

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 14 February 2019 at 5.30 pm in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 5.30 pm
Concluded 8.30 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Azam Duffy Bacon Green Kamran Hussain Watson	J Sunderland

Apologies: Councillors Cooke, Hargreaves and Martin Smith

Observer: Councillor Vanda Greenwood (Minute 53 and 55)

Councillor Azam in the Chair

49. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interest of transparency Councillors Azam and Kamran Hussain declared an interest in the item relating to Universal Credit (Minute 55) as private sector landlords.

ACTION: City Solicitor

50. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 November and 13 December 2018 be signed as a correct record.

51. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted by the public to review decisions to restrict documents

52. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals made to the Committee.

53. PERIOD AND HYGIENE POVERTY IN THE BRADFORD DISTRICT

The Strategic Directors Health and Wellbeing and Corporate Resources submitted a joint report (**Document “AA”**) which updated the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on work across the Bradford district in relation to ‘Period and Hygiene’ Poverty.

The Assistant Director Revenues and Benefits stated that following a motion at the meeting of Council on 16 October, a recommendation on period and hygiene poverty was considered by the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who in turn referred the matter to this Committee as the issue was related to poverty.

The Senior Manager for Wider Determinants explained that although a comprehensive analysis of period and hygiene poverty in Bradford had not been undertaken, national figures had been extrapolated to give an insight into the problem locally. In addition partner agencies involved with food banks routinely provided help and support in this area, as did schools and a number of organisations including the Council and the Unions, who were contributing to providing period and hygiene products and the success of the red box scheme was alluded to.

Representatives from partner agencies were present at the meeting and stated that period and hygiene poverty was linked to the wider poverty people experienced, and that further work was required to extend the help required and work with community organisations was on going.

Members welcomed the report and the work that was going on to address period and hygiene poverty and commented that the provision of products at the point of use was an excellent idea which reduced the stigma around the issue.

The work being undertaken by a number of schools and supermarkets was also endorsed and there was a need to increase provision of products across the secondary and primary school sector.

Members also alluded to the need for more education around periods and identifying best practice in order that the issue can be addressed effectively and efficiently. In addition gauging the problem amongst those who were homeless was also essential in order to provide the necessary support to them.

Resolved –

- (1) That this Committee welcomes the report and thanks officers and organisations for the work being undertaken to date to tackle period and hygiene poverty.**
- (2) That a report be presented in 12 months time which specifically focuses on:**
 - (i) The causes of period and hygiene poverty;**
 - (ii) Actions being taken to address period and hygiene poverty;**
 - (iii) Identifying best practice and how this can be applied across the Bradford district;**
 - (iv) The approaches being used with homeless people in tackling period and hygiene poverty.**
- (3) That this Committee requests that officers liaise with appropriate organisations to address period and hygiene poverty across the district.**

ACTION: Strategic Director Health and Wellbeing

54. QTR. 3 FINANCE POSITION STATEMENT FOR 2018-19

The Director of Finance submitted a report (**Document “AB”**) which provided Members with an overview of the forecast financial position of the Council for 2018-19.

It examined the latest spend against revenue and capital budgets and forecasted the financial position at the year end. It stated the Council’s current balances and reserves and forecasted school balances for the year.

Based on the 31 December 2018 projection, the Council was forecasted to overspend the £358.1m net budget by £0.4m. The overspend related primarily to the area of Adults and Children’s Social Care and in the Department of Place.

It was stressed that more work needed to be done to close the budget gap going forward for 2020/21 and therefore there was a need to plan for the future, and in addition protect the reserves position.

During the discussion Members asked a number of questions on the Quarter 3 position statement, the questions together with the responses are detailed below:

A Member raised concerns around the overspend in the Department of Place and the missed targets in a number of the waste related areas. In response it was stated that mitigation measures had been put into the budget when the Council moved from weekly to fortnightly waste collection, and despite a number of initial setbacks, contamination was lessening and recycling rates were steadily improving.

The Member also raised a concern around the £0.6m overspend within Sports

and Leisure which was primarily related to the use of casual staff and allowances, and he urged that the staffing costs should be brought under control as this was a significant overspend in the context of reduced Council funding.

The £200,000 loss on the Bingley Music Live festival was also alluded to by a number of Members and although the suggestion that poor ticket sales and the weather were to blame for the loss, Members expressed concern at the loss, again in the context of reduced funding and where statutory services were being affected.

A Member commented that there had been a concerted effort to increase the Council Tax base by increasing the number of homes built and increase prices to achieve income generation, however this report was thin on details on how the going for growth initiative was progressing.

In response the Head of Budgeting, Management Accounting and Projects stated that within the 18/19 budget and in future budgets one off monies from Government were difficult to plan for as they could vary year on year. He acknowledged that they were increasing the Council Tax base and this had amounted to an extra £700k in this financial year.

Members further expressed concerns on the significant overspend within Children's Services, however no one from the Service was present at the meeting to respond to Member's questions.

In relation to the overspend in the Department of Place, it was stated by the Assistant Director Transportation Design and Planning that senior officers within the Department were looking at the recovery plan and identifying savings to achieve a balance budget. Monthly meetings between Assistant Directors and the Strategic Director were also being held to address the budget pressures.

A Member commented that in the context of strict vacancy controls, did we have staff in the right places and he ascertained what were the level of vacancies in the Council.

The Strategic Director Health and Wellbeing stated that the CMT were looking at the budget and savings closely, in order to ensure that the overspend was kept under control.

Resolved –

- (1) That this Committee requests that a report be presented to this Committee which sets out the reasons for the £0.6m overspend in Sports and Leisure.**
- (2) That this Committee also requests that a report be presented which demonstrates how Council departments are addressing overspends in their service areas and to what extent are the approaches being used robust enough to the address the overspends.**
- (3) That the information requested by Members in relation to vacancies be provided.**

(4) That this Committee requests an update on Going for Growth.

ACTION: *Director of Finance*

55. UNIVERSAL CREDIT

From 20 June 2018, working-age households, with up to two children, across the Bradford District became eligible to claim Universal Credit.

The Strategic Director Corporate Resources submitted a report (**Document “AC”**) which examined the progress of, and future plans for, the roll out of Universal Credit, its impact, and the arrangements in place to support claimants.

The Assistant Director Revenues and Benefits stated that many current housing benefit claimants will, over time, have a change in their circumstances and will be required to claim Universal Credit, a process known as natural migration. He added that challenges remained and how more vulnerable or disabled claimants will be affected by Universal Credit remained to be seen, however the Council would be working with the Citizens Advice Bureau to ensure the right level of support was provided.

During the discussion a Member stated that in terms of access to digital support and the informal support provided by Libraries and Community Centres, how was this factored and supported through the Universal Credit process. In response it was explained that the figures provided on digital support were purely done via the agreement with the Department for Work and Pensions, any informal arrangements were not factored in. The Assistant Director acknowledged that more work could be done with Libraries and Children’s Centres in terms of how much digital support was provided to Universal Credit claimants.

The Chair of the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee was present at the meeting and stated that many claimants had no access to IT or email and they could lose out under the new system, and that there was no mention about vulnerability within the report. In response it was stated that under Universal Credit there was a need to own a email and additional support was required to facilitate this.

A Member commented that Universal Credit was an ill thought out welfare system and would adversely affect some of the most vulnerable in our communities. He also raised an issue around payment to a single person in the household, and that this could have a detrimental impact in situations where there was an issue around domestic violence or coercion.

He added that the new benefit had also seen a spike in the number of people resorting to using food banks as well as the potential to be evicted by the landlord when payments were late, which in turn would exacerbate the homelessness situation.

The Assistant Director acknowledged there were issues with the new benefit and as a Council we would try and provide the necessary support, especially to the most vulnerable and try and build additional protections, where possible.

Resolved –

- (1) That this Committee welcomes the report and requests a further report which focuses on the impact of Universal Credit on the most vulnerable residents of the district and also include the impact on Housing and Homelessness Service.**
- (2) That this Committee requests that Bradford Council officers contact the Department for Works and Pensions, both locally and nationally to consider ways of mitigating sanctions for people who do not have access to Information Technology.**

ACTION: Strategic Director Corporate Services

56. BREXIT PREPAREDNESS

The Corporate Resources Director submitted a report (**Document “AD”**) which advised members on progress to date in preparing for the impact of Brexit, including a no deal Brexit, and the actions proposed to deal with identified issues.

It was stressed that the current situation was highly uncertain and liable to change. At the time of writing, a range of options remained open, including a no deal Brexit. The Prime Minister had been negotiating with EU partners and due to return to Parliament on the 14th February for a vote on a final deal.

The Council was undertaking work in a number of areas pertaining to Brexit including implementing a scheme to support settlement status within our own workforce; engaging with partners such as the Chamber of Commerce around wider business and employment issues affecting the district; working with partners in the voluntary and community sector to develop a bid to support the most vulnerable residents. To this end a community consultation event was held on 13 February and it was a very successful event, which was attended by over 50 community group representatives and highlighted issues around impact of Brexit and the impact on community cohesion issues, and the potential for an increase in hate crimes; to this end it was important to celebrate the strengths of Bradford as a diverse community.

In addition it was mentioned that the feedback from the consultation event will be used to inform proposals for how best to spend the additional funding announced by Government in late January.

It was also important to identify specific issues that we can take back to Government, for example around passport and other status documentation, and how to advise and help people who had misplaced their documentation.

During the discussions a number of Members reaffirmed the need for the Council to ensure that Looked After children were supported through the Brexit process. In response it was stated that the sufficiency team in Children's Services could be approached on the issue specifically.

A Member stated that he had real concerns around the potential for a surge in hate crime post Brexit. In response it was stated that the community event last night addressed this issue amongst other things, and it was important to ensure we had a grasp of the situation as well as reach out and support the hard to reach communities like the Roma community around settlement status and community cohesion.

A Member also stated that the actions of the far right and their potential to stir up hatred in the district should also be closely monitored, so that we are prepared.

A Member also stated that procurement should also be proactive in terms of how contracts will be procured in the coming months and that we are clear which rules we are working to. In response it was mentioned that some work around procurement and Brexit had already been done.

Resolved –

- (1) That this Committee requests a report to be presented which specifically focuses on the community cohesion issues across the district related to Brexit.**
- (2) That a verbal update on Brexit be presented at the 21 March meeting of the Committee.**
- (3) That it be recommended to the Executive that the status of Looked After Children be adopted by the Council.**

ACTION: Strategic Director Corporate Resources

57. CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

The Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee submitted a report (**Document "AE"**) which set out the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2018/19.

No resolution was passed in respect of this item.

Chair

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

THIS AGENDA AND ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER