



# **Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 6 February 2020 at 5.30 pm in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford**

Commenced 5.30pm  
Concluded 8.20 pm

## **Present – Councillors**

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT AND INDEPENDENT GROUP
Azam D Green Kamran Hussain Watson Tait	Goodall Riaz	Griffiths

## **Councillor Azam in the Chair**

Apologies: Cllr Shafiq

### **56. ALTERNATE MEMBERS (Standing Order 34)**

There were no alternative members.

### **57. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

Cllr Riaz in relation to item 8, as Cllr Riaz is the Director of a Care Home that has a contract with Bradford Council.

### **58. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS**

There were no appeals submitted to review decisions to restrict documents.

### **59. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no referrals to the Committee.

### **60. HANSON SCHOOL'S FINANCIAL POSITION**

The Deputy Director for Education and Learning presented a report, (**Document "Z"**) in relation to the financial circumstances relating to Hanson School's overspend.

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee has previously considered this

at its meeting on Thursday 10 October 2020, where members not only requested for the financial position in relation to the school to be presented, but also that the Portfolio holder for Education, Employment and Skills to ensure that the views expressed by the Committee were communicated to the Minister.

Officers informed members that Hanson School is a foundation school maintained by the Local Authority and that the Governing Board has financial powers and responsibilities as delegated under the Scheme for Financing Schools.

The report highlighted that Hanson School's deficit at March 2020 was forecasted to be at £4.16m and that the School was overspending. However at the meeting officers informed members that there had been a slight increase in the deficit to £4.5m. Yet despite this, officers highlighted to members that a process was now being developed looking at options to bring the School deficit back into balance and that the budget related work for 2020-21 had already begun.

Members sought further clarification on the re-structuring that was taking place in Hanson School, as to whether it would actually have an impact.

Officers replied by stating that this was actually work-in-progress and that benchmarking activity had demonstrated how Hanson School and other similar sized schools are structured, with leadership arrangements.

Furthermore, officers stressed that it was important to consider all the options appraisals for staffing structures at Hanson School and more importantly, whether Hanson School had staffing in the right places for the School to be able to move forward and make improvements.

Members discussed the pay award for teachers and raised their concerns in relation to the overspend increasing, the reason for the overspend and how much had been allocated to the pay awards.

In response, officers highlighted that there were in fact some legacy issues surrounding this area, particularly around staffing structures and contractual arrangements. In addition to this, officers stated that they now had much greater control over the spending now.

Councillors were keen to establish the trajectory of the expected improvement, over time and whether this had gradually got worse.

Regarding this, officers indicated to members that the last time Hanson School achieved a balanced budget was in 2014/15. Furthermore, in 2016/17 pupil numbers decreased, which resulted in a £1million deficit.

Continuing on some members discussed the schools budget provision together with Academisation Order of Hanson School. Here officers were clear, in that any budget deficit would be the responsibility of the school; if Hanson School converted to an academy.

The Portfolio holder for Education, Employment and Skills informed members that through the Opportunity Area Programme, £150,000 had been given to Hanson School to ensure that the children in the school are being supported.

Members were concerned that a meeting with the Minister had not been arranged yet. In response the Portfolio holder for Education, Employment and Skills said that along with officers, they would be trying to arrange a meeting with the Minister.

Furthermore, members highlighted that in line with the Bradford Council's Third Quarter Financial Position Statement, the deficit for Hanson School was approximately 75% of the total deficit for schools. Therefore, when could members expect to receive a report which would say that the budget deficit is reducing.

In response, officers stressed that it was difficult work with a school with an Academy Order, as it was challenging to plan. Officers also said that the budget deficit was something that had happened over several years and that officers now had greater control over the school's finances.

Members of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that they would a report to come back, once there was a clearer idea and direction of travel.

**Resolved –**

**An update on the School's Financial position be presented to the Committee at a future meeting.**

*ACTION: Strategic Director of Children's Services*

**61. QTR. 3 FINANCE POSITION STATEMENT FOR 2019-20**

The Director of Finance presented the Quarter 3 Finance Position Statement, (**Documents "AA"**), which provided members with an overview of the forecast financial position of the Council 2019-20.

It examines the latest spend against revenue and capital budgets and forecasts the financial position at the year end. It states the Council's current reserves and forecasts school balances for the year.

Members were keen to explore the why there was an underspend in Early Help Service, as members were concerned that this was an area where monies should be spent on assisting children being looked after.

In response, officers highlighted that they were in the process of re-investing this money back into supporting children being looked after and this was as a result of the previous re-structure. Furthermore, officers also emphasised that they now had a more co-ordinated partnership approach to the Early Help Service.

Members queried the use of the ICT, (Information Communication Technology), Programme budget.

Officers replied by saying that the main purposes of the ICT Programme budget

was to upgrade the Microsoft Licence, the Citrex Licence refreshing the servers that were approaching their end of life.

Continuing on, Members expressed their disappointment at the large numbers of iGels that had been purchased, but were not being used.

Officers acknowledged members concerned and agreed that a large number of iGels had been purchased, were not used and were now approaching their end of life. Officers assured members that this would not happen again.

**Resolved –**

**Members thanked officers and looked forward to receiving future Finance Position Statements.**

*ACTION: Strategic Director of Finance*

**62. COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION**

The Strategic Director Corporate Resources presented a report, (**Document “AB”**), which set out Bradford Council’s performance in and the challenges in relation to the collection of Council Tax.

Councillors heard that Council Tax is collected on an annual basis, following the budget setting process, for all households in the Bradford District. The Council Tax is then collected over the course of the financial year, with council tax payers offered a range of payment options and ways in which to pay.

Members also learned that the Council Tax Reduction scheme helps low-income working-age households by providing means tested support.

Members were keen to understand the approaches being utilised to pursue people who are not voluntarily paying their Council Tax.

In response to this, officers highlighted that they were focusing on obtaining Council Tax payments from people who were not paying voluntarily, through bailiffs and enforcement agencies.

In addition to this, officers also informed Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee members that they were training their staff to obtain as much information from people as possible to assist in the collection of Council Tax payments. Moreover, Bradford Council had also recently signed a Council Tax Protocol with the Citizens Advice Bureau. This would also assist in the collection of Council Tax and also assist those residents with the Council Tax payments.

Councillors wanted to know if Bradford Council still used internal bailiffs to collect payments.

Officers replied by stating that they used private sector enforcement agencies to collect Council Tax, which supplemented their own internal bailiffs; particularly at

peak busy periods.

There was considerable discussion between members and officers in relation to the challenges being faced towards the collection of Council Tax. Members learned that key challenges included the Council Tax Premium on empty properties, areas across the District where there are high levels of transiency and the approach of applying “breathing space”, to any Council Tax debt.

**Resolved –**

**This Committee requests that officers take into consideration the comments raised by members.**

*ACTION: Strategic Director of Finance*

**63. BUSINESS RATE COLLECTION**

The Strategic Director Corporate Resources submitted a report, (**Document “AC”**), concerning the Council’s performance in and the challenges with regards to the collection of Business Rates across the District.

Members heard that Business Rates are set by Government and that the Rateable Value of business properties across the District are determined by the Valuation Office Agency – an Executive Agency of Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs.

Furthermore, it is the Council’s responsibility to issue Business Rate bills, collect monies invoiced and to implement a number of nationally defined schemes to assist local businesses with their rate bills. Members also heard that there are approximately 19,000 Business Rate bills used and once exemptions and reliefs are applied, the actual number of accounts can be reduced to approximately 11,000.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee members, were to explore Bradford starting from a low base Business rate collection point.

In response to this, officers stated that there was an advantage from being at low collection point, in that Bradford Council received a “top up”, grant.

Officers were also very keen to stress that Bradford Council could now support various regeneration initiatives to grow the base of Business rate collections. More importantly, this was actually more important than the percentage of Business Rates collected.

**Resolved –**

**The committee provided views in relation to the progress of collection in Business Rates, for consideration by Officers.**

*ACTION: Strategic Director of Finance*

#### **64. PERIOD AND HYGIENE POVERTY**

The Director of Health and Well Being submitted a report, (**Document “AD”**), which provided members with details in relation to the provision and support services for women and girls in the Bradford District who may be experiencing period and hygiene poverty.

Officers also set-out the services that are being delivered by Bradford Council services across a range of settings, local activity and the supporting agencies that distribute sanitary wear and other materials and local and national support mechanisms for period poverty.

Members asked officers how Bradford Council was feeding into the work being undertaken by the Taskforce into period poverty. Officers stated that they had not been asked yet.

Members were concerned about the involvement of schools in this programme and that there was a need to make it easier for schools to opt into this programme.

Officers acknowledged this and indicated that a lot of effort has to be directed into schools to get them on board. Officers highlighted that this area was also of concern for them.

Members also informed officers that the use of other health service setting should also be explored to participate in this programme, as they are likely to be accessed by a wide range of people.

Members pointed out that the work undertaken by Red Box was only with approximately 40% of the schools across the District and that it was vital to improve the Red Box offer to all schools. Furthermore, members also suggested that many Councillors are actually Governors at schools and information packs should be provided to them, so that they can also promote the Red Box offer with schools.

In response, officers indicated that schools did not have a very good knowledge and understanding of period and hygiene poverty and this needed to be improved.

#### **Resolved –**

- (1) A report be presented to this Committee which includes more detailed information relating to service needs and responses re-period poverty locally.**
- (2) That officers are asked to work with current providers across the District to better understand the impacts of period poverty and/or hygiene poverty and that a further report be presented in 12 months.**
- (3) This Committee requests that the work undertaken by the Red Box**

**Project be further developed.**

- (4) **That future reports should also specifically focus on the take-up from schools across the District, of the Department of Education offer.**
- (5) **That officers provide information to all Councillors, to assist them in promoting the Red Box offer with schools and GP surgeries in their wards.**

*ACTION: Strategic Director of Health and Well Being*

**65. CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20**

The Overview and Scrutiny Lead presented the work programme.

Members discussed the work programme and made amendments.

**Resolved –**

**That the work programme be kept under review.**

*ACTION: Overview and Scrutiny Lead*

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