

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 11 November 2021 in Council Chamber, City Hall - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 5.00 pm
Concluded 6.00 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST
Azam Akhtar D Green Arshad Hussain	Bibby Riaz	Jenkins

Observers: Councillor Hinchcliffe, Leader of Council, Councillor Dodds, Portfolio Holder, Healthy People and Places.

Apologies: Councillor Angela Tait, Councillor Sarfraz Nazir and Councillor Jeanette Sunderland and Tait

Councillor Azam in the Chair

36. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillor Green disclosed a personal interest in Minute 39 as he had attended an armed forces and veterans breakfast event. The interest was not prejudicial and he remained in the meeting during consideration and voting on that matter.

ACTION: *City Solicitor*

37. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

38. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals made to the Committee.

39. ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT ON THE LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

The Strategic Director, Place submitted a report (**Document “P”**) which provided an update on the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant locally and reported on progress made by the Bradford District Armed Forces Covenant Partnership and the Council in identifying and addressing need within the local Armed Forces Community.

The Chair introduced Councillor Dodds and referred to her passion for her duties as Armed Forces Champion. Councillor Dodds reported that an enormous amount of work had been conducted throughout the Covid pandemic and paid tribute to the efforts of the West Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Implementation Officer and to the work of other West Yorkshire Partners. It was explained that the work undertaken to develop the West Yorkshire Service Pupil Premium Resource Directory for schools, which was hosted on the Bradford Council website, had received national recognition.

Lieutenant Colonel Paul Davies, who was representing the armed forces, expressed gratitude for the support that the City provided; he felt that the city loved the armed forces; was an amazing partner and he believed that the armed forces could not achieve the things it did without the city's support. He reported that across the UK Bradford was a place with a lot to shout about; he felt that was not the case in some other places and he expressed thanks and the appreciation of all the armed forces.

The report revealed that between 1 April 2018 and 30 June 2021 a total of 373 people applying for employment with the Council identified themselves as either currently serving or having served in Her Majesty's Armed Forces. Of those applicants 37 were shortlisted for interview and 13 contracts of employment were issued. Member queried why only 10% of applicants had been shortlisted and only 5% had been offered a contract. It was questioned if additional training may be required to allow those applicants to successfully apply. In response the representative of the armed forces explained that all local authorities recruited in identical ways although this was not always universally understood. A partnership to support applicants through the process was being developed by the armed forces.

A Member questioned if statistics were compiled to show the number of homeless people or rough sleepers who were armed forces veterans. It was explained that this information was not available at the meeting but was compiled by the Housing Options teams. It was agreed to provide that information after the meeting.

It was explained that a training programme to build staff awareness of the covenant was being developed and a survey was being conducted to understand if the Armed Forces Community were represented in the workforce. Members expressed interest in the covenant awareness training programme. It was clarified that this was an on line training course and details would be shared with Members.

It was queried why NHS users were questioned to ascertain if they were armed forces personnel or veterans and it was explained that this was to allow for

additional support to be provided for specific needs. It was reported that the Bradford District Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Action Plan, appended to the report, aimed to build relationships with the NHS although those plans had been hindered throughout the Covid pandemic.

A Member, acknowledging the difficulty that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) could have on members of the armed forces, questioned if local health services were able to fulfil the pledges undertaken in the covenant. Whilst being unable to guarantee the provision of NHS services the Armed Forces Covenant Officer confirmed that there were pathways to mental health services specifically for the Armed Forces Community offered through the NHS, and that service was in the process of being rebranded as 'Op COURAGE'. Members requested that an update be provided in the next update report.

The possibility of conducting prayers for all faiths in the annual remembrance service was discussed. In response it was explained that the remembrance services were organised nationally and in a very prescriptive manner. Talks had been conducted with faith leaders about the services in Bradford to ensure that people of all faiths were welcomed and that their contributions to the armed forces were acknowledged.

Councillor Dodds explained a proposal to develop an armed services hub and Members were advised that plans commenced in 2019, to create a hub at Belle Vue Barracks, had been stalled by the pandemic. The proposal was to provide support to younger veterans, and others, who were not accessing breakfast clubs or other support methods. It was reported that Wakefield Council had developed a hub, based in Pontefract, and whilst it had not yet opened, Councillor Dodds planned to visit that facility and hoped that a similar service could be developed either at Belle Vue Barracks or in the city centre.

The support provided through the covenant to the Afghan relocation scheme was questioned and assurances were provided that Afghan settlers did receive support.

The ability for other nationals who had now become Bradford citizens to access support was queried and whilst that information was not available at the meeting it was agreed that the issue would be investigated and provided in a future update report.

The report also provided an overview of the West Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Implementation Project and noted expected legislative changes to the Armed Forces Covenant expected later in the year. It was requested that in the next annual update report the impact of the new legislation and progress in relation to the development of an armed forces hub be included.

40. QTR 2 FINANCE POSITION STATEMENT FOR 2021-22

The Director of Finance presented a report (**Document "Q"**) which provided Members with an update on the forecast year-end financial position of the Council for 2021-22.

Document "Q" examined the latest spend against revenue and capital budgets

and the forecast year-end financial position based on information at Quarter 2. It stated the Council's current balances and reserves and school balances.

Following a very detailed presentation Members raised a number of questions to which the following responses were provided:

- The departmental commentary on recruitment to Children's Social Care included some internal promotions within the number of new posts but was broken down into two separate figures to reflect the natural turnover in that service.
- Significant pressure in the Department of Place had arisen in the Waste Management Service and mitigating factors were included in the report. It was more difficult to comment on services such as Sport and Culture as those services were more reliant on income generation. That income was relied upon to balance base budgets but had been significantly impacted by COVID. People were beginning to return to sports centres and theatres but there was still some hesitancy because of the pandemic. An initiative to generate additional income by the Museums Service had also been delayed.
- The Council's Strategic Risk Register, appended to the report, was reviewed to assess risk after mitigating action had been identified. It was acknowledged that some legacy risk remained high and it was agreed that discussions would be held with the Council's Risk Manager to ascertain if that was an error in the report.
- A major deficit in income from business rates was not expected as this had been offset by government relief through Covid funding. There would be a concern if businesses did not recover from the pandemic and ceased to trade in the future.

Officers were thanked for the report and Members looked forward to receipt of the third quarter information.

41. PROGRESS OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK UNDERTAKEN BY IMPOWER AND THE COUNCIL

The Strategic Director of Corporate Resources submitted a report (**Document "R"**) which set out a summary of the progress made by the Council in partnership with IMPOWER since the commencement of the new IMPOWER contract on the 1st September 2020.

Members were reminded that the previous report provided in December 2020 had outlined that IMPOWER were supporting work in three key areas with the Council. The information provided at that time was reiterated in Document "R" and reported programmes conducted in the Council's Departments of Health and Wellbeing; Children's Services and Localities.

It was reported that since that time IMPOWER had completed their support activity in all three areas; completed their transition and handover arrangement for

the projects; provided skills transfer support to internal teams; completed the project and had exited at the end of July 2021.

A Member questioned the value for money that the contract had provided and believed that the actions that had been identified through the contract were part of the ordinary day to day work of the Council. He used issues in Children's Services which the Council had acknowledged and being dealing with for the previous ten years to demonstrate his point. Measures identified in localities had also been debated for some time in Area Committees and Council Policy amended accordingly. He stressed that he struggled to see if the contract costs were a wise investment.

In response it was reported it was national experience; best practice; strength based practices and understanding what the organisation was not doing well which would bring ongoing services and benefits.

The impact in Children's Services was once again questioned and it was stressed that the organisational requirements to make improvements had been known and management were supposed to be sorting. Discussions were held about projected savings and it was felt that the real test would be if things continued to improve and savings were continued to be made in 12 months' time. Concern was expressed that if things were not being done properly previously would they be undertaken efficiently in the future. In reply it was explained that an understanding of business models had been provided and national skills and expertise transferred.

The Chair explained that work in Localities had helped managers to utilise performance measures to improve outcomes. It was felt that looking at Key Performance Areas there had been improvements. Analysis of critical indicators had afforded an understanding of what was required and provided a strong focus on how improvements could be made.

The length of the contract with IMPOWER was queried and it was explained that, with the exception of a few additional handover days in August, it had run for a period from September 2020 to July 2021.

Assurances were provided that the savings did take account of the costs incurred and that as soon as the skills required were transferred the contract had ceased.

42. CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22

The Chair of the Committee submitted a report (**Document "S"**) which presented the Committee's work programme for 2021/22.

It was reported that the Review of Domestic Violence was ongoing and measures were being undertaken to engage with strategic partners. Once those arrangements were in place an informal session would be arranged with Members to discuss the scope of the review. Following that process engagement would be made with victims of domestic violence.

Members were asked to contact the Overview and Scrutiny Lead with any

comments they wished to make and advised that they would be contacted separately about the dates and times for the informal review sessions.

Chair

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

THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER