

## Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 21 July 2022 at 5.00 pm in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 5.00 pm  
Concluded 7.30 pm

### Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT AND INDEPENDENT GROUP	THE QUEENSBURY WARD INDEPENDENTS
Azam D Green Arshad Hussain Mohammed Wood	F Ahmed Loy	Stubbs	J Clarke

Apologies: Councillor Nazir

### Councillor Azam in the Chair

#### 11. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

#### 12. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

#### 13. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no recommendations referred to the Committee.

#### 14. FINANCE POSITION STATEMENT FOR 2021-22

The Director of Finance submitted a report (**Document “E”**) which provided Members with an update on the year-end financial position of the Council for 2021-22.

The report outlined the revenue and capital budgets and the year-end financial position based on information at the end of March 2022. It also stated the Council’s current balances and reserves and school balances.

The Director stated that the Council balanced the £385.4m net revenue budget in 2021-22. This was after taking account of the c£27m of Covid related funding that’s been carried forward from 2020-21, and c£58m of additional Covid related funding that was received in 2021-22. The Executive also approved £4m of additional reserve use to fund some Covid related investments in the Qtr 1 Finance Position Statement. At year end, only £3.5m of this was required to be drawn down to balance the budget.

Although the Council balanced its budget overall, there were however some significant overspends in a number of service areas. Most notably, Children’s Services overspent by £15.5m due largely to agency staffing costs and increased Child Looked After Placements, both of which have increased significantly in recent years.

During the discussion a number of questions were posed on the financial position statement, the questions together with the responses are detailed below:

In response to a question regarding the use of agency staff, particularly within the social work field, it was stressed that there was a huge shortage in the number of qualified social workers, which mirrored the national picture. However, the service was actively recruiting with a campaign to portray the challenges and benefits of working in Braford. In addition encouraging agency staff to see the benefits of permanency, such as access to an excellent pension fund. The recruitment campaign was in its early days, and despite the recent negative press, the Service was positive of yielding good results.

In respect of the Council’s reserves position, it was stated that the amount of £19.5m was the auditor’s requirement that this amount be kept in reserves on an annual accounting basis as a level of adequate reserves. A Member stated that some services had been carrying reserves in their accounts for a number of years that needed to be revisited. In response it was stated that Strategic and Assistant Directors were being actively challenged around reserves, vacancies and spend in their respective service areas, and this information will be contained in the Medium Term report.

In response to a question re rateable valuation, it was clarified that rateable value was undertaken by the National Valuation Office and public sector buildings were valued differently compared to commercial properties.

**Resolved –**

**Members discussed and commented on the Financial Position Statement for 2021-22.**

***ACTION: No Action***

**15. QTR 1 FINANCE POSITION STATEMENT FOR 2022-23**

The Director of Finance submitted a report (**Document “F”**) which provided Members with an update on the forecast year-end financial position of the Council for 2022-23.

It outlined the revenue and capital budgets and the year-end financial position based on information at the end of May 2022. It also stated the Council’s current balances and reserves and school balances.

Based on a projection at the May 28th 2022, the Council is forecasted to overspend the £388.5m net revenue budget by £55.9m in 2022-23. c£20m of this is due to the expected extraordinary impact of inflation above budgeted levels.

The Council approved a budget increase for inflation of c£22m for 2022-23, to pay for a 2% pay award; the impact of National Insurance increases, National Living Wage increases, contract price inflation based on CPI inflation of 4% and Energy price inflation 5%.

The largest forecast overspend is c£33m in Children’s Services as a result of continuing increases in agency staffing costs and increased Child Looked After Placements, both of which have increased very significantly in recent years.

The Department of Place also has a number of pressures and is forecast to overspend by £8.9m, with the main issues being Street lighting energy costs (£3.7m), and a £2.4m forecast overspend in Waste Services due in part to higher waste tonnages and recycling income losses which were supported by Covid funding in 2021-22 that has now ceased (£1.2m), and inflationary cost increases above those budgeted (£1.2m). Additionally, there are undelivered savings in Sport and Culture, and on-going pressures in Housing and Markets amongst others.

During the discussion a number of questions were posed on the Quarter 1 position statement, the questions together with the responses are detailed below:

A Member stated that in terms of the budgetary pressures outlined in the report, what plan was the Council working to address these pressures. In response it was stated that a review was already underway as mentioned in the previous report, to ensure we reassess spend and look at how savings can be made in the context of the current financial challenges facing the Council.

In relation to the continuing and projected overspend in Children’s Services, it was explained that there had had been a 30-36% increase in the cost of

placements and previous assumptions that demand for specialist placements would tail off had not materialised, as well as not being able to deliver on other savings; the continued reliance on agency staff remained and therefore the budget assumptions had changed significantly, since February 2022.

In response to the budgetary pressures facing Children's Services, a Member suggested that preventative work with families may yield some positive results. It was also stressed that in achieving savings across different service areas that conversations had to be had with the Trade Unions and front line staff in terms of the impacts on service delivery.

In relation to the overspend in waste services, inflationary pressures were driving up costs, as well as an increase in the amount of waste being collected had gone up since the pandemic, and the Council was actively looking at how this could be mitigated against.

Returning to the overspend in Children's Services it was further stated that detailed work was ongoing to mitigate against the overspend, however pressures remained in terms of the number of children entering the care system.

In relation to the Hanson School deficit, it was stated that from the 1 July the school had achieved academy status and under the Dfe rules, the current deficit would remain with the Local Authority, however conversations were ongoing with the Dfe to seek clarifications around the deficit.

#### **Resolved –**

**Members commented on the report and looked forward to receiving the Mid-Term Financial Position Statement.**

***ACTION: No Action***

## **16. FULL-YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (**Document "J"**) which provided a summary of the Council's overall achievements in the Financial year 2021/2022. Alongside this was an overview of performance against the Council's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2021/2022. This overview focused on measures where there has been new, comparable data since the update provided at December's Executive Committee.

A detailed overview of the key performance indicators and achievements for 2021/2022 was provided along with those areas that required improvement.

During the discussions the following questions, comments and clarifications were sought:

A Member commented that in terms of the percentage of BAME employees currently working for the Council, the percentage still did not adequately reflect the overall BAME population in the district. In response it was stated that the overall direction of travel was good and that the Equalities Plan would address this issue in more detail.

A Member commented that upskilling young people was key in improving performance in the better lives and better jobs indicator. In response it was stated that sometimes this was difficult to measure instantly as the impact could take a while to filter through, but the point was acknowledged.

A Member commented that the performance report would be difficult for residents to understand and that the language and how the performance data is presented needed looking at, as well how the message could be better communicated.

In relation to the increase in the number of Children Ksi data, it was stated a new vision was being looked at around road safety at a West Yorkshire level and this issue would be addressed in the new approach to improving road safety, enforcement and driver behaviour .

In response to a question regarding the levels of persistent absenteeism, the Strategic Director Children's Services stated that some progress had been made in stemming the tide, and although it was early days the rate of improvement was an encouraging one. In addition Bradford was taking a whole district wide approach to the issue and working across both Local Authority controlled schools as well as the Academy chains.

**Resolved –**

**The Committee requested that an update on Road Safety across the District be presented in the next three months.**

***ACTION: Chief Executive***

#### **17. CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23**

The Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee submitted a report (**Document "H"**) which included proposed items for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2022/23. The Committee was asked to consider which items it wishes to include in the work programme.

**Resolved –**

**Members requested that the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Chair writes to the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council and the Overview & Scrutiny Chairs, in relation to officers reporting in a timely manner, with regards to Overview & Scrutiny decisions.**

***ACTION: Chair / Overview & 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