

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 9 February 2023 at 5.00 pm in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 5.00 pm
Concluded 6.50 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Azam D Green Mohammed Regan	Nazam P Clarke	Stubbs

Councillor Azam in the Chair

Apologies: Councillors J Clarke, A Hussain and Nazir

Observer: Councillor Hinchcliffe

59. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interest of transparency Councillor David Green declared an interest that he worked for a Voluntary Sector organisation.

ACTION: Director of Legal & Governance

60. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2022 and 12 January 2023 be signed as a correct record.

ACTION: Director of Legal & Governance

61. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

62. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals made to the Committee.

63. IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT

The Strategic Director, Corporate Resources, presented a report (**Document AF**) which examined the progress of, and future plans for, the roll out of Universal Credit (UC) and the implications for residents and the Council.

Representatives from the Department of Work & Pensions were present at the meeting to provide additional information/clarification on the roll out of UC and respond to Member's questions.

It was stated that the roll out of UC was progressing well, with 65% of eligible claimants having been migrated to UC, the remaining claimants will be migrated by 2025. This was part of an early testing and learning phase for UC and it was, therefore, important to get right.

In response to a question regarding migration, it was stressed that once claimants migrated to UC they would not be able to reverse the process, and to this end, a system was in place to help claimants with the application process and seek advice via the Citizens Advice Bureau, however, it was highlighted that the majority of claimants would be better off financially, however claimants were advised to seek independent advice and not rush into making a decision regarding migration.

In response to a question regarding the process of migrating to UC and whether or not it was compulsory, it was explained that the managed migration referred to those on legacy benefits such as housing benefit, and it was this cohort that would be migrated by 2025.

A Member stated that he had constituents in his ward that had experienced some difficulties in migrating to UC and that some had lost out financially. In response it was stated that some claimants had experienced difficulties in migrating across with family and friends helping claimants, however claimants could seek help from the DWP on migrating across as well as help in completing the necessary forms.

In response to a question regarding the help available from the CAB, in particular take up and feedback of the service they provided, it was stated that national figures were available, and that this information could be obtained and circulated to Councillors.

In response to a question regarding the online application and the support in place for vulnerable claimants, it was explained that staffing levels had been increased to support the roll out of UC, with vulnerable customers identified and help provided accordingly. However, it was stressed that the most vulnerable claimants would be migrated later on into the roll out.

Resolved –

- (1) **Members thanked officers from Bradford Council and also from the Department for Works and Pensions.**
- (2) **The Committee requests that a report be presented in 12 months which includes not only details about the implementation of Universal Credit across the District, but also the additional support offered by the Council to residents, in relation to the cost of living crisis.**

ACTION: Strategic Director for Corporate Resources

64. QTR 3 FINANCE POSITION STATEMENT FOR 2022-23

The report of the Director of Finance, IT and Procurement, (**Document “AD”**) provided 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 December 2022. It stated the Council’s current balances and reserves and school balances.

The report was the third monitoring report presented to Members on the Council’s 2022-23 financial position. It provided the forecast revenue and capital financial position of the Council at the 31st March 2023. The report covered:

- The forecast outturn of the Council’s *revenue* budget in 2022-23
- The forecast financial impact of inflation in 2022-23
- A statement on the Council’s reserves
- An update on the Capital Investment Plan.
- The Council’s Risk Register.

During the discussion, a Member stated that the crux of the overspend was the cost in the provision of external placements in Children’s Services and he also sought clarity on the reserves position and the capital programme. In response it was stressed that reserves would be used now to cover for shortfall in the budget, and this was also the advice given by external experts. It was also highlighted that there had been unprecedented levels of investment within Children’s Services.

In response to a question regarding the long term use of reserves and the contingency, it was explained that the use of reserves would continue into the future.

In response to a question regarding vacancy control, it was stated that there had been challenges experienced in the recruitment market in filling some key vacancies, however services were working hard to minimise the impact on service delivery.

In relation to the cost of living crisis and the rise in energy bills, it was explained

that the rise in energy bills had only become an issue later in 2022, and was not a factor when the 2022/23 budget was set.

In response to a question regarding the continuing problems being experienced in recruiting social workers, it was explained that recently a large cohort of newly qualified social workers had joined the service, and that additional support was in place to ensure that they progressed within the Service. However, the recruitment and retention of social workers was a national issue and to this end the Council was trying to recruit international social workers, where the induction process would be shorter, once they joined the service.

In response to a question regarding educational attainment, it was stated that the pandemic had seen a dip in attainment levels in Bradford, and that the service was working hard to make improvements going forward and that it will be a particular area of focus.

In relation to the underspend in Neighbourhoods, it was explained that this was a result of some additional funds coming into the service, and that efforts were ongoing to fill vacancies that existed within the Service.

The Leader of Council was present at the meeting and she stressed that the gap in Local Government Funding was a national issue, which the LGA was lobbying hard on, and what was really needed was a fair funding review, so that Councils were adequately funded

Resolved –

- (1) The Committee looks forward to considering the Fourth Quarter Financial Position Statement.**
- (2) The Committee requests that a report be presented in the new municipal year, in relation to the progress of the Capital Programme.**

ACTION: Strategic Director for Corporate Resources

65. COUNCIL PLAN - MID YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022-23

The report of the Chief Executive, (**Document “AE”**) provided a summary of the Council’s overall achievements in the first six-months of the municipal year 2022-2023.

Alongside that summary was an overview of performance against the Council’s Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the first six-months of 2022-23. The overview focused on measures where there had been new, comparable data since the full-year report provided at the July 2022 Executive Committee.

During the discussion a Member stated that although he appreciated the high level ambitions set out in the report, it was important to get a gauge of the broader

operational performance data underpinning service areas. In response it was acknowledged that there was a broader data set, which set out these operational figures in more detail.

In response to a question regarding how KPIs were set and agreed, it was explained that this was very much a Government agreed set off indicators, which Councils had to measure against, although there was an intention to add to the number of KPIs that we currently measured against.

It was also stressed that regeneration was a key indicator that the Council measured against. To this end the Leader stated that the Council was working hard to realise its regeneration ambitions for the whole district, as well as ensuring the key day to day service delivery was also maintained.

Resolved –

The Committee requests that the full Council performance report be presented later in the year, which also includes consideration of the Council's Locality Plan.

ACTION: Strategic Director for Corporate Resources

66. COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES COLLECTION

The report of the Strategic Director, Corporate Resources, (**Document "AG"**) examined performance in and challenges for Council Tax and Business Rates collection.

Despite good collection rates overall, the cost of living crisis was having an impact on collection rates, and the service was working hard to help and ensure that debt problems were managed through appropriate payment plans and other intervention measures.

In relation to a question regarding bad debt and collection rates, it was explained that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme supported those on low incomes and that those struggling to make payments would also be signposted to other agencies, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Money Advisor Network. The service actively encouraged people to contact the Service regarding debt issues, early on, so that appropriate support could be put in place before the debt issue escalated. Ultimately a percentage of debt would be written off after all other avenues had been exhausted.

In relation to a question regarding the use of debt enforcement companies, it was stressed that the majority of the enforcement work was done in-house and where external agencies were used, they strictly adhered to the enforcement code, so that debt was collected fairly, and where vulnerability was identified as an issue' appropriate, additional safeguarding measures would be followed.

Resolved –

(1) The Committee thanks officers for the work undertaken.

(2) That a further progress report be presented in 12 months.

ACTION: Strategic Director for Corporate Resources

67. CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2022 - 23

The Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee submitted a report (**Document “AH”**) which included proposed items for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2022/23. Members were asked to consider which items should be included in the work programme.

The Overview and Scrutiny Lead drew Members' attention to the Councillor Call for Action sessions that would be arranged in due course in the BD2 and BD10 areas, as well as a session elsewhere in the district. Member would be provided with details of these sessions in due course.

Resolved –

Members discussed the work programme and agreed on the next steps for the Call for Action enquiry into Anti-Social Behaviour across the District.

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.