

Minutes of a meeting of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 22 June 2022 in the Banqueting Hall - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 5.30 pm
Concluded 7.20 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	GREEN	BRADFORD INDEPENDENT GROUP
Mohammed Kamran Hussain Dearden Rowe	Herd	Watson	Elahi

Apologies: Councillor Simon Cunningham and Councillor Mohsin Hussain

Councillor Kamran Hussain in the Chair

1. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interests of transparency, the following declarations were received:

Councillor Dearden declared that he was a food business owner (minute no.5)

Councillor Herd declared that he was a food business owner (minute no.5)

Action: Interim City Solicitor

2. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2022 be signed as a correct record.

Action: Interim City Solicitor

3. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals to the Committee.

4. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

5. FOOD SAFETY IN THE BRADFORD DISTRICT

The report of the Strategic Director of Health and Wellbeing (**Document “A”**) was submitted to the Committee as the Council was required to have a documented and approved Food Safety Service Plan by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The object of a plan was to safeguard food and drink produced, prepared or sold within the district.

The report informed Members of what was included in the Plan and it included a copy of it appended to the main report. Members were asked to consider the contents of the plan which would also need approval at full Council as part of the policy framework.

In light of the Covid 19 pandemic, no plan was produced for 20/21 and 21/22 as staff were re-deployed to enforcement of pandemic regulations. The impact of this was recognised by the FSA and guidance and advice from this body was set out for July 2021 to the end of 2023/4. The Recovery Plan was also contained in the main Food Safety Service Plan.

Officers stated that there were significant challenges as the number of businesses registered had increased and they were facing a backlog of inspection work. They were also working to encourage businesses to improve food safety standards and bring about a reduction of food borne illness. Since the scheme was adopted there was a continued increase in the number of establishments achieving a rating of 3 or higher with the FSA collecting evidence to enable a statutory scheme whereby businesses would be required to display their rating on their premises and online. The final decision would be made by Government Ministers not the FSA or the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC).

Officers also stated that the team was under-resourced and faced challenges to recruit qualified and experienced Environmental Health Officers and contract staff were used when available. Eighteen full time equivalent staff were required in order that statutory requirements were met.

The report contained a review of work carried out and the service plan which showed a drop in percentages of visits and food sampling, due to the increased numbers of businesses operating in the district. There was also the possibility of increased scrutiny for those involved with exporting to the EU. The team were focussing on addressing the backlog in the 22/23 action plan as well as participation in a pilot project with the FSA concerned with food quality in schools.

Members were then given the opportunity to comment and ask questions, the details of which and the responses given are as below.

- As salaries in other nearby local authorities were more attractive, was this

affecting morale in the team, were they aware of the salary differences?

- Officers advised that staff were aware of the position relating to salaries, in addition to salary issues, the Bradford district was a challenging area to work in. It did provide a great opportunity for trainees but there was a sense of frustration.
- What was the staff retention/turnover rate?
 - Members were informed that there were some long serving members of staff who lived locally and wanted to work in the proximity of their homes
- Were staff overwhelmed with the rise in the number of businesses and resultant workload during Covid?
 - Officers stated that it had been a challenge and was a challenging role, coupled with staff reductions from 125 to 40 EH Officers
- With new market chains possibly moving into the area, what impact would they have and would funding be made available to address the increase in demand?
 - Officers responded that there was no additional money available at the current time
- One Member asked if there was any collaboration or relationships with HE and FE establishments to address the skills shortage and was advised that there was no funding for apprentices and Leeds had stopped the process as they were unable to take anyone on for 12 months following an Ofsted inspection.
- As the number of premises had increased, what was the knock on effect for residents in terms of the risk to health and the possible consequences for increased need for the NHS and employers with staff absence through sickness?
 - Officers stated that the risk of food poisoning would be increased, but only national data from the FSA was collected and no information to reflect the local situation was available
- With 15% of the EH workforce due to retire, was there a plan to replace these staff?
 - Members were advised that there was an option to work beyond retirement age plus the service would seek to recruit graduates and apprentices if the funding was available to do so. The situation would likely deteriorate due to being unable to recruit and the loss of experience, skills and knowledge.
- The cost of employing and training a member of staff constituted their salary plus a fee of £2,000 for membership of the Chartered Institute, was there a return of service feature in contracts of employment?
 - Officers stated that staff were required to stay with the authority for 2 years, if they left during this time then the £2,000 fee would be re-payable. In relation to an apprentice post, funding was available for the training element from a central fund but not for a salary.

- Members asked about the possibility of transferring staff across from the Pollution team but were informed that they were all busy.

New business start-ups needed support and the team planned to visit them all. However, not all new start-ups were registered. A meeting was due to take place with the FSA where it was hoped that a new, more sustainable scheme could be introduced in relation to frequency of visits. Officers also stated that premises with poorer hygiene records would be prioritised and visit frequency would be tailored so that businesses rated as 'good' had less.

Following an exercise whereby a cohort of businesses was divided into two – one section received a questionnaire, the businesses in the other half were invited to a seminar. The cohort who received the questionnaire appeared to be more successful.

A Member asked if the level 2 hygiene certificate was mandatory in food preparation/processing and was advised that it was not but notices could be served if improvement was needed.

Officers stated that the FSA was working with online platforms and social media to improve information for customers. It was noted that Deliveroo and Just Eat only accepted registered businesses. The question of regulating these types of businesses was raised but they were not directly involved with food preparation, simply deliveries. Regulation of delivery agents would require statute.

- A Member asked about charities, food banks and community kitchens and was advised that they were required to register also.
- The forthcoming City of Culture year in 2025 and the anticipated boom in visitors could possibly result in further increases in the number of new food related businesses which could, in turn, place further pressure on Environmental Health Team.

Resolved -

That the Executive be requested to consider the implications of City of Culture and the increase in the number of food services businesses on the workforce issues within the Environmental Health Food Safety Service and that consideration also be given to supporting the apprenticeship scheme for this service.

Action: Strategic Director, Health and Wellbeing

6. ELECTRICITY SUPPLY CONTRACT 2023-2027

The report of the Strategic Director of Corporate Resources (**Document "B"**) was submitted to the Committee to provide Members with an explanation of the process and background for the procurement path relating to the intended, new electricity contract with N-Power. The new electricity contract would run from April 2023 to March 2027.

The Council had previously procured its energy through the YPO frameworks to minimise staff time involved in procurement processes, the economies of scale available from the size of contract being procured through YPO as well as Bradford being a founder member. The water supply contract was also supplied as this would run alongside following deregulation and issues caused by rising inflation.

The Council was continuously approached by energy brokers and sales people and used these opportunities to carry out soft market testing to ensure we were still receiving the best value for money. Whilst the normal level of price comparisons was not possible in the previous year, spot checks indicated that the YPO framework had still outperformed possible contracts that comparisons were made with.

Officers advised that the anticipated drop in energy prices did not happen due to the conflict between Russia and the Ukraine. In addition to the low domestic price cap that worked against the wholesale market, there was no longer the option of re-circulating air in the wake of the Covid pandemic for health reasons. Energy consumption in Council operated buildings had not decreased, apart from during the first lockdown. With more employees returning to work, lighting etc still needed to be switched on.

Members were then given the opportunity to comment and ask questions, the details of which and the responses given are as below.

- A Member asked if savings would be made with the new street lighting programme and was told that savings would be made and there was also a framework on how buildings would be more energy efficient when renovated. LED conversion would be rolled out wherever possible. When asked what the plan was if energy prices remained high, Officers stated that there was a plan to get alternative sources of electricity, such as solar and money was available to do a large scale solar project. Suitable sites were being sourced.
- A Member asked whether N Power were buying alternative sources of energy and was advised by Officers that they were buying certificates of renewable energy but the sources could not be separated from the national grid.
- A Member asked if Bradford had invested in off-shore re-newable energy and was informed that there were discussions underway with WYCA as part of a multi Council investment opportunity, which would be a parallel project with Bradford's solar farm.

Officers also stated that since working from home, there was a drop in carbon literacy training when asked about the mindset of people in Council buildings.

Officers were asked if quotes were obtained for energy and confirmed that the contract would be with N-Power through the YPO framework. A benchmarking exercise was due to take place in April 2023 with Crown Commercial Services to gain approval for future contracts if benefits could be realised from this process.

Resolved -

That the report be noted.

Action: Director of Corporate Resources

7. PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS FOR 2022-2023

Resolved:-

That the programme of meetings for 2022-23 be noted.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Interim City Solicitor (**Document “C”**) was submitted to the Committee to provide Members with the details of the draft work programme for 2022/23.

Resolved:-

(1) That Appendix A to Document “C” be adopted as the Committee’s Work Programme 2022/23, and;

(2) That the Work Programme 2022/23 continues to be regularly reviewed during the year.

Action: Overview and Scrutiny Lead

Chair

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

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