

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 25 July 2023 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	GREEN
Azam Alipoor Robinson D Green Mohammed Regan	Loy Glentworth	Stubbs	Love

Councillor Azam in the Chair

Apologies: Councillor Falak Ahmed

Observers: Councillors Hinchcliffe & Pollard

9. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

10. MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023 be signed as a correct record.

11. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

12. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The following referral had been made to the Committee from the meeting of Full Council held on Tuesday 11 July 2023:

Motion on Anti-social behaviour (ASB) reduction fund:

Council Resolved –

To continue prioritising action against ASB and working with police and partners in measures to combat it.

Request a report to Corporate Overview & Scrutiny on the district’s progress in tackling ASB and options for any new approaches and learning from other areas to build on our measures to tackle ASB and its causes.

The Council Leader to write to all District MPs asking them to make the case to Government about the detrimental impact of national funding cuts on police resources to tackle ASB and community safety issues.

Resolved –

That in noting the referral in relation to the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) reduction fund, the Committee agreed to include this in the 2023-24 work programme.

ACTION: Overview and Scrutiny Lead

13. FULL-YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022-23

The report of the Chief Executive, **Document “D”** provided a summary of the Council’s overall achievements in the financial year 2022-2023. Alongside this was an overview of performance against the Council’s Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2022-23. The overview focused on measures where there had been new, comparable data since the update report provided at the March 2023 Executive Committee.

The background to the report outlined the overall context in which the Council was operating and key achievements provided a summary by outcome area highlighting performance over the whole of the year.

It was reported that, like other local authorities across the UK, the Council faced significant financial and demand pressures as it sought to protect services and support people through the cost of living rises amidst soaring energy fuel and food prices, rising interest rates and increases in the costs of goods and services.

The Head of Policy, Performance, Partnerships and Research provided an overview of the significant achievements to date including the successful bid for Bradford to become the City of Culture 2025; the reduction in people killed or seriously injured on the roads; supporting learning disabled people into employment and protecting children from discrimination.

The report revealed that 18 of 35 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) were travelling in a positive direction and there was a report against each KPI in terms of national challenge provided.

Some impactful work in localities was reported including improvements made at Hanson School, (Bradford East); staff training around domestic abuse, (Shipley),

collaborations with businesses to increase skills and the economy (Keighley); targeting work on recycling (Bradford West) and funding to promote outreach energy events (Bradford South).

Following the presentation, a number of questions and queries were discussed including around those KPIs which were not reported positively.

The Chair reported that despite hearing similar reports on children, young people and educational attainment for many years the figures for Bradford were the worst in the UK. He questioned if a change of direction and focus was needed to see progress. The Head of Policy, Performance, Partnerships and Research explained that focus had begun to consider issues which were not going well and strategic leaders were working together on absenteeism and attainment. It was also hoped that support could be provided to neuro diverse children at a much early stage. The Strategic Director, Corporate Services, agreed to discuss the Chair's concerns with the Strategic Director, Children's Services, who was not at the meeting at that time, and to provide more information for Members. A Member commented that the Government's policy of academies made the role of Councillors more difficult.

Whilst acknowledging that six parks in the district had achieved a Green Park award concerns were raised that the budget allocated to those parks could be to the detriment of other parks in the district. It was felt that consideration should be given to providing better parks across the entire district as opposed to a limited number of Green Flag areas. The report referred to 35 play areas across the District being refurbished and it was asked where those play areas were located and if Councillors were being involved in those projects. It was explained that some work was being conducted around strategic open spaces and it was agreed that details would be forwarded.

A Member believed that the locality plan work should be aligned to the strategic plan and requested that the locality plan be presented to a future meeting which revealed what had been delivered. It was also requested that the items presented should not be cherry picked. In response it was explained that the locality plan initiatives had been selected by the Area Co-ordinators and it was hoped to bring something more substantial in the future.

It was felt that the report contained a lot of narrative and that it was not easy to compare to previous years and judge improvements made. Reference was also made to a lack of information on KPIs for schools and young people. Members felt that the lack of school information made it difficult to assess the impact of what had been conducted. In response it was reported that there was a breakdown in more detail from page 33 of the report. It was agreed to review and incorporate more information in future reports and link the narrative and KPI differently.

Concerns were raised by a Member who believed that 70% of suggested improvements in the "*how we improve/maintain performance*" section of the report had been included in previous years. He questioned if the requirement to have one or more organisations to be locally based when procurement requirements were developed would happen or would that requirement remain on the list of things to improve. In response it was explained that there was a new Head of

Procurement in post. A strategic review was being conducted and it was expected developments would move forward shortly. In relation to local suppliers it was explained that there was not always a local supplier who could fulfil contract requirements.

In response to queries about examples of progress the significant work undertaken with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) on people killed or seriously injured on the roads was reported. It was explained that negative KPIs were always challenged. Members felt that all 35 KPIs should improve and suggested a figure of how many year's issues had been reported in the "*how we can improve/maintain performance*" be included in future reports.

Targets which were worsening around additional homes and affordable homes per year were questioned. In response it was explained that some of those targets had been set nationally and placed into the housing strategy. The challenge of providing attractive sites was acknowledged. Work was ongoing with WYCA to facilitate dialogue with Government departments to make sites more viable. A lot of work was also ongoing with house builders in the region.

The prevalence of "*overweight including obesity*" in the report was questioned. A Member believed that the performance indicator had never been included in previous reports and questioned if the category had been rebranded. In response it was agreed to discuss that category with the Public Health Department and report back.

The indicator revealing the percentage of people with Learning Disabilities who lived with their family was discussed and it was explained that this was to reveal people living in settled accommodation and was to ensure people had the best intensive support.

The spending in budget and year on year savings indicator was discussed and it was questioned if this should be just targeted at 100% or removed from the KPI's and monitored under Council Standing Orders. It was agreed that the point made that it shouldn't need a KPI to ensure the budget was achieved was valid.

In response to queries about KPI's with no value attached it was explained that all parties had agreed to the KPI's and these had been through the Executive process. Those indicators could be amended to show percentages.

The Chair questioned the KSI on Killed and Seriously Injured on the Roads and questioned if the value of 292 was a local figure. It was confirmed that this was a local figure and whilst it was improving there was still a significant amount of work planned. The Chair acknowledged that accidents were reducing, however, the number of life altering crashes on the roads was still too high. He referred to the use of drugs and nitrous oxide issues and a blatant disregard for road safety. The Strategic Director, Place, confirmed that there would be a greater focus on those issues in the community safety partnership.

A Member whilst acknowledging the fiscal pressures and cost of living crisis in the district believed that the issues being faced could not be met without the support of external partners. It was requested that future reports include how the Council was building and strengthening those partnerships to meet KPIs. She

appreciated the hard work undertaken and thanked officers for their efforts.

The Head of Policy, Performance, Partnerships and Research reported that in response to the cost of living crisis the focus of the Ant-Poverty Group, led by the Strategic Director, Health and Wellbeing, was the practical delivery of household support for residents. Work was being undertaken with finance officers to ensure that all children eligible for free school meals were given the opportunity to take up that provision.

A Member queried the figure depicted for the percentage of Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates and was advised that this was a cumulative total.

Resolved –

That this committee requests that the comments and suggestions raised by members, be considered in the development of the next performance report, with particular focus to be given to more narrative and progress, year on year.

ACTION: Strategic Director, Corporate Resources.

14. FINANCE POSITION STATEMENT FOR 2022-23

The report of the Director of Finance, **Document “E”** provided Members with the 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 March 2023. It stated the Council’s current balances and reserves and school balances.

Following a detailed presentation Member questioned why some savings targets had not been achieved and if they would be met in the current year. In response the impact of Covid was discussed and it was confirmed that some savings were to be undertaken on a four-year programme. Officers were confident that the remaining savings could be delivered and it was reported that 350 million had been saved over a ten-year period.

It was accepted that Adult Services had small undelivered savings but it was questioned why no explanation was included in the report. Officers explained that services were still recovering and it was difficult to achieve those savings whilst responding to continual demand.

Following discussions about increased costs and underachieved savings it was requested that a report be provided, before the next scheduled quarterly report, on savings targets which were achievable and those which would not be met.

The report referred to efforts being made to bolster reserve levels by applying accounting policy changes to the 2021-22 accounts and the potential repatriation of reserves held at a West Yorkshire level. In response to questions about those policy changes it was explained that an accounting policy change would be adopted on consumption of assets. An annual method to repay debts at a lower

repayment at the start of that debt and higher payments later would provide some savings. Those plans had received favourable legal advice and could have a significant impact on reserve levels but at the current time were not assured. It was agreed that a briefing note would be provide to Members explaining the procedure.

The expected amount of repatriated reserves was queried and it was agreed to cover that in a future report in more detail.

The level of underspend in some areas such as skills was discussed and concern was raised that this could impact performance. It was explained that the underspends were constantly reviewed. The Leader of Council reported that the skills team were proficient at procuring funds from external resources and not totally dependent on Council reserves.

The ratings on the Risk Management Register were discussed with Members requesting assurance that those with yellow, amber or red status were mitigated. The Director of Finance provided assurances that officers reported to him and that the risks were reviewed on a regular and systemic basis. A senior leadership meeting including experts from Price Waterhouse, a leading professional services company, had been held to underpin the approach to risk and to raise the profile of managing risks. The session had been very successful and would improve dialogue between risk holders and managers.

Resolved –

That having discussed the report, the Committee requests that officers report back to this Committee on the underachieved savings for 2022-23, before the Second Quarter Financial Position Statement is considered.

ACTION: Strategic Director, Corporate Resources.

15. QTR 1 FINANCE POSITION STATEMENT FOR 2023-24

The Director of Finance of Finance presented a report (**Document “F”**) which provided Members with the forecast year-end financial position of the Council for 2023-24.

It outlined the revenue and capital budgets and the year-end forecast financial position based on information at the end of May 2023. It stated the Council’s current balances and reserves and school balances.

The report was the first monitoring report presented to Members on the Council’s 2023-2024 financial position. It provided the forecast revenue and capital financial position of the Council at 31 March 2024. The report covered:

- The forecast outturn of the Council’s revenue budget in 2023-24
- The forecast delivery of budgeted savings in 2023-24
- A statement on the Council’s reserves

- An update on the Council Tax and Business Rates collection funds
- An update on the Capital Investment Plan.
- Benchmark spend and income comparators.
- The Council's Risk Register.
- An update on the Bradford Children's & Families Trust

Following a very detailed presentation the Chair, whilst acknowledging the challenges faced, raised concern about the identification of a risk of overspend in 2023-2024 made by the Bradford Children's and Families Trust reported in Document "F". The Director of Finance reported that he had met with the Trust that morning and discussed his concerns about some of the calculations reported. It was explained that the numbers of children in expensive care provision and the level of agency staff forecast remained high. A mitigation plan had been requested as there was a risk to the Council if the Trust exceeded reserve capacity.

The Strategic Director, Corporate Services, explained that the Trust needed time to do due diligence to be certain of facts and figures. Time was needed and if mitigation plans were required the Council would work with the Trust.

A Member referred to other Council's being crippled by costs of children's services and raised concern about particular areas including the corporate organisation of the Trust and the control that the Council had. He was unclear as to whether the Council could refuse to fund any overspend and also unsure about what mitigating plans were in place.

It was explained that the Trust had been developed very quickly and an interim business plan had been developed. A full business plan would be provided by the end of September 2023. Previous work undertaken by the Strategic Director to recruit overseas social workers was coming to fruition and it was hoped that the plan provided in September would show that the Trust was running efficiently. Members were assured that there were mechanisms in the commissioned contract with the Trust to challenge costs but it was too early to say if those measures were required.

A Member questioned if it was possible for the Trust to say that to deliver what contracted they would need additional funding and if so would that funding would be from the Council or Government. It was stressed that the Trust had been in operation for only eight weeks and needed time to settle.

The Leader of Council stressed the importance of having collaborative arrangements and that all were working for the Trust to achieve its objectives.

The Strategic Director, Children's Services explained her biggest concern had been that progress begun would slow down or reverse but stated that she had not seen any evidence of that to date.

The impact on revenue of the closure of bus lanes in the city centre was raised. It was questioned if the pedestrianisation of the city centre would impact projections for the second financial quarter. The Strategic Director, Place, reported that 1.6km of roads would be closed and the impact on bus lane and parking revenue

was currently being assessed.

Measures to produce a balanced budget were queried and it was explained that plans had been agreed with the Executive and joint senior leadership team. Regular reviews were undertaken and officers were confident in their plans although the risk of the Bradford Children's and Families Trust were unknown. An update would be provided to the Executive in September identifying any projected gaps in budget and the Local Government Settlement impact.

Resolved –

That the Committee looked forward to receiving the second quarter financial position statement and also thanked officers.

ACTION: Strategic Director, Corporate Resources.

16. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Resolved –

That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the item relating to the District Heat Network on the grounds that it was likely in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if they were present, exempt information within Paragraph 3 (Finance or Business Affairs) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), would be disclosed and it was considered that, in all the circumstances, the public interest in excluding public access to the relevant part of the proceedings outweighed the interest in publication of the report.

It was in the public interest in maintaining these exemptions because it was in the overriding interest of proper administration that Members were made fully aware of the financial implications of any decision.

17. DISTRICT HEAT NETWORK - UPDATE ON THE PROPOSALS TO MOVE TO PRE-PROCUREMENT FOR HEAT ENERGY FROM A DISTRICT HEAT NETWORK

The Strategic Director of Corporate Resources submitted a report (**Document "G" which included a Not for Publication Appendix 1**) which provided an update on the district heat network for Bradford and the proposal to move to market testing tender process for heat energy from a district heat network. To gain an understanding of the availability, strengths and weaknesses of the market and to develop the specification and best value procurement and contractual approach.

Resolved –

That the committee request the comments and suggestions raised by members, be considered as part of the District Heat Network procurement exercise.

ACTION: Strategic Director, Corporate Resources.

18. CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

The Chair of the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee presented a report (**Document “H”**) which included the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2023/24, which were attached as appendix 1 to Document “H”.

Members were advised that Neighbourhood Forums would be utilised for the Anti-Social Behaviour call for action sessions and these were being planned to be held in September. The sessions would be public meetings to allow residents to attend and communicate their concerns.

A Member suggested producing an agenda for the meetings to provide structure and a focus for discussions. The Overview and Scrutiny Lead agreed to produce terms of reference which he would send to Members for comment.

Resolved –

That the committee discussed and amended the work programme.

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