

## Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 11 January 2024 at 5.00 pm in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 5.00 pm  
Concluded 7.50 pm

### Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	GREEN
Azam Aneela Ahmed Regan Robinson D Green	Loy F Ahmed	Stubbs	Love

### Councillor Azam in the Chair

Observer: Councillor Hinchcliffe (Leader of Council)

### 51. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interest of transparency, the following declarations were made:

- (i) In the item relating to West Yorkshire Joint Services Update (Minute 55), Councillors Azam and Mohammed stated that they were aware that test purchases had been carried in their ward following concerns they had raised about a particular premise.
- (ii) In the item relating to the Armed Forces Covenant (Minute 58), Councillor Green stated that he worked for Age UK, who had undertaken some work relating to the Covenant.
- (iii) In the item relating to the Budget (Minute 56), Councillor Falak Ahmed stated that a close relative worked in the care sector.

***To be actioned by: Interim Director of Legal and Governance***

### 52. MINUTES

**Resolved –**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2023 be signed as a correct record.**

**53. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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

**54. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no referrals made to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**55. WEST YORKSHIRE JOINT SERVICES (WYJS) - UPDATE**

The Director of West Yorkshire Joint Services submitted a report. (**Document “X”**) which provided details on activities of the West Yorkshire Joint Services, both in the Bradford district and generally across the region.

The Director gave an overview of the activities undertaken by the WYJS during 2023/24 which were detailed in Document “X”. He stressed that WYJS adopted an intelligence led approach based on the number of complaints received, with considerable activity taking place in the area of sales to minors and dealing with the proliferation of illicit tobacco, which in many cases was a front door to organised criminality, such as human trafficking and slavery. Another key area of work was supporting people who had been targeted by unscrupulous gangs by interrupting their operations and encouraging victims to come forward and report such crimes.

The well renowned Archaeology Service and its work was also alluded to.

During the discussion and in response to a question on doorstep scams and whether there were figures on the extent of this problem by ward, area and amounts recovered, the Director stated that he did not have this information to hand and that he will provide this information outside of this meeting, however work had been undertaken in around 19 wards.

In response to a question around customers being overcharged when using contactless payments, it was stated that the number of concerns expressed in this regard had not reached a threshold that warranted further investigations, however where there is a particular issue regarding a particular premise, WYJS would investigate this further.

In response to a question on how priorities and resources were deployed across West Yorkshire, the Director explained that the coverage across the region was

not uniform and many investigations and consequent enforcement work was very much on an intelligence led basis, and that resources were deployed accordingly based on achieving the best outcomes.

In response to a question regarding illicit tobacco and individuals getting more adept at evading detection, the Director acknowledged that this was the case and that the use of hidden compartments as well as storing illegal tobacco offsite was now commonplace, so the Service had to be wise to this way of concealment and operation.

A Member raised concerns around the use of cosmetic surgery and the age limits associated with procedures. In response it was explained that this was a difficult area to police as you couldn't just go and undertake a test purchase, however some initial work had been done in this area.

Underage vaping was another area of concern and the increased use by children. To this end schools were trying to tackle the problem as well as warning letters being sent to premises, where complaints had been received, however enforcement work was limited given that resources were stretched.

In relation to a question regarding the Archeology Service, it was stated that metal detectorists reported finds regularly, some of which were worthy of note. In terms of other architectural finds, trenching bids were performed and where there were significant finds a bigger dig would be commissioned lasting over a few months.

**Resolved –**

**That the Committee requests a progress report be presented in 12 months.**

***To be actioned by – Director of West Yorkshire Joint Services, (WYJS)***

**56. 2024-25 BUDGET PROPOSALS - FINANCIAL ANALYSIS, INITIAL FINANCIAL OUTLOOK AND BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2024-25 AND BEYOND**

The Director of Finance submitted a report (**Document “AA”**) which set out the financial analysis, initial financial outlook and Budget proposals for 2024-25 and beyond.

The Director of Finance set out the Budget proposals for 2024/2025 following the Local Government Settlement which were detailed in Document “AA” and earmarked for consultation with staff, Trade Unions, public and interested parties. The proposals had been developed in an unprecedented level of financial pressure and in the context of a rise in the demand for adult and children social care services. The Council was in close dialogue with Government about our challenges, and that without financial support the Council would not be able to deliver a balanced budget for 2024/2025. Further details of the budget proposals were alluded to, the details of which were set out in Document “AA” and the related appendices.

The public consultation process was also referred to with the closing date for this consultation ending on 17 February 2024; the final report setting out the details

will be presented to the Executive in due course. The consultation process will be expansive and target as many stakeholders as possible, asking for their comments. Equality Impact Assessments had been undertaken on the proposals and the details will also be presented to the Executive.

During the discussion Members asked a number of questions on the budget proposals set out in the report, the questions together with the responses are set out below:

A Member questioned that in Section 6.4 of the report, excess spend was in the region of £50m within Children's Services and he ascertained the reasons behind this. In response the Director of Children's Services stated that Bradford was in a high deprivation area, the 13<sup>th</sup> most deprived area in the country, which was significant and this placed a great strain in terms of the demand for services, with 39% of the children in the district living in poverty, and therefore the call on statutory care services was significant as well as in those relating to education and disability and costs relating to home to school transport.

The Chief Executive of the Care Trust was also present and stated that keeping children safe was key and that children with high level of needs required specialist provision, albeit to say that efforts were being made to reduce costs in this area and we should see some reductions in due course. Again, in relation to the use of agency staff, efforts were ongoing to stabilise the workforce and have a more permanent workforce.

In reducing cost, our early intervention work was key, of which we were seeing reductions as well as in the numbers of those exiting the system earlier, however this will take time to show in terms of a tangible reduction in cost.

A Member expressed concern that any savings or reductions in early intervention work would impact on the results we were trying to achieve. In response it was stressed that there were no plans to reduce the work around early intervention.

A Member stated that the budget consultation had now gone live, with proposals to increase a number of charges which will have an impact on residents and businesses. In response the Strategic Director Place stated that impacts will be felt across the piece, and it was therefore to gauge the views expressed through the consultation process and what mitigation measures can be put in place to reduce the impact of the proposed savings.

The Leader stated that youth service provision in the district had been maintained over the years, despite the impact of austerity, however resources overall were limited, and the need was high, and we were lobbying Government to fund services, whilst maintaining financial stability.

In response to a question on the number of children in the care system and the increase in demand over the years, the Leader stressed that we were awaiting a response from the Department for Education on increasing the funding in this area. In addition, the Council had also requested exceptional financial support, and these were subject of ongoing discussions with the relevant Government department.

A Member stated that the cost of placements in the care sector were significant and that companies were making profit out of vulnerability and need and therefore

Government needed to urgently address this issue. He also stated that as part of the Budget consultation exercise that there was a lot of confusion around capital and revenue spending, and therefore there needed to be clear messaging and clarity around this.

In relation to a question on income generation proposals set out within the report, the Strategic Director Place stated there were proposals to generate income within Museums by 'what you can pay' contactless donations as well as other proposals from the Department of Place, and based on the feedback, so far, we were confident that we can deliver on those savings as well as raise income.

In relation to a question on asset disposals, it was explained that this would subject to a further report to the Executive, which will set out the details.

A Member questioned the proposals to reduce costs by closing two household waste sites in Ilkley and Queensbury, he questioned if other options beyond closure had been looked at, which would retain provision but still result in cost savings. In response the Strategic Director Place stated that the proposed closures would still enable residents in those areas to access alternative provision, with the sites earmarked for closure, they had been chosen as they dealt with the least tonnage and there were specific logistical issues associated with those sites.

**Resolved –**

**That this Committee requests the Executive to take into consideration the comments raised, in relation to the 2024-25 Budget Proposals, as part of the consultation process.**

***To be actioned by – Strategic Director for Corporate Resources.***

## **57. HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE SERVICE**

The Strategic Director Place submitted a report (**Document “Z”**) which provided an update to the committee on how the service is working towards achieving a high performing, customer focused hackney carriage and private hire service. How it analysed information to drive improvements in service delivery to the benefit of trade and employees.

The Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Manager gave an overview of the Service and improvements to date, details of which were set out in the report.

During the discussion a Member stated that the survey return amongst drivers was poor and it was difficult to gauge service provision and what drivers really felt about the Service. In response it was acknowledged that the number of returns was poor, and this was partly due to staffing levels, however the Service was actively looking at other ways of engaging with the taxi trade. She added that in any case if the Trade was unhappy with any aspects, they would normally contact the Service straight away.

In response to a question regarding enforcement, it was stressed that the Service worked closely with the other West Yorkshire Councils to ensure there was a

collaborative approach, as well as close liaison with the Private Hire operators to ensure that drivers adhered to the rules. Training was also provided to drivers around safety and professionalism.

In response to a question on improving driver feedback via the online system, it was noted that when drivers upload details on the system they are also asked for feedback on the Service.

In relation to a question on the compulsory use of dashcams and in car CCTV, it was stated that although useful, the Service can't enforce the use these devices based on the current legislation.

Members welcomed the report and the huge improvements that had been made by the Service and the good liaison and working relationship that had been established with the Trade, and it was therefore:

**Resolved –**

**That a progress report be presented in 12 months, as members are keen to keep an overview of this service area.**

***To be actioned by – Strategic Director for Place.***

**58. PROGRESS REPORT ON WORK TO IMPLEMENT THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT LOCALLY AND TO MEET THE COUNCIL'S COVENANT DUTIES**

The Assistant Director of Office of the Chief Executive submitted a report (**Document “Y”**) which provided an update on work undertaken and ongoing to implement the Armed Forces Covenant locally and to meet the Council's duties under the Armed Forces Covenant Duty contained within the Armed Forces Act 2021.

A comprehensive overview was given on the implementation of the Covenant, including how support was being officered via Airedale Hospital to assist veterans. The Armed Forces champion was also present to lend her support to the work undertaken to date and raising awareness of the Covenant.

A Member thanked the Armed Forces Champion, Councillor Dodds for her sterling work in supporting veterans and he urged that we also reach out to other veterans, for example those that had served in the Army of India.

A Member commented that the figures around homelessness looked very low, anecdotal evidence suggests that a number of homeless people had previously served in the armed forces. In response, it was acknowledged that further work needed to be done in this area to reach out and work with colleagues and partners to better identify this cohort.

A Member suggested that some training should also be provided to all Members around the Covenant as well as a guide for Councillors which could encompass

key information around the Covenant and signposting to support and services available.

**Resolved –**

**That a report on progress be presented to this Committee in 12 months.**

***To be actioned by – Strategic Director for Corporate Resources***

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

The Chair of the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee submitted a report (**Document “AB”**) which included the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2023/24, attached as appendix 1 to Document “AB”. Also attached as appendix 2, was a list of unscheduled topics for 2023-24.

**Resolved –**

**That the Committee discussed and amended the work programme.**

**To be actioned by: 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