

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING, 23RD AUGUST, 2022

Present – Councillors Veevers (Chairman), Atcha, Brady, Bullock, Donaghy, Hartigan, Haworth, Heslop, Iqbal, Meehan, and Patel.

Also in Attendance

Councillor Mrs. Fairclough	Executive Cabinet Member Deputy Leader
Councillor Haslam	Executive Cabinet Member Highways and Transport
Councillor Muslim	Executive Cabinet Member Environmental Services Delivery
Councillor Hewitt	Executive Cabinet Member Strategic Housing and Planning
Mr. G. Brough	Director of Place Development
Mr. J. Dyson	Director of Place Services
Mr. P. Whittingham	Assistant Director Development and Regeneration
Mr. G. Parker	Assistant Director Environment and Regulatory Services
Mr. M. Russell	Head of Environmental Assets
Mr. A. Bolan	Head of Service, Regulatory Services
Mrs. L. Hunter	Head of Environmental Delivery
Mrs. J. Barber	Services Schools Manager
Mr. P. Entwistle	General Manager
Mr. P. Mykytiuk	Trading Standards Manager
Mr. D. Shepherd	Principal Group Accountant
Mr. I. D. Mulholland	Deputy Democratic Services Manager

(Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors D Wilkinson, Walsh, Weatherby, Ayub and Eckersley- Fallon and Councillor Warren as executive Cabinet Member)

Councillor Veevers in the Chair.

6. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Place Scrutiny Committee held on 28th July, 2022 were submitted.

Resolved – That the minutes be agreed and signed as a correct record.

7. THE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report which set out details of the updated Committee work programme.

Members discussed matters around performance reports and that the waste management item at the next meeting would include a thorough understanding of the challenges.

The Chairman also mentioned the proposal that the items concerning apprenticeships and the Albert Halls would be considered by a joint meeting of this Committee and the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee to be held on 9th February, 2023.

Resolved – That the updated work programme position, as outlined be agreed.

8. TRADED SERVICES

Mr. Jon Dyson, Director of Place Services and colleagues gave a presentation on how Covid-19 had impacted Bolton's Traded Services.

With regard to Bolton's Markets, Members were appraised of the following –

- Responsible for the Bolton Market; other special markets in the Borough and support to the Corporate Events team in organising the Bolton Food and Drink Festival;

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- Open Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday (9am-5pm);
- Employed 16.31 FTE staff;
- High level trader occupancy - currently 90%; and
- Secured £5.9m from the Towns Fund to upgrade/modernise Bolton Market to create a unique community/shopping destination.

The meeting was also informed of the Markets projected financial position for 2021/22.

The meeting was also informed of the following -

- Significant loss of rental income;
- Additional operating costs due to restrictions (ceased on 30th March 2022);
- Occupancy levels remained above the national average (83%) at 93%;
- High level of trader arrears due to the pandemic - individual repayment plans are in place;
- Ongoing review to attract new businesses to the market;
- Regular updates to traders on the Towns Fund investment to upgrade/modernise Bolton Market;
- Phase 1 of the early works development of Bolton Market completed (car park entrance);
- Public realm works around Bolton Market – on target to be completed in early September; and
- Phase 2 of the early works development of Bolton Market underway (waste compound move).

The meeting was also informed of the current financial position of Heaton Fold Garden Centre and Gift shop, the Covid 19 impacts and recovery. It was explained that there were 3.8 FTE staff plus a casual pool for retail / catering. There had been a loss of income due to business disruption during the pandemic. The café had now re-opened and was trading, and the monthly Artisan market resumed in May, 2022. Continued promotion of the business was being undertaken.

An Overview of Building Cleaning Services was given together with the financial impacts of Covid, the 2021/22 Actual Outturn

and the Covid 19 recovery plan. Members were reminded that the service was provided to 59 primary schools, 1 secondary school and 38 assorted internal Council buildings and the NHS.

It was explained that the service had been vital to the continued operation of schools throughout the pandemic and had generated a consistent level of income throughout. There had however been challenges with staff shielding, provision of cover staff and on-going recruitment challenges.

An overview of the School Meals service was given together with the impacts of Covid 19 2021/22 and the Actual Outturn 2021/22. Members were reminded that the service was provided to 94 primary schools and academies across Bolton and employed 339 staff.

There had been a significant loss of income from paid meals, Breakfast Clubs and adult meals during Covid. There had also been other additional costs due to the impact of covid 19. In terms of recovery a number of theme days had been delivered and would continue to be delivered, new menu launches, tasting sessions and flexible menus.

An overview of the Trade Waste service was given along with the effects of Covid 19 on the service. The outturn for 2021/22 was also provided and a summary of how the Service was recovering post Covid 19.

It was explained how the residual waste service operated in Bolton, and turnover, with over 1,500 customers. The vast majority of contracts had been retained during Covid. In terms of recovery, it was indicated that the business mix and price enabled the service to remain attractive and the income had recently been enhanced by several large contracts.

Matters around school collections (and charging opportunities), route optimisation and service promotion were also mentioned.

An overview of the Pest Control Service was given along with a summary of Covid 19 impacts and the financial outturn for 2021/22. It was noted that there were five staff in the service

with a duty to keep the Borough as free from vermin as practically possible. The service scope also included an annual sewer baiting programme, responding to domestic and commercial pest control requests and delivering contracts to the commercial sector.

The service had been disrupted during Covid 19 and there had been a reduced number of enquiries.

The service had now fully resumed, and a new charging structure had been put in place following approval. The service was currently reviewing commercial development opportunities.

An overview of Bereavement Services was also provided including the financial outturn for 2021/22. The Service operated the Overdale Crematorium, 8 public cemeteries and maintained 4 closed church yards. There were 20 operational and administrative staff.

Members were appraised of the demand during the pandemic and current demand. It was also explained that the service recovered its costs and made a contribution to departmental budgets.

Members in their discussions referred to the following -

- The presentation was a reminder of how difficult things were during covid;
- Priority afforded to Bolton Market public realm and aesthetics vs trader support in challenging economic times. Also, how the Market Place distinguished from the Market;
- Pest control services and contracts with the Council;
- The impact of charges – Service Level Agreements with landlords;
- Pest control enforcement and where the statutory service met the paid service;
- Markets - the dialogue with stall holders re Towns Fund project and wider support;

- Free school meals being important – universal service as opposed to infant free school meals;
- Digitisation to reduce costs regarding traded services;
- Heaton Fold – profits v other social/value adding benefits;
- Bolton Market open days and out of town markets;
- Vegan and plant based foods as part of the school meals offer;
- Pest control and whether requests had dropped due to the charges;
- Trade waste and charges;
- Provision for internment of ashes and opportunities for woodland burials;
- Second hand Sunday market provision;
- Market footfall;
- Sincere thanks to all staff throughout the pandemic who have played their part in securing the financial outturns that have been considered by the Committee;
- Cause of pest infestations and actions that could be taken;
- Markets and opportunities to increase footfall, e.g. local development; and
- Universal services.

Resolved – That Mr. Dyson and colleagues be thanked for their detailed and informative presentation and that the position and discussions be noted.

9. TRADING STANDARDS – TACKLING THE SALE OF ILLICIT TOBACCO

Mr. Jon Dyson, Director of Place Services Mr. Philip Mykytiuk, Trading Standards Manager and Mr. Andrew Bolan, Head of Regulatory Services gave a presentation relating to the threat to communities of the sale of illicit tobacco.

Members were informed that once seen as an insipid criminal commodity, illicit tobacco was now determining the make-up of some of our neighbourhoods and was impacting on community life. It was the highest area of demand for Trading Standards in Bolton.

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As a consequence, the team was committed to tackling illicit tobacco on Bolton's Streets.

Almost a year on from the previous committee meeting the following results/outcomes should be noted :-

- In excess of 470,000 cigarettes and 74kg of hand rolling tobacco across 38 seizures since October 2021;
- Over 2,000 Nitrous Oxide cannisters seized alongside illegal tobacco - being supplied alongside one another;
- 13 cars used for storing illegal goods, seized, removed from streets and impounded along with £6k in cash;
- If you consider that across GM authorities, 280,000 cigarettes were seized in the last 6 months, Bolton was well in excess of this figure in the first 5 months of operating; and
- those methods worked - the pace and intensity needed to continue.

Operation Avro was explained to members of the Committee and the following highlighted -

- An example of the exemplary partnership enforcement work with our partners in GMP;
- Dynamic response to continued intelligence; and
- Working towards more integrated partnership operations- shared intelligence and resources.

The meeting was advised that illicit tobacco was an organised threat to our communities and was -

- No longer an insipid criminal commodity;
- Distorting the local economy;
- Linked to money laundering - buying up property; and
- Linked to other crime.

Furthermore, the following was indicated -

- Operated by organised crime groups (OCGs) and links to other forms of serious criminality;
- Developing knowledge and intelligence indicates illegal immigration was fuelling and resourcing this activity; and
- Shops that were once hubs of the community were now influencing the living standards of local residents/communities.

An illustrative portrayal of how illicit tobacco infiltrates communities was provided through video clips.

It was emphasised that the sale of illicit tobacco was serious and organised, and that Bolton's direction of travel should take the following course –

- This should not be tackled by a single agency- needed both internal and external enforcement partners;
- Information and intelligence maintained pace;
- Restore faith in the communities and re-establish territory; and
- Creative solutions:
 - Landlord disruption;
 - Mapping and targeting OCG's;
 - Premises closures; and
 - Cash seizures and asset recovery.

In terms of a local and national context, the following was noted:

- The government were aiming to reduce national smoking prevalence to 5% - in Bolton we were currently at 15%;
- Increasing the price of tobacco was the proven, worldwide strategy, to reduce smoking prevalence.
- The availability of illicit tobacco flies in the face of this strategy; and
- Surpassing illegal drugs in terms of cost to society.

Members in their discussions referred to the following –

- the big criminal activity and who was involved;
- The funding for these strategies;
- Commend the work done;
- Working with landlords;
- How the Council could help to make a difference;
- The extent of the issue in Bolton;
- Planning for raids.
- It ruins communities and importance of co-ordinated activity; and
- Nitrous Oxide use, effect on children and legal position.

Resolved – That Messrs Dyson, Bolan and Mykytiuk be thanked for the very informative presentation and that the position and discussions be noted.

10. MEMBERS' BUSINESS

The minutes of various meetings relevant to the remit of this Committee were also submitted, viz –

- (i) Executive Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation held on 15th August, 2022;
- (ii) Executive Cabinet Member Regeneration held on 15th August, 2022;
- (iii) Executive Cabinet Member Deputy Leader held on 15th August, 2022;
- (iv) Executive Cabinet Member Strategic Housing and Planning held on 16th August, 2022; and
- (v) Executive Cabinet Member Environmental Service Delivery held on 15th August, 2022

Resolved – That the minutes be noted.

(The meeting started at 6.00pm and finished at 8.40pm)

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NOTES