

**CORPORATE AND EXTERNAL ISSUES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

MEETING, 13th DECEMBER, 2021

Present – Councillors Silvester (Chairman), Veevers (Vice-Chairman), Connor, Cowen, Jiva, Mistry, Peel, Radcliffe, Rimmer, Walsh, Wright and Zaman.

Also in Attendance

Councillor Cox	Leader of the Council
Councillor Dean	Executive Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities
Councillor Hartigan	Council's Representative on the Greater Manchester Pension Fund
Ms. S. Johnson	Deputy Chief Executive
Ms. H. Gorman	Borough Solicitor
Mr. G. Brough	Director of Place - Development
Mr. L. Fallows	Assistant Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development
Mr. E. Brook	Assistant Director Strategy and Partnerships
Ms. R. Albrow	Principal Consultation and Research Officer
Mrs. V. Ridge	Democratic Services Manager

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors Allen, Ismail and McMulkin.

Councillor Silvester in the Chair

21. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25th

October, 2021 were submitted.

Resolved – That the minutes be signed as a correct record subject to it being noted that Councillor Jiva had not been notified about the meeting and therefore was not in attendance.

22. THE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021/2022

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report which detailed the proposed work programme for 2021/2022.

Resolved – That the Work Programme for 2021/2022 be approved and that with regards to the item on Policing this should include how the staffing structure will provide continuity across the borough.

23. COVID 19 AND FINANCES UPDATE

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that, since the last meeting, there was no further detrimental impact on the budget due to Covid 19.

Members were also advised that the financial situation at Manchester Airport was due to be reported to the next meeting of the Audit Committee but could also be considered at a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

Following the update, members made the following comments/observations:-

- What representations were being made to Central Government with regards to providing financial support to the hospitality industry;
- The financial impact on public health in terms of the roll out of boosters; and
- An update on the final guidance which was being awaited from the Department for Work and Pensions on some additional funding be circulated to members of this Scrutiny Committee once available.

Resolved – That the position be noted.

24. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Ms. E. Brook, Assistant Director Strategy and Partnerships, Mr. L. Fallows, Assistant Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development and Ms. R. Albrow, Principal Consultation and Research Officer, gave a presentation to members which provided details in relation to the Equalities Strategy 2021-2025 which had been approved by the Executive Cabinet Leaders Portfolio on 7th December, 2021 and also endorsed by the Trade Unions.

Information was provided in relation to the following areas, viz:-

- The Public Sector Equality Duty;
- The Equality Objectives which were contained within the Strategy;
- The key actions which were undertaken during Spring 2021;
- The key actions which were undertaken during Summer 2021;
- The key actions which were undertaken during Autumn/Winter 2021; and
- The next steps in terms of the Action Plan for 2022 which included:
 - Review activity undertaken throughout 2021;
 - Formalise Action Plan for 2022 in partnership with the Trade unions
 - a. Review accessibility of intranet and website;
 - b. Review current EIA process – challenges and best practice;
 - c. Equalities Allies Network; and
 - d. Review of 2021 Census data.

Following the presentation, members made the following comments/observations:-

- What consultation had taken place with other stakeholders, including elected members;

- Who would monitor the performance of the objectives and measures contained within the Strategy;
- Concerns regarding workforce data and that previously black and ethnic minority employees was approximately 10% of the workforce and the aim was to reflect the local community, however, it was noted that this figure had now decreased;
- Concerns were also expressed regarding the statistical data of the workforce for LGBT and those with a disability, however, it was acknowledged that these figures might not reflect the actual position; and
- Information on the public workforce was due in March, 2022 which could then be considered by this Scrutiny Committee in April, 2022.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted and that an item on public workforce be included on the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for the meeting in April, 2022.

25. GREATER MANCHESTER PENSION FUND

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee had raised a number of questions to be answered by the Council's representative on the Greater Manchester Pension Fund in response to a Notice of Motion which was approved by Council in 2019.

A copy of the questions had been circulated in advance of the meeting, together with, the approved Notice of Motion.

In response, the Borough Solicitor circulated information which she had received from the Director of the Greater Manchester Pension Fund.

Under Standing Order 16 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules, the Chairman invited Councillor Hayes to address the Committee to outline his concerns regarding the lack of response and information from the Greater Manchester Pension Fund.

Councillor Hartigan, the Council's representative on the Greater Manchester Pension Fund, advised that he had

attended his first meeting of the Fund on 10th December, 2021 and he had submitted the questions raised to officers but was still awaiting a response.

Members expressed their disappointment with regard to the information provided and were of the opinion that someone from the Pension Fund should attend this Committee to address the concerns. They were also of the view that this should be considered further at the next meeting of the Committee and that a representative from Fossil Free GM be invited to attend to evidence that the Pension Fund had actually increased its investments in fossil fuel companies, and also on what other Pension Funds had managed to achieve.

Resolved – (i) That issues and concerns raised regarding the Greater Manchester Pension Fund be further considered at the next meeting of this Committee.

(ii) That a representative from Fossil Free GM be invited to attend the next meeting of this Committee to provide evidence that the Pension Fund had actually increased its investments in fossil fuel companies, and also on what other Pension Funds had managed to achieve.

(iii) That the Leader of the Council be requested to consider the questions and provide answers in relation to the work being undertaken by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

26. CROMPTON PLACE

The Director of Place – Development gave a presentation to members which outlined the situation with regards to the Crompton Place Levelling Up Bid.

The presentation provided information on the process for submitting the bid; how the bid was submitted; and the reasons given by the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government as to why the bid had been unsuccessful.

It was also stated that work was still ongoing to fully understand what happened with the bid.

In conclusion, members were advised that unsuccessful first round bids could be re-submitted as second round bids and, therefore, work undertaken to produce a first round bid could still be used to produce a viable second round bid.

Following the presentation, members made the following comments/observations:-

- Which necessary signed documentation was not received until the morning of 18th June, 2021;
- What level of political leadership was involved and what was their role;
- What plan was in place to ensure the bid was submitted on time;
- The Governance arrangements;
- A request to be informed of the external contributors;
- Issues around the ownership of the asset; and
- Concerns that it was not known which documents were missing.

In response, the Director of Place – Development, advised that a meeting had been set up with the MHCLG and any further updates would be submitted to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved – (i) That the presentation be noted.

(ii) That any further updates from the MHCLG be submitted to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

(iii) That information regarding the external contributors be circulated to members of this Scrutiny Committee.

27. MEMBERS BUSINESS

The following questions were submitted by Councillors Allen and Silvester in accordance with Standing Order 36 and the response was prepared by the Deputy Chief Executive and the Director of Place - Development.

Q1.

Question - £100 million Loan – Councillor Allen

Back in 2017 the council secured a £100 million loan to kickstart the £1 billion town centres developments. Since then other government grants have been won to support the wider regeneration of the borough. This is ultimately public money and councillors should be appraised of expenditure against these loans and grants.

I would therefore ask the following question –

Could we please see an income and expenditure account for the £100 million and subsequent grants? The account should show the various incomes and a quantified breakdown of spending against each loan or grant. Where grants are ring fenced could we also have a note clarifying what the grant is to be used for?

A.

In 2017, the Council borrowed £100m to facilitate the regeneration of the Town Centre.

	Project	Actual Amount Spent £'m
Acquisitions	M&S	12.74
	Victoria Plaza	3.55
	Crompton Place plus leases	23.06
	Church Wharf	2.02
	Central Street/Deansgate	1.06
	156-180 Bradshawgate	0.16
	Chadwick Street	1.30
	Bus Station/Queens Street/Magistrates Court	2.14
Wider Town Centres initiatives	Octagon	5.80
	Albert Halls Restaurant	0.17
	Le Mans Hotel	0.07
	Town Centres	2.19

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	Town Centre Enforcement Team	0.08
	Town Centre Team - Staffing	1.26
	Public Realm	2.32
	Farnworth Health Village	0.04
	Developer Guarantees	5.71
	Digital Quarter	0.09
	Free Parking/Economic Recovery	0.86
	Metroshuttle	0.13
External Advice	Across all areas	1.18
Site Investigation and Demolition	Across all areas	1.75
Development Costs	Across all areas	0.63
Other revenue costs	costs	1.27
Total		69.59

Since 2017, the Council has made bids for additional funding.

The table below provides details of the funding applied for.

Grant Name	Grant awarded	Amount Received	Spent to Date
Towns Fund Accelerated Funding	£1m	£1m	£105k
Towns Fund	£22.9m	£1.145m	Nil
Future High Street Fund	£13.27m	£3.893m	£1k to date, £500k pending
Brownfield Land Fund:	£11.837m		
<i>Church Wharf</i>	£1.84m	£1.239m	£1.239m
<i>Trinity</i>	£2.16m	£0.563m	£0.563m

<i>Bark St</i>	£0.85m		Grant paid direct to developer
<i>Central St</i>	£3.625m		Paid direct to developer
<i>Moor Lane</i>	£2.222m		Paid direct to developer
<i>Farnworth</i>	£1.14m		Paid direct to developer
Housing Infrastructure Fund	£12m	£0	Nil
Levelling Up Fund – BCMS	£20m	£0	Nil

Q2.

Question – City Status – Councillor Silvester

The Government announced in the summer of 2021 that a Civic Honours competition had been launched to celebrate Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022 and that Her Majesty would grant the prestigious and rare civic honour of 'city status' by selecting a number of worthy towns in United Kingdom.

Bolton Council has previously submitted applications for city status in the 1992, 2000, 2002 and 2012 Civic Honours competitions.

The present Civic Honours competition was open for applications between 8th June 2021 and 8th December 2021. Has Bolton Council submitted an application for the present city status Civic Honours competition and if not, is it because the 8th December 2021 closing date deadline was missed ?

A2.

Submitting a bid for city status involves a considerable amount of officer time and resource from the Council. On this occasion, following discussion with the Council Leader and other relevant Executive Cabinet Members, it was decided not to submit a bid so we could prioritise the Council's core services and response to the on-going pandemic. Whilst we do not rule out submitting a bid in the future, we are rightly proud of our status as one of the largest towns in the country which has given us some advantages.

With regard to question 2, members felt that more effort should be made to promote Bolton as a big town and also queried why other elected members had not been informed about this decision.

The Committee also received the extracts of minutes of other meetings of the Council relevant to the remit of this Committee:-

- (a) The Cabinet held on 15th November, 2021;
- (b) The Executive Cabinet Member Leader's Portfolio held on 12th October and 16th November, 2021; and
- (c) The Executive Cabinet Member Stronger Communities Portfolio held on 16th November, 2021.

Resolved – That the minutes of the various meetings be noted.

(The meeting started at 6.00 p.m. and finished at 8.15 p.m.)