

**CORPORATE AND EXTERNAL ISSUES SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE**

MEETING, 25<sup>th</sup> JULY, 2022

Present – Councillors Silvester (Chairman), Heslop (Vice-Chairman), Allen, Connor, Hornby, Jiva, Meehan (as deputy for Councillor Cowen), Mistry, Peel, Patel, Mrs. Thomas, Veevers, Walsh, Weatherby and Wright.

Also in Attendance

Councillor Cox	Leader of the Council
Councillor Dean	Executive Cabinet for Stronger Communities
Ms. S. Johnson	Deputy Chief Executive
Mr. P. Rimmer	Assistant Director Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Ms. H. Gorman	Borough Solicitor
Mrs. V. Ridge	Democratic Services Manager

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Brady, Cowen and Rimmer.

Councillor Silvester in the Chair

**1. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2022 and the informal meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2022 were submitted.

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

**2. THE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR  
2022/2023**

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report which detailed the proposed work programme for 2022/2023.

Resolved – That the Work Programme for 2022/2023 be approved.

### **3. BOLTON CVS AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR**

Further to minute 39 of the previous meeting, a report was submitted from Bolton CVS which provided details in relation to the funding programmes for Bolton CVS for 2020/2021 and 2021/2022. Information was also provided on the Bolton's Fund Grants awarded in years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022.

The report also gave details on how Bolton CVS administered funding programmes and it was stated that The Bolton's Fund programme was agreed with The Bolton's Fund Co-design group who determined the priorities for future programmes.

The Chairman explained that unfortunately representatives from Bolton CVS were unable to attend the meeting this evening, however, any questions/comments from members would be sent to them and they would also be invited to attend the meeting of the Committee in October, 2022.

Members in their deliberations made the following comments/observations:-

- From Appendix B who was Action for Children's Services Limited, Breakdown Bolton, Breaking Barriers, Changing Life Directions, Raise the Youth, Stand up Sisters, Third Space and Wave Adventure;
- Further information on the conditions of each grant; the purpose of the grant and details of review and measure of success;
- Further information regarding the Bolton's Fund Grant which awarded grants via Bolton CVS in the total of £549,050 for 2021 -2022, however, the total value of all grants awarded via Bolton CVS was £1,252,205.18;
- Queried the statement that 3,000 people in Kearsley had benefited from the Fund;

- The need to look at the distribution of grants across the borough;
- How the voluntary sector funding was administered;
- How grants were given out and how this was publicised to those groups who were not aware of this funding;
- The council should do an audit on geography and subject matter of the voluntary sector which would probably identify gaps in such provision across the Borough and how could Bolton CVS assist the council with this and could information be provided on a ward by ward basis;
- The Executive Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities advised that he met with Bolton CVS on a monthly basis and he would ask them to incorporate the questions and answers in their presentation to Committee at the meeting in October;
- It was acknowledged that this report provided more transparency in terms of the grants allocated via Bolton CVS than in the previous years.

Resolved – (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the questions/concerns raised by members be sent to Bolton CVS for a response.

(iii) That Bolton CVS be invited to attend the meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2022 and that they also be requested to provide data on the projects that they are monitoring.

#### **4. UPDATE ON THE £150 ENERGY PAYMENT**

Mr. P. Rimmer, Assistant Director Revenues and Benefits and Customer Services gave a presentation to members which outlined the work taken to date with regard to the £150 Energy Payment.

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

- The background to the support for energy bills;
- The funding levels for Bolton;
- The eligibility criteria;
- How payments were made;

- Progress to date; and
- Next steps.

In terms of the progress made to date, members were advised that the £150 rebate had now been paid to 88,302 residents which totalled £13.245m and all direct debit accounts had received the rebate. 3,650 residents had opted to have the £150 credited directly to their Council Tax account which amounted to £547,500. It was also stated that there were currently 1,261 claims outstanding that had failed the Spotlight check and 22,216 were still to claim and the deadline for payments under the main scheme was 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2022.

With regard to the next steps, members were informed that letters were issued last week to the 22,216 that had not claimed at this point and letters were being issued this week to the 1,261 that had failed the Spotlight check. Furthermore, a report was to be drafted to outline the proposals for the Discretionary Scheme and the deadline to spend the £705,150 was 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2022.

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

- When would the criteria for the Discretionary Scheme be determined;
- Credit and thanks was expressed to the team for all their efforts in administering the scheme and the quick response to members queries;
- Had any additional resources been provided from Government to assist with administering the scheme;
- An explanation of what 'Spotlight' meant;
- An increase in publicity and social media to reach out to those who had not yet applied;
- The reasons as to why people were not making a claim;
- Concerns were expressed with regard to the wording of the scheme which was being referred to as a council tax rebate rather than an energy payment;
- Could the payment be used to pay off council tax arrears;
- How many people out of the 3650 residents who had opted for a credit to their council tax account had arrears

over and above £150 – Mr. Rimmer agreed to circulate this figure to members;

- Was there the ability that by the end of September, 2022 those residents who had not applied could automatically have the £150 credited to their council tax account;
- A view that people should be able to decide how they wanted to spend the £150;
- A debate ensued with regard to the terminology of the grant and whether it was a council tax rebate or an energy rebate;
- The use of post office vouchers;
- The letter which had been to sent out to those residents who had not yet applied be circulated to members of the Committee;
- Communication with other partner agencies, support from the one stop shop and the visiting service which could assist people ie those with mobility issues and would go into their homes to help them. Details of the two visiting officers be shared with members of the Committee; and
- A view that the least well off should be given it as a cash payment as soon as possible.

During the debate Councillor Hornby moved a motion which was seconded by Councillor Peel which asked Cllr Walsh to withdraw his statement regarding his comments on the Council Tax Rebate.

Councillor Peel then moved an amendment which was seconded by Councillor Silvester which stated that this Committee believes that referring to energy grant assistance as a council tax rebate was damaging to potentially thousands of Bolton residents who were eligible for the energy grant assistance and no member should refer to it as a council tax rebate in the future.

The amendment was then put to the vote when the voting was as follows:-

For the Amendment 11 viz:-

Councillors Allen, Heslop, Hornby, Jiva, Mistry, Peel,

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Silvester, Mrs. Thomas, Veevers, Weatherby and Wright.

Against the Amendment 4 viz:-

Councillors Connor, Meehan, Patel and Walsh.

Abstained, 0

Whereupon the amendment was declared carried and became the substantive motion.

The substantive motion was then put to the vote when the voting was as follows:-

For the Substantive Motion 11 viz:-

Councillors Allen, Heslop, Hornby, Jiva, Mistry, Peel, Silvester, Mrs. Thomas, Veevers, Weatherby and Wright.

Against the Substantive Motion 4 viz:-

Councillors Connor, Meehan, Patel and Walsh.

Abstained, 0

Whereupon the substantive motion was declared carried.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted and thanks be conveyed to officers for the presentation and for all their hard work in administering the scheme.

## **5. MEMBERS BUSINESS**

The following question was submitted by Councillor Silvester in accordance with Standing Order 36 and the response was prepared by the Director of Place Development.

Q.

Public meeting on the De Havilland Way improvements levelling up bid.

On Monday 4th July, as part of the De Havilland Way improvements levelling up bid, a public meeting was organised at the Platinum Suite, Bolton Whites Hotel in which Council officers and the Leader of the Council was present. This meeting was advertised as being for 'stakeholders' however none of the 6 Borough Councillors representing either Horwich & Blackrod Ward or Horwich North East Ward in which the proposed improvement scheme is located were informed about or invited to it. Who requested this meeting took place and who authorised it took place? Who organised this meeting? What date was the meeting organised? How was the meeting advertised? Does the Leader of the Council have ultimate responsibility for the levelling up bid? Who was being classed as 'stakeholders'? Why were none of the 6 Borough Councillors covering Horwich informed about or invited to the meeting?

A.

Q1. Who requested this meeting took place and who authorised it took place?

Answer: The meeting was requested by Chris Green on Wednesday 29th June, so that residents and other stakeholders could be given a further opportunity to find out more about the project and ask officers further questions relating to the project, prior to the bid's anticipated submission date of 6 July.

Q2. Who organised this meeting?

Answer: It was organised by Council officers within our Development & Regeneration Team, at very short notice.

Q3. What date was the meeting organised?

Answer: Thursday 30th June

Q4. How was the meeting advertised?

Answer: Through the Council's website and via Chris Green's Facebook Page and via a Bolton News article referring to the meeting on Friday evening

Q5. Does the Leader of the Council have ultimate responsibility for the levelling up bid?

Answer: The De Haviland Way bid was prepared by the Council's Development & Regeneration team, working in collaboration with our Highway and Engineering team, with support from Aecom and Savills. The draft bid was discussed with the Leader and Cabinet members and fully consulted on, via a formal highways consultation process, before being finalised. Chris Green made sought further details from Council Officers and Aecom and asked that an additional public meeting be held, before deciding whether or not to support the bid.

Q6. Who was being classed as 'stakeholders'?

Answer: Anyone that wanted to express their views because they felt that they may be affected by the proposals.

Q6. Why were none of the 6 Borough Councillors covering Horwich informed about or invited to the meeting?

Answer: Several Councillors attended the event (Cllrs Grant and McKeon, for example). Councillors had previous opportunities to attend meetings and input to the consultation process. No personal invitations were issued to anyone. The only channels used to promote the meeting were referred to in Q 4.

Resolved - That the question and answer be noted and that the Director of Place Development be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee to explain why Ward Councillors were not invited to the meeting.

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

- (a) The Cabinet held on 11<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> April, 13<sup>th</sup> June and 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2022;
- (b) The Executive Cabinet Member Leader's Portfolio held on 5<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> April, 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> June and 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2022; and
- (c) The Executive Cabinet Member Stronger Communities



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Portfolio held on 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2022.

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

(The meeting started at 6.00 p.m. and finished at 7.25 p.m.)