

**CORPORATE AND EXTERNAL ISSUES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

MEETING, 9th FEBRUARY, 2023

Present – Councillors Silvester (Chairman), Heslop, Brady, Connor, Cowen, Jiva, Mistry, S. Patel, Peel, Rimmer, Mrs. Thomas, Veevers, Walsh and Wright.

Augmented by members of the Place Scrutiny Committee for minutes 31, 32 and 33: Councillors Atcha, M. Ayub, Donaghy, Iqbal and A. Patel.

Also in Attendance

Councillor Cox	Leader of the Council
Councillor Dean	Executive Cabinet for Stronger Communities
Councillor Mrs. Fairclough	Executive Cabinet Member Deputy Leader
Councillor Haslam	Executive Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
Councillor Warren	Executive Cabinet Member for Regeneration
Ms. S. Johnson Chief Superintendent Parker	Chief Executive Greater Manchester Police
Mr. L. Fallows	Director of Corporate Resources
Mr. J. Dyson	Director of Place
Mr. P. Whittingham	Assistant Director Economic Development and Regeneration
Mr. P. Rimmer	Assistant Director Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Ms. H. Gorman	Borough Solicitor
Mr. T. Glennon	Borough Treasurer
Ms. J. King	Assistant Director HR/OD
Ms. N. Littlewood	Head of Communications and

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Engagement

Mrs. V. Ridge

Democratic Services Manager

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Eckersley-Fallon, Grant, Hartigan and Hornby and the Executive Cabinet Member for Strategic Housing and Planning and the Executive Cabinet Member for Environmental Services Delivery.

Councillor Silvester in the Chair

29. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8th December, 2022 were submitted.

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

30. 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 noted.

31. POLICING THE ROADS

Chief Superintendent Parker, Greater Manchester Police, gave a presentation which updated members on the current work being undertaken in relation to the policing of the roads within the Borough.

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

- The force departments – specialist operations;
- Statistical information regarding specialist operations incident attendance;
- Force operations which involved Operation Considerate; Operation Wolverine; and Operation Dynamo;
- Local operations which involved Operation Portman and

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Operation Camenca;

- Community Speedwatch which was currently being operated within Farnworth but would like it to be extended to other areas within the Borough but was dependent on volunteers coming forward;
- The types and numbers of speed cameras in the Borough; and
- The speed camera site data.

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

- The use of ANPR cameras, in particular in places like Horwich, and how this data was accessed;
- How did community speedwatch work and how were people prosecuted;
- The promotion of the community speedwatch initiative at PACT meetings;
- Concern that some speed cameras were working and some were not and was this a deliberate policy;
- The action taken in relation to abandon vehicles on the highway and vehicles that don't have car tax;
- Speeding was a real issue on arterial roads and, in particular, 20 mph roads and how could this be addressed collectively;
- A query was raised regarding Eskdale Grove, which was a very small cul-de-sac, being part of the community speedwatch scheme; and
- Progress made in the recruitment process for road policing officers.

Resolved – That Chief Superintendent Parker be thanked for her informative presentation and the position be noted.

32. APPRENTICESHIPS AND EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES AT BOLTON COUNCIL

Ms. J. King, Assistant Director of HR/OD gave a presentation which updated members on the current position with regards to apprenticeships and employment initiatives at Bolton Council.

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

- The background to the Council's Apprenticeship Strategy;
- The current approach being undertaken;
- The process for existing staff;
- The number of apprenticeships by Directorate;
- The Levy and Expenditure;
- Opportunities for workforce planning;
- Future possibilities to develop moving forward; and
- The recruitment strategy for young people.

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

- Concern was expressed regarding the age profile of the workforce and the need for succession planning to be in place within the leadership training initiative ;
- Flexible working arrangements ie: job share with apprentices, for those employees between 66-75;
- How long did an apprenticeship last;
- Concern was expressed regarding the levy for apprenticeships and the issue of giving the unused money back to the Treasury;
- A comparison be undertaken with other Greater Manchester Authorities on the age profile of the workforce; and
- The reviewing of job titles/job descriptions/person specifications.

Resolved – That Ms. J. King be thanked for her informative presentation and the position be noted and that benchmarking information with other Greater Manchester authorities in relation to the age profile of the workforce be circulated to

members of this Scrutiny Committee.

33. UPDATES FROM THE DIRECTOR OF PLACE

Mr. P. Whittingham, Assistant Director of Regeneration and Economic Development, gave a presentation which provided an update in relation to the Levelling Up Fund Bids and the recent announcement of the closure of Marks and Spencer within the Town Centre and the next steps.

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

- The amount of money, in terms of value of funding bids, which had been 'lost' on the unsuccessful Levelling Up Fund bids and the lack of confidence shown by the Government in the Conservative administration;
- Was there any opportunity to resubmit the De Havilland Way bid or alternative options to improve this corridor;
- Disappointment was expressed regarding the criteria for evaluating bids and the fact that this had changed without anyone being aware of this and a request was made that the Leader of the Council provides this feedback to the Secretary of State;
- The need to understand the criteria for Round 3 bids prior to making any submissions;
- To undertake a comparison with other authorities to understand their successful/unsuccessful bids;
- The need to work with Marks and Spencer to ensure that when they vacate the building it does not become a dilapidated boarded up building;
- A request for an informal briefing to held for all members to provide an update on regeneration – the Leader of the Council agreed to hold an informal briefing for group leaders;
- The current working relationship with Marks and Spencer;
- The timeline when Marks and Spencer informed the Council they were vacating the building and the current lease agreement;
- The maintenance of the building once it has been vacated;

- The need to be upfront with the public about the regeneration of the Town Centre; and
- Negotiations ongoing with town centre food store operators.

Resolved – That officers be thanked for the presentation and the position be noted.

34. THE ALBERT HALLS - UPDATE

Ms. N. Littlewood, Head of Marketing and Engagement gave a presentation which updated members on the progress being made with the Albert Halls.

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

- The history of the Albert Halls and the recent transition from the Department of Place to Chief Executive's in July, 2022;
- The vision for the Albert Halls going forward;
- The key priorities during Winter 2022/2023; and
- Timelines from October, 2022 until March, 2023.

Following the presentation, the following comments/observations were made, viz:-

- How had the offer of light food been promoted;
- The need for a financial profile of the Albert Halls was vital as it had been losing money for a long time;
- The future of the Albert Halls and the need to radically improve it as a sustainable business;
- The need to establish the reasons for the lack of interest in the venue;
- The maintenance of the building;
- Issues associated with the previous contractor and the contract for the Albert Halls;
- Utilisation of the building for more civic/community events;
- The need to ensure charging prices were reasonable in particular for community groups;

- The potential to reintroduce 'Heritage Week' to promote the building; and
- Marketing of the Albert Halls was vital.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

35. BUDGET REPORT 2023-2024

The Borough Treasurer submitted a report which provided members with the following:-

- The consolidation of service budgets to provide the Council's overall 2023/2024 budget;
- Options to inform Council Tax setting for 2023/2024; and
- The Financial Arrangements account for 2023/2024.

Members were informed that the Local Government Settlement for 2023/2024 was a one-year settlement with broad guidance on government intentions for 2024/2025 but no confirmation of actual local government funding from 2024/2025 onwards. The key points to note for the 2023/2024 settlement were detailed in the report.

In terms of the savings programme for 2023-2024, members were advised that given the considerable financial uncertainty, both nationally and locally, it was proposed that a one-year budget be presented to Council for approval in February, 2023 and this would comprise of the use of £10 million reserves to balance the budget which would mean that unachieved savings would be rolled forward into the 2024/2025 budget cycle.

In addition, to achieve a balanced budget it was proposed to include savings targets of £5.2 million, however, there was scope to reduce this requirement as a result of agreement with the Council's NHS partners. Due to the strength of partnership and commitment to valuing social care, the Locality partnership had agreed to make a contribution of £937,000 towards Health and Social Care activities for 2023/2024. As a result, the following changes to the savings targets were proposed as follows:-

Directorate	Original Allocation	Less NHS Contribution	Revised Allocation
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Adults and Housing	1,840	(260)	1,580
Children's	1,188	(200)	988
Public Health	477	(477)	0
Place	924		924
Corporate	771		771
Total	5,200	(937)	4,263

The report also outlined a number of pressures which impacted on the current financial year and 2023/2024.

Members were also reminded that the Council has had to find significant savings over the last ten years which totalled around almost £220 million by the end of 2022/2023 with a further £4.3 million to be found in 2023/2024. It was also stated that beyond 2022/2023 there were some key funding issues yet to be confirmed which could impact further on the Council which were as follows:-

- Fair Funding Review (FFR) – as part of the 2016/2017 finance settlement it was announced that there would be an FFR of authorities' funding needs, initially to be implemented in 2019/2020. This was subsequently deferred by one year to 2020/2021 and the Brexit debate pushed this further back to 2021/2022. However, the Covid-19 pandemic had pushed this back further to 2023/2024 and the expectation was that 2025/2026 was now the earliest date of implementation; and
- Business Rates – the government had announced that from 2023 business rates retention would be 49%, 1% of this being passed to the Fire Authority and 50% to central government. However, this had also now been deferred to 2024/2025 at the earliest. Furthermore, the business rates reset initially intended to be implemented in 2021/2022 had also been deferred until at least 2025/2026. As a result this made forecasting business rates beyond 2023/2024 extremely difficult to do. In

addition, it was not possible to project what the council could receive in some form of re-distributed grant from any potentially available funds.

The report also provided an updated expenditure forecast for 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. This forecast was based on the assumption that Council Tax would increase by 2.00% for Adult Social Care and 1.99% for the general levy for 2023/2024. It was explained that the level of Council Tax would be determined by the Council at its meeting on 15th February, 2023 following a recommendation from the Cabinet.

In terms of reserves, the council estimated its reserves balance to be £158 million at the end of 2022/2023 excluding the DSG and Collection Fund balances and details of this were provided in the report. Appendix E to the report also provided some information of the implications of not holding these reserves.

Currently it was estimated that available balances as at 31st March, 2023 would be £10.66 million and the Borough Treasurer's recommended, as a minimum, balances of £10 million or higher should be maintained based upon his understanding of the risks and financial issues facing the Council over the next three years and the proposals around the budget, as identified in the report.

The individual parish precepts were also detailed in the report and as required by the Local Government Finance Act 1982 these needed to be added to Bolton's budget requirement.

With regard to the Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept and Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services), it was explained that this was set by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. The proposed increases in the Mayoral Precepts, which were still to be confirmed, were as follows:-

- For the Mayoral General (including Fire Services) a £5/4.86% increase; and
- £15/6.57% increase for the Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept.

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It was stated that should the final decisions of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority be different, this would be reported to members at the meeting.

With regard to Business Rates, whilst the Council was part of the Greater Manchester 100% pilot, it should be noted that the Government determined the rates to be collected and had set these at 49.9p in the pound for small businesses and 51.2p in the pound for larger businesses.

In terms of setting the Council Tax, it was explained that based upon the Adult Social Care precept being set at 2.00% for 2023/2024 plus a 1.99% general levy increase for Council Tax for Bolton Council for 2023/2024 (i.e. excluding Parish and Mayoral precepts) this was the equivalent to an additional 83p per week for Band A properties which were more than 40% of the overall tax base. A Draft Substantive Council Tax Resolution was set out in Appendix H to the report.

In conclusion, the report advised that at the meeting of the Cabinet on 6th February, 2023 the Leader of the Council advised members that, since consultation on the budget proposals had commenced, the Authority had received an additional £1 million one-off funds for 2023/2024 from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. Consequently, it was agreed that £500,000 of this be allocated for environmental improvements and public safety schemes. This left £500,000 unallocated and it was agreed that members of the opposition groups could put forward proposals as to how they would like this to be spent which would be considered by Council at its meeting on 15th February, 2023.

The relevant Equality Impact Assessment had been undertaken and was detailed in Appendix I to the report.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

36. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND AND COST OF LIVING RESPONSE 1ST OCTOBER, 2022 TO 31ST JANUARY, 2023

Mr. P. Rimmer, Assistant Director Revenue and Benefits and Customer Services gave presentation which updated members on the progress being made with regards to the Household Support Fund and Cost of Living Response during 1st October, 2022 to 31st January, 2023.

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

- Key themes/workstreams;
- Cost of Living Strategic Group;
- Cost of Living Operational Group;
- Cost of Living Micro Site;
- The publicity campaign;
- The events which had and were taking place;
- The Free School Meals Vouchers;
- The Local Welfare Provision;
- Warm Spaces;
- Bolton's Fund;
- Additional expenditure; and
- Next steps.

A request was made for a breakdown, on a ward basis, to be provided to members on the footfall and age groups in relation to Warm Spaces.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

37. MEMBERS BUSINESS

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 12th December, 2022 and 6th February, 2023; and
- (b) The Executive Cabinet Member Leaders Portfolio held on 6th and 21st December, 2022 and 10th January, 2023.

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

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(The meeting started at 6.00 p.m. and finished at 8.55 p.m.)

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NOTES