



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

BURNLEY TOWN HALL

Monday, 16th September, 2019 at 6.30 pm

PRESENT

MEMBERS

Councillors A Tatchell (Chair), M Johnstone (Vice-Chair), H Baker, T Commis, D Ferrier, B Foster, S Khan, S Lone, P McCann, L Mehanna, A Newhouse, L Pate, A Royle and M Townsend

OFFICERS

Asad Mushtaq	– Head of Finance and Property
Rob Dobson	– Head of Policy and Engagement
Paul Gatrell	– Head of Housing & Development Control
Clare Jackson	– Housing Manager
Amy Johnson	– Principal Accountant
Eric Dickinson	– Democracy Officer

IN ATTENDANCE

21. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gordon Lishman.

22. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th June 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

23. Empty Homes Programme

Paul Gatrell gave a presentation on the Empty Homes Programme, in particular regarding target figures. He set out the key priorities, current programs, and pre-enforcement work. Clare Jackson described a number of examples of the Programme being implemented.

Members made a number of points which Officers responded to;

- What help could the Council provide to Landlords to avoid upfront costs? The Council made interim payments based on an agreed schedule of works.

- Did the Programme incur a cost to the Council? Each case varied but overall the Council had to keep the programme sustainable - a competitive tender process helped to do this along with a balance between the cost and harm prevented.
- Target increased from 40 to 80, could it be increased to 120? The programme needed capital and staff resources to continue.
- Significant improvement required selective demolition such as happened under the Elevate Programme.
- Were local companies used and was the green agenda promoted? Local companies were used and a balanced approach of green outcomes with cost taken into account was applied e.g. energy efficiency to a B/C standard.
- How many properties had the 200% Council Tax premium applied to it? Officers would provide this information as soon as it was available.
- What percentage of Burnley's housing was terraced compared to the national average, as this might explain why Burnley's 6% Empty Homes was higher than the national average of 2.6%? Burnley had 50% of its housing as terraced properties compared to the national average of 24%.
- The Programme could potentially be increased by more financing, borrowing more capital, and being less risk averse.

IT WAS AGREED

That the presentation and discussion be noted.

24. Notice of Key Decisions and Private Meetings

Eric Dickinson reported on the last 28 day Notice of Key and Private Decisions which was published on 16th August 2019, and also reported that there had been 2 additional Individual Notices published since then for the following public reports;

- Revenue Budgets 2020/23 – published 20th August 2019
- Disabled Facilities Grant- Social Care Capital Projects-published 6th September 2019

IT WAS AGREED

That the report be noted.

25. Revenue Budget monitoring quarter 1

Amy Johnson reported on Revenue Monitoring 2019/20 Quarter 1 (to 30 June 2019). She indicated that the report introduced a new format of presenting the net budget forecast and the achievement of the savings targets.

She stated that last year's 2018/19 in-year budget monitoring reports showed an assumed year-end break-even position from the beginning of the year based on the assumptions that savings would be identified due to the number of vacant posts and in year-savings predicted.

This new report format adopted a different approach and showed the current forecast outturn position based upon the forecast savings identified within the current reporting period. As in previous years, it is expected that as the year progresses, further in-year savings would be identified and reported at each quarter, reducing the forecast overspend position.

The report asked Members to note a projected revenue budget forecast position of an overspend of £248k.

Members made the following points;

- What would happen to the vacant posts in Green Spaces and Streetscene? It was understood that the Green Spaces vacant post would be offered up for savings, and the Streetscene vacancy would be replaced.
- What has happened to the savings expected from the Planning post having been vacant for a while? The savings were used to fund the temporary provision of a replacement in order to meet planning requirements including a spike in applications.
- What was the reason for changing the format of the report, as there is no longer an end of year forecast, the report does not spell out the mitigation activity undertaken now to reduce the overspend, and the old format worked? The difference from last year is that in the current year there are no redundancies planned- the new report gives the position at the end of Q1 and future savings will be reported in Q2.
- How was the change in format instituted as it seems to have removed the impetus to look for savings? It was believed to be following a request from Scrutiny in 2018/19 for clearer reporting on redundancy and pension information.

IT WAS AGREED

That the report be noted, and that it be recommended that the format for the new report be reviewed after Q2

26. Capital budget monitoring quarter 1

Asad Mushtaq reported on Capital Budget Monitoring Q1 for 2019/20, and indicated that the format of this report had not changed.

IT WAS AGREED

That the report be noted.

27. Revenue budgets 2020-23 - latest position and savings proposals

Asad Mushtaq reported on the Revenue Budgets 2020-23 and the latest position and savings proposals. He indicated that this was part of the budget process which would end with a final budget to Full Council in February 2020.

He indicated that there the Government had just carried out a one year spending round with an assumed roll forward of budgets, with an expected further spending review to take place during 2020.

He referred to the following additional assumption (x) to be added to the assumptions set out in paragraph 7;

x) Given the funding pressures the Council is facing, the above incorporates the removal of the £250k operational savings target, effective from 2020/21 onwards.

A supplementary note had also been circulated to Members on the potential savings for the recycling scheme.

Members made the following points;

- What would the effect be of the Lancs Business Rates Pilot not being successful? Whilst disappointing, the scrapping of the pilot would not have an effect as the money involved was not classed as delivered money, and issues involving appeals potentially backdated to 2010 meant that it was a complex area of funding
- Why was there a reduction in town and parish grants if the expected grant from Government was not being reduced, as the understanding was that they would be in line?
- Where is the reference to the savings of £200k expected from the new recycling scheme being implemented as detailed in previous reports as the scheme was introduced on that basis, as these savings should appear in this report?
- How are Council Tax and NNDR write offs shown in the accounts? It is done as a delegated function involving the relevant Executive Member, the Chair of Scrutiny and the Section 151 Officer.

IT WAS AGREED

That the report be noted.

28. Strategic Plan

Rob Dobson reported on an updated Strategic Plan following the formation of a new Executive.

He referred in particular to the following references;

- PL5 – Climate Emergency Strategy
- PR5- Localise Public Sector Spend
- PF5- Review Council's Governance Structures
- PF6-Set up Cross Party Working Groups

Members made the following points;

- Under Burnley Council:adapting to change on page 5 second bullet point, the reference to "...seek to outsource services to the private sector.." should be taken out as the appetite for it is now diminishing.
- Regarding PF3 and a digital strategy, an assurance was sought that this would be a strategy led by the Officers and Members of the Council itself
- There needs to be an inclusive Growth Strategy
- PL1- refers to a focus on dog fouling- this should be widened to include others if relevant
- PL2- should include the social rented sector as well specifically and relate to all rented accommodation
- PR5- can the scope of "Localise Public Sector Spend" be clarified- is it macro or micro?
- PF5- previous Committee based system was cumbersome and required double the number of Officers, and the Executive system is much sharper
- PF5 -need to look at all options with a level playing field without any red lines determining the Governance review, with the benefits for all options compared
- PF5-any Governance structure should reflect the whole commitment by Members to attend training sessions in order to be able to do the work for residents- the attendance currently by Members at training sessions needed improving and any structure should challenge Members regarding their training attendance

- The old committee system required much more commitment by Members to attend evening Committees, in particular any ruling Groups
- Unless on the Executive, any other Councillor does not know what is going on
- Members attendance at training should be published
- The Governance review is not set in stone, and needed to look how other systems can allow more Councillors to get a say. It was stated that the Governance Review is a constitutional review, and that following the recent Member Structures Working Group which deals with constitutional issues it was agreed there to set up a Governance Review Group to look at the issues.

IT WAS AGREED

That the report be noted.

29. Scrutiny Reviews 2019/20

Members considered Scrutiny review proposals on the following topics after presentations by the lead Member proposing each review if present;

Selective Licensing Fees, Manchester Road Railway Station, Citizen engagement and public participation, Social determinants of health and the role Burnley Council can play, Housing Needs, Public Space Protection Orders, and Alleygating Policy.

IT WAS AGREED

- (1) That there would be 2 Scrutiny reviews conducted during 2019/20, with one focussed on before the New Year, and one after the New Year;
- (2) That the 2 Scrutiny reviews would be on Manchester Road Railway Station and Housing Needs, with Members contacted over the next few weeks to confirm the Working Groups Memberships and to agree dates for their first meetings; and
- (3) That there would be further consideration to accommodate on the Work Programme the issues raised in the presentations and discussions on the topics not chosen for a Review.

30. Work Programme 2019/20

IT WAS AGREED

That the Work Programme for 2019/20 be noted.