



# SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

BURNLEY TOWN HALL

Wednesday, 1st July, 2020 at 6.30 pm

## PRESENT

## MEMBERS

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

## OFFICERS

Lukman Patel	– Chief Operating Officer
Rob Dobson	– Head of Policy and Engagement
Paul Gatrell	– Head of Housing & Development Control
Asad Mushtaq	– Head of Finance and Property
Howard Hamilton-Smith	– Finance Manager
Alison McEwan	– Democracy Officer
Imelda Grady	– Democracy Officer

## IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Margaret Lishman, Executive Member for Resources and Performance Management.

### 7. Minutes

The following three questions put by Councillor Fewings were omitted from the minutes. He asked for written responses;

1. In respect of the natural environment, meadows and hedges have been cut too early in the season against the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act and can this be stopped?
2. In respect of road works on Lower St James Street have the works been analysed in light of COVID and have businesses been spoken to on this?
3. Some residents do not have access to social media and would be unaware of the work of the Hub, can a leaflet explaining what is available from the Council be sent out with the electoral cavass forms?

With the correction detailed above, the minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020 were approved as a correct record.

## **8. Additional Items of Business**

There were two additional item of business that the Chair agreed should be taken

1. Q4 performance Report 2019/20 – the reason being to ensure scrutiny had sight of the figures in a timely manner
2. Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Households – to ensure scrutiny had sight of the Executive report before a decision was taken. The reason being to ensure the Council has services developed enough to tackle rough sleeping and have a range of services available to effectively respond to homelessness during the COVID 19 pandemic and to continue to support those households as the Country moves out of lockdown measures.

Decision

In accordance with the provisions of Section 100 (B)(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Chair decided that the items should be considered as items 11 and 12 on the agenda for the reasons stated.

## **9. Notice of Key Decisions and Private Meetings**

The Chair indicated that the item on temporary accommodation for homeless households would be taken as an additional item of business on the agenda.

The items on single use plastics and Contact Centre dilapidations would come to the September Scrutiny meeting if the reports were available at that time. Councillor Fewings said that due to the current COVID crisis he would understand if the report on single use plastics slipped, however Councillor Pate said that this issue did need to be scheduled in as it had been ongoing for quite some time.

Councillor Townsend expressed concern regarding the lateness of the Revenue, Capital and Treasury Outturn reports and Q1 monitoring report and asked if an emergency budget was being considered. The Executive Member for Resources and Performance Management said that the Executive was putting together options and was awaiting to see if the Government was to release further funds to local authorities before calling for an emergency budget meeting. The Head of Finance and Property said that there were many variables and any further tranches of funding from the Government would be significant on how the economy of Burnley would get through the coming months, the Council needed to be in a position to take a proportionate response at that time. He indicated that the close of the accounts had been delayed by one month due to COVID and the statutory deadline for the accounts was now the end of September.

It was agreed that Scrutiny would receive the finance reports in a timely manner and a revised timetable for scrutiny meetings would be aligned to the Executive reports.

IT WAS AGREED

That the 28 day Notice of Key Decisions and Private Meetings be noted and Officers look at a revised timetable of meetings of Scrutiny to align them with the Executive finance reports.

## **10. Scrutiny Review Groups**

## **Housing Repairs Review**

The Chair outlined the position of scrutiny reviews as at the end of the 2019/20 municipal year and indicated that there was a carry-over of the housing repairs review that needed to be completed. He asked that an email be sent out to scrutiny members asking for volunteers to join a small working group to complete the review.

Councillor Pate asked whether the timing of the presentation of the Leisure Trust's Annual Report would be impacted on by COVID. The Chief Operating Officer said that the Council was working with the Leisure Trust and any service realignment would be put to the Executive and that Scrutiny would have sight of this. He indicated that this might form part of an emergency budget should one be called.

IT WAS AGREED

That the housing repairs review group be reconvened and an email be sent to scrutiny members asking for volunteers to join this group.

## **11. COVID 19 Questions and Answers**

Further to the last meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> June , members had submitted questions on the COVID presentation for Officer responses.

A questions and answers paper had been submitted and those members who had submitted questions were asked to make any further comments on the responses if required.

1. Councillor Fewings on the selective licensing powers further asked if he could be provided with a list of all powers available for dealing with empty properties including those under selective licensing powers. The Head of Housing and Development Control agreed to supply Councillor Fewings with this information.
2. Councillor Townsend on planning applications further asked for an explanation of the performance indicators figures and referred to an outstanding application in his Ward. The Chief Operating Officer explained that the Q4 performance figures for 2019/20 for planning targets had been achieved, however the figures in Q1 of this year had been effected by COVID and there was a backlog of applications to work through. He asked Councillor Townsend to let him know of the specific application he was referring to and he would look into it for him.
3. Councillor Fewings in respect of lobby Government to support industries he further asked that the Council be innovative on supporting low carbon industries. Councillor Gordon Lishman agreed and said that a Burnley based approach was needed rather than being subsumed by into the LEP.
4. Councillor Townsend in respect of the flood defences in Padiham further commented that it was disappointing that the work had slipped to late Summer 2020 despite it being an emergency in 2017. He said that a more pro-active response was required. The Chief Operating Officer said that a more detailed response would be provided, he said that it required a multi-agency approach but that the Council was trying to

influence partners as much as possible to complete the works. A more comprehensive report would be available shortly.

5. On the response to Councillor Townsend's question on infrastructure projects, Councillor Gordon Lishman said that the Council needed to be ready to take advantage of the Government's job creation and job protection initiative and in respect of retro-fitting older homes under climate change the Council should be in pole position to make bids.
6. Councillor Townsend further commented on his disappointment of Burnley's response in the Redefining Lancashire plan that had been sent to the Prime Minister which had only referred to Pioneer Place and felt a more ambitious submission could have been made. The Chief Operating Officer responded by saying that there was a short window of opportunity for bids with a strict set of criteria which precluded other projects. Councillor Fewings asked if the cinema and restaurant complex needed to be reconsidered in light of COVID as the Council had a fiduciary duty to ensure money was being used wisely.
7. Councillor Fewings further commented on the transparency and accountability of the LEP and asked who was speaking for Burnley on this board. Councillor Townsend said that the LEP had recently failed a governance review and ought to have had a scrutiny committee established 12 months ago.
8. Councillor Commis commented on Pioneer Place but said it was not an option to review the decision on it, he said it might prove difficult to secure tenants in the current climate.
9. Councillor Townsend criticised the Government's funding package which for Burnley Council equated to £10 per capita as the majority of the money was ring fenced. This left the Council with a £3.4m deficit. Councillor Margaret Lishman said that she was pushing for additional funding from the Government and felt that the Government was relying on the local Councils to provide services in the community, whilst devaluing what Councils do by not acknowledging the costs to the Councils during the COVID crisis.
10. Councillor Fewings on Burnley Golf Club further commented that golf was a niche sport and that Burnley Leisure could have opened this up for general public use during the pandemic in the interests of the health and wellbeing of residents.
11. Councillor Pate in respect of a digital strategy further commented that she still had no answer on when this would happen and that it was being confused with an IT strategy. There was a need for connectivity of choice for residents. The Performance and Engagement Manager said that the name of the document caused confusion but that it was clearly a digital strategy and he would involve Councillor Pate in the review of it. He said that the Council had to get best value from Liberata. Councillor Pate referred to the Good Things Foundation who had done Salford's digital strategy and said they should be considered when refreshing Burnley's digital strategy.
12. In respect of holiday provision for children during school holidays Councillor Pate praised Burnley Leisure for their plans to run activities which was generous given their current situation with COVID.

13. The Policy and Engagement Manager responded to Councillor Townsend's question on the % of vulnerable children identified who had been attending school. He said that a % figure of vulnerable children could not be given but the number of children attending school during week commencing 15<sup>th</sup> June had been 285 across all settings. He would send out the detailed LCC response on the definition of vulnerable children to everyone.
14. Councillor Pate asked if all the vulnerable people had now been identified. The Chief Operating Officer (COO) said that had a comprehensive list had been compiled with many partner organisations. He confirmed that a leaflet on what is on offer for residents will be sent out with the canvass forms as previously suggested by Councillor Fewings.
15. On the impact of COVID on the third sector Councillor Pate said she had wanted a more local response. She said some had changed how they worked for which there were positive and negative aspects. She said some were providing free meals to the vulnerable but asked what might happen when things return to normal. What is the impact for our local third sector and what funding issues they have experienced? The COO advised that he was working with the third sector on a weekly basis.
16. Councillor Townsend in respect of UCLAN, said that whilst it was good news that the 4k number of students was still on track for 2025 he had concerns around the dip in foreign students and how this would impact on the accommodation provision at Sandygate. He asked if the business case was being monitored to ensure the Council wasn't left with a financial burden. The COO said that the first year had been modelled on a significantly less figure, but as of last week 25 expressions of interest for accommodation had been received. The situation will continue to be monitored.
17. In respect of the cut in bus services the COO said he was still awaiting a response from LCC and would report back to members on this.
18. Councillor Foster asked if any evictions had taken place since she raised the issue at the last meeting and also whether an analysis of the data captured could show a breakdown of the hard to reach groups in terms of age, ethnicity, areas had been possible, The Head of Housing and Development Control said he was not aware of any evictions and that his team were working closely with landlords. The Head of Policy and Engagement said that there wasn't a breakdown of information to share as it was based on data from the NHS and there were strict parameters on how the data could be used.
19. Councillor Townsend asked would happen next in terms of the scrutiny of the COVID response. He said that a recovery plan was needed over the next 12 months. The COO confirmed that this was being developed and there would be an economic recovery plan and a community recovery plan which would be on the forward plan for scrutiny to monitor.

## **12. Scorecards: Q4 performance report 2019/20**

The Policy and Performance Manager presented the Q4 performance report for 2019/20 and highlighted key areas.

The Council had recorded its lowest staff sickness absences., the economy and growth team had helped in creating 127 jobs and safeguarded 47 through business support programmes, which was ahead of target and the number of vacant properties brought back into use had exceeded the target set.

On the off target indicators he highlighted the performance of Liberata and the calls answered on time which had ended at 73% compared with 80% last year. He said this was in part due to COVID crisis.

Councillor Townsend and Councillor Fewings both congratulated the staff for the sickness absence figures.

In respect of calls answered in time Councillor Fewings said that he wanted a more qualitative analysis and whether clients` queries were being dealt with satisfactorily and not just answered in a certain time frame. The Head of Policy and Engagement said he would provide this in the next set of figures. The COO said that this might have cost implications as it wasn`t in the current contract with Liberata.

IT WAS AGREED

That the report be noted.

### **13. Work Programme 2020/21**

The work programme was noted.

### **14. Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Households**

The Head of Housing and Development Control presented the report that was to be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> June.

He highlighted the key points being proposed to prevent and relieve homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough through a comprehensive approach that would focus on providing individuals with accommodation and support to access and sustain settled housing.

Councillor Pate said that the £45k put into the budget was intended to eradicate rough sleeping by the provision of a night shelter, She appreciated that today's position was different from that of February when the budget was set but that this was additional money that had been put into the housing service and the Government should be asked to reimburse the Council for this amount. She asked that a similar amount be ringfenced for this type of accommodations in future. The Chief Operating Officer said that Council resolution was for £45k to eradicate rough sleeping and not specifically for a night shelter. Councillor Pate accepted this but said that members were clear on how that money should be spent and the type accommodation it should be used for.

Councillor Foster said she had sat on the homelessness working group where it had been agreed that what was needed was a step before Gateway and it be referred to as ` a bed for the night`, where people could go into this accommodation without any restrictions. If in

the experience of the housing unit officers felt that people wanted more support it would be offered but not be. a condition of accessing a secure place to sleep for the night.

The Executive Member Councillor Margaret Lishman said this was what was intended and to provide a wrap around service. She said that the homeless group`s work would continue to provide solutions to homelessness issues in the future.

Councillor Pate said it is about having the right accommodation within the borough to prevent people being sent out of the borough.

The Chair said he looked forward to receiving future reports on this issue.

IT WAS AGREED

That the report be put to the Executive.