



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

BURNLEY TOWN HALL

Thursday, 24th November, 2022 at 6.30 pm

PRESENT

MEMBERS

Councillors H Baker (Chair), A Royle (Vice-Chair), G Birtwistle, S Hall, A Hosker, M Ishtiaq, L Khan, J Launer, A Lewis, G Lishman, S Lone and J McGowan

OFFICERS

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| Lukman Patel | – Chief Operating Officer |
| Rob Dobson | – Head of Policy and Engagement |
| Howard Hamilton-Smith | – Head of Finance and Property |
| Paul Gatrell | – Head of Housing & Development Control |
| Amy Johnson | – Finance Manager |
| Carol Eddleston | – Democracy Officer |
| CJ Walmsley | – Democracy Officer |

52. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Barton, Mehanna and Whitaker.

53. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th September were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Further to minute 44, it was agreed that arrangements would be made with Liberata for the Committee to visit the contact centre.

54. Additional Items of Business

Members noted that the Chair had decided that an additional item of business, the Town to Turf scheme delivery, should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency. This item had been published in a supplementary agenda.

55. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest in any of the items on the agenda.

56. Exclusion of the Public

It was agreed that the public would be excluded for the meeting before discussion took place on the item relating to minute 68 (Town to Turf Scheme Delivery) in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, if the public were present there would be a disclosure to them of exempt information within the meaning of Paragraph 12 A of the Local Government Act 1972 relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

57. Notice of Key Decisions and Private Meetings

Members noted the Notice of Key Decisions and Private Meetings (NKDPM) published on 1st November 2022 and were reminded that, when they received notification of each NKDPM being published, they should ask the Chair to request any items of interest to be brought to committee.

Members also noted that the Cultural Strategy anticipated date of decision had now moved to March 2023 and the St James's Street Heritage Action Zone anticipated date of decision had now moved to January 2023.

58. Revenue Monitoring Report 2022/23 Q2

Amy Johnson reported that the forecast outturn position for the year as at 31st March 2023 based upon actual spending and income to 30th September 2022 was a net overspend of £89k as compared with a forecast net overspend of £149k as reported in Quarter 1.

Officers responded to questions and observations from members.

Amy Johnson and Howard Hamilton-Smith explained that the reduction in car parking income was due to reduced footfall as a consequence of the COVID pandemic and the cost of living crisis. It was hoped that income would increase as the year progressed, thereby resulting in a reduced deficit. The COVID-19 Reserve was proposed to be renamed the COVID-19 and Cost of Living Reserve to more accurately reflect how it was being used.

Rob Dobson explained that the significant increase in Performance and Policy from an original budget of £90k to a current forecast budget of £422k was due to the Household Support Fund.

A query was raised in terms of fixed amount pay increases in relation to Liberata staff, but as TUPE staff, this would be dealt with by Liberata. Further details around the agreed pay award for Council staff would be provided in Quarter 3.

IT WAS AGREED THAT: the report be noted.

59. Capital Monitoring Report 2022/23 Q2

Amy Johnson provided an update on capital expenditure and the resources position, along with highlighted variances.

Members were informed that it was unlikely that the Council Chamber would be brought back into use in the current financial year so the audio and visual upgrade scheme would be likely to slip into the 2023/24 Capital Programme.

IT WAS AGREED THAT: the report be noted.

60. Treasury Management Mid-Year Update Report 2022/23

Howard Hamilton-Smith reported on treasury management activity for the first half of 2022/23 from 1st April 2022 to 30th September 2022.

Members noted that whilst the Council's decision making must bear Treasury Management in mind, it was also important to take account of regional and local considerations such as inflation and the cost of living crisis, the impact of which varied significantly across the country.

IT WAS AGREED THAT: the report be noted.

61. Fees and Charges Tariff Report 2023/24

A report was submitted that informed Members of the Council's proposed fees and charges from 1st April 2023. As at September 2022, CPI inflation was at 10.1% and therefore a 5% increase was proposed on fees and charges to help fund the increasing costs of the provision of services. A range of exceptions to this were also outlined within the report.

Concerns were raised with regards increases to car parking and commercial waste, but reassurance was given that despite the increase, fees remained competitive and would generate additional income.

The importance of household support was stressed due to wage inflation being less than CPI inflation. There was a need to consider wider issues such as housing costs and food poverty. When considering the overall strategy, the need to look at 'real' income and impact was highlighted. It was pointed out that the Household Support Fund was a means to try and address this.

It was highlighted that the building control fee increase of 10% had been agreed by the Pennine Lancashire Building Control Joint Committee and would take effect from 1st January 2023. The Pennine Lancashire Building Control shared service was due to end on 31st March 2023, after which any excess income generated would be transferred to an earmarked reserve within the Council's accounts for future use in providing the service.

Concerns were raised in relation to housing conditions within the borough and the provision of enforcement. Consideration would be given as to whether more enforcement officers were required. Government delays on no fault evictions meant figures were rising. It was felt that this was an indicator for the need of enforcement.

IT WAS AGREED THAT: the report be noted.

62. Q2 Performance Report 2022/23

A report was submitted that informed Members of the Quarter 2 performance results. It was reported that efforts had been upped to enforce dog fouling penalties, with enforcement action being increased.

A query was raised over Housing and Development, percentage of planning applications processed within target time. There was an error in the report for the 'other' category, which should have read on target, with 88% processed in time, against a target of 80%.

In terms of off target indicators, clarification was sought in relation to Liberata, telephone calls answered within target time. Calls answered within time had increased to 71%, however the target was 80%. A decrease in call length appeared to be one of the reasons for this, along with a slight increase in staffing. It was reported that there had been an emphasis on accountability and reporting, and Liberata was producing a second remediation plan. A service credit would be paid by Liberata for missing the target.

The caller abandonment rate was now at 3% and was on target and 84% of calls were answered within 2 minutes. However, more detailed information in respect of this was requested and it was agreed that it would be circulated to Members upon receipt of the data.

Peak trends and ways of managing the spikes in demand were highlighted and it was reported that Liberata were working on smoothing out demand and deploying resources where necessary.

The successful prosecutions figures from Streetscene were highlighted, particularly in relation to dirty back yards.

IT WAS AGREED THAT: the report be noted.

63. Household Support Fund

A report was submitted on the delivery of the Household Support Fund. It recommended that the priority for Burnley Council's allocation of Household Support funding be to reduce food poverty and support residents who may not have benefited from other cost of living payments from central or local government. The report highlighted which groups could be targeted, and also pointed out that any resident may be offered extra help through Burnley Together.

It was proposed that the Council continue to fund the food bank and other charities providing food and other essential supplies to residents. The majority of the funding would be made in targeted direct payments to residents in the form of a post office payment voucher. In line with the previous scheme, a £90 payment was proposed.

It was felt that how demand was going to increase was unclear, and therefore potential implications on how to respond to the increase in demand needed to be monitored closely and other support explored, with a view to responding to change as it happens. It was requested that a further update be submitted to the February/March meeting, though it would also be reported upon in the Strategic Progress report to Council. More national intervention by government was necessary regarding the cost of living crisis.

For smaller scale help the Acorn Fund was suggested, though only as a last resort. Information in relation to this could be circulated to Members.

IT WAS AGREED THAT:

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) a further update be submitted to the Committee in February/March 2023, and
- (3) Acorn Fund information be circulated to Members.

64. Dog Control Public Space Protection Order

Jonathan Jackson presented a report which was due to be considered by the Executive on 30th November seeking to extend the Dog Control Public Space Protection Order once the current consultation closed.

It was confirmed that dogs had to be kept on leads in all cemeteries, crematoriums, churchyards and burial grounds within the borough of Burnley.

IT WAS AGREED: That the report be noted.

65. Scrutiny Review Groups

Councillor Royle provided a verbal update on the Calico and Queensgate reviews, with more detailed updates to be provided in early 2023.

Calico had recently confirmed that a Stock Condition survey was currently underway and was due to be completed in early 2023, along with a plan for upgrading housing stock.

Councillors Birtwistle and Royle had met with the Head of Development Control & Housing and Street Scene officers at the end of September to discuss issues of concern in Queensgate and possible actions, including an education campaign with resources from Enforcement Officers in a bid to curtail littering offences.

The Head of Development Control & Housing informed members that Michael Gove MP had written to all local authorities requesting information about the private rented sector, specifically about cases of damp and mould and the number of related prosecutions. An initial response was required by the end of November and a full response by the end of January. This Council actively prosecuted and issued Fixed Penalty Notices to landlords for mould.

IT WAS AGREED: That the updates be noted and the committee look forward to more detailed reports in due course.

66. Work Programme 2022/23

IT WAS AGREED: That the Work Programme 2022/23 be noted.

67. Exclusion of the Public

Members determined to exclude the public from the meeting before discussion took place on the following item of business on the grounds that in view of the nature of the business to be transacted if the public were present there would be a disclosure to them of exempt information within the meaning of part 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

68. Town to Turf Scheme Delivery Procurement of Services and Materials

Members received a report outlining proposed arrangements in relation to the procurement of materials for the Town 2 Turf Scheme. The report was to be considered for approval by the Executive on 30th November and the Chair confirmed that he had agreed to waive call-in due to the urgent nature of the decision.

IT WAS AGREED: That the report be noted.