



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

BURNLEY TOWN HALL

Thursday, 9th February, 2023 at 6.30 pm

PRESENT

MEMBERS

Councillors H Baker (Chair), G Barton, A Royle (Vice-Chair), A Lewis, G Lishman, S Lone, J McGowan and D Whitaker

OFFICERS

Lukman Patel	– Chief Operating Officer
Rob Dobson	– Head of Policy and Engagement
Howard Hamilton-Smith	– Head of Finance and Property
Amy Johnson	– Finance Manager
CJ Walmsley	– Democracy Officer

89. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Birtwistle, Hosker and Launer.

A minute silence was held for the Turkey and Syria earthquake victims.

90. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th January 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

91. Additional Items of Business

There were no additional items of business to be considered.

92. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

93. Exclusion of the Public

Exclusion of press and public was as set out in the agenda.

94. Public Question Time

No questions, statements or petitions had been received from members of the public.

95. Notice of Key Decisions and Private Meetings

Members were asked to note the Notice of Key Decision and Private Meetings (NKDPM) published on 13th January 2023 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.

The Committee was also asked to note the Notice to Scrutiny Chair under Regulation 10 (1) (a) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meeting and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, published on 27th January 2023 in relation to the Strategic Plan 2023.

The Members requested that Delivery Agent Cosy Homes in Lancashire (ChiL), the Allotment Review 2023, and the Cultural Strategy, be included on the Scrutiny Committee work programme.

RESOLVED - (1) That the NKDPM of 13th January 2023 and the notice in relation to the Strategic Plan 2023 published on 27th January 2023, be noted; and (2) That the Delivery Agent Cosy Homes in Lancashire (ChiL), the Allotment Review 2023, and the Cultural Strategy, be included on the Scrutiny Committee work programme.

96. Resident Satisfaction Survey

The Committee received a presentation from Rob Dobson, the Head of Policy and Engagement, on the outcome of the Resident Satisfaction Survey.

The survey was run at least every 2 years and residents were invited to participate through the Council's website or social media post and ads. Though not a statistically representative sample, 647 responses had been received. The feedback provided useful evidence alongside other data on service needs and performance.

57% of respondents had indicated they were satisfied with the borough as a place to live. The survey also gathered data on: -

- The best and worst things in the borough
- The overall opinion of Burnley and Padiham Town Centres
- Satisfaction with public services
- Telephone queue wait time

It was felt that the data needed to be considered in the wider context, particularly with regard to the satisfaction of Burnley Town Centre, which was considered worse than 10 years ago.

With regards to satisfaction with sports/leisure facilities, Councillor Barton raised a query in relation to the proportion of respondents with disabilities. Rob Dobson would clarify if statistics were available.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

97. Strategic Plan 2023

The Committee received a report on the Strategic Plan 2023 which set out the Council's strategic priorities for the next 3 years. Reviewed annually, the new draft restated the Council's commitment to ongoing priorities, but also included: -

- Action to support vulnerable residents with the cost of living.
- Working closely with the NHS and partners through new placed-based partnerships for health.
- Working with partners to ensure that residents were able and ready to participate in the workforce.

Some concerns were raised with regards to working with Health Services, insofar as some links had weakened since the pandemic, with fewer strong day to day relationships. It was also felt that there had been a decline in short term emergency support for people.

Further discussion took place regarding the NHS Reforms presentation to the LCC Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee being lacklustre. It was reported that the NHS were going to revisit the strategy over the coming weeks and months, taking on board comments and feedback.

It was queried if commitments were too broad to deliver measurable change, however it was explained that the scope of the commitments was due to multi-agency involvement.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

98. Pay Policy Statement 2023/24

A report was submitted on the Pay Policy Statement 2023, which was required to be published by the end of March each year; along with the Council's Gender Pay Gap report.

It was suggested that it may be helpful for the changes from the previous year to be highlighted, and whilst there was no tracked change facility within the Council's Committee Management System, a tracked change version could be circulated to Members going forward.

A discussion took place in respect of the gender pay gap and the work done by the Council to improve working conditions and promote flexibility to encourage female applicants. The Council had also changed the way it advertised, and the language used to be inclusive.

Further to the report an update was given on the Employer Pension Contribution, which was due to increase from April 2023 to 19.4% of an employee's salary.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

99. Revenue Budget Monitoring Q3 2022/23

A report was submitted on the forecast outturn position for the year as at 31st March 2023 based upon actual spending and income to 31st December 2022.

A query was raised on how the savings on the insurance contract had been achieved. It was advised that each year there was a re-tendering exercise. An assumption is made as the cost is not confirmed until shortly before the commencement date.

With regards to the reduction in income from crematorium memorial wall plaques, despite there being fluctuations in demand depending on the number of cremations, it was also felt that this could also be due to the cost-of-living crisis.

Councillor McGowan queried the locations of the fountains that required refilling and Councillor Baker queried when Land Charges would transfer to the Land Registry. Lukman Patel would forward this information to the respective Councillors.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

100. Capital Budget Monitoring Q3 2022/23

A report was submitted that updated Members on capital expenditure and the resources position, along with highlighting any variances. The report recommended to Full Council approval of net budget changes totalling a decrease of £18,513,011, giving a revised capital budget for 2022/23 totalling £20,225,741; approval of the proposed financing of the revised capital budget; and to note the latest estimated year end position on capital receipts and contributions showing an assumed balance of £5,617,708 at 31st March 2023.

Clarification was sought with regards to the contribution for canal towpath improvements and it was advised that this was the Council's contribution to the scheme as part of improvements in the Borough.

Charter Walk refurbishment was discussed, with reference to Calder House. The building was in disrepair and therefore options were being investigated as part of a wider feasibility study. Options and costings would be reported to Members once established.

It was queried if live streaming of Committees would be included as part of the IT upgrades. It was reported that whilst this was being considered, it currently needed dedicated support which would have financial implications. However, tech options were currently being considered.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

101. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/2028

A report was submitted on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2024/25 to 2027/28, which incorporated the Reserves Strategy.

It was explained that the Covid and Cost-of-Living Reserve had been kept within the strategy to give flexibility and resilience to the revenue budget in 2023/24 and future years.

Clarification was sought with regards the New Homes Bonus Scheme, which was originally paid for a 6-year period but was subsequently reduced to 5 year and then 4 year period from 2018/19. The scheme was then amended again in 2020/21 to 1 year period, and it was likely that the scheme wouldn't exist in its current form from 2024/25.

Discussion took place in relation to businesses across the borough and how they are retained. It was highlighted that calculation of rateable values was based on a number of factors, including size of premises, and small business rate relief could be applied for. The Valuation Office Agency were responsible for calculating the rateable values.

A suggestion was made in relation to licensing dog walkers, to regulate the industry and generate income. The work involved and the enforcement implications would need to need to be considered.

Howard Hamilton-Smith offered to meet with Members to discuss alternative budget proposals.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

102. 2023/2024 Treasury Management Strategy and 2023/2024 Prudential and Treasury Indicators

A report was submitted that recommended to Full Council the approval of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2023/24; the prudential and treasury indicators for 2023/24 to 2025/26, including the authorised limit for external debt of £96.918M in 2023/24; the list of Counterparties for Deposits; and the Council's MRP Statement for 2023/24.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

103. Council Tax Support Scheme 2023/24

A report was submitted that presented the findings of the Council Tax Support Scheme consultation with regards to temporarily increasing the maximum level of subsidy for working age claimants, from 85% to 100%, for the 2023/24 scheme only. Eligibility would depend on circumstances, but the scheme was aimed at the most vulnerable. Howard Hamilton-Smith would provide threshold information to Councillor McGowan.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

104. Revenue Budget 2023/24

A report was submitted that summarised the key issues that needed to be considered when finalising the Revenue Budget 2023/24.

The report recommended that Full Council: -

- Endorse the approach that had been adopted in developing budget proposals that reflect the Council's Strategic Objectives for 2023/24;
- Approve the proposals contained within the report;
- Set a Council Tax Requirement of £7,722,735 for the financial year 2023/24;
- Set a Net Budget Requirement of £16,266,712 for 2023/24;
- Receive and consider the statutory report issued by the Head of Finance and Property under the Local Government Act 2003;
- Authorise the Chief Operating Officer/Heads of Service to progress action plans to deliver the 2023/24 budget;
- Approve a Council Tax (Band D) figure of £328.01 for this Council for the year commencing 1st April 2023 and adopt the statutory resolution to set the full Council Tax for the year. This was equivalent to a 2.99% increase.

Any alternative budget proposals needed to be submitted to the Head of Finance and Property by 17th February 2023.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

105. Capital Budget 2023/24 and Capital Investment Programme 2023/28

A report was submitted that recommended to Full Council the approval of the Capital Budget for 2023/24 totalling £41,357,215; the Capital Investment Programme 2023-28; the estimated position on capital resources; and the Capital Strategy 2023-28. Furthermore, subject to the approval of the Capital Budget, it was recommended that the Executive approve the release of capital scheme budgets including slippage from 2022/23, subject to compliance with the Financial Procedure Rules and Standing Orders for Contracts.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

106. Work Programme 2022/23

The Committee was advised that there would be a new Director for Calico, and an introduction for Members would be arranged in due course.

RESOLVED – That the work programme for 2022/23 be noted.