



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

BURNLEY TOWN HALL

Thursday, 8th February, 2024 at 6.30 pm

PRESENT

MEMBERS

Councillors G Barton (Chair), B Horrocks (Vice-Chair), M Brindle, J Broughton, Hall, N Kazmi, S Lone, J McGowan and F Wild

OFFICERS

Rob Dobson	– Chief Operating Officer
Howard Hamilton-Smith	– Director of Resources
Kate Ingram	– Director of Economy and Development
Amy Johnson	– Finance Manager
Kieron Roberts	– Green Spaces and Amenities
CJ Walmsley	– Democracy Officer

219. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bridges, Gordon Lishman, Sollis and Whitaker.

220. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th January 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Wild in the apologies.

221. Additional Items of Business

There were no additional items of business to be considered.

222. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest on any of the items on the agenda. However, whilst no decision was to be made in relation to the item on the proposed budget for the next

financial year, the Chair reminded Members of their interest in relation to Council Tax and the dispensation that was required to be in place.

223. Exclusion of the Public

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

224. Public Question Time

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

225. Notice of Key Decisions and Private Meetings

Members were asked to note the Notice of Key Decisions and Private Meetings (NKDPM) published on 15th January 2024.

Members were reminded that should they wish the Committee to consider any items on the NKDPM, they should inform the Chair.

RESOLVED – That the NKDPM of 15th January 2024 be noted.

226. Strategic Plan 2024/25

The Committee received a report on the Strategic Plan 2024/25, which set out a clear vision for the future: one that was evidence based, shared by all units of the Council, and was in tune with the aspirations of local people. There were no changes to the commitments from 2023/24, however during 2024, the Executive was planning to conduct a more detailed review of the Strategic Plan priorities and would present a new strategy for 2025/26 and beyond.

Clarification was sought with regards supporting the formation of a new academy for Burnley's high schools. Though the Academy Trust would drive it forward, the Council would give support in the interest of educational attainment. It was felt that this should also be the case for other Academy's operating across the borough. A further update would be provided to a future meeting.

RESOLVED that (1) the report be noted; and
(2) a further update on the formation of a new Academy be provided to a future meeting.

227. Revenue Monitoring Report 2023/24 - Quarter 3 (to 31 December 2023)

A report was submitted that provided the forecast outturn position for the year ending 31 March 2024 based upon actual spending and income to 31 December 2023. The

Committee was asked to note the projected revenue budget forecast position of a net overspend of £60k, although it was expected that there would be a break-even position by the end of the financial year. The net overspend of £60k had reduced from a forecast net overspend of £166k as reported in quarter 2.

Clarification was sought in relation to Environmental Enforcement following the re-letting of the contract, and it was advised that this was currently being kept under review.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

228. Capital Monitoring Report 2023/24 - Quarter 3 (to 31 December 2023)

A report was submitted which provided Members with an update on capital expenditure and the resources position, along with highlighting any variances.

The Executive was being asked to recommend to Full Council, approval of net budget changes totalling a net increase of £69,936, giving a revised capital budget for 2023/24 totalling £41,727,259. The report also recommended the proposed financing of the revised capital budget totalling £41,727,259 for approval.

The Committee noted the latest estimated year end position on capital receipts and contributions, which showed an assumed balance of £3,553,100 as at 31 March 2024.

It was clarified that progress was being made in relation to the Nicholas Street site.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

229. 2023/24 Treasury Management Quarter 3 (April - December)

A report was submitted on treasury management activity for the period 1 April to 31 December 2023.

The report also recommended that Full Council endorse the quarterly update on the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 in compliance with the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

230. Medium Term Financial Strategy - 2025/26-2028/29 Incorporating the Reserves Strategy

A report was submitted on the longer term financial outlook within the context of a Medium Term Financial Strategy covering the financial years 2025/26 to 2028/29, which highlighted uncertainties and underlying risks.

The report recommended to Full Council the approval of the latest Medium Term Financial Strategy, along with the Reserves Strategy. It was also asked to note that a refreshed document would be provided when required as an aid to monitoring the continued delivery of an annually balanced budget; and the annual review of the Financial Management Code.

The financial environment in which the Council operates was highlighted in terms of challenges, particularly within the context of continuing austerity. Given the reduced Government funding during austerity and pressures on other income and uncertainty around future funding, the Council endeavoured to meet those financial challenges taking a strategic view whilst protecting the quality of services and minimising impact on residents.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

231. 2024/25 Treasury Management Strategy and 2024/25 - 2026/27 Prudential and Treasury Indicators

The Committee considered a report on the 2024/25 Treasury Management Strategy and 2024/25 to 2026/27 Prudential and Treasury Indicators.

Full Council were recommended to approve the Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25; the prudential and treasury indicators for 2024/25 to 2026/27, including the authorised limit for external debt of £100.199m in 2024/25; the list of Counterparties for Deposits; and the Council's Minimum Revenue Position Statement for 2024/25.

It was highlighted that there had been poor Member attendance at the recent Treasury Management training which had taken place on 1st February 2024. However, a link to the recording of the training had been circulated to all Members for their convenience.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

232. Revenue Budget 2024/25

The Committee considered a report on the estimates of revenue income and expenditure for 2024/25. 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 2024/25; approve the proposals set out in the report; set a Council Tax Requirement of £8,054,980 for the financial year 2024/25; set a Net Budget Requirement of £18,986,918 for 2024/25; receive and consider the statutory report issued by the Director of Resources under the Local Government Act 2003; authorise the Chief Operating Officer/Directors/Heads of Service to progress action plans to deliver the 2024/25 budget; and approve a Council Tax (Band D) figure of £337.82 for this Council for the year commencing 1st April 2024 and adopt the statutory resolution to set the full Council Tax for the year. This was equivalent to a 2.99% Council Tax increase.

It was pointed out that there had been an amendment to the original report, with the removal of the saving relating to Fulledge Recreation Ground car parking income (£20k). Utility savings amended from (£147k) to (£167k).

A query was raised in relation to Rowley Lake and whether the annual inspection of the dam included water testing. The water quality was deemed safe before recreational usage; however, an update would be provided.

Clarification was given on the price increase for Civica Financials, the need for development and to look at other options, which would be subject to another report.

With regards to tree work, and Lancashire County Council now carrying out their own works which had meant a reduction of rechargeable income of £9k, it was highlighted that the resource time could be utilised in other areas.

Burnley Together was discussed in terms of Government funding previously being used and that now being reduced. The building had been previously funded by partners, and a greater partnership contribution was expected going forward. The demand for the service was very high so may well need long term support from the Council.

Clarification was sought on the annual subscription cost of £13k for the 'Love Clean Streets' App. It was advised that this was the most economical of the two key players, and was also used by Lancashire County Council. 600-900 reports came through the App each month, and officers were to meet to discuss how usage could be improved.

RESOLVED that (1) the report be noted.
(2) an update be provided on the water quality of Rowley Lake.

233. Revenue Budget 2024/25 - Statutory Report of the Chief Financial Officer

The Committee considered a statutory report of the Chief Financial Officer when setting the Revenue Budget for 2024/25.

Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 required the Chief Financial Officer to report on the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of the financial reserves. The Act also required the Authority to have regard to the report when making decisions about the budget.

The report covered: -

- an assessment of the robustness of the 2024/25 budget setting process for both revenue and capital;
- a high level assessment of key risks that may impact the budget for 2024/25;
- an assessment of the overall adequacy of reserves to contain financial risk and ensure the sustainability of the Council over the financial year 2024/25; and
- an indication of future direction of travel for the Council over the medium term.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

234. Capital Budget for 2024/25 and Capital Investment Programme 2024-29

A report was submitted that recommended that Full Council approve the 2024/25 Capital Budget, totalling £16,290,933; note the 2024-29 Capital Investment Programme; note the estimated position on capital resources; and approve the Capital Strategy 2024-29. The report also recommended that subject to the approval of the 2024/25 Capital Budget, the Executive approve the release of capital scheme budgets including slippage from 2023/24, subject to compliance with the Financial Procedure Rules and Standing Orders for Contracts.

Clarification was given on the £220,000 for extension of Burnley Cemetery being used for a feasibility study, landscaping and works. It was suggested that land at Freshfields could be used as a green burial ground.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

235. Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25 and 2025/26 & Empty Homes Premium Policy

A report was submitted which presented the findings of the Council Tax Support Scheme consultation with regards to plans to temporarily increase the maximum level of subsidy for working age claimants, for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 scheme and to amend the Council's Empty Homes Premium Policy.

The consultation was a statutory requirement and was publicised via the press, website and social media pages, however the response had remained low.

A query was raised on the number of empty properties and the amount of exemptions awarded under the business rates. This information would be circulated to Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED that (1) the report be noted;
(2) information on the number of empty properties and the amount of exemptions awarded under the business rates be circulated to Members.

236. Multi-use Games Areas

A report was submitted that provided a detailed overview of the current position, and a proposed way forward, regarding the provision, condition and work needed, including costed options, for the improvement of the Council's Multi-use Games Areas (MUGAs) stock.

Concerns were raised over MUGAs not being gender equitable, with limited data showing a ratio of 13:1 usage between boys and girls. It was highlighted that a document called, 'Safer Parks - Improving Access for women and girls' was being considered to improve inclusion.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

237. Pay Policy Statement 2024/25

A report was submitted that sought Full Council approval for the Council's Pay Policy Statement which was required to be published prior to the end of March each year.

A query was raised regarding the non-usage of some of the spinal points on the NJC pay structure. Clarification would be sought and circulated to Members.

RESOLVED that (1) the report be noted;
(2) information on the non-usage of some of the spinal points on the NJC pay structure would be circulated to Members of the Committee.

238. Scrutiny Review Groups

The Committee was informed that a report would now be submitted to the March meeting to brief Members on the work of the Climate Change Review Group and the conclusions.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

239. Work Programme 2023/24

The Committee received the updated work programme for 2023/2024.

RESOLVED – That the updated work programme for 2023/24 be noted.

Members determined to exclude the press and public from the meeting before discussion took place on the following items 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 Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

240. Levelling Up Fund

A report was submitted on the progress of the Levelling Up fund programme.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.