

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Management Board



9 February 2017 at 6pm

DISCLAIMER

The attached Minutes are DRAFT. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information and statements and decisions recorded in them, their status will remain that of a draft until such time as they are confirmed as a correct record at the subsequent meeting

Members Present:-

Donald Alexander (for Gill Kirk), Charlie Bolton, Tom Brook, Jude English, Geoff Gollop, Gary Hopkins (for Anthony Negus) Olly Mead, Graham Morris, Steve Pearce, Celia Phipps (for Brenda Massey)

Officers in Attendance:-

Stephen Hughes, Interim Chief Executive, Anna Klonowski, Interim Strategic Director - Business Change, , Shahzia Daya, Service Director, Legal and Democratic Services, Andrea Dell, Service Manager, Democratic Services and Civic Affairs, Lucy Fleming Scrutiny Co-ordinator, Allison Taylor, Democratic Services

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed all members to the meeting and explained the evacuation procedure in the event of an emergency.

2. Apologies for absence.

Apologies were noted from Councillor Kirk with Councillor Alexander as substitute, and Councillor Massey with Councillor Phipps as substitute.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes and Action Sheets for:-

A – 8 December 2016;

B - 12 January 2017;



C – 19 January 2017.

It was agreed that these be considered at the next meeting of OSMB.

5. Chair's Business.

The Chair advised that the Extraordinary meeting in March would formally consider the Bundred report and that this meeting would be chaired by Councillor Pearce.

6. Public Forum.

The public forum submissions were received and noted. Copies of which are held on the Minute Book within Democratic Services.

7. Scrutiny Structure and Ways of Working.

The Chair, referring to statements submitted as Public Forum, stated that any changes proposed were not part of a cost cutting exercise but were to establish more effective scrutiny with an emphasis on policy development rather than pre-decision scrutiny. He believed that Scrutiny had not played the part it should in light of the findings of the Bundred Report. He noted the Mayor's positive message at the Mayoral Question Time regarding the importance of Councillors engaging in decision making.

The Service Manager, Democratic Engagement stated that the report was intended to open discussions and the Board was asked to consider whether it wished the Local Government Association to be involved. She pointed out that a national review of Overview and Scrutiny was currently underway and there was an option for this Council to submit evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee.

The following points arose from discussion:-

1. A Councillor raised concerns that the Scrutiny review was being driven by the need to reduce costs. She was advised that whilst there were some modest staff reductions, the overriding reason for considering the changes was the need to work more effectively. She added that consideration should be given to digital ways of working (eg. Slack) and not relying on so many formal meetings and reports;
2. A Councillor referred to the comment 'sustained financial pressures' in page 9 of the report which appeared to acknowledge the context of a shrinking organisation. He asked whether the current format of reports was a statutory requirement and suggested that reports should be written in a more accessible format. Reports often included misbalanced options and needed to present a cohesive narrative moving forward;
3. A Councillor believed that the current structure was not fit for purpose and an emphasis on policy development was needed. As the report was written before the Bundred review, it seemed premature to discuss this matter in detail until that report had been fully assessed;



4. A Councillor asked what the expectations for Scrutiny were when decisions had already been made by the Mayor and Cabinet. There needed to be recognition of the resources available to produce information for scrutiny and not make unreasonable demands on officers;
5. A Councillor stated that good scrutiny was key but it was important that it be relevant and that there was ownership of a piece of work. It was vital that all large budgets were regularly scrutinised. Consideration should be given to the imbalance of some Work Programmes, fewer but deeper pieces of work and the formalising of the Scrutiny Chairs' meeting;
6. The Interim Strategic Director – Business Change clarified that the report before the Board did not seek to make recommendations but was intended to assist with identifying the objectives for Scrutiny and then to design a model on that basis. Clearly, the work programme needed to be aligned with Cabinet, Audit Committee and Human Resources Committee in order to form an appropriate governance structure;
8. A Councillor stated that any model should put public engagement at its heart and it should move away from alignment with structures of the Council, which meant little to the public;
9. A Councillor, in response to the point above, stated that the public tended to respond to matters important to them leaving the other less popular areas which should perhaps be scrutinised more deeply. She felt it was important that the members with the right knowledge and skills sat on the appropriate Committees;
10. The Chair suggested a way forward would be to arrange an informal workshop to develop a scrutiny proposal between the next meeting and the last meeting of the year. It was confirmed that the AGM Full Council would only be required to set up a broad scrutiny service and the detail could be worked up later. This was supported;
11. The Interim Strategic Director – Business Change proposed that a 'hothouse' workshop could be piloted for this meeting;
12. It was agreed to submit a statement to the Parliamentary Select Committee advising that Bristol's Scrutiny structure and ways of working were being revised and to engage with the Department for Communities and Local Government on this matter;
13. As a result of a request, it was agreed to place the minutes of the Constitutional Working Group on Al Fresco.

RESOLVED –

- 1. That an informal workshop ('hothouse') take place between 13 March Extraordinary OSMB and the scheduled OSMB on 6 April in order to develop a proposal for the scrutiny structure and new ways of working.**
- 2. That the Board notes that the Constitution allows it to determine how Scrutiny operated.**
- 3. That a Statement be submitted to the Parliamentary Select Committee's Review of Overview and Scrutiny advising that Bristol's Scrutiny structure and ways of working were being revised.**
- 4. That the Council engage with the Department for Communities and Local Government on this matter.**



At this point, Councillor Alexander left the meeting.

8. Feedback Regarding the Budget Process.

The Interim Strategic Director – Business Change introduced the report stating that this year's process had been unique and would not be the 'norm'. A new process would be designed for the MTFP and savings for next year would need to be identified as early as June 2017. It was intended to have a 'greenhouse' session on the new Decision Pathway and income generation ideas.

The Interim Chief Executive stated that the Authority had been running to catch up this year but had met its statutory obligations. He added that, from his past experiences, budget processes had come a long way as they were once very secretive. The Mayor wanted further change by engaging members and the public from the start in order to develop a framework of priorities by which propositions could be tested. The timeline would be a strategic process in June, with a full set of options to consider for September before going out for consultation.

The following points arose from discussion:-

1. A Councillor had confidence in the new Chief Executive's willingness to do things differently.;
2. A Councillor stated that the information made available in the budget papers had been much improved from previous years. It was noted that there were ongoing discussions with Party Group Leaders regarding improvements to the process;
3. It was noted that the HRA figures would form part of the budget and these figures were in the public domain;
4. The timetable for the MTFP would be considered at OSMB's April meeting.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

9. Elimination of the Gender and Race Pay Gap.

It was noted that this would be considered by the Human Resources Committee on 6 April and update would be provided to the Commission in due course.

RESOLVED – that the update report be noted.

At this point, Councillor Mead left.

10. Scrutiny Work Programme.

1. It was noted that the pre-election period did not preclude 'normal' Council business taking place ie. Scrutiny work, but did place restraints regarding publicity.



2. The Scrutiny Co-ordinator reported that she was continuing dialogue with young people in order to forge close working relationships and engage them in the democratic process. The Chair of the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission reported that the youth element of any scrutiny matter was considered early on and their contributions had been useful. It was agreed that examples of good practice across Commissions should be highlighted at the 'hothouse' session and incorporated into a future model;
3. It was agreed to invite Place Scrutiny Members to attend the item on Green Capital scheduled for the 13th March OSMB meeting, and the housing items that would be considered by Neighbourhoods Scrutiny in February 17.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

11. Mayor's Forward Plan.

It was noted that the Housing Delivery Plan would be considered at the February Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission meeting and be fed back to the Cabinet meeting in March.

It was noted that the Decision Pathway had been revised to give clear ownership of the Forward Plan to the Mayor. Decisions would not be progressed if they were not first approved by the Mayor. An ideas form was also in development which the Mayor alone would approve for inclusion on the Forward Plan. OSMB would be briefed on the Decision Pathway at its meeting on 13 March.

The Chair noted the above but emphasised the need for known key decisions to populate the Forward Plan. It was essential to have a comprehensive list of forthcoming decisions so that they could be scrutinised if there was concern. This was not possible if they were only submitted to the Forward Plan shortly before the decision. He was informed that there was a need to manage business plans to give a clearer picture of milestones for the Forward Plan. It was suggested that perhaps a 'queuing' list of items for the Forward Plan could be developed. The Chair supported this as a way forward.

RESOLVED – that the Mayor's Forward Plan be noted.

12. Scrutiny Resolution, Inquiry Day Outcome and Full Council Motion Tracker.

1. A Councillor expressed his frustration that good pieces of scrutiny work such as the Supermarkets Select Committee, the Housing Inquiry day and the Waste Inquiry Day have not had their recommendations implemented.
2. A Councillor asked for an update on the Air Pollution Motion for a future tracker.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.



13. Date of next meeting.

This was noted as 13 March 2017.

The Meeting ended at 7.55pm.

CHAIR _____

