

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

25 July 2017 at 6.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors:

Geoffrey Gollop

John Goulandris (for Graham Morris)

Martin Foder (for Jude English)

Councillor Kirk leaving at 730 substituted by Councillor Harriet Bradley

Anthony Negus

Anna Keen

Tom Brook

Charlie Bolton

Donald Alexander

Councillors who raised questions from the floor:

Helen Holland

Asher Craig

Jo Sergeant

Nicola Beech

Olly Mead

Officers in Attendance:-

Alison Comley (for Anna Klonowski),

Andrea Dell, Service Manager

Nancy Rollason, Deputy Monitoring Officer

Denise Murray, Service Director - Finance

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The emergency evacuation procedure was noted. The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence.

These were received from Councillors Morris and English. Councillor Kirk will leave at 7.30pm.



3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes of Meeting held on 26th June 2017

Minutes not yet available.

5. Chair's Business.

None.

6. Public Forum

None.

7. Medium Term Financial Plan.

The report was presented to Members by the Service Director, Finance.

The report aims to introduce a new approach to strategic direction. It provides a guide to strategic goals and sets a plan for the future.

The plan will look at the current financial position, refresh the budget gap (a £42m gap persists after the identification of £62m savings).

Also included are:

- Evidence available and summarised data, for funding and changes since February.
- Information about economic trends both nationally and locally.
- Risks, opportunities and threats.
- Factors which must be considered to ensure resilience.
- Principles which must guide prudent expenditure, investment and efficiency savings and grow income and transform services.

The officer noted that an uncertain climate continues and that the figures presented in the financial plan do not make allowances for future issues outside the control of the council.

During the discussion which followed the following points were made:

- The plan will be applied to different areas of the budget to ensure the council is spending prudently, and with flexibility in our contracts. The aim will be to maintain a financially balanced position each year, to deliver on the budget that's been set.



- In relation to investments the council will look at new investments. Prioritisation metrics will be used to determine expenditure; this should drive efficiencies as the council looks at budgets in these new ways.
- It is intended to review peppercorn rents and to provide a suite of options to the Executive. The intention is to give flexibility and transparency to review these rents and provide more clarity about where subsidies are effectively being given to organisations.
- Start-up grants may be changing to start-up loans.
- With regard to capital programme procurement, going forward the council should take account of maintenance when making investments. Frequently capital programme spending and the revenue budget do not align; in the future a whole life cycle approach will be used. This will enable fully informed decisions to be made about the running costs of an asset as well as the capital cost. There are models available to help provide a full picture of the costs of various assets (such as highways, school buildings etc.) and these will be used to provide better information and may in due course change the approach to the management and maintenance of assets. The objective will be to save unnecessary expense to revenue budgets.
- Social value will also be considered through the social value policy which will be incorporated into the financial plan.
- Savings and benefits may accrue to different budget holders. At present the savings and benefits are not aligned to functions in recognition that a whole system approach is necessary. A silo approach is unhelpful. More detailed work will be taking place to ensure an organisation-wide approach is taken.
- Bristol City Council will need a mix of internal skills and external skills to help take forward this new way of working. Support across the board from Members will be welcome.
- Task and finish groups will be driven by Members. Project Management support will help take this forward. There will be discussion with the Executive to decide how to engage about this.
- Asset base work will be essential to help decisions move forward. Subject to endorsement by Cabinet, it is hoped that Bristol City Council will make a programmed approach through work in the autumn.
- It is expected that Bristol City Council will engage with the West of England Mayor where appropriate. It is most likely to be appropriate with regional infrastructure development. The Executive will determine the level of engagement.
- It will be necessary to work in partnership with other bodies (such as neighbouring local authorities) too.
- Assets are not only one-off physical resources. The council is expected to think creatively, and consider how to deliver a commercial return and improve core service delivery.
- The aim will be to develop a comprehensive asset base, then reduce the idle assets and make them work harder for the council.
- Members will be provided with a rich and comprehensive database of information on which to make decisions. Disposal of assets can be considered when appropriate.
- Council debt is expected to double, along with interest. Interest rates quoted in the plan are based on current rates. The Council has borrowed in advance following an offer for a reduced rate. Generally, if interest rates go up then the budget gap will increase.



- The plan outlines the budget gaps. It is necessary to balance the budget.
- It is necessary to take quick action to produce a thorough inventory.
- A strong analysis of the financial situation, encompassing all aspects of the wealth of the Council is essential.
- This is an important piece of work which has been carried out alongside the normal business of the council. It is a positive step and will prompt a vital wider strategy debate.
- The transformation capacity fund had £5m allocated, and a proportion of that will be used to facilitate this work-stream for up to 3 years. Additional resources to deliver these changes are essential.
- By October the intention is to produce detailed factual information to take to consultation.
- Current staff will be supplemented by others to deliver the work-stream as necessary.
- The 2012 asset data base was very comprehensive.
- Human assets are important. The workforce plan will align to strategic direction and it is necessary to right-size the back-office to match front-office service
- Management of change process will happen with redeployment based on skills.
- HR will look at skill sets and matching people to roles to successfully move staff, providing support and training where necessary. This is already happening.
- There is a need to develop a more commercial approach to the use of existing resources.
- The council should consider how to measure value and entrepreneurialism, beyond monetary figures. A cross-cutting approach looking at opportunities will help with these new areas of work. It will be necessary to upskill existing teams in terms of the market.
- The procurement team will need to think about market segmentation and analysis to look at opportunities and drivers and bring information back to the service.
- Culture change in the Council will take time.
- Other Smart City approaches have been examined. There are some quick wins which can be made to help pay for longer-term strategies.
- Opportunities may arise from the operations centre, Bristol Energy, infrastructure projects, the universities, and other areas. The Council should look to link areas of work for the benefit of citizens and the Council.
- There is a need to think creatively, take risks and be analytical about how to help the people we need to support and target.
- There are many complaints from citizens regarding the answering of calls in the call centre. Poor response is too common.

In concluding the discussion the Chair asked for thanks to be conveyed to the team. This is a fundamental piece of work which is in its early stages.

8. Scrutiny Work Programme 17-18

The agenda item was introduced by the Service Manager – Scrutiny, and the Chair. During this item and throughout the meeting the following key points were made by members.



- The headlines generated by the earlier workshop have now been scoped. Further ideas have been developed.
- OSM lead members for each work area will be discussed and confirmed in the future. Once agreed, they will be shared to all Councillors, to give Councillors the opportunity to contribute where they have a particular interest or expertise in a specific work area.
- There will be monthly OSM meetings. For each work area there might be a formal report or just a verbal report. The list of work areas will continue to be reviewed. The work areas may change in response to legislation or a local requirement. At each OSM and OSM Planning meeting the work list will be reviewed.
- All Scrutiny meetings are captured on webcast. It is proposed that a dedicated webpage for Scrutiny will be developed which will give links to appropriate detailed reports, webcasts and webpages.
- Items for Scrutiny will be brought forward by Members through OSM; OSM will determine whether to use a Task and Finish Group or a Commission. The Group or Commission will always report back via OSM. OSM will co-ordinate the whole Scrutiny programme.
- If there was an urgent Scrutiny matter then OSM would be able pull a working group together quickly if necessary.
- Scrutiny Commissions will remain as an option for the present as they are included in the Constitution.
- A view was expressed that the new ways of working will not work as there will always be items which need to be reviewed as well as new subject areas and that there should be provision for both and that work of Scrutiny is too big to be covered by the members of OSMB without further involvement of many other councillors.
- There was concern from some members that those on Scrutiny committees have lost their roles. The new way of working may be interesting and more effective, but there's a danger that we have created a group of people who decide what everyone else does.
- The Majority of OSMB members endorsed the view that Task and Finish Groups will be the process for the future (subject to how they work in reality). It was argued that OSMB cannot go back over the agreement made in the past and must commit to making the new method of working successful. It is not sensible to keep defending a change, which evolved out of a lengthy process. The new working groups will help OSM get away from long agendas with short updates from Scrutiny Commissions. There should enable be more detailed Scrutiny and debate.
- The vision is to avoid the conscription of Members and instead have the benefit of willing volunteers with interest in the work area.
- There will be regular communications with members to reflect work and to raise new issues.
- There is recognition that Scrutiny has not always worked very well in the past.
- It would be preferred that all working groups are cross party to make them more representative. Scrutiny should not be used for political end; this will make the outcomes more powerful.
- Places on the work groups will not be rationed. If 20 people want to be on one group then priorities may need to be reappraised. Councillors have a diverse range of interests and expertise which can deliver Scrutiny in a range of groups.



- It is important that the tagging of the subjects on the Scrutiny web page help councillors spot overlapping areas.
- It will be necessary to consider the overall workload of Scrutiny officers. It may be possible to consider matters and make progress without officers always being present. Scrutiny officers should be used as a resource for powerful pieces of work. There are 2.6 FTE Scrutiny officers as previously, however in the future there will be no Democratic Services Officer clerking at the same time. Democratic Services Officers need to focus on regulatory meetings. The intention will be to capture action notes. In addition, OSMB is webcast so that's always there as a record. Scrutiny officers are experienced so know when to expand record keeping. Scrutiny officers will be doing more support in future. The organisation is getting smaller although that's not the driver for the Scrutiny changes.
- There will be a limit on the number of viable work-streams which can be conducted at one time.
- Recognition that it is a changed system and councillors must prove it can work.
- All reports will be made to OSMB, and anything that requires a significant decision would come to OSMB, or a special public meeting could be held as necessary. Working groups are not always minuted at present, so there is no significant change.
- Scrutiny cannot be driven by the executive, it should be ensuring the Mayor is delivering his objectives and whether they are effective; their inclusion in the manifesto is irrelevant. OSMB should raise concerns if actions are being taken way outside the council's pledges. OSMB must scrutinise cabinet leads of all sides.
- If a particular work-stream draws attention from a great many councillors then it may be necessary to reconsider the working methods of the group e.g. breaking the work up into different elements or through breakout groups rather than a single committee.
- If a particular work-stream is populated disproportionately with councillors from one party then other parties will be informed in case they wish to ensure they are represented.
- Members presented the scoping approach they had developed working in small groups for the subjects defined previously as being of fundamental significance and relevance to the Executive and Senior Management of the Council. A discussion of each subject followed the introduction.

a) **Air Quality and Pollution**

- It has been decided to approach this broad topic, which touches on a range of issues (such as public health, planning, transport, and congestion) via two working groups: Congestion Taskforce and a Clean Air Zone working group.
- The aim will be to ensure better public engagement and conduct a holistic examination of the issue.
- A consistent remit would be helpful for all the working groups.
- Various aspects need to be examined for air quality e.g. freight consolidation, wood burning stoves, diesel engines, etc.
- The working groups will have a role in co-ordinating all the work which is on-going in various areas of the council to ensure that Members all know what is happening.



- Working groups will be the key Scrutiny method, but there will be some enquiry days as and when appropriate to develop public awareness.
- It will not be possible to make big groups working elsewhere restructure to fit in with the Scrutiny task and finish groups. Timetables are crucial and will determine what Scrutiny can achieve and by when.

b) Council Assets

- This is a longer-term piece of work best suited to a Scrutiny Commission. It is expected that reports will be presented and the work will move forward over a period of time.
- With regard to council buildings, it's important that their use is reconsidered at Ward level if the council decides that it no longer has a use for them.
- Some categories of asset will need more urgent attention than others, such as libraries.

c) Children's Centres

- Headteachers who manage children's centres have already met with Exec Councillors.
- There is a Family steering group.
- Work is needed on financial models.
- Headteachers will be available again in the autumn when further progress will be made on this work area.
- Breakfast clubs and holiday hunger should be added into the scope.
- Children's centres may link to libraries and retaining resources. Many work areas overlap and link with each other.

d) Council Commissioning and Contracts

- This is a broad topic. Scrutiny will work to ensure that the best value and best social value is obtained from the Council's commissioning.
- Areas of good practice and areas of development will be identified.
- Adult social care and Children's social care are very significant areas of commissioning.
- The best format would be a working group meeting regularly with officers and appropriate Executive Members.
- Innovation Partnerships must be included. A change in EU contracting laws means that a case may be made for working with specific partners without having to go to the open market through tendering.
- Commissioning of services for people is different to the commissioning of service contracts for buildings. Different councillors may be interested, and this group may split in due course.
- The People Directorate in Bristol City Council is significantly bigger than many local authorities in its own right. A split of the workload can be determined which allows the involvement of members with special interests. Different work-streams will be inevitable.

e) Cribbs Patchway New Neighbourhood

- The new development in Cribbs / Patchway will have a significant impact on North Bristol Wards. It is effectively a new small town on the edge of Bristol.



- A working group is the practical way to develop this work-stream. The group should meet sporadically with bursts of activity when appropriate.
- Issues which will need to be considered include: schools building, doctor's surgeries and traffic, the aim will be to ensure minimal negative impact on the Bristol wards.
- This will be an interesting and integrated piece of work which must involve South Gloucestershire councillors from the outset.
- It will be important to learn from the working group which previously existed between South Gloucestershire Councillors and Officers, and to work from there (to avoid duplication of previous work).
- Areas of concern will include traffic and congestion, although it is sometimes difficult to engage, it is important to work with the other authority to protect Bristol citizens and resolve issues.
- To establish and maintain a positive working relationship with South Gloucestershire Council and obtain positive outcomes, it is important to scope this work correctly. This is a sensitive area. Bristol City Council has no authority over South Gloucestershire Council, however it is hoped that by understanding more about the new development it will be possible to mitigate the impact for Bristol residents as much as possible. It is important to consider traffic flows, mitigation and plans for expenditure on traffic schemes.
- There has been little information forthcoming from Officers about the development that is the reason why this subject has been made a Scrutiny work area.
- It is important to consider bus routes at an early stage before travel plans of new residents are established.
- Proactive work to reduce congestion in this area is important; otherwise the knock-on effect will lead to congestion in other areas too.
- There was consideration of whether this was the best way to have oversight of the development. It is important to make progress, but the Scrutiny process should not impede action. It is not acceptable to wait a further six months for information.
- Cross-party working in those wards most directly impacted is essential. There has been very little progress so far and there is frustration among many local councillors.

ACTION: Alison Comley to approach Planning to ask for officer input re Transport issues in the north Bristol wards in relation to the new neighbourhood.

- There was a series of briefings by South Gloucestershire Council and their planners some years ago. A member of OSM was unaware of any subsequent meetings.
- It is of concern if S106 money is diverted entirely to Highways Officers. A more holistic view of congestion should be taken; it would not be good if all funds were directed to speed traffic through congested A-roads where there are also business and retail areas, routes to school and pedestrian hubs. Other options such as improved public transport should be considered.
- This will be prioritised in a constructive way and there will be work to determine how to take it forward.

f) Fire Safety in High Rise Residential Buildings



- A helpful meeting has taken place, and there is evidence of a comprehensive approach to addressing people's concerns. This has been reassuring.
- There will be further issues to address when the government review is published.
- Councillors are interested and now await a detailed report. They are ready to engage when it is useful to do so. Timing is important.
- It will be useful for Scrutiny to contribute a view from outside the main group and will help the main group understand how the communication is working.
- The topic will be deferred for the time being.

g) Libraries

- There is much raw data which needs preparation.
- It is important to monitor the information which comes back from the consultation and then develop the results of the exercise.
- A Scrutiny commission or a Select Committee would not be helpful given the urgent timescales involved. This work area should be progressed through a task and finish group who need to act quickly. It was raised that Neighbourhoods Scrutiny has conducted work on this previously.
- If recommendations are to be considered for cabinet in January, then members must press on to make constructive suggestions.
- A previous very thorough consultation took place in 2014/2015. Many people responded to a two stage consultation. That material is not included in current consultation. An early concern is that the Council should not lose sight of the good ideas developed two to three years ago which could inform cabinet decisions.
- It will be necessary to work around the current consultation, and to work with some urgency through a working group.

h) Medium Term Financial Plan

- This is an important work-stream and it is essential that there is cross-party involvement.

i) Parks and Green Spaces

- The scoping suggested is for i) Scrutiny of what's under development ii) how can we help develop future plans. This will be executed by a working group.
- This topic is a fundamental issue.
- The Executive would welcome the engagement of councillors with the challenges that need to be resolved.
- There is a consultation on parks planned for the near future, and this group will have the opportunity to feed into the development of the consultation.

j) Tackling increasing demand for Social Services – Adults

- Social services is a huge part of the council budget. This is a good time to scrutinise how the three-tier model is working.



- It is also important to consider discharges from Southmead and the Bristol Royal Infirmary and how that process is working.
- Discharges involve both bed-blocking and rehabilitation services.
- Pressures on social care come from the market and from service demand.
- Adult and Children's social services both have significant budgetary implications. Both Cabinet members were present at the scoping meetings.
- Involvement of the Executive Members is crucial.
- The working group should look at what is in place and determine whether it is effective.
- Much work has been completed in this area already, so it is important to build on that and avoid duplication
- The largest part of the council's budget is spent in this area.
- There is an important role for lay people to prompt specialists to look at issues in a different way. Members greatly concerned with this.
- A small task and finish group might work best, using people from across all parties who have good knowledge and experience the council can learn more and make good progress.
- The Chair suggested that it would better to have half a dozen task and finish groups which start, work and then finish than one huge group.
- There was agreement that all the comments above also applied to item k).

k) Tackling Increasing Demand in Social Services – Children.

- Agreed to address children's work in the same way as Adult demand for social services.

l) Children's Council

- This will be discussed in more detail in the autumn as it is not the best time of year to contact the youth council.
- It is important to support the youth council's work and pledges.
- It is hoped that the youth council will be involved in task and finish groups in some way.

9 Your Neighbourhood Consultation

Members asked for an agenda item at Overview and Scrutiny on the current Your Neighbourhood Consultation. Neighbourhood and People Scrutiny have examined the consultation. It is felt that it is important to improve member involvement in the consultation and to assist members with engagement. OSM must decide if it wishes to submit anything to Cabinet and a response to the consultation itself. OSM will take note of the next steps in the consultation which closes on 5 September 2017.

Cllr Asher Craig, Deputy Mayor with responsibility for Communities (Public Health, Public Transport, Libraries, Parks) has been asked to attend this meeting.

During the discussion the following points were made:



- The community links element of the consultation is more acceptable and this model would lead to less concern from OSM members. This will be raised at Cabinet.
- Some ward members have made a lot of effort to involve citizens and encouraged them to make a response to the consultation.
- The way questions are laid out is felt by some members to be prescriptive. If people respond online they have more space to respond. It is possible to make lots of comments or enter “*None of the above*”, to ensure that a response is not counted as supporting one of the closure options. A view was expressed that this could lead to some residents to vote for options which preserve their library and then it may be claimed that there’s a mandate to close a number of libraries.
- There are a lot of questions regarding the management of neighbourhoods directorate which are not covered by the consultation.
- The Executive instructs citizens to communicate with councillors but the support to councillors has been removed at the same time; this is unhelpful. Budgets are shrinking but councillors are being asked to take on more.
- People may not feel inclined to engage, which is not at all desirable.
- Many people have been attending local meetings with the Mayor and officers regarding the consultation.
- There is a statutory duty to consult (which is separate from any drive for cuts) and there is also real dialogue necessary on a case by case basis, particularly where the library is one of a number of services / users in a particular building. The Executive is trying its best and the consultation is progressing well. Although the written part of the process may not look as good as it should be, the process as a whole is going well.
- There was no reference to the previous libraries consultation. It had a good response, but there is no acknowledgement in the current consultation of the previous one. Many people volunteered to help to keep their library open at that time, and these offers were not followed up at all.
- It was felt by some members that communication has been a problem with this consultation.
- People with learning difficulties are experiencing great difficulty responding to the online questionnaire. This excludes many people who feel the cuts the most. **ACTION - email from Learning Difficulties Group to be sent to Consultation team.**
- The Mayor’s budget docs published in November 2016 stated that documents from both stages of the previous consultation must be visible and available. Experts from the Carnegie Trust, the House of Commons inquiry into libraries, community practitioners, librarians and others made contributions, but it is felt by some members that this has been ignored in this recent consultation exercise.
- The problem has arisen because the current consultation is a statutory requirement, but there is also a requirement to make savings to a schedule.

The Strategic Director Neighbourhoods made the following points:

- The current consultation is trying to cover several areas at the same time. That has not been done before.



- This consultation has not been entirely well received but there has been an attempt to consult in a more sophisticated way; the objective was to try to examine the overall impact on a geographical area.
- The team have worked to make the response options as simple as possible.
- Contributions from councillors indicate that this has not been entirely successful, but there has been an attempt to do something different.
- None of the original libraries consultation work is lost.
- There is a sincere attempt to be clear with people. Giving upfront options helps pull proposals together. Having attended all consultation meetings, there has been a good turn out, so many are contributing via face to face conversations as well as in writing or online.

The Executive Member made the following points:

- There have been many well-attended meetings.
- People have criticised the consultation and the proposals but also debated and discussed the options.
- Invitations for further presentations have been received from various groups.
- Previous consultations took place.
- Feedback received so far has been focused on bricks and mortar issues.
- A number of alternative options and proposals have been made which will be considered.
- Savings must be made.
- At the end of the process the final version will be presented to the public, it will be a combination of statutory and community-led services.
- The Chief Exec of CILIP has praised the consultation, specifically the fact that the consultation is not trying to pretend that the changes are transformation of services; there is honesty that the changes are driven by finance.
- CILIP have offered to provide support to officers when the council starts framing the final outcomes.
- It is not possible to keep all parties fully informed of all contributions at all times.
- Some interesting contributions have been made, for example the university has shown some interest and other community groups are interested in developing community hubs.

Further comments were made as follows:

- The Executive welcomes further alternatives.
- The wording does not invite further alternative suggestions.
- The consultation is a legal process. Therefore options and alternative options must be set out so that people can make intelligent comment; this is different to an engagement process which may develop other suggestions.
- The consultation is open until 5 September 2017. All options and responses will be reviewed. If as a result of the responses the options change, then there may not be time to consult again.
- The point of a consultation is to receive the views of local people and allow them to influence the outcome, in the light of the funding and the needs identified.



- OSMB concluded that as Neighbourhoods Scrutiny were submitting a statement to Cabinet that OSMB would not do so.
- It is positive that there are many options coming in to the consultation and that the Executive has an open mind. OSM wishes to play a proactive role in that process.
- Many variations and solutions for different areas would appear to be the most likely outcome.
- Although many would like to keep all 27 libraries open this is not likely.
- When closures were proposed two or three years ago, a number of very engaged community groups were provoked into action.
- The Head of Libraries has been clear that there is a limited budget with constrained options, if a library continues but is not operated by the Council's Library Services, then it will not be a library as we currently know it: supported by the Council and connected to Libraries West.

The Chair thanked all those present for attending this long meeting where a number of serious matters had been discussed. Thanks were given to the Executive Member for attending the meeting.

Meeting Closed at 9:32pm

8. Date of Next Meeting.

31st August 2017

Meeting ended at 9.32pm.

CHAIR _____

