

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.

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMISSION
HELD ON 20TH SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 9.30 AM**

P Councillor Hopkins (in the Chair)
A Councillor Brain
A Councillor Emmett
P Councillor Khan
P Councillor Naysmith
P Councillor Watson
P Councillor Weston
P Councillor Wright

**RSC
37.9/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE, SUBSTITUTIONS AND
INTRODUCTIONS**

Apologies were received from Councillors Mark Brain and Sean Emmett. Councillor Steve Pearce substituted for Councillor Mark Brain.

**RSC
38.9/13 PUBLIC FORUM**

None received.

**RSC
39.9/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Pearce declared a non-pecuniary interest as being a member of the Avon Pension Fund Committee.

**RSC
40.9/13 WHIPPING**

None.

**RSC
41.9/13 MINUTES – RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 19TH
JULY 2013**

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting of the Resources Scrutiny Commission held on 19th July, 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**RSC
42.9/13**

CHAIR'S BUSINESS

The Chair reported that there had been an initiative by Resources Scrutiny members to call for a special Council meeting to look at capital spending priorities which had been supported by all four political parties. This had subsequently been put on hold as the Mayor had agreed to release the relevant reports to all political parties by the end of September and therefore they would be available for formal scrutiny at the next Resources Scrutiny Commission meeting on 18 October at which the Green Party was also invited to attend.

The other items on the Work Programme for the 18 October would be reviewed accordingly.

**RSC
43.9/13**

WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED - that the Work Programme be noted.

**RSC
44.9/13**

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORTING – QUARTER ONE

The Commission considered a report of the Head of Executive Office (agenda item no. 8) setting out details of corporate performance reporting – quarter one.

The Commission were informed that the report was not available pending improved presentation options, however the raw data was available. Members asked that the information be circulated to them in the meantime.

Action : Paul Taylor, Head of Executive Office to circulate the Corporate Performance (Quarter 1) information to members of the Resources Scrutiny Commission as soon as possible.

RESOLVED - that this item be deferred until 13 December, 2013 meeting, when performance against quarters one and

two would be combined to show progress against the first six months of the financial year.

RSC

45.9/13

DEREGULATED TENANCIES (EXEMPT ACCOMMODATION)

The Commission considered a report of the Service Director, Integrated Customer Services (agenda item no. 9) regarding deregulated tenancies (exempt accommodation).

The Commission were informed that this item was being deferred until its next meeting on 18 October, 2013, once the future of the service provider was better understood. A full report would then be submitted to enable a better picture to be provided of exempt accommodation across the city and the associated cost to the Council.

To allow time for full consideration of this item the next meeting would commence at 9 am under exempt session in accordance with paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) to the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

RESOLVED - that this item be deferred until the next meeting of the Resources Scrutiny Commission on 18 October, 2013 and the meeting to commence at 9 am.

RSC

46.9/13

FINANCIAL IMPACTS OF WELFARE REFORM

The Commission considered a report of the Interim Strategic Director, Organisational Development (agenda item no. 10) noting the financial impacts on individuals and Bristol City Council regarding welfare reform changes and obtaining views on future possible activities.

During discussion of this item the following points were raised/highlighted –

- Changes to child benefit payments impacted higher income earners more than lower income earners;
- The impact of rising income tax thresholds was not shown in the report due to lack of resources to do that level of detailed work;

- The point was made that if child benefit payments were included then it was more relevant that income tax threshold information should also be included;
- Members felt that it was important that future reports should include all information so that both sides of the equation could be given proper scrutiny;
- Other data that was considered relevant for inclusion was free school meals and increases in employment as although not a direct link to the social benefit changes it did have an impact on the overall outcome;
- Debt recovery without increased costs to the Council was also considered to be an important issue for further scrutiny;
- Regarding payment of Council Tax easier payment strategies needed to be considered including a possible cheap lending service;
- Rent arrears had increased sharply, before the impact could take effect, and therefore this issue needed to be investigated further and reported back to the Commission why this was happening including information separating out those who could not afford to pay versus those who simply refused to pay, this would help to identify the key source areas of rising debt arrears and provide an opportunity to forecast costs relating to eviction and rehousing of tenants.

RESOLVED –

- (1) that the financial impacts of welfare reform on Bristol and its citizens be noted;**
- (2) that the work that had been done to date to inform its citizens and stakeholders be noted;**
- (3) that more information, as outlined above, be made available in future reports to enable better scrutiny regarding the financial impact of the Welfare Reform changes.**

RSC

47.9/13

PROCESS FOR 2014/15 – 2016/17 BUDGET

The Commission considered a report of the Service Director, Finance (agenda item no. 11) setting out in detail the process and approach to the three year budget construct that would culminate

in the setting of the Council Tax 2014/15 at Full Council on 18th February, 2014.

During discussion of this item the following points were raised/highlighted –

- The DCLG consultation on future local government finance was continuing and a response from the Council would be given on 2 October, 2013;
- Figures for the 2014/15 budget were still under review and would be confirmed in the next few weeks, it was anticipated that the budget reductions would be front loaded;
- Budget consultation would commence on 18 November, 2013;
- The budget would be considered by Cabinet prior to the scrutiny process;
- It was anticipated that the budget proposals would not be a rigid set of proposals but would give options for consideration, allow for full engagement from the public, staff and Council members and provide a rating system to enable a greater consistency of feedback;
- It was acknowledged that statutory services contained discretionary elements within them and this might provide new opportunities to make savings;
- Members noted that the budget would be developed to ensure that it reflected a new set of Corporate Priorities aligned to the Mayor's vision for Bristol. There was general support for these priorities but members felt that it would be helpful to compare these with the previous priorities so that it was clear how they differed;

Action : Paul Taylor, Head of the Executive Office to provide a summary of the process by which the new Corporate Priorities had been developed including a comparison with the previous priorities which highlighted significant differences.

- The Corporate Non Pay Panel (CNPP) would monitor and control key types of expenditure across the Council and included spend at operational level and therefore would not normally include elected member input. Robust processes would ensure that any spend not in the specified format or not meeting the agreed objectives would not occur;

- Some Members felt that the MTFP assumptions in relation to Council Tax setting were to prudent however the Commission was advised that most Councils were opting for the 'wait and see' approach in relation to the economic recovery and in this respect advised that a prudent approach was probably the most favourable option;
- It was agreed that occasional reports regarding CNPP would be brought to the Commission to allow an overview of progress and to test robustness of the process.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted and that occasional reports regarding CNPP be brought to the Commission to allow an overview of progress and to test robustness of the process.

RSC

48.9/13

COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME – 2014/15

The Commission considered a report of the Interim Strategic Director, Organisational Development (agenda item no. 12) seeking views on the two options currently under consultation regarding Council Tax Reduction (CTR) schemes for 2014/15 before submitting the final report to the Cabinet meeting on 28th November, 2013.

Members of the Commission felt that there was insufficient information to enable them to reach a conclusion regarding which of the options outlined in the report was preferable.

RESOLVED –

(1) that Option 1 and Option 2 be noted;

(2) that the work that had been done and continued to be done in order for Cabinet to make an informed decision at its meeting on 28th November, 2013 be noted.

RSC

49.9/13

SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC INVESTMENT PROGRAMME (SPVIP)

The Commission considered a report of the Commercial Director, Energy (agenda item no. 13) seeking approval for the supply, installation and ownership of a large-scale domestic and

non-domestic Solar Photovoltaic (PV) programme across a wide range of council-owned and public-sector assets.

The Commission supported the aims and objectives of the SPVIP and emphasised the importance of engaging tenants of council owned properties to participate in the programme. Consideration would need to be given regarding the potential sale of council properties in the future in terms of what would be the most financially favourable option having regard to the feed in tariff value. The Commission were informed that the most likely preferred option would be to sell the SPV Panels with the property.

RESOLVED - that the recommendations to be put to 3rd October, 2013 Cabinet meeting, as set out in the report, be endorsed.

**RSC
50.9/13**

CYPS CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Commission considered a report of the Service Director, Resource, Planning and Performance (CYPS) (agenda item no. 14) summarising changes to the CYPS capital programme based upon the merging School Organisation Strategy for the period to 2017.

The Chair referred to the point raised under 'Chairs Business' Capital spending (*RSC 42.9/13*) and that the reports would be made available to Resources Scrutiny members by end of September and would provide more detail. It was important that the reports included full details and justification for any spending assumptions made.

RESOLVED - that the report be noted.

(The meeting ended at 11.45 am)

CHAIR