

Summons to attend meeting of Full Council

Budget Council



Date: Tuesday, 21 February 2023

Time: 2.00 pm

Venue: The Council Chamber - City Hall, College Green,
Bristol, BS1 5TR

To: All Members of Council

Issued by: Oliver Harrison, Democratic Services

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Date: Friday, 10 February 2023



Agenda

7. Budget Report 2023

(Pages 3 - 28)

Signed



Proper Officer
Friday, 10 February 2023



RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMISSION COMMENTS ON 2023/24 BUDGET PROPOSALS

INTRODUCTION

The Finance Task Group met on regular occasions from late summer 2022 and onwards through the autumn/winter to receive detailed briefings as the 2023/24 budget preparation progressed.

The administration's budget consultation proposals were scrutinised in detail at meetings of the Resources Scrutiny Commission held on 22 and 23 November. The relevant sections of these meetings were also attended by members of the other scrutiny commissions, Cabinet members and senior officers.

Following the publication of the Cabinet's budget proposals in January, the Finance Task Group met and identified specific areas of focus and questions. Subsequently, the members convened as the Resources Scrutiny Commission in two sessions held respectively on 31 January and 2 February to scrutinise the budget proposals and (based on the areas of focus identified by the Finance Task Group) to ask questions of Cabinet members and officers. The relevant sections of these meetings were also attended by members of other scrutiny commissions.

Members welcome the involvement and openness from Cabinet and officers. We wish to specifically thank Denise Murray, Director: Finance and all the officers who supported the extensive series of Finance Task Group meetings, and also Stephen Peacock, Chief Executive, Executive Directors and Service Directors, Councillor Craig Cheney and his Cabinet colleagues who attended all the public meetings of the Resources Scrutiny Commission and responded to our questions.

The comments set out below have been agreed by all parties that serve on and attended the Resources Scrutiny Commission budget meeting. They are intended to inform members when considering the budget but are not intended as any form of criticism of all who have put so much effort into the budget papers. The detailed minutes of the Part 1 (31 January) and Part 2 (2 February) budget scrutiny sessions are enclosed respectively as Appendix A and Appendix B.

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMISSION - COMMENTS ON BUDGET PROPOSALS

A. GENERAL COMMENTS

1. The scale of the very significant budgetary challenges faced by the Council and the need for urgent action to balance the budget is recognised, together with the wider context of

the national issues presented through the economic situation/cost of living crisis and uncertainty over short, medium and long-term local government funding.

2. The scale/amount of budget savings proposed in the 24 January Cabinet report against a number of items nevertheless seemed arbitrary, with insufficient detail available in some cases to enable members to understand clearly and assess how some savings will be delivered – this issue was discussed in detail in relation to particular services at our meetings held on 31 January and 2 February.

3. All savings proposals should have sufficient information for members to understand impact, alternatives and likelihood of delivery. It is questionable whether the level of optimism bias applied to each proposal fully reflects both the challenge of delivering the saving, but also the previous experience of achieving savings within service areas.

B. PEOPLE (Children and Education & Adult and Communities directorates)

1. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

Members are very concerned about the impact of very substantial pressures and significant challenges in the Early Years and High Needs blocks and how these can be sustainably resolved. The extent to which reserves are being used is a serious issue and an area of high ongoing risk for the Council.

In our discussions on 31 January, we noted that:

- a. Notwithstanding the particular circumstances in Bristol, the challenge faced around DSG deficit is a national issue with serious implications for a significant number of local authorities.
- b. In terms of the high needs block deficit, the statutory override permitted by the government allows borrowing from other council budgets to cover the deficit, but a long-term plan is needed to achieve a sustainable solution. The statutory override effectively gives the Council a maximum of 3 years to achieve a solution and reduce the deficit. This work must be progressed as quickly as possible.
- c. A DSG management plan is being developed, with the engagement of the Bristol Schools Forum, including a range of mitigations. This sits alongside the Delivering Better Value programme which will identify opportunities to improve outcomes for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
- d. Scrutiny will be kept informed of and consulted on the management plan and this will be picked up in the context of the People / Resources scrutiny work programmes.
- e. Given the seriousness of the issue, the DSG deficit will continue to be highlighted in the authority's Annual Governance Statement.

2. Service provision/quality of Children's Services and Adult Social Care

a. Savings

We note that very significant savings are proposed at a time of increased demand for some services. We are concerned whether these savings/efficiencies can realistically be delivered without impacting on service quality and effectiveness.

b. High-cost individual care packages

Some individual care packages continue to be very high cost (some incurring costs of £10 - 15k per individual per week through expensive, outsourced private sector provision). We are keen to see that all possible action is taken, e.g. through 'spend to save' initiatives to deliver increased, locally based solutions and to reduce the high costs of 'out of area' placements/provision. All available 'spend to save' options should be explored, for example around developing extra care housing to help enable more independent lives and reduce out of area placements.

In our discussions on 31 January, we noted that:

- a. Staffing structures across adult social care will be reviewed to ensure they are 'fit for purpose' - and that, as service redesign is taken forward, some staff roles may need to change as part of moving to a better service. It is important to bear in mind that in relation to adult social care, Bristol is a relatively high spender but not necessarily a high performer across all service areas.
- b. A key part of the approach is to provide services which will help people to live as independently as possible at home; apart from helping to improve the quality of individuals' lives, this has the added benefit of reducing costs when compared with the cost of care settings.
- c. A service transformation programme is being developed for the new Children and Education directorate which will include examining and addressing wider issues around workforce recruitment and retention with full account also to be taken in the plans of any recommendations for improvement arising from the recent Ofsted Inspection of Bristol's Children's Services.
- d. There is a wider corporate issue to be addressed and managed through with the Integrated Care Board and other partners in terms of reviewing tripartite arrangements, particularly in terms of ensuring a more equitable sharing of costs in relation to high cost placements.
- e. Improved arrangements are in place to actively monitor adult social care provision and related budgets. It is essential to continue the drive to use resources as effectively as possible.

C. RESOURCES DIRECTORATE:

1. Savings in Legal and Democratic Services (£900k), Finance restructure (£998k), IT service (£450k)

We are concerned to ensure that these savings/efficiencies are delivered without impacting on service quality and effectiveness.

In our discussions on 31 January, we noted an assurance that in implementing IT savings, every effort will be made to mitigate any impact on service delivery.

2. Mayor's/Executive office 2024/25 saving

Cutting budgets in this area appears short-sighted e.g. savings in the Mayor's/Executive office means money is being taken out of the budget but in the knowledge that the new committee governance model will require funding from May 2024. The year 2024/25 saving is therefore unlikely to be realised as funds will likely be redeployed.

3. Savings in Local crisis prevention fund (£350k) and Debt collection outreach (£100k)

We raised concerns about the impact of these proposals, especially in terms of the risk of additional pressures caused to other services.

In our discussions on 31 January, we noted that it is the administration's intention to top-up these budgets through the Household Support Fund as 2023/24 progresses.

4. Reserves

We note that reserves are under pressure, not just in relation to DSG, amid current and future financial uncertainty.

D. GROWTH & REGENERATION DIRECTORATE

1. Supported bus services/transport levy

We note the recent decisions taken by the West of England Combined Authority on supported bus contracts, which will see a significant reduction in the number of services able to be continued (noting that the West of England Mayor does not have any precepting powers and that supported bus services are funded through the transport levy contributions made by Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Bath & North East Somerset councils as the constituent members of the Combined Authority).

We discussed this issue at length on 2 February. In acknowledging the national issues in relation to bus services, there was nevertheless a general concern among scrutiny members about the impact in the next year for residents arising from the significant reduction in supported bus services. Members also flagged the importance of the Combined Authority and Bristol (and the other West of England authorities) working together effectively to tackle the longer-term challenges in relation to bus services. In terms of the budgetary aspects, members expressed disappointment that in advance of proposals being included in committee reports, scrutiny had been given no advance information or input into discussions about the 2023/24 transport levy.

2. Savings in transport and highway maintenance (£1m)

We identified concerns in advance of our scrutiny session about the level of detail provided, particularly about alternative income sources.

At our 2 February meeting, we noted that:

- a. Seeking alternative income services will be an ongoing process, i.e. not confined to 2023/24 as seemed to be indicated in the papers.
- b. It was projected that in 2023/24, potentially up to £1m of Clean Air Zone income would be available and that, under set criteria, this income could be used to support sustainable transport interventions.

3. Savings in City Transport discretionary activities (£940k)

We identified concerns in advance of our scrutiny session about the level of detail provided.

At our 2 February meeting, we noted that the proposed savings (which include some savings in relation to bus stop maintenance, road safety and residents parking expenditure) have

been assessed as deliverable by the transport/highways teams whilst continuing to maintain services. Scrutiny members are concerned that it may ultimately prove to be a false economy if bus shelters are not maintained to appropriate standards, for example in relation to lighting, as this may deter some potential bus users. We noted an assurance from the Cabinet member for Transport that the savings would be implemented carefully so that bus stop standards are maintained.

4. Savings in Sustainable City and Climate Change services (£286k)

We identified concerns in advance of our scrutiny session around the likely sources of external funding required to enable this saving to be made, and whether this proposal placed the Council's net zero carbon objectives at risk.

We also feel that net zero objectives plus higher energy costs mean that all possible 'spend to save' investment opportunities should be explored/accelerated in this area.

At our 2 February meeting, we noted there was confidence within the Climate Change team around their ability to secure longer term external funding so that the delivery of the Council's climate and carbon neutral ambitions are not impacted; and that appropriate mitigation is being put in place to ensure that current work streams continue. We feel though that it will be essential to ensure that the Climate Change team has capacity to develop the required external funding bids.

5. Council owned companies and related issues

We identified the following concerns in advance of our scrutiny session:

- a. A concern that the Council budget will be approved without the detail of Bristol Waste's Business Plan being available, which constitutes an unnecessary risk.
- b. An accountability issue: staff will transfer from the Council as a result of the establishment of the City Leap Energy Partnership but how will the Council monitor developments if there is effectively no 'client' function'?
- c. The Council will still need the ability to develop energy saving proposals and higher energy costs makes this a priority.

At our 2 February meeting, we noted that in relation to the City Leap Energy Partnership, a new client function is being established.

6. Savings linked to waste service charges

We are concerned about a number of issues in relation to the proposed waste service charges:

- a. The potential impact/adverse consequences of the proposed charges on recycling rates and fly-tipping.
- b. The 'fairness' issue of charging customers for replacement bins in circumstances where bins are damaged beyond repair by crews (in response to this latter point, we received an assurance at our 2 February session that free replacement bins will be provided in circumstances where bins are damaged by crews).
- c. In relation to the proposed £5 charge for Christmas tree collections (noting that this service will continue to be free for green waste bin subscribers), we query whether there will in reality be a significant saving/benefit in overall terms if an adverse consequence of

this measure sees some trees being disposed of by fly-tipping or burning following the introduction of this charge.

We note that the revised waste service charges are subject ultimately to finalisation through the Bristol Waste business plan.

7. New parking charges for small district car parks (saving of £150k)

A number of scrutiny members raised concerns about the impact of introducing new car parking charges at small district car parks. In particular, it was highlighted that in Westbury-on-Trym, charges would impact on local residents (and residents from Southmead and Horfield) who use that car park to access the GP surgery and local banks and churches; the impact of these proposals on communities and local high streets must be considered. Concerns were also expressed about the impact of these charges in other areas such as Shirehampton.

The impact of these proposals on communities and local high streets must be considered. A number of members feel that the impact of these changes on residents seems disproportionate given the savings that will be achieved are small in the context of the wider budget. Some doubts were also expressed about the degree (and cost-effectiveness) of enforcement linked to these proposals.

If these proposals progress, we ask at least that serious consideration is given to refining the detail to take account of community impact. For example, with reference to the Westbury-on-Trym car park, the proposals could perhaps be refined to allow, for example, a free first half-hour or free first hour's use of the car park to assist those visiting the GP surgery or local shops; alternative timing of charges could also be considered on Sundays to assist congregations of the two neighbouring churches; and a maximum parking time of 4 hours would assist in ensuring 'turnover' of car park space availability.

E. CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Given the budgetary pressures, we will continue to seek assurance/clarification as necessary on the action/measures being taken by the Council in relation to the governance and management of the capital programme, in response to last year's External Auditor's report, including action to address slippage within the capital programme and to address any inflationary impact of slippage/delay.

We are also concerned that work is taken forward in assessing the carbon impact of projects included in the capital programme (this point also applies to revenue spends). At our meeting on 2 February, we noted an approach around a sustainable framework is being piloted with Arcadis across 5 projects; we wish to be kept updated on this.

F. HOUSING / HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2023/24

We note and support the range of short term and longer-term actions being taken in relation to the Council's housing blocks in response to concerns about EPS (expanded polystyrene) cladding. We also urge accelerating relevant aspects of spend within this programme where possible to reduce overall costs and wish to be kept informed of progress.

We also wish to be kept advised of progress in creating new temporary accommodation, including the use of existing properties (including council housing) and working with partners to source available properties, and therefore reducing spend on expensive and inappropriate accommodation.

Councillor Geoff Gollop
Chair, Resources Scrutiny Commission (on behalf of members of the Commission)

APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Minutes of the Resources Scrutiny Commission - Budget Scrutiny meeting – Part 1, 31 January 2023

Appendix B: Minutes of the Resources Scrutiny Commission - Budget Scrutiny meeting – Part 2, 2 February 2023

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Resources Scrutiny Commission

31 January 2023 at 4.45 pm



Members present:

Resources Scrutiny Commission:

CLlr Geoff Gollop (Chair), CLlr Heather Mack, CLlr Mark Bradshaw, CLlr Martin Fodor, CLlr Zoe Goodman, CLlr John Goulandris

People Scrutiny Commission: CLlr Tim Kent, CLlr Christine Townsend, CLlr Kerry Bailes, CLlr Brenda Massey, CLlr Lisa Stone, CLlr Tim Wye

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board: CLlr Tony Dyer, CLlr David Wilcox

Cabinet members:

CLlr Craig Cheney, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for City Economy, Finance and Performance
CLlr Asher Craig, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Equalities
CLlr Helen Holland, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Integrated Care System
CLlr Ellie King, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities

Officers in attendance:

Stephen Peacock, Chief Executive
Denise Murray, Director: Finance
Steph Griffin, Director: Workforce and Change
Tim Borrett, Director: Policy, Strategy and Digital
Tim O'Gara, Director: Legal and Democratic Services
Abi Gbago, Executive Director: Children and Education
Richard Hanks, Acting Director: Education and Skills
Hugh Evans, Executive Director: Adult and Communities
Stephen Beet, Acting Director: Adult Social Care
Johanna Holmes, Scrutiny Co-ordinator

16 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.



17 Apologies for Absence

It was noted that apologies had been received from Cllrs Gary Hopkins, Mohamed Makawi, Tim Rippington, Sharon Scott and Mark Weston.

18 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

19 Chair's Business

None.

20 Public Forum

Questions

It was noted that the following two questions had been submitted by Tom Merchant, Unison:

Q1. Deletion of vacant roles in teams by senior managers added to the recruitment freeze has put staff under pressure in several teams but particularly in customer-facing roles like libraries. This seems to be a fait accompli before the council has actually made a decision on cuts, does the committee think that this should be relaxed until staff consultation has been completed some time after this full council budget meeting?

Q2. At Cabinet yesterday, Cllr Asher Craig mentioned about in-house services (which I thanked her for). With the extra workstreams in the recommendations: children's homes; learning disability and autism; and cultural outreach programmes is the committee worried we are wasting in-house talent making council staff redundant when they could be utilised on these projects rather than outside providers?

The Chair commented that in the context of the budget process, it was not appropriate for the Resources Scrutiny Commission to express a direct opinion on these matters.

Points raised/noted:

1. Cllr Fodor commented that there may be an issue if the freezing of recruitment to posts led to increased workload/pressure on other members of staff.

2. Cllr Cheney advised that the recruitment freeze had been introduced in response to the in-year budget pressures. He stressed that any service redesigns/restructures would be developed taking full account of service needs.



3. The Director: Workforce and Change clarified that a total recruitment freeze had not been in place; a 'dispensation' process had accompanied the freeze whereby certain posts had been recruited to subject to the scrutiny/approval of senior management - for example, any recruitment in relation to the Growth and Regeneration directorate had been subject to approval by the Executive Director.

4. In relation to question 2, the Director: Workforce and Change advised that Human Resources would be supporting directorates in relation to service redesigns, and as part of this every opportunity would be explored to redeploy any displaced members of staff; the importance of seeking to retain experienced and committed individuals was recognised.

5. It was noted that a written reply would also be sent to Unison in relation to these questions.

(Action: via the Scrutiny team, a written response to be sent to Unison)

Statements

It was that the following statements had been submitted:

1. Cllr Carla Denyer - topic: carbon impact assessments.
2. David Redgewell, Robbie Bentley, Gordon Richardson and Brendon Taylor - topic: comments on the proposed budget including the transport levy.

David Redgewell briefly outlined this statement - it was noted/agreed that as this statement related to the Growth and Regeneration elements of the budget, it would be appropriate for the statement to be presented at Part 2 of the meeting on 2 February, when members of the Growth and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission would be present.

21 Scrutiny of 2023/24 Budget Proposals (part 1)

It was noted that the Finance Task Group had identified a number of issues/questions/areas of focus in advance of these budget scrutiny sessions. Part 1 of the meeting was accordingly structured around these areas of focus.

PEOPLE (Children and Education & Adult and Communities directorates):

1. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

In advance of the meeting, members had identified a key concern about the impact of very substantial pressures and significant challenges in the Early Years and High Needs blocks and how these could be sustainably resolved. The extent to which reserves were being used was a serious issue and an area of high ongoing risk for the Council. It was essential to address how a sustainable annual position could be achieved as quickly as possible

Points raised/noted:



1. Cllr Craig commented as follows:

- a. Notwithstanding the particular circumstances in Bristol, the challenge faced around DSG deficit was a national issue with serious implications for a significant number of local authorities.
- b. It was acknowledged that there had been a 7% increase for 2023/24 from government in terms of the annual DSG funding increase.
- c. In terms of the high needs block deficit, the statutory override permitted by the government allowed borrowing from other council budgets to cover the deficit, but it was fully recognised that a long-term plan was needed to achieve a sustainable solution. The statutory override effectively gave the Council a maximum of 3 years to achieve a solution and reduce the deficit.
- d. A DSG management plan was being developed, with the engagement of the Bristol Schools Forum, including a range of mitigations. This sat alongside the Delivering Better Value programme which would identify opportunities to improve outcomes for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Scrutiny would be kept informed of and consulted on the management plan (**Action: to be picked up in the context of the People / Resources scrutiny work programmes**)
- e. It was recognised that a holistic approach was also required to significantly improve inclusive practices in school/academy settings, learning from all available best practice. This was particularly important in terms of improving early interventions, recognising the context of continuing, increased demand for Education, Health and Care Plans.

2. In response to a question about whether there had been sufficient strategic focus on the DSG issue over the last decade, Cllr Craig commented that, in her view, it would have been preferable if better planning and collective action had taken place collaboratively across the 4 West of England unitary authorities 5-10 years ago.

3. In response to further questions, Cllr Craig stated that given the scale of this issue nationally, it was her view that the government needed to provide further financial assistance to authorities; the Council must also take all possible action to reduce the scale/trajectory of the deficit.

4. The Director: Finance commented that implementing the Delivering Better Value programme will be an important step in demonstrating that progress is being made; however, it was also clear that the Council was currently some way off from determining a fully sustainable plan. The Council must own the position as it is and pursue all possible mitigations and actions.

5. Given that this was a national issue, it was noted that a collective voice to government across the Council (and other authorities) will be important in relation to potentially securing additional financial assistance.

6. In noting the above, the Chair suggested that the budget report to the Full Council budget meeting should include additional narrative to highlight more fully the seriousness of the position in relation to the DSG deficit alongside reference to the action being taken/planned and mitigation measures. It was agreed that this would be actioned (**Action: appropriate additional narrative to be included in the Full Council budget report**)



7. In response to a point raised by the Chair, it was noted that the issue of the DSG deficit would continue to be highlighted in the authority's Annual Governance Statement.

8. Cllr Kent stressed the key importance of improving inclusion across mainstream school/academy provision; it was also important for the Council to provide as much specialist support and advice as possible to assist schools in achieving this.

9. Cllr Townsend welcomed the commitment of the Mayor/administration to create 450 new, specialist provision places. She stressed, however, the importance of securing effective focus on early intervention for 2/3/4 year olds. Cllr Townsend also expressed deep concern about the continuing issue (reflected for example, through the numbers of children on roll eligible for free school meals) of schools (especially secondary schools) whose cohort of children on roll were not sufficiently reflective of the characteristics of their local communities. In her view, the Council needed to set a clear vision/expectations of schools in this regard and exercise all possible levers in taking this forward.

In response to this point, the Executive Director: Children and Education commented that she was holding discussions with the Department for Education around levers available to the Council in relation to schools/academies.

10. In relation to a point raised by Cllr Townsend, the Interim Director: Education and Skills agreed to check the accuracy of the DSG equalities impact assessment which currently indicated there was not a disproportionate impact under the 'sex' protected characteristic (given that special educational needs remain more prevalent in boys than girls); also, the EQIA should take account of the carers of early years children with SEND (**Action: these points to be checked in relation to the EQIA**)

2. General issue - Service provision/quality of Children's Services and Adult Social Care:

In advance of the meeting, members had identified the following areas of focus:

a. Savings

- Very significant savings are proposed at a time of increased demand for some services.
- Can these savings / efficiencies realistically be delivered without impacting on service quality and effectiveness?
- Specific detail is required on how these savings will be delivered.

b. High-cost individual care packages: Some individual care packages continue to be very high cost (some incurring costs of £10 - 15k per individual per week through expensive, outsourced private sector provision).

- What more can be done, e.g. through 'spend to save' initiatives to deliver increased, locally based solutions and to reduce the high costs of 'out of area' placements/provision?
- Given the scale of the savings, will there be staff capacity available to develop future 'spend to save' options?
- How can improved local options be developed in collaboration with neighbouring authorities and health partners?



Points raised/noted:

1. Cllr Wye raised the issue of addressing any potential impacts of reduced staffing in relation to adult social care. In response, Cllr Holland commented as follows:
 - a. It was understandable that there were concerns about the impact of adult social care savings.
 - b. It was important to review staffing structures across adult social care to ensure they were 'fit for purpose' – as service redesign was taken forward, some staff roles may need to change as part of moving to a better service. It was important to bear in mind that in relation to adult social care, Bristol was a high spender but not necessarily a high performer across all service areas. It was essential to continue the drive to use resources as effectively as possible.
 - c. A key part of the approach was to provide services which would help people to live as independently as possible at home – apart from helping to improve the quality of individuals' lives, this had the added benefit of reducing costs when compared with the cost of care settings.
2. The Acting Director: Adult Social Care drew attention to the mitigations identified in the EQIA. He added that some savings would be delivered through rationalising more senior management posts. In relation to some practitioner posts, new and different ways of working would help achieve savings; there would also be an emphasis on ensuring that teams operated at safe and manageable levels. The ongoing national issues around recruitment were also recognised and would be factored into the approach being taken.
3. In response to questions from Cllr Mack about the feasibility of delivering savings across children's services, including foster care, without diminishing services, the Executive Director: Children and Education stressed that a service transformation programme was being developed and would be taken forward as soon as possible; this would include examining and addressing wider issues around workforce recruitment and retention. Full account would also be taken in the plans of any recommendations for improvement arising from the current Ofsted Inspection of Bristol's Children's Services.
4. It was noted that there was a wider corporate issue to be addressed and managed through with the Integrated Care Board and other partners in terms of reviewing tripartite arrangements, particularly in terms of ensuring a more equitable sharing of costs in relation to high cost placements.
5. In response to a point raised by Cllr Dyer around the issues of recruiting care staff, Cllr Holland acknowledged the importance of attracting younger adults to work in care related services, and working e.g. with the universities to increase awareness of access to care career starting points/pathways and progression opportunities; it was also important to encourage apprenticeships where possible.
6. It was noted that resources were potentially not always being used to best effect across organisations in cases where individuals moved jobs between providers and then undertook training which was in many ways similar to that provided through their previous employment; Cllr Holland suggested it would be beneficial from all perspectives to look to introduce a relevant accreditation/'kite' mark that was recognised across the sector - there were also best practice examples to learn from, e.g. a Somali led care provider which had reached into an inner city community to help recruit a diverse workforce. Cllr Craig drew attention to the valuable insight and opportunities being taken forward through the Bristol Race



Equality Strategic Leaders' Group in improving the diversity of employees recruited to work in the public sector.

7. In response to questions from the Chair, Cllr Holland and the Executive Director: Adult and Communities outlined details of the improved arrangements in place to actively monitor adult social care provision and related budgets. This included covering a senior management panel to ensure additional rigour for high cost placements. There was confidence that better monitoring systems were now in place with improved locality knowledge/insight and increased internal rigour and scrutiny of expenditure; all of this helped the service in responding better and more quickly to emerging issues and pressures. Work was ongoing also with providers to develop the Bristol market as this would reduce more costly 'out of area' placements.

8. It was noted that important lessons were being learnt through the Better Lives at Home programme, involving close liaison between Adult Social Care and the Housing Delivery team to help enable people to live independently whilst also reducing overall costs. The Addison Apartments development in Sea Mills was an example of the best practice provision that could be achieved.

9. In discussion, members commented that 'spend to save' options must be further explored, for example around developing extra care housing to help enable more independent lives and help reduce out of area placements.

10. It was noted that on request, scrutiny members could be given the opportunity to view the Liquidlogic IT monitoring system.

C. RESOURCES DIRECTORATE:

In advance of the meeting, members had identified the following areas of focus:

1. Savings in Legal and Democratic Services (£900k), Finance restructure (£998k), IT service (£450k):

- Can these savings/efficiencies realistically be delivered without impacting on service quality and effectiveness? Further detail is required on the impact on service levels.
- Cutting budgets in some areas appears short-sighted e.g. savings in the Mayor's/Executive office means money is being taken out of the budget but in the knowledge that the new committee governance model will require funding from May 2024. The year 2024/25 saving is therefore unlikely to be realised as funds will likely be redeployed.

Points raised/noted:

1. **IT savings:** In response to questions from Cllr Wilcox about proposed IT savings, Cllr Cheney advised that in implementing these savings, every effort would be made to mitigate any impact on service delivery. The Director: Policy, Strategy and Digital outlined further detail of the proposed IT savings which would involve reviewing all current spending on IT software and services across the council and seeking to reduce or cancel any non-essential contracts and services. An IT staff restructure would take place - at this point, staff consultation had not started but further detail could be provided in due course. In terms



of service impacts that may be necessary, this was likely to see greater emphasis on meeting purely statutory obligations and there may, for example be a need to slightly trim operational service hours (e.g. from 10 operational hours per day to 9). A digital strategic partner would also be contracted to carry out specific work, with accompanying rigorous contract/cost management.

2. Mayor's/Executive office 2024/25 saving: Cllrs Mack and Fodor reiterated previous concerns expressed about this saving – in their view, money was being taken out of the budget but in the knowledge that the new committee governance model would require funding from May 2024. In response, Cllr Cheney commented that at this point, there was no clear view emerging through the Committee Model Working Group about the detail of the likely future committee model; therefore, there could also be no clarity about what costs would be involved or the budget required. Cllr Cheney suggested that as the saving related to 2024/25, this would be a key consideration for the cross-party 2024/25 budget planning group that the Mayor intended to establish. Cllr Fodor suggested that it should be possible to benchmark and judge potential anticipated costs from core cities already operating without a Mayoral model.

2. Savings in Local crisis prevention fund (£350k) and Debt collection outreach (£100k):

- Further detail is required to enable members to assess these proposals, especially in terms of the risk of additional pressures caused to other services.

In discussion, Cllr Cheney advised that it should be possible to top-up these budgets as 2023/24 progressed through the Household Support Fund. It was agreed that this point should be clarified in the Full Council budget report (**Action: appropriate additional narrative to be included in the Full Council budget report**)

3. Reserves: Members had previously commented that reserves were under pressure, not just in relation to DSG, amid current and future financial uncertainty – a much more comprehensive explanation was needed generally on the rationale guiding the use/allocation of reserves.

Other issues raised:

1. Bristol Waste Business Plan

The Chair raised a concern that the Council budget would be approved at a point when the detail of Bristol Waste's Business Plan would not have been available for OSMB scrutiny, which seemed to constitute an unnecessary risk, given that the national economic situation may be impacting/placing pressure on their costs and services. His preference was that the company plans should have been approved in advance of the Budget Council meeting.

In response, Cllr Cheney advised that the Shareholder Group (attended by the OSMB Chair in an observer capacity) would be reviewing the draft Bristol Waste Business Plan on 6 February. The Director: Finance advised that the Council's budget reflected the Council's financial commitment to the companies and associated reserves and established the capital and revenue cash limits considered sufficient to meet the business needs. The companies would operate within these funding parameters for 2023/24 and business



plans would be developed within these thresholds. Further detail was included at Appendix 9 of the budget report: Long Term Investments & Shareholdings. The Director: Finance reminded members that the External Auditor had advised previously that due to the complexity of the Council budget papers and the Company business plans, they should not all be considered on the same Cabinet agenda (i.e. in January, ahead of the Budget Council meeting).

2. New parking charges for small district car parks

Although noting that the Growth and Regeneration budget proposals would be scrutinised in detail on 2 February, Cllr Massey drew attention to the fact that the introduction of car park charges in Westbury-on-Trym would impact on residents from Southmead and Horfield who used that car park to access the GP surgery and local bank; the impact of these proposals on communities must be considered.

22 Meeting adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7.22 pm (to reconvene at 4.00 pm on 2 February 2023)

CHAIR _____



Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Resources Scrutiny Commission

2 February 2023 at 4.00 pm



Members present:-

Resources Scrutiny Commission

Cllr Geoff Gollop (Chair), Cllr Heather Mack, Cllr Mark Bradshaw, Cllr Martin Fodor,
Cllr Zoe Goodman, Cllr John Goulandris, Cllr Gary Hopkins

Growth and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission

Cllr David Wilcox, Cllr Emma Edwards, Cllr Mark Weston, Cllr Andrew Brown (substituting for Cllr Andrew Varney)

Communities Scrutiny Commission

Cllr Barry Parsons, Cllr Kerry Bailes, Cllr Amal Ali, Cllr Amirah Cole, Cllr Tessa Fitzjohn

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:

Cllr Tony Dyer, Cllr Brenda Massey

Cabinet members:

Cllr Don Alexander, Cabinet Member for Transport

Cllr Kye Dudd, Cabinet Member for Climate, Ecology, Waste and Energy

Cllr Tom Renhard, Cabinet Member for Housing Delivery and Homes

Cllr Ellie King, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Public Health and Communities

Officers in attendance:

Stephen Peacock, Chief Executive

Denise Murray, Director: Finance

Sarah Chodkiewicz, Head of Financial Management

John Smith, Director: Economy of Place

Pete Anderson, Director: Property, Assets and Infrastructure

Patsy Mellor, Director: Management of Place

Donald Graham, Director: Housing and Landlord Services

Johanna Holmes, Scrutiny Co-ordinator



23 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed attendees to this reconvened meeting.

24 Apologies for Absence

It was noted that apologies had been received from Cllrs Craig Cheney, Jenny Bartle, Marley Bennett, Steve Pearce, Kevin Quartley, Tim Rippington and Andrew Varney (Cllr Andrew Brown was substituting for Cllr Varney). It was noted that Cllr Cheney was contactable by telephone to clarify particular points if/as necessary.

25 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

26 Chair's Business

None.

27 Public Forum

It was noted that the following statements had been submitted:

1. Cllr Carla Denyer - topic: carbon impact assessments
2. David Redgewell, Robbie Bentley, Gordon Richardson and Brendon Taylor - topic: comments on the proposed budget including the transport levy.

David Redgewell was in attendance at the meeting and presented this statement.

28 Scrutiny of 2023/24 budget proposals - part 2

It was noted that the Finance Task Group had identified a number of issues/questions/areas of focus in advance of these budget scrutiny sessions. Part 2 of the meeting was accordingly structured largely around these areas of focus, together with points on other issues as raised by members.

A. GROWTH & REGENERATION DIRECTORATE:

1. Supported bus services/transport levy

The Chair referred to the recent decisions taken by the West of England Combined Authority on supported bus contracts, which would see a significant reduction in the number of services that were able



to be continued (noting that the West of England Mayor did not have any precepting powers and that supported bus services were funded through the transport levy contributions made by Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Bath & North East Somerset councils as the constituent members of the Combined Authority).

Points raised/noted:

1. Cllr Alexander commented as follows:

- a. It was important to recognise that transport operators nationally continued to face a major challenge due to the shortage of bus drivers.
- b. Any action taken to increase Bristol's transport levy would effectively place a substantial additional cost on each Bristol household.

2. The Chair commented that the key objective of the Clean Air Zone was to reduce vehicle emissions; however, the current situation regarding bus service provision and reliability was likely to result in a situation that, by default, encouraged people to make some journeys by private car that they might otherwise have made by bus, thus having the effect of increasing emissions. In response, Cllr Alexander stated that whilst some supported bus services would cease as they could no longer be subsidised, some of the funding available to the Combined Authority through the Bus Service Improvement Plan was being used to fund increased frequency/reliability (and reduce journey time) on designated main commercial routes; it was hoped that this would encourage increased patronage on these routes.

3. In response to questions about the role of the Council in encouraging public behaviour change in relation to transport modal shift, Cllr Alexander advised that the administration's transport policies were geared to the reallocation of road space where appropriate and encouraging modal shift. In the longer term, his view was that public transport route segregation was desirable to ensure improved passenger journey reliability; in the meantime, the administration was implementing specific initiatives - for example, 3 reports had been submitted to the most recent Cabinet meeting on:

- Using CRSTS Liveable Neighbourhood funding to complete Streetspace and related schemes.
- Pay and display parking in district car parks.
- A combined E-scooter & E-bike on-street rental scheme.

4. It was noted that:

- a. The transport levy charge for 2023/24 remained unchanged at £10.2m (the 2022/23 level).
- b. Unitary authority levies were pooled by the Combined Authority's Transport Integration Team and managed on a regional basis.
- c. An equalities impact assessment had been carried out in connection with the recent (18 January) report on supported bus services as considered by the Combined Authority.
- d. Any proposal to increase the levy would also need to be discussed and agreed at the regional level.

5. It was noted that the Combined Authority would be deploying Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) across the region for rural and feeder services from April 2023. The Chair commented that it would be important to monitor the impact of DRT especially in light of the significant risks identified in the 18 January Combined Authority committee report. These risks had also been highlighted by WECA Overview



and Scrutiny Committee members, who had expressed concern about the reliance on an unproven DRT model. At this point, the viability of DRT as a long term solution was unknown.

6. Cllr Weston commented that, in his view, notwithstanding the increased cost to residents if an increased levy were to occur, in light of the current governance and delivery arrangements, residents were unlikely to have faith that an increased levy could be taken forward effectively.

7. Cllr Wilcox commented that some of the supported bus services to be withdrawn would impact on residents in a number of areas of the city with relatively low rates of car ownership, including Ashley, Lockleaze and Stapleton.

8. In concluding this part of the discussion, the Chair noted that whilst acknowledging the national issues in relation to bus services, there was nevertheless a general concern among scrutiny members about the impact in the next year for residents arising from the significant reduction in supported bus services. Members also flagged the importance of the Combined Authority and Bristol (and the other West of England authorities) working together effectively to tackle the longer-term challenges in relation to bus services. Members also expressed disappointment that in advance of proposals being included in committee reports, scrutiny had been given no advance information or input into discussions about the 2023/24 transport levy.

2. Savings in transport and highway maintenance (£1m):

In advance of the meeting, members had identified the following areas of focus:

- Further detail is required to enable members to assess these proposals.
- Why is the option of seeking alternative income sources restricted to 2023/24? This should be ongoing?

The Director: Management of Place confirmed that seeking alternative income services would be ongoing, i.e. not confined to 2023/24. It was projected that in 2023/24, potentially up to £1m of Clean Air Zone income would be available. Under set criteria, this income could be used to support sustainable transport interventions.

3. Savings in City Transport discretionary activities (£940k)

In advance of the meeting, members had identified the following areas of focus:

- Further detail is required to enable members to assess these proposals.
- Will this proposal impact on capacity available to model/develop new proposals?

Points raised/noted:

1. It was noted that the proposed savings (which included some savings in relation to bus stop maintenance, road safety and residents parking expenditure) had been assessed as deliverable by the transport/highways teams whilst continuing to maintain services, bearing in mind the overall financial challenge faced by the Council.

2. Some concern was expressed by scrutiny members that it may ultimately prove to be a false economy if bus shelters were not maintained to appropriate standards, for example in relation to lighting, as this



may deter some potential bus users. Cllr Alexander commented that the savings would be implemented carefully so that bus stop standards were maintained. The importance of not reducing the quality of the bus journey customer experience was recognised but some savings had been identified to help balance the budget.

4. Savings in Sustainable City and Climate Change services (£286k):

In advance of the meeting, members had identified the following areas of focus:

- What are the likely sources of external funding to enable this saving to be made?
- Is this proposal placing the Council's net zero carbon objectives at risk?
- Net zero objectives plus higher energy costs will mean the case for 'spend to save' is higher than before.

Points raised/noted:

1. In response to questions from Cllr Mack and other members, the Director: Economy of Place acknowledged that the level of saving (£286k) in relation to Sustainable City and Climate Change services was significant. These savings would reduce the cost of running these services; however, from discussions with the officer team, there was confidence around ability to secure longer term external funding so that the delivery of the Council's climate and carbon neutral ambitions were not impacted. Appropriate mitigation was being put in place (recognising that a proportion of the work on climate change was cross-council work) to ensure that current work streams continued.

2. Cllr Fodor suggested that it would be essential to ensure that the Climate Change team had capacity to develop the required external funding bids.

3. Cllr Dudd highlighted the focus that was being given through the Strategic Climate and Ecological Emergency Board to achieving the Council's own objective of achieving carbon neutrality as an organisation by 2025.

4. In further discussion, it was suggested that all possible 'spend to save' investment opportunities should be explored/accelerated in this area.

5. Council owned companies and related issues:

It was noted that in advance of the meeting, members had identified the following areas of focus:

- A concern was raised that the Council budget may be approved without the detail of Bristol Waste's Business Plan being available, which constitutes an unnecessary risk.
- Accountability issue: Staff will transfer from the Council as a result of the establishment of the City Leap Energy Partnership but how will the Council monitor developments if there is effectively no 'client' function'?
- The Council will still need the ability to develop energy saving proposals and higher energy costs makes this a priority.

In discussion Cllr Fodor raised issues around:

a. How the Council's client function would operate in relation to the City Leap Energy Partnership. In response to this point, it was noted that a new client function was being established.



b. (With reference to Cllr Denyer's public statement) whether there would be capacity to develop carbon impact assessments for capital projects and revenue spends. In response to this point, it was noted that working with Arcadis, an approach around a sustainable framework was being piloted across 5 projects; Resources scrutiny members would be kept updated on this.

6. Savings linked to waste service charges:

In advance of the meeting, members had identified the following areas of focus:

- Will these charges impact negatively on the Council's recycling performance?
- How deliverable is the replacement bin charge? (e.g. some bins may be damaged by crews; this can be checked by video but will incur administrative time/cost).

Points raised/noted:

1. In addition to the above, Cllr Fodor drew attention to questions he had submitted to the Cabinet on 24 January in relation to the potential impact/adverse consequences of these changes on recycling rates and fly-tipping. A number of scrutiny members also expressed their concerns on these issues and about the 'fairness' issue of charging customers for replacement bins in circumstances where bins had been damaged beyond repair by crews (in response to this latter point, it was noted that free replacement bins would be provided in circumstance where bins were damaged by crews; it was suggested that further work needed to take place with some crews in ensuring that bins were treated with greater care when placed back outside residents' homes after being emptied).

2. Cllr Dudd commented as follows:

- a. It was important to note that the changes to waste service charges were proposals at this stage. The proposed charges had been benchmarked with core cities and neighbouring authorities but would be subject to finalisation through the Bristol Waste business plan.
- b. Bristol Waste needed to examine all aspects of its operations in relation to savings and income, given the national economic situation and inflationary/market impacts.
- c. Any increase in charges would accordingly be driven by the financial/economic situation and the need for Bristol Waste to raise income; if charges were increased, careful monitoring would be required as it was acknowledged that there were potential risks around recycling participation/rates and the increased incidence of fly-tipping.

3. Whilst noting that an online process would be introduced in relation to the proposed £5 charge for Christmas tree collections after Christmas (noting that this service would continue to be free for green waste bin subscribers), and whilst also noting the approx. £20k cost of free Christmas tree collection, Cllr Edwards and other members queried whether there would in reality be a significant saving/benefit/behaviour change in overall terms if there was an adverse consequence of some trees being disposed of by fly-tipping or burning following the introduction of this charge.

4. Other issue raised in discussion about waste services:

It was flagged that there were difficulties in refuse vehicles accessing narrow streets in some parts of the city, e.g. Windmill Hill. It was noted that this issue had been alleviated to an extent due to newer refuse vehicles being narrower in design; however, solutions could continue to be explored such as mini-



recycling centres/bespoke collection arrangements for certain streets (as had been introduced previously in St Pauls) and flat blocks. Cllr Dudd suggested that new/innovative solutions could also be considered, e.g. exploring the options for communal underground bins (which, for example, were planned for implementation in Liverpool). **(Action: this item to be considered as a potential item for the Communities Scrutiny Commission work programme).**

7. New parking charges for small district car parks (saving of £150k):

In advance of the meeting, members had identified the following areas of focus:

- How accurate is the £150k calculation given many of these car parks are low usage?
- Will enforcement be cost-effective?

Points raised/noted:

1. The Chair advised that (along with other ward councillors) he had submitted a statement to the Cabinet on 24 January expressing concerns about this proposal, specifically in relation to Westbury-on-Trym car park.
2. Cllr Goulandris, Massey and Weston expressed concern about the introduction of these car park charges. It was highlighted that in Westbury-on-Trym, charges would impact on local residents (and residents from Southmead and Horfield) who used that car park to access the GP surgery and local banks; the impact of these proposals on communities and local high streets must be considered. Concerns were also expressed about the impact of these charges in other areas such as Shirehampton. The impact of these changes on residents seemed disproportionate given the savings that would be achieved were small in the context of the wider budget.
3. Cllr Alexander commented as follows:
 - a. It could be argued that up to this point, the Council had effectively been subsidising the provision of free car parks at these locations; maintaining these car parks came at a cost to the Council.
 - b. The introduction of charges would deliver improved management of these car parks and appropriate enforcement measures would be in place, linking in with enhanced local 'yellow' line parking enforcement. Free parking for Blue Badge holders would be maintained.
4. The Director: Management of Place commented that part of the rationale for introducing car park charges was to encourage those who could to walk to their local high street shops, thus helping to free car park spaces up for those who needed to use them.
5. Whilst understanding the financial situation, the Chair suggested, with particular reference to the Westbury-on-Trym car park, that the proposals could perhaps be refined, especially in light of the age profile of the local population - for example, a free first half-hour or free first hour's use of the car park would assist those visiting the GP surgery or local shops; alternative timing of charges could also be considered on Sundays to assist congregations of the two neighbouring churches; a maximum parking time of 4 hours would assist in ensuring 'turnover' of car park space availability. In response, Cllr Alexander indicated that specific further discussion could be held around these points of detail.



6. Cllr Massey suggested that particular small district car park proposals could be paused where there were strong community interests at stake, in order to assess whether and how implementation should proceed; it was important to consider the implications for local high streets. The Chair flagged that discussions with local communities should take place in advance of any related TROs being progressed.

7. Cllr Hopkins expressed concern about the degree (and cost-effectiveness) of enforcement linked to these proposals. He also expressed concern that the introduction of these charges could lead to increased on-street car parking around some locations.

8. Whilst noting the views expressed, Cllr Parsons welcomed the broader principle of managing demand for car parking through parking charges. He was concerned that a comprehensive parking strategy for the city was required, highlighting the particular issues faced in many parts of the city with free on-street parking, especially inner-city areas which had streets crammed with parked cars on a permanent basis. In response, Cllr Alexander agreed that a wider parking strategy for the city would be beneficial but highlighted the current lack of resource available to develop this work.

9. Cllr Fitzjohn expressed the view that a new residents parking scheme(s) were needed urgently in the Bedminster/Ashton Gate area of the city.

8. General concern about the need for a clear parks and green spaces plan/strategy.

In advance of the meeting, members had identified this as an area of focus.

Points raised/noted:

1. At the suggestion of the Chair it was agreed that the parks and green spaces plan/strategy should be maintained as an item for consideration as part of the Communities Scrutiny Commission work programme (**Action: this item to be maintained as an item for the Communities Scrutiny Commission work programme**).

2. It was noted that updated parks/trees/allotments strategies were anticipated to come forward for Cabinet decisions in June.

B. CAPITAL PROGRAMME

It was noted that in advance of the meeting, members had identified the following areas of focus:

- Given the budgetary pressures, clarification is sought on the action/measures taken by the Council in relation to the governance and management of the capital programme, in response to last year's External Auditor's report.
- What action has been taken to address slippage within the capital programme and to address the inflationary impact of slippage/delay?
- What progress is being made in assessing the carbon impact of projects included in the capital programme? (see earlier related point raised under '**Council owned companies and related issues**').



At the suggestion of the Chair, it was agreed that as these were ongoing issues, they could be picked up for further detailed discussion (after the 2023/24 budget had been determined) by the Resources Scrutiny Commission (**Action: this item to be picked up as an item for further discussion by the Resources Scrutiny Commission**).

C. SPEND TO SAVE

In advance of the meeting, members had identified that given the seriousness of the budgetary pressures, scrutiny members would like further information to assess whether the Council has maximised the potential of 'spend to save', for example, in tackling pressures in relation to adult social care and homelessness.

At the suggestion of the Chair, it was agreed that 'spend to save' updates should be picked up as an ongoing issue for further detailed discussion into 2023/24 (**Action: this item to be picked up as an item for further discussion through the Resources Scrutiny Commission work programme**).

D. HOUSING / HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2023/24

Points raised/noted:

1. In response to questions, it was noted that in relation to the 'Waking Watch', 24 hour/7 days a week fire safety patrols were in place at 36 housing blocks where there were concerns about the EPS (expanded polystyrene) cladding. In cases where the EPS cladding could be removed within the next 12 months, the plan was to have a Waking Watch presence until the EPS cladding was removed. Where the works to remove EPS cladding were scheduled to take longer, the plan was to replace the Waking Watch with an alarm system. In the longer term, a sprinkler installation programme would be progressed across all 62 high-rise blocks with proposed costs allowed for the installation of these sprinklers over a 5-year period totalling £32.7m (subject to change depending on rates of inflation).

In discussion, it was noted that the prospect of accelerating relevant aspects of spend within this programme where possible to reduce overall costs was being kept under constant review – scrutiny members would be kept informed. Certain actions were being planned in the interests of cost-effectiveness – e.g. replacing windows whilst scaffolding was in place.

2. It was noted that scrutiny members would also be kept informed of progress in taking forward work on creating new temporary accommodation, including the use of existing properties (including council housing) and working with partners to source available properties, and therefore reduce spend on expensive and inappropriate accommodation

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chair thanked scrutiny members, Cabinet members and officers for their attendance and contributions through both of these budget scrutiny sessions.



The meeting finished at 6.49 p.m.

