

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

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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.

