

Bristol City Council
Minutes of the Strategy and Resources
Policy Committee



18 November 2024 at 2.00 pm

Members present:-

Councillors: Tony Dyer (Chair), Caroline Gooch (Vice-Chair), John Goulandris, Ellie King, Heather Mack, Abdul Malik, Tom Renhard, Tim Rippington and Jenny Bartle (substitute for Ani Stafford-Townsend)

62 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting and explained the emergency evacuation procedure.

63 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

It was noted that apologies had been received from Cllr Stafford-Townsend; Cllr Bartle was in attendance as a substitute.

64 Declarations of Interest

It was noted that there were no declarations of interest.



65 Minutes of previous meetings

On the motion of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Gooch, the Committee **RESOLVED:**

- To confirm the minutes of the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee held on 14 October 2024 as a correct record, to be signed by the Chair.

On the motion of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Gooch, the Committee **RESOLVED:**

- To confirm the minutes of the meeting of the Extraordinary Strategy and Resources Policy Committee held on 14 October 2024 as a correct record, to be signed by the Chair.

66 Chair's Announcements

None.

67 Public Forum

Public questions:

It was noted that 9 public forum questions had been submitted to this meeting as follows:

Q1. Suzanne Audrey: Public questions and statements

Q2. Suzanne Audrey: Public questions and statements

Q3. Suzanne Audrey: Freedom of Information Requests

Q4. Dan Ackroyd: Agenda item 11 - Confidential report

Q5. Dan Ackroyd: Agenda item 11 – Confidential report

Q6. Dan Ackroyd: Agenda item 8 – Period 6 Finance outturn report – reference to slippage in stock condition surveys in Appendix A2

Q7. Joanna Booth: Agenda item 8 - Period 6 Finance outturn report - reference to Modulous project at Romney Avenue in Appendix A2

Q8. Joanna Booth: Agenda item 8 - Period 6 Finance outturn report - reference to Modulous project at Romney Avenue in Appendix A2

Q9. Joanna Booth: Agenda item 11 - Confidential report

In relation to Q1 and Q2, Suzanne Audrey asked the following supplementary questions:

1. Please define defamatory, frivolous and offensive as currently used by the Monitoring Officer and committee Chairs to reject or redact statements and questions from the public?



2. Why were the Council's definitions of defamatory, frivolous and offensive NOT provided in the answer to my question?

The Chair advised that he would arrange for written responses to be provided to the questioner in respect of these supplementary questions.

Public statements:

It was noted that 2 public forum questions had been submitted to this meeting as follows:

1. Suzanne Audrey: Public questions and statements
2. Dan Ackroyd: Use of resources/culture change at the council

Suzanne Audrey was in attendance at the meeting and presented her statement.

68 Household Support Fund 6 (October 2024 to March 2025)

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 7) seeking approval of the Household Support Fund (HSF) 6 policy and its proposed £4.039m allocation, including a change of budget to reflect this funding. The report also sought approval to authorise all steps required to accept and spend the remaining £3 million of the extended allocation and asked the Committee to note the urgent financial key decision taken in September 2024 to spend £1,021,500 of the Household Support Fund in respect of free school meals food vouchers over the October and Christmas school holidays.

It was noted that this was a key decision report, as the proposed decision involved spend of more than £500k and had a significant impact on more than 2 wards.

Summary of main points raised/noted in discussion of this item:

1. The extended allocation of the Household Support Fund was generally welcomed.
2. In response to a question, it was confirmed that approx. 5% of the allocation (£197,298) would be used to assist in covering administration costs, which was in line with standard practice.
3. In terms of the funding allocated to the advice sector (£404k), it was noted that it was anticipated that this would also enable advice and support to be targeted to pensioners, especially those affected as a result of changes to the universal Winter Fuel Allowance.
4. In response to a question, it was confirmed that management information was required to be kept and maintained by the relevant organisations and provided to the Council to ensure effective reporting on the delivery of agreed objectives and actual spend.



5. The Chair commented that it was anticipated that the government would be looking to move to a multi-year financial settlement for local authorities, which would assist councils in planning future use of this type of funding. It was suggested that in early 2025, it may be useful to establish a short-term, cross-party task and finish group to review how the Household Support Fund has been used to date and to consider potential future adjustments to the HSF policy.

The Chair then moved the report recommendations, noting that there was 1 recommendation for noting by the Committee and 2 recommendations for approval.

This was seconded by Cllr Gooch.

The Committee **RESOLVED** (unanimously):

- 1. To approve the Household Support Fund Policy October 2024 - March 2025 and change of budget to reflect the funding as outlined in the report.**
- 2. To authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee, to take all steps required to accept and spend (including procuring and awarding contracts over £500k) the remaining £3 million of the extended allocation of the DWP Household Support Fund as outlined in the Household Support Fund Policy October 2024 - March 2025, and up to the maximum budget envelope outlined in the report.**
- 3. To note the finance urgent key decision taken in September 2024 to spend £1,021,500 of the Household Support Fund in respect of Free School Meals food vouchers over the October and Christmas school holidays.**

69 Period 6 Finance outturn report 2024/25

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 8) presenting information and analysis on the Council's financial performance against the approved budget and its forecast use of resources for the financial year 2024/25. The report also updated the Committee on progress on the delivery of in-year planned savings.

Summary of main points raised/noted in discussion of this item:

1. It was noted that in relation to the original revenue budget for 2024/25 approved by Full Council (£533.7m), the Period 6 total forecast service variation from that original budget was £35.2m. It was expected that this would be partially offset by £16.2m of forecast contingent budget for inflation and optimism bias currently held corporately so that the total net forecast revenue overspend at Period 6 was £18.9m (3.5% of the original approved budget).



2. In response to a question, it was noted that depending on the financial position at financial year end, if necessary and if there was no alternative, the Council would need to consider utilising earmarked reserves to achieve a balanced budget; under this scenario, these reserves would need to be replaced in future years. The avoidance of this type of scenario was a key reason why the budget process had been brought forward this year.

3. It was noted that the overall financial position was showing a broadly improving trend since the summer in relation to the net forecast overspend; there was, however, still significant work to be undertaken to deliver the required in-year savings.

4. In response to a question, the Chair agreed to discuss with officers and the Chair of the Finance Sub-Committee an appropriate mechanism for the Sub-Committee reporting progress on their work to the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee.

The Chair then moved the report recommendations, noting that there were 10 recommendations for noting by the Committee and 1 recommendation for approval.

This was seconded by Cllr Gooch.

The Committee **RESOLVED:**

To note:

- 1. The council's General Fund forecast outturn revenue overspend of £18.9 million at P6 2024/25 against the council approved budget of £533.7 million.**
- 2. The performance on delivery of savings (Appendix A1, Section 3, Tables 3a and 3b).**
- 3. The additional weighted net risk of £5.6 million per the risks and opportunities register (Appendix A1, Section 4, Tables 4a and 4b).**
- 4. The council's outturn position of £14.2 million overspend within the Housing Revenue Account to be transferred to the HRA general reserve at the year end (Appendix A1a, Section 5.3).**
- 5. The council's outturn position of a £31.6 million overspend (net £15.0m) in the Dedicated Schools Grant and that this brings the carry forward deficit to £90.2 million. Following the application of the DfE's 24/25 Safety Valve combined with contribution from the General Fund a total £52.1 million is forecast to be carried forward at the year end in the DSG deficit reserve (Appendix A1, Section 5.4).**
- 6. The breakeven position on Public Health services (Appendix A1, Section 5.5).**
- 7. The breakeven position on the Bristol Harbour Fund. (Appendix A1, Section 5.6).**
- 8. The council's forecast underspend of £34.2 million against the Capital Programme revised budget 2024/25, comprised of £15.5 million underspend on the General Fund (including £8.1 million underspend on corporate contingency and adjustments) and £18.7 million underspend on the HRA. (Appendix A1, Section 6).**
- 9. That SCIL budget allocation of £5.0 million will be utilised to support the Investment in the 'New Cut' harbour wall works to repair and strengthen the River Avon New Cut retaining walls. (Appendix A1, Section 6.4).**



10. The urgent key decision by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee to approve spend of £1,021,500 to assist 22,700 free school meals food vouchers for the October and Christmas 2024 school holidays. (Appendix A3).

To approve (6 members voting in favour and 3 against):

- Revisions to the revised Capital Budget to incorporate the reprofiling of up to £18.7 million HRA budget into future years following the £18.7 million forecast underspend at P6.

70 Estate rationalisation - surplus asset disposals

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 9) seeking approval of the disposal of particular council assets which had been identified following analysis of the Council's estate.

It was noted that this was a key decision report, as the proposed decision involved spend of more than £500k and had a significant impact on more than 2 wards.

Summary of main points raised/noted in discussion of this item:

1. It was noted that the report included an exempt appendix (Appendix E, relating to matters of commercial sensitivity) and that, in the event that any member wished to raise a question or matter specifically in relation to the exempt information, it would be necessary for the Committee to move into exempt session.
2. In response to questions, it was confirmed that the 2024/25 budget approved by the Full Council included specific proposals to generate a target figure of £21.6m in capital receipts and make £440k revenue savings in 2024/25 in relation to the council's asset base. Progress against this target was kept under constant review; it was currently estimated that approx. £15m would be generated in-year against the target figure.
3. Cllr Renhard noted that the Property Working Group (as established at the 16 September meeting of the Committee) would be carrying out and concluding their work in December. Given this, it was the view of Labour group members that it would be appropriate for the Committee to defer the report at this point, on the basis that it was premature for the Committee to take decisions on assets for disposal just before the working group began their work.

In response to this point, the Director: Finance advised that the report had been prepared in line with the Council's current policies; the Council would need to utilise these capital receipts either in the current financial year or in the next year in order to meet its costs.

Following further discussion, Cllr Renhard moved:



‘That the report be deferred.’

This was seconded by Cllr Rippington.

On being put to the vote, the motion was lost (3 members voting in favour and 6 against).

Cllr Goulandris indicated that he wished to ask particular questions which related to the information included within exempt appendix E to the report. It was noted that other members might also wish to raise questions in relation to the exempt appendix.

On the motion of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Gooch, the Committee then **RESOLVED:**
That under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the business to be discussed is likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of schedule 12A of the Act.

Whilst the Committee was in exempt session, members asked questions about and discussed the detail included in the exempt appendix.

Once the discussion in exempt session had concluded, the Committee went back into public session and the meeting was re-opened for members of the public to observe proceedings.

On the motion of Cllr Renhard, seconded by Cllr Rippington, the Committee **RESOLVED** (unanimously):

- To defer the report.

71 Exclusion of press and public

On the motion of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Gooch, the Committee **RESOLVED:**
That under Section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act.



72 Confidential report

Note: As per agenda item 10, the Committee agreed that under Section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for this item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

The Committee took a decision on this matter in exempt session. A specific exempt minute relating to this matter will be submitted to the committee for confirmation as a correct record.

CHAIR _____

