

Bristol City Council
Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny
Management Board



22 January 2018 at 4.00 pm

Members Present:-

Councillors: Geoff Gollop (Chair), Donald Alexander, Charlie Bolton, Tom Brook, Jude English, Gill Kirk, Brenda Massey, Graham Morris, Anthony Negus and Estella Tincknell

Officers in Attendance:-

Shahzia Daya (Director - Legal and Democratic Services)

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and attendees introduced themselves

2. Apologies for absence.

None.

3. Declarations of Interest

None.

4. Chair's Business

Mayor's Forward Plan - Key decision item for Cabinet on 23 January 2018 - urgent decision taken under APR16 - WECA Strategic Transport Feasibility:

The Chair raised his concern over the very short notice given of this urgent item, to be considered at the 23 January Cabinet meeting.

Following discussion, OSMB

RESOLVED –

That their comments, as set out below, should be referred to the 23 January Cabinet meeting:



OSMB was disappointed that an item could be added to the Cabinet agenda less than 24 hours before the meeting in such a way that most members and interested parties would not even have the opportunity to read the paper, let alone to scrutinise it.

OSMB has repeatedly asked for the Forward Plan to be made more relevant, and yet here was an item that was in the plan which had to be brought forward at extremely short notice.

OSMB's view is that surely a Forward Plan is only published when there is a reasonable anticipation that the meetings referred to in it will happen. For scrutiny and public accountability to happen, there has to be an opportunity for the review of documentation, and, if appropriate, scrutiny of the document.

In this case, the only reason the item was deemed urgent was because no-one planned for the possible cancellation of the 6 February Cabinet meeting until 2 working days before the 23 January Cabinet meeting. OSMB recognised that they do not have enough knowledge or information to comment on the proposals themselves within these papers but wish to highlight that those that do would not have been aware of them. In addition, the Chair commented that he felt he could not have refused to let this item go forward for decision at this short notice, but also felt that it could set a precedent for items bypassing scrutiny in the future. In the circumstances, the Mayor should be asked to give a categorical assurance that he was committed to making the Forward Plan fit for use and that he recognised the importance of ensuring that no decision was excluded from the possibility of being scrutinised.

5. Public Forum

OSMB noted the content of 2 public forum statements received, as follows:

1. Cllr Charlie Bolton – subject: items for future scrutiny.
2. David Redgewell – subject: Bristol Arena.

6. Bristol Arena - Update

The committee considered an update report due to be considered at the 23 January Cabinet meeting.

Following discussion, OSMB

RESOLVED -

That their comments, as set out below, should be referred to the 23 January Cabinet meeting:

At today's meeting (22 January 2018) OSMB has received an update report on the Bristol Arena. Members were advised that the outcome of the value for money report and the subsequent decision on the Arena project was to be scheduled for the April 2018 Cabinet meeting.

OSMB members have significant concerns that this timing is unlikely to permit any meaningful scrutiny activity (either OSMB and/or Task and Finish work) and specifically that members in wards adjoining either site and/or on transport routes to either site will not have any opportunity to contribute to the decision making process or bring forward the views of their constituents despite the significant impact of the decision upon their communities.

OSMB Members were keen to highlight that, whilst they strongly feel the need for scrutiny on this item, it is acknowledged that due to the commercial nature of the project this may have to be done in way that respects commercial sensitivity* and also does not further delay decision making.

OSMB members therefore seek assurance from the Mayor that he will work with officers to enable meaningful scrutiny on this item prior to the publication of the Cabinet reports for the April meeting. **



**It was noted that a full review of the exempt procedures process needs to be carried out and that this should be informed by the government's Select Committee into Scrutiny and recent guidance from the CfPS.*

***It was noted that consideration will need to be given to the Easter Holidays and the possible moving of the Cabinet date to later in April.*

7. Bristol City Council 2018-19 Budget Proposals

The committee considered the 2018-19 budget proposals as detailed in the report to be considered by the Cabinet on 23 January 2018.

Following discussion, OSMB

RESOLVED -

That their comments, as set out below, should be referred to the 23 January Cabinet meeting:

Consultation Report Overview and Corporate Strategy

The following summarises the discussion:

- ☑ The responses received as part of the consultation were relatively low compared to the population (with around 600 respondents). Concerns were raised that the results of the consultation were therefore not representative, which could be partly due to fatigue, although it was noted that with sample sizes of 500 and over the data was more reliable.
- ☑ Increasing public engagement remained a priority although there were some challenges around resources and timing. Furthermore, caution should be exercised when targeting particular groups to participate which could skew the findings. One solution would be to improve engagement when ideas were in the formative stages.
- ☑ Plans were in place to co-ordinate all of the consultation/engagement that was taking place citywide in order to better share data and learning.
- ☑ Many of the procedures relating to recent City Council consultation exercises have been queried by Members. A Scrutiny Task and Finish Group could be established to enable Member to shape the process and improve engagement.

Capital programme (Appendix A2 to the Budget Report)

The following key points were raised by OSMB and discussed with the Executive and relevant officers:

- ☑ Funding for Temple Meads Masterplan - it was noted that funding appears to reduce over the five year programme. Officers confirmed that this is due to the expectation that further into the programme, external funding sources should come forward. The total is £2m (with WECA) with the levering in of £1.5m of Network Rail funding to undertake the Masterplan for the station and surround. It was noted that this work will be extensive requiring this level of budget envelope.
- ☑ Members were pleased to see capital investment in the People Directorate. The focus of this was confirmed as extra care (enabling independent living) as opposed to residential care. It was noted that Bristol has an over-reliance on residential care and that this needs to be addressed alongside the city's affordable homes and under-occupation strategies. It was noted that a Business Plan is not yet written for this work and that further work is required to engage with service users and providers to develop this.
- ☑ Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – it was clarified that the HRA is still facing significant challenges. From 2020, councils will have the ability to increase rents but this is offset by the reducing housing stock due to Right to Buy. The current assumptions indicate that capital will run out by year 7/8 of the business plan and that the HRA will be in deficit in 16 years' time. Significantly more work is required to address the future HRA business plan position in 2018/19. A series of member briefings on the HRA are to be organised to focus on



the debt cap, borrowing assumptions and the reserves required to support the HRA. It was noted that this budget position will begin to impact upon provision of service (e.g. reduced letting standards and provision of planned programme) in the future. It was noted that the Housing Company may be able to contribute to tackling the issue of social housing and members requested that details be provided on this at an appropriate point in the development.

☐ Members requested a break-down of what is included within the £14m corporate expenditure and it was agreed that this would be circulated by finance officers.

☐ Capital Programme – it was noted that there is not a significant amount of change in the budget envelope from 17/18 to 18/19. Members questioned as to why most capital expenditure is front-loaded in the programme. It was noted that this is standard practice regarding capital projects and the programme budget sets the overarching budget and borrowing envelope and that more projects/programmes are likely to be put forward/developed in coming years. It was noted that a contingency fund is always available to manage project time delays/over-spends and other emerging pressures including the Council's liabilities. The MTFP principles are to ensure that these are contained within the borrowing and budget envelope set. Any draw down from the contingency budget will require a key decision and Cabinet approval and thus be available for scrutiny.

Place Budget Proposals

The following key points were raised by OSMB and discussed with the Executive and relevant officers:

☐ BE57 - The Property division had repeatedly had issues with its budget although there were plans in place to increase efficiencies by reorganising the team; reviewing the asset management policy; and improving IT systems.

- The Council's property strategy had last been reviewed in 2011/12 and was now due to be significantly revised following a full stock take of assets (including categorising facilities into type eg housing/investment portfolio/community asset etc); a rent review; rationalisation of the estate; and adopting more commercial approach. Steps were being taken to bring in the right expertise and the project was expected to be completed within 18 months although early findings would be available in June 18.

- Particular care should be given around the community asset aspects of any property disposal and discussions were underway with the relevant organisations.

- Concerns were raised regarding the significant delays to this piece of work, and also that the Council Assets Scrutiny Task and Finish Group had been established to assist with this project but to date had been underutilised.

☐ IN22 – the £1M of savings identified would come from a combination of inflation but also rebasing fees and charges.

☐ IN07 – The decision to reintroduce Sunday parking charges was not expected to result in a significant decline in visitors because the fees were relatively modest.

☐ RS02 – Plans were in place to improve the quality of road maintenance works in order to increase their longevity as well as to work more effectively by targeting works to where they were most needed.

☐ PL10a – The City Council was working in conjunction with the West of England Combined Authority to make savings around transport which had led to a £900k reduction per annum from supported bus services. WECA were developing a Bus Strategy which would set out the plan for the region and help to develop a more efficient bus network.

☐ IN24 – The Planning service was currently running without revenue support and income would be raised in the future by offering a deluxe service but that could only be rolled out if sufficient staff were in place.



BE43 – A series of work streams were planned to improve debt management arrangements such as reviewing single persons Council Tax discounts.

Neighbourhoods Budget Proposals

The following key points were raised by OSMB and discussed with the Executive and relevant officers:

- ☐ FP01 - It was confirmed that savings for third party payments were documented in each directorate budget schedule, not just in Neighbourhoods. Members were advised that there is a council wide 10% savings target on all external contracts when they are up for renewal.
- ☐ BE55 – concerns were raised about the ending of the Neighbourhood Partnerships and reduction in community focused officers and specifically how information on networks and community resources etc. will be available to residents and groups going forward. It was advised that work is underway regarding VOSCUR's role within this. It was also confirmed that a new structure for this area is still in development and will be shared with members at an appropriate stage.
- ☐ FP40 – it was clarified that this saving relates to bringing together programmes such as smoking and weight-loss into one service thereby making savings on contract spend. It was noted that there is a double-edged sword when making such savings in terms of the impact on BCC staffing vs impact on employment in the city and that changes should not be done in isolation.
- ☐ RS04- it was confirmed that the library savings are year two of a total of £1.5million of two years.
- ☐ FP02 – it was noted that there are two figures for parks savings. It was confirmed this is due to savings in support functions to the parks service. It was agreed that a breakdown would be produced.
- ☐ BW02 – it was noted that the Bristol Waste Company is one area where the budget appears to have increased. Officers advised that the Waste Company is looking to expand its commercial income in the future whereas currently the majority of income is from council services and so at this stage there is limited income and this is not shown within the budget savings.

Treasury Management Strategy (Appendix A4 to the Budget Report)

The following key points were raised by OSMB and discussed with the Executive and relevant officers:

- ☐ Members questioned what assumptions and what stress testing had been done on potential changes to interest rates. Officers confirmed that external advice from a range of sources is used to inform their assumptions and they are in line with Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT) assumptions. Sensitivity tests are carried out and scenarios consider an approximate 3% increase.

Meeting ended at Time Not Specified

CHAIR _____

