

**Bristol City Council
Minutes of the Strategy and Resources
Policy Committee**



3 February 2025 at 2.00 pm

Members present:-

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

103 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

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

104 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Cllr King; Cllr Renhard was in attendance as a substitute for Cllr King.

105 Declarations of Interest

None.

106 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

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 20 January 2025 as a correct record, to be signed by the Chair.



107 Chair's Announcements

None.

108 Public Forum

Public questions:

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

1. Richard Coates: Archives opening hours - budget saving
2. Dan Ackroyd: Freedom of Information Golden Motion (update on subsequent action)

It was noted that responses had been sent to the above individuals and published on the Council's website alongside the agenda papers for this meeting,

Public statements:

It was noted that 12 public forum statements had been submitted to this meeting as follows:

1. Dr Evan Jones: Budget report – Archives search room opening hours
2. Professor Steve Poole: Budget report – Archives search room opening hours
3. Trish Mensah: Budget report – Archives search room opening hours
4. Bristol UNISON: Budget report – Archives search room opening hours
5. Richard Jones: Budget report – Archives search room opening hours
6. Kathleen Thompson: Budget report – Archives search room opening hours
7. Geoff Gardiner: Budget report – Archives search room opening hours
8. Jeremy Clarke: Budget report – Archives search room opening hours
9. Rachel Beaney: Budget report – Archives search room opening hours
10. Rose Wallis: Budget report – Archives search room opening hours
11. Professor Lois Bibbings: Budget report – Archives search room opening hours
12. David Redgewell: Council budget

David Redgewell was in attendance and presented his statement.

109 Report from the Finance Sub-Committee

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 8) from the Finance Sub-Committee.

The report was presented by Cllr Malik, Chair of the Finance Sub-Committee. It was noted that the sub-committee had held a two-part, in-public meeting over 15-16 January, where members had commented and raised questions with Policy Committee Chairs about the draft savings options across each individual policy committee's remit. The report summarised members' comments on the draft savings options.



It was noted that feedback from the Finance Sub-Committee, as per their report, had been taken into account in terms of the preparation of the budget reports for this meeting.

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

1. It was noted that the Finance Sub-Committee would be meeting in March to discuss and review the effectiveness of this year's budget setting arrangements with a view to identifying any improvements in terms of best practice that might be applied in relation to next year's budget development process. It was also noted that, following that meeting, the views of the Finance Sub-Committee would be fed into the current work being undertaken by the Committee Model Review Group.
2. In relation to the issue of the library service review (to be undertaken by a Task and Finish Group), Cllr Blenkinsop queried what criteria/metrics were likely to be used in forming future recommendations about the retention or closure of current library buildings. In response, the Chair commented that the Task and Finish Group's scope would be based on improving the library service for the city's residents; as part of this work, the cross-party group would consider any key criteria to be applied, alongside considering other relevant factors such as identifying potential additional sources of income.
3. In relation to the issue of future waste collection arrangements, Cllrs Rippington and Renhard raised an issue around the modelling that had taken place so far on future black bin collection options and queried whether any degree of pre-determination of a decision had taken place ahead of the public consultation. In response, the Chair commented that no pre-judgements had been made around this issue, noting that the public consultation was open until 10 March; savings in this area were subject to decisions that would be taken at the appropriate future point after consultation results had been assessed.
4. In response to a question from Cllr Rippington, the Executive Director: Children and Education confirmed that an appropriate balance was being sought, mindful of service demand and service effectiveness/cost, in determining the level of new capital investment in local children's homes. This would be kept under close review. It was important to recognise the overriding aim of keeping as many children safely at home as possible.
5. Cllr Rippington raised a concern about the proposal to reduce spend on domestic abuse services by £140k in 2025/26. Whilst noting that this saving was proposed to be delivered through uncommitted funds released from the ending of a time limited project and through not filling a vacant commissioning post (in respect of which, the Finance Sub-Committee had received an assurance that current service delivery would not be impacted), he suggested that these resources would nevertheless be more appropriately diverted to continue to support domestic abuse services.
6. In relation to the proposals around linear parking charges, it was confirmed that this proposed saving would be subject to a final decision to be taken by the Transport and Connectivity Policy Committee.



7. In relation to the savings associated with the Adult Social Care strategic review of in-house services, Cllr Rippington expressed concern that this could see more privatisation, which, in the Labour group's view, could lead to less accountability and poorer services. Whilst noting these concerns, the Chair commented that the use of private provision was something that had happened for quite a long time. Part of the work being done through this review was to look at how the Council could ensure that services were delivered in a way that didn't affect the levels of service being provided.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Committee **RESOLVED**:

- **To note the report from the Finance Sub-Committee.**

110 Budget Report 2025/26

The Committee considered the 2025/26 budget report (agenda item 8) setting out, for onward referral to Full Council, recommendations for decisions regarding the Council's revenue plan for the 5 year period 2025/26-2029/30, the capital programme for the 10 year period 2025/26-2034/35 and the treasury management strategy (which included the Council's minimum revenue provision, prudential indicators and limits).

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

1. The Chair advised that it was important to note that no final decisions would be taken at this meeting on the 2025/26 budget; the recommendations set out in the report were for onward referral to the Full Council budget meeting on 25 February.
2. It was noted that at this point, the Council was in receipt of the provisional Local Government Financial Settlement. Following the 2025/26 final Local Government Finance Settlement, the Director: Finance, in consultation with the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, would make any adjustments that may be required to the budget report in the interim period between this meeting and the Full Council budget meeting on 25 February. Any such adjustments would be reported to Full Council for noting.
3. Cllr Goulandris advised that, on behalf of the Conservative group, he would be voting in support of the onward referral of the budget recommendations to the Full Council budget meeting, in line with the budget process; this did not mean that the Conservative group supported the budget as currently presented. The group intended to submit budget amendments for consideration at the Full Council budget meeting.
4. In response to questions, it was confirmed that the purpose of the Council's earmarked reserves was to meet identified spending commitments. These reserves would only be used for the purpose for which they were created and were reviewed regularly through financial reporting to policy committees as well as being subject to annual review. It was important for the Council to maintain sufficiency around the level of reserves, taking account of ongoing risks and assumptions.



5. In response to a question, it was confirmed that the proposed investment (£175k in 2025/26) in a Generative AI pilot was a one-year pilot project seeking to test new services which use generative AI to help boost productivity and efficiency. This would be targeted particularly at a limited number of users in office-based roles with greater administrative tasks and to help automate common work.

6. Cllr Renhard highlighted that (to inform preparation of proposed budget amendments), Labour group members had submitted a number of advance questions and clarification requests to the Finance team and were yet to receive a response. The Director: Finance confirmed that responses to these questions were being prepared and would be forwarded to the Labour group as soon as possible.

7. In response to questions, it was confirmed that following the feedback from the Finance Sub-Committee meeting in January, savings options had been reviewed considering the substantial points raised. As a result, savings on heritage museums and the cultural investment programme were now proposed to be deferred by one year and the following savings had been removed:

- Future of Bristol's Library Service
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme changes
- Removal of funding for school crossing patrols
- Introduction of fees for disabled parking bays

(The full detail of this was set out in section 6.48 of the report.)

8. Arising from the equality impact assessments, it was flagged (as had also been raised by the Finance Sub-Committee) that it was important to understand the impact and outcome of specific proposals on those individuals most directly affected, noting that older people and disabled people tend to be disproportionately affected by budget reduction proposals. The Chair commented that whilst acknowledging this point in relation to proposed savings, it was also important to recognise that the budget proposed a range of investments.

9. In response to questions around the deliverability of savings, it was noted that the previous practice of applying an optimism bias in relation to savings delivery was being discontinued. The delivery of savings would be monitored/tracked closely through 2025/26 through the application of updated spending controls and procedures.

10. Whilst noting that no final decisions were being taken at this meeting, and also noting that the budget proposals had been reviewed in light of issues raised by the Finance Sub-Committee, Cllr Renhard and Labour group members advised that they retained a number of concerns, including their comments as raised earlier at the meeting when discussing the report from the Finance Sub-Committee.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Chair then moved the report recommendations.

This was seconded by Cllr Gooch.

The Committee **RESOLVED:**



A. To note:

- 1. The budget consultation process that was followed and feedback as outlined in Section 18 and Appendix 6.**
- 2. That the budget consultation feedback and equality impact assessments have been taken into consideration by officers and have informed the final budget proposals.**
- 3. The categorisation of earmarked reserves and provisions as set out in section 15 of the main report.**
- 4. The feedback provided by Bristol Schools Forum for Strategy and Resources Committee and Council, for consideration in making final decisions on the Dedicated Schools Budget for 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 13.**
- 5. The gross distribution of the 2025/26 Dedicated Schools Grant £547.8 million (£244.8m is received net after deductions, for application and onward administration of funds to schools and early years settings) as set out in section 9.**
- 6. The Housing Revenue Account Revenue budget of £154 million as set out in section 11.**
- 7. The Section 25 Statement of the Chief Finance Officer (s151 Officer) as set out in section 17.**
- 8. Any further DSG mitigation proposals for commencement in 2025/26 approved by Children and Young People Committee (subject to consultation where required).**

B. (6 members voting in favour and 3 against) To delegate authority:

- 1. To the Director of Finance in consultation with the Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee, following the 2025/26 Final Local Government Finance Settlement, to make any adjustments that may be required to the budget report in the interim period between Strategy and Resources Committee 3 February 2025 and Full Council 25 February 2025. Any such adjustments will then be reported to Full Council for noting.**
- 2. To the Director of Finance in consultation with the Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee to make any necessary technical adjustments that may be required to the budget with transfers to and or from reserves as appropriate.**

C. (6 members voting in favour and 3 against) To recommend for onward consideration to Full Council:

- 1. The Bristol City Council levels of Council Tax increase by 4.99%; which includes 2% precept to support Adult Social Care, noting the precepts of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Avon and Somerset and the Avon Fire Authority.**



- 2. The council's General Fund net revenue budget for the year 2025/26 as £571.139 million and expenditure allocations as set out in Appendix 1; subject to any budget amendments properly notified to and approved by the council in line with the Constitution.**
- 3. To approve the Reserves Policy 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 14.**
- 4. To approve the Capital Strategy 2025/26 – 2034/35 as set out in Appendix 2a.**
- 5. The council's capital budget and programme for the years 2025/26 – 2034/35, totalling £1.2 billion for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Fund as set out in Appendix 2b.**
- 6. The strategic Community Infrastructure Levy allocations in section 13 are approved.**
- 7. The proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26 in Appendix 4, incorporating the Minimum Revenue Provision policy and the prudential indicators and limits.**
- 8. To approve the strategy for the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts as set out in Appendix 5.**

111 Dedicated Schools Grant budget proposals 2025/26

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 9) setting out, for onward referral to Full Council, recommendations in relation to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget 2025/26.

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

1. The Chair advised that it was important to note that no final decisions would be taken at this meeting on the DSG budget for 2025/26; the recommendations set out in the report were for onward referral to the Full Council budget meeting on 25 February.
2. In response to a question, it was noted that an update was awaited from the Department for Education (DfE) on the position on the statutory override permitted for the DSG deficit (currently the statutory override applied until 31 March 2026).
3. It was noted that whilst the High Needs block had received an increase in funding of 7%, it remained under considerable pressure. The level of demand seen across Bristol, and nationally, indicated that the increased allocation would not provide sufficient funding for growth in additional needs.
4. In response to a question on the Early Years block, it was confirmed that the 2025/26 allocation was £23.690m higher than in 2024/25; the allocation took account of the continued expansion of early years free entitlements to 30 hours for under-2s and 2-year-olds with effect from September 2025.



5. In response to a question, it was noted that Bristol had entered into the DfE Safety Valve agreement/programme in March 2024, after the determination of the 2024/25 Council budget. The outcome of the judicial review brought against the Council in relation to its Safety Valve agreement was awaited.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Chair moved the report recommendations.

This was seconded by Cllr Gooch.

The Committee then **RESOLVED** (6 members voting in favour, none against and with 3 abstentions):

To recommend the following proposals to Full Council:

A. To approve the 2025/26 DSG Budget:

1. Schools Block (detail in appendix A3):

a. The Schools Block budget be set at £368.274 million for 2025/26 as per Table 1.

b. £1.851 million of the overall Schools Block DSG is transferred to the High Needs Block.

c. The basis for distributing the funding to mainstream schools be as set out and agreed by Schools Forum (Appendix A3).

d. The Growth Fund for established schools expanding in September 2025 be set at £1.0 million (a component of the total Schools Block) or as agreed by Schools Forum.

2. Central School Services Block (detail in appendix A2):

a. Following Schools Forum agreement, approve the Central School Services Block budget is set at £2.733 million for 2025/26.

3. High Needs Block (detail in appendix A2):

a. Approve the High Needs Block budget be set at £97.624 million for 2025/26 as per Appendix A2, after receiving transfers of £1.851 million from Schools Block.

4. Early Years Block (detail in appendix A2):

a. Approve the Early Years Block budget be set at £79.154 million for 2025/26, noting that spend and DSG income will fluctuate, according to participation levels in each of the three school terms.



b) Approve that funding for Early Years should be distributed in line with the arrangements explained in the report to Schools Forum (Appendix A2).

B. To note:

a. The 2025/26 DSG Allocation of £547.785 million.

b. That the forecast DSG expenditure in 2025/26 is £574.255 million, with a forecast accumulated deficit of £58.568 million.

c. Bristol Schools forum feedback on the 2025/26 DSG Budget.

112 Housing Revenue Account budget proposals 2025/26

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 10) setting out, for onward referral to Full Council, recommendations for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget 2025/26.

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

1. The Chair advised that it was important to note that no final decisions would be taken at this meeting on the HRA budget for 2025/26; the recommendations set out in the report were for onward referral to the Full Council budget meeting on 25 February.
2. In relation to HRA asset disposals, it was confirmed that the current assumption was to consider the disposal of 14 units in 2025/26 and 28 annually thereafter.
3. In response to a question, it was clarified that the disposals policy and associated procedure were currently being drafted and would follow the Council's decision pathway process. No disposals would be actioned until the policy and procedure had been agreed and implemented.
4. In response to questions about void property turnover, it was noted that the planned reduction against void losses for 2024/25 would not be met as the resource allocated to this workstream had been redirected to clearing the backlog of repairs following the regulatory judgement received from the Regulator of Social Housing. This position had been carried forward into the 2025/26 Business Plan; a planned reduction was assumed over the first five years of the plan of reducing void relet periods from 120 days at present to 70 days in 2025/26, reducing by a further 5 days per annum over the period of the Medium Term Financial Plan.
5. In response to questions about cladding replacement at multiple tower blocks, it was clarified that work was taking place to disaggregate the existing major projects programme, to enable the development and implementation of an accelerated programme for the removal and replacement of cladding on high rise blocks.



6. In relation to the capital programme/investment, it was noted that improved programme management/control arrangements were in place; accordingly, there was increased confidence around delivery - regular monitoring and re-forecasting as necessary would take place throughout 2025/26.

7. It was noted that as part of the consumer standards programme, the allocation of funding to support stock condition surveys had increased from £450k to £650k.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Chair moved the report recommendations.

This was seconded by Cllr Gooch.

The Committee **RESOLVED** (6 members voting in favour and 3 against):

To recommend the following proposal to Full Council:

- 1. Agrees and recommends a rent and service charge increase of 2.7% effective from April 2024 to Full Council, applicable to HRA dwellings (general needs accommodation, supported housing and temporary accommodation).**
- 2. Agrees and recommends the introduction of a new service charge for Grounds Maintenance, and to approve the implementation of a service charges Management Fee of 15% levied against applicable service charges.**
- 3. Agrees and recommends the one-year revenue budget of £154m for 2025/26 set out in Appendix A1 to Full Council.**
- 4. Authorises the Executive Director of Growth and Regeneration (to be replaced by the Executive Director of Housing in due course), in consultation with the Chair of the Homes and Housing Delivery Committee, to increase service charges by 2.7% with the exception of Heating and Water service charges which are to be increased by 10%, and garage rents by 10% and to approve the recalculated service charges and service charge statement based on actual costs for issue in September 2025.**
- 5. Notes the key assumptions in the 30-year business plan and that the finance model is established within the agreed affordability principles summarised in Appendix A1, Paragraph 54.**
- 6. Agrees and recommends the five-year capital programme 2025/26–2029/30 as detailed in Appendix A1 to Full Council.**
- 7. Agrees and recommends the termination of the current contracts for the HRA to acquire homes from Goram at Dover Court and New Fosseway.**



8. Approves the HIP and Development Programme set out in A2 and A3, subject to the following recommendations Nos 9 to 13:

9. Authorises the Executive Director of Growth and Regeneration (to be replaced by the Executive Director of Housing in due course) in consultation with Chair of the Homes and Housing Delivery Committee and s151 Officer to submit appropriate funding applications (including Homes England grants for development and any over the key decision threshold) to support the HRA budget and in particular the delivery of the HIP and Development Programme and if successful to:

- a. accept funding and agree associated grant terms/conditions; and**
- b. utilise the funding for delivery of the projects set out in appendices HIP and Development Programme; and**
- c. where appropriate use HRA investment plan funds and or reserves to match fund projects to maximise funding opportunities.**

10. Authorises the Executive Director of Growth and Regeneration (to be replaced by the Executive Director of Housing in due course) in consultation with Chair of the Homes and Housing Delivery Committee:

- a. To approve the priority of the procurement projects set out in the HIP and take all steps required to select the appropriate procurement route and to procure and award the contracts in line with the Council's procurement rules and regulations. Such authority to include decisions on matters which exceed the key decision threshold.**
- b. To adjust, remove and/or defer from within the current year's programme (including those set out in Appendix A2 and Appendix I), any project(s) in order to fund the increased cost of any other project and/or to accommodate other changes in the programme subject to keeping within the approved overall budget.**

11. Authorises the Executive Director of Growth and Regeneration (to be replaced by the Executive Director of Housing in due course) in consultation with Chair of the Homes and Housing Delivery Committee to:

- a. approve the priority of the Development Programme projects set out in Appendix A3 and take all steps required to procure and award contracts (including goods, works and professional services).**
- b. during 2025/26 to deliver the Development Programme capital investment plans detailed in Appendix A3 (notwithstanding any individual project or contract may exceed the key decision threshold)**
- c. agree the allocation of financial expenditure on schemes within the Development Programme and to authorise changes to adjust, remove and/or defer schemes as required to deliver the general development proposals. (Such authority to include decisions on matters which exceed the key decision threshold).**
- d. to determine the appropriate nature/mix of tenure appropriate for each scheme.**
- e. to identify and allocate suitable sites and properties for the Development Programme, including both Council property and acquiring additional land or properties.**



12. Authorises the reallocation and rearrangement of the above delegations from the Executive Director for Growth and Regeneration to the Executive Director of Housing on appointment, as required.

13. Authorises the Executive Director of Growth and Regeneration (to be replaced by the Executive Director of Housing in due course) in consultation with Chair of the Homes and Housing Delivery Committee (subject to approval by Full Council) to take all steps required to terminate the current contract for the HRA to acquire homes from Goram at Dover Court and New Fosseway.

113 Period 9 2024/25 Finance outturn report

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 11) 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 Committee **RESOLVED** to note:

- 1. That there are no material changes to the forecast financial position as previously reported at Q3/P8 2024/25.**
- 2. The decision to accept and spend Disabled Facilities Grant additional funding for 2024/25 of £529,560**
- 3. The key decision to accept and spend up to £1,718,900 (provisional maximum allocation) Family Hubs and Start for Life funding allocation for 2025/26.**

Meeting ended at 4.43 pm

CHAIR _____

