

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Date: Wednesday, 8 July 2020

Time: 1.30 pm

Attendees: Councillors: Geoff Gollop, Stephen Clarke, Anthony Negus, Jo Sergeant, Mark Brain, Jeff Lovell, Claire Hiscott, Paula O'Rourke, Celia Phipps, Brenda Massey.

Also in attendance: Craig Cheney, Helen Holland, Kye Dudd.

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed the attendees. The meeting was conducted via video conference.

2. Apologies for absence

No apologies were received.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

Two sets of minutes were considered.

RESOLVED; that the minutes of 24th April 2020 be approved as a correct record.

RESOLVED; that the minutes of 1st June 2020 be approved as a correct record.

5. Public Forum

Public Forum questions and statements were published prior to the meeting and can be viewed [here](#).

David Redgewell (South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside) presented a statement regarding the impact of Covid-19 and social distancing on public transport.

Councillor Clive Stevens raised a question around the administration costs of the City Leap project (item 7), and thanked Officers for the written response at short notice. OSMB considered this question under item 7.

Apologies were received from further public forum participants, and written responses to raised questions were provided.

6. Chair's business

The Chair raised the proposals for Scrutiny Working Groups as part of Chair's business. He advised that due to the impact of Covid-19 on Bristol City Council work streams the Commission Chairs had proposed a number of working groups to address emerging and relevant issues before Commission meetings were reconvened in the Autumn.

The following Working Groups were proposed:

Growth and Regeneration: Emergency Active Travel Fund. This would examine the strategy and delivery of transport projects in response to Covid-19.

Resources: Finance. This group had already met twice to examine the financial impact of Covid-19, and would continue its work as part of the budget planning process.

Communities: Volunteer Network Response. This would examine the work conducted by volunteer groups within the Bristol communities, and the interface between local mutual aid groups and Council responses. Further details would shortly be confirmed.

People: Safeguarding Vulnerable Children. This Group would conduct policy review and development of safeguarding vulnerable children within the context of Covid-19 response and recovery planning.

Health: Impact of Covid-19 on Planned Healthcare. Established to examine how delayed treatments, increased waiting lists and changes to working practice had impacted on the delivery of healthcare in Bristol.

RESOLVED; that

- **The Commission Chairs proceed with the proposed Working Groups over the next 6-8 weeks; and**
- **An outline Scrutiny Work Programme be brought to the next OSMB meeting on 29th July 2020.**

7. City Leap

The Service Manager for Energy Services presented an update on the City Leap project. He stated that;

City Leap was an innovative project to attract investment in to energy systems over the next 20 years which had attracted international interest, and would be a key support in post-pandemic recovery.

- The timeline of the project's progress was reviewed from the publication of the prospectus in May 2018. Stages included dialogue with the bidders to obtain feedback about the aims to ensure the market could respond in the way intended. As the project developed a number of changes to the original project were identified, and it was agreed that these amounted to a material change to procurement. The process paused with bidders informed in May 2020, and would recommence with a revised procurement exercise.
- A report on the next stage would be brought to Cabinet on 14th July 20. Once recommenced the procurement process would proceed swiftly. It was not the intention to change the aims of the project and the objectives remained largely the same.
- The estimated timescale following decision at Cabinet was for a contract to be in place by July 2021. The procurement process had totalled £4.2million to this point, and was estimated to total £6.5million overall.

Following a question from Members, Officers clarified that the changes proposed were material, and legal advice directed that the procurement process should be restarted to ensure that potential bidders had the opportunity to bid for the revised proposals. The eight bidders previously identified had indicated continued interest.

Members raised concerns about the delay. Officers confirmed that while the procurement process would be initiated again, the dialogue stage would not need to be repeated and the procurement could proceed more quickly. The information gathered had improved the project

and should ultimately lead to an improved result. Some slippage had also been caused by Covid-19. Officers considered the total delay to be around 4 months.

It was not thought that changes to procurement rules or the impact of Brexit would affect this process; legal advice had not identified this as a concern.

Members asked for further details regarding the nature of the changes in order to fully assess how and when these decisions were made. Officers advise these could not be shared in a public forum as they were commercially sensitive and may provide an unfair advantage to the previous bidders.

A number of Members confirmed their support for the project as an innovative piece of work.

Members queried where the project stood in relation to employees and smaller companies. Officers confirmed that safeguarding terms and conditions and workers' rights were part of the requirements of the project, and this could be overseen by Bristol City Council.

RESOLVED; that OSMB make a referral to Cabinet indicating general support for the project, with a request for confidential information regarding the procurement process.

8. Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Benefits Manager and Service Director for Resources presented a paper on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

Members noted that Bristol was the only core city to retain this scheme and Officers were asked to note that support for the scheme could be improved by building a supportive case, including:

- Factors that particularly impact Bristol
- Correlations against collection rates
- The multiplier effect of funds directed into the local economy

It is understood that this scheme is an administration priority.

The timing of the report was queried, but officers advised that as any changes to the scheme would require a consultation period and re-presenting the paper to Cabinet before March 2021 it was necessary to bring this paper now. It was acknowledged that the full impact of Covid-19 and potential increase in caseload was currently not fully known although some potential outcomes had been identified and estimated eg. the impact of an increased caseload of 10%.

Members were pleased to see the support for the scheme, however, there was some disagreement over the appropriate level of Scrutiny at present considering that there was an unknown level of impact.

RESOLVED; That;

- **Officers provide a the Resources Scrutiny Commission with a report setting out additional details about the implication of the Scheme in circa 3 months (timing to be aligned with Council Tax Base report); and**
- **that OSMB make a referral to Cabinet indicating support of the Scheme, but noting that additional financial details would have been off assistance.**

9. Finance Working Group – update

The Board was advised that;

- the Finance Working Group had met three times to date and focused on the financial impact of Covid-19.
- The financial impact of Covid-19 was evident in both immediate expenditure and income losses. The cash flow impact would be seen in the current financial year, while future losses would continue beyond.
- A recent government announcement of an additional grant to assist with Covid-19 expenditure was welcomed. It was emphasised that papers could not have been made available more quickly due to frequent and recent changes.
- The total budget impact (of both expenditure and loss of income) was estimated at around £68million. Current projections indicated that central government would cover £55million, creating a £12million shortfall. This shortfall was being addressed through a number of sources, but was projected to balance. It was emphasised that these figures were provisional.

Issues that required either further input from central government or were continuing concerns included;

- The planned support from central government for up to 3 years; more than three years of support was thought to be required for continued financial planning..
- Commercial income
- The methodology for grant allocation which has not yet been established
- HRA
- Business rates
- As previously discussed, a potential increase in caseload for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The furlough scheme was queried, with a question around which staff were included and when. This was thought to be around 300-400, but specific details could be provided.

It was noted that this information related to the Covid-19 financial impact only. Additional pressures were also applicable in the current financial year, particularly around Adult Social Care. There was a delineation between the two areas to ensure that appropriate claims for funding are made.

It was agreed that a full report to Cabinet will not be necessary.

Members asked that particular thanks be given to the Officers supporting the Finance Working Groups who provided a significant amount of high quality work at short notice in a changing environment.

RESOLVED; that the Finance Working Group recommendations be shared with the Cabinet which would include OSMB's thanks to officers for their support.

10. Cabinet 14th July

No further discussion of this item was required.

11. Mayor's Forward Plan – Standing item

The MFP was published on Monday 6th July.

It was identified that four items were due for a decision in April 2021 which would fall in the pre-election period and officers were asked to confirm whether these dates would be amended

RESOLVED; that the updated Forward Plan be noted.

12. WECA Overview and Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan - Information only

The WECA forward plan was noted for information.

13. Covid-19 update – Information only

The Covid-19 update was noted for information.

14. Corporate Risk Report – Information only

Members identified that the Corporate Risk and Performance reports were e useful documents and in future meetings the opportunity to discuss these would be welcomed..

RESOLVED; that the update be noted

15. Performance Q4 Report – Information only

The Performance Q4 Report was noted for information.