

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee



15 July 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 Ripington and Ani Stafford-Townsend

12 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

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

13 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

None.

14 Declarations of Interest

It was noted that there were no declarations of interest.

15 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Committee **RESOLVED:**

To confirm the minutes of the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee held on 17 June 2024 as a correct record, to be signed by the Chair.



16 Chair's Announcements

None.

17 Public Forum

It was noted that no public forum items had been received for this meeting.

18 Quarterly Performance Report (Quarter 4, 2023/24)

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 7) that provided an update on the Business Plan theme summary reports and outcomes from the thematic performance clinics for Quarter 4, 2023/24 and highlighted areas of additional performance improvement support.

The Chair commented that there were no decisions to be taken on this report, which was for the Committee's information.

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

1. Re: BPPM120 Road Safety - reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic incidents:
 - It was noted that the number of incidents had increased and that discussion with the lead officer indicated that incidents involving e-scooter use was the cause of this trend. The introduction of e-bikes, which were a safer mode of transport, might address this in time but it was too early to tell.
 - It was noted that the number of incidents related to e-scooters was likely to be higher than recorded; whilst data was received from police reports, there was not currently a mechanism in place to pick up data from relevant hospital cases. Further work would be required to look into the detail of this.
 - Whilst noting the above concerns, it was noted that over time, active travel measures also brought broader public health benefits.
 - In response to a question, officers undertook to check whether or not the use of e-cycles was permitted on the Bristol and Bath Railway Path.

2. Re: BPPM378 - Reduce number of council house repairs still outstanding outside of target completion time:
 - It was noted that there were concerning issues in relation to data quality. In response, dedicated resources were being allocated to a detailed review of the repairs backlog.
 - It was noted that the latest backlog figure was approx. 11,000 (i.e. the latest figure, further to the position of 15,993 response repairs outside of the target completion timescale at the end of quarter 4).
 - The delivery of the data review and implementation of improved processes to manage repairs data would be monitored through an improvement programme and enhanced performance management



processes currently being implemented. A wider, detailed external review of the repairs and maintenance service would also be undertaken by the end of September. It was anticipated that the review would confirm that a large proportion of outstanding repairs had been completed but not closed down correctly, or were duplicates, and that a proportion of jobs had been completed on new or more recent orders.

- In terms of context, it was noted that approx. 75,000 response repairs were carried out annually.

3. It was noted that the Corporate Risk report (also to be discussed at this meeting) continued to highlight a critical risk around children placed in unregistered provision, which was unlawful, but this issue was not referred to in the performance report. In response to this point, it was noted that this indicator was not specifically included within the Business Plan metrics. The seriousness of the issue was though recognised through the Corporate Risk Register and was the subject of a report to be submitted to the Audit Committee on 22 July.

4. A query was raised about the degree of correlation between the number of young people aged 16-17 who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training) and the number of similarly aged young people with special educational needs. It was noted that data analysis would need to be undertaken to investigate this point.

The Committee **RESOLVED:**

- To note the theme summary reports and overall performance progress, and the measures to address performance issues to be implemented by the relevant council services.

19 Quarter 1, 2024/25 Corporate Risk Report

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 8) that provided an update on current significant strategic risks to achieving the Council's objectives as set in the Corporate Strategy 2022-2027 and summarised progress in managing the risks and actions being taken as at Quarter 1 of 2024-25.

The Chair commented that there were no decisions to be taken on this report, which was for the Committee's information.

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

1. In response to a question in relation to CRR13 (Possible financial framework and Medium Term Financial Plan failure), the Director: Finance confirmed that work was taking place to identify actions to mitigate the net forecast revenue overspend at Quarter 1/Period 2 of £12.5 million (2.3% of the original approved budget) although it was possible that the position could deteriorate further. The Period 3 report would be brought to the next meeting.

2. In response to a question about CRR7 (Potential cyber security Issues), which carried an ongoing risk score of 20, it was noted that whilst it would never be possible to completely eliminate the threat of a



potential cyber-attack, a range of actions implemented through the Council's digital transformation programme, system modernisation and improved working practices had helped to increase the Council's resilience to cyber-attacks. Further work was planned in terms of assessing and addressing supplier risk in this regard.

The Committee **RESOLVED:**

- To note the report.

20 Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 9) that provided an update on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, together with illustrative options of scheme costs, and requested the Committee to agree an approach in relation to Bristol's 2025/26 Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The Chair commented that depending on the approach decided on by the Committee, this matter could ultimately result in a key decision being required.

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

1. The Chief Executive commented that whilst recognising that the Council had to date prioritised the shielding of the city's low-income households from the burden of making a council tax contribution, Bristol had now become quite a significant outlier in terms of its approach to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. Comparable councils had found that due to resource constraints/affordability considerations, reform of the scheme had become necessary. In terms of Bristol's approach, reform of the scheme seemed inevitable given the financial situation and constraints faced by the Council, though the timing and manner of change to the scheme were a matter for this committee's consideration; in developing a revised scheme, the principles of equity and fairness which had been at the forefront of the approach so far would need to be taken into account.
2. In response to a question, it was noted that if a new approach was adopted that required, for example, minimum council tax contributions from all working age households, it was inevitable that, having exhausted relevant collection procedures, a small degree of contributions would not ultimately prove to be collectable.
3. It was noted that last year, following consultation, the Council had decided not to change the scheme. In response to a question, it was confirmed that the key change in circumstances since that previous decision was that the overall financial position of the Council had deteriorated.

The Chair then moved the recommendations as set out in the report.



Cllr Gooch seconded this motion.

Cllr Mack then moved the following amendment:

Amend recommendation 2 to read as follows:

'To agree the following approach:

In the context of the council's challenging financial position, the committee:

- a. Welcomes the new Government's commitment to addressing inequalities;*
- b. Instructs the Leader of the Council to make representations to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government requesting that the new Government reaffirms that welfare support to low income households is the responsibility of national Government and should not be subject to a postcode lottery; and that therefore it urgently reviews the current arrangements for council tax reduction with a view to reinstating the national council tax benefit system;*
- c. Continues to fund the existing council tax reduction scheme at its current level for one more year in 2025/26 but recognises that without a change in national policy, the current scheme is unlikely to be feasible from that time;*
- d. Recognises that the impact of this decision will require steeper reductions in service levels in 2025/26 as a consequence of protecting Bristol's uniquely high level of council tax reduction scheme for a further year with the attendant risk of insolvency and Government intervention as a consequence;*
- e. Requests officers to bring forward to this committee a detailed account of existing and pipeline plans to modernise the council, reduce costs and rationalise its service offer to reflect the community's priorities within the cash limits of the Medium Term Financial Plan.'*

Cllr Malik seconded this amendment.

Following discussion, Cllr Renhard suggested that the amendment be revised as follows:

- Adjust c. (as above) to read: 'Continues to fund the existing council tax reduction scheme at its current level for one more year in 2025/26;'
- Delete d. (as above).

Cllr Mack indicated she was prepared to accept the above revisions to her amendment.

It was noted that the full text of the amendment to be voted on was therefore as follows:

Amend recommendation 2 to read as follows:

'To agree the following approach:

In the context of the council's challenging financial position, the committee:

- a) Welcomes the new Government's commitment to addressing inequalities;*
- b) Instructs the Leader of the Council to make representations to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government requesting that the new Government reaffirms that welfare support to low income households is the responsibility of national Government and should not be subject to a*



postcode lottery; and that therefore it urgently reviews the current arrangements for council tax reduction with a view to reinstating the national council tax benefit system;

c) Continues to fund the existing council tax reduction scheme at its current level for one more year in 2025/26;

d) Requests officers to bring forward to this committee a detailed account of existing and pipeline plans to modernise the council, reduce costs and rationalise its service offer to reflect the community's priorities within the cash limits of the Medium Term Financial Plan.'

On being put to the vote, this amendment was CARRIED (unanimously).

The Committee then voted on the substantive report recommendations including the above, approved amendment.

The Committee **RESOLVED** (unanimously):

1. To note the report and its financial implications.

2. To agree the following approach:

In the context of the council's challenging financial position, the committee:

a) Welcomes the new Government's commitment to addressing inequalities;

b) Instructs the Leader of the Council to make representations to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government requesting that the new Government reaffirms that welfare support to low income households is the responsibility of national Government and should not be subject to a postcode lottery; and that therefore it urgently reviews the current arrangements for council tax reduction with a view to reinstating the national council tax benefit system;

c) Continues to fund the existing council tax reduction scheme at its current level for one more year in 2025/26;

d) Requests officers to bring forward to this committee a detailed account of existing and pipeline plans to modernise the council, reduce costs and rationalise its service offer to reflect the community's priorities within the cash limits of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

21 Bristol Temple Quarter acquisitions

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 10) that sought approval of:

1. Putting an Option Agreement in place of Redcliffe Way in favour of the Bristol Temple Quarter LLP.
2. Arrangements for the acquisition of the Lower Station Approach site from Railpen.
3. An arrangement to acquire leaseholder interest within Temple Quarter where Bristol City Council hold the reversionary freehold.



The Chair commented that this was a key decision report, as the proposed decision involved spend of more than £500k.

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

1. In response to questions, it was noted that the Redcliffe Way site had previously been a pipeline development site for Goram Homes; that scheme had not progressed as it had not been possible to secure a private sector development partner. It was confirmed that Goram had been compensated financially for time and costs incurred. The work undertaken through that process would be taken into account in progressing the current proposals; officers agreed to check whether the previous advisory group arrangements would remain in place.
2. In response to a question, it was confirmed that liaison would take place with Redcliffe nursery school about their potential relocation into Temple Quarter and associated requirements.
3. In response to questions, it was noted that as part of the detailed masterplanning to be taken forward through the LLP, consideration would be given to a range of factors, including the need for more family-sized social housing in the city centre area. The final draft of the strategy around affordable housing within Temple Quarter would be shared with members, once finalised in conjunction with Homes England and the LLP.
4. Reference was made to:
 - the motion approved at the 12 March Full Council calling (under the committee system) for exploration of the allocation of future Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy raised in regeneration areas towards the capital costs of establishing new childcare centres and/or nursery schools.
 - the importance of actively pursuing green space opportunities in new developments in line with the aspirations of the new Parks and Green Space Strategy.It was noted that these considerations would also be factored into the masterplanning process.
5. It was noted that arrangements would be made for wider briefing(s) of council members on the next steps for the programme.

The Chair then moved the recommendations set out in the report.

Councillor Gooch seconded this motion.

The Committee **RESOLVED** (unanimously):

To authorise the Executive Director: Growth and Regeneration, in consultation with the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee, Section 151 officer and Director of Legal Services to take all steps required:



- 1. To seek and enter into agreement with Homes England to either defer or transfer the repayment obligation under the provision of the Hengrove Park Phase 1 Infrastructure Grant Funding Agreement dated 23 February 2010 to the BTQ LLP.**
- 2. Subject to reaching agreement with Homes England to defer or transfer the repayment liability, to utilise allocated clawback provision to acquire Lower Station Approach including entering into any necessary legal agreements.**
- 3. To agree the terms for, and thereafter conclude, and enter into, an option agreement with the Bristol Temple Quarter LLP subject to satisfaction of the best consideration test being met under section 123(1) Local Government Act 1972.**
- 4. To agree the terms for, and thereafter conclude, and enter into, option agreements (and associated documentation) with the BTQLLP for Redcliffe Way (as identified at Appendix A1) subject to satisfaction of the best consideration test being met under section 123(1) Local Government Act 1972**
- 5. To reach and enter into agreement to acquire leaseholder interests within Temple Quarter where Bristol City Council hold the reversionary freehold, subject to the costs being met by either Homes England, Combined Authority, Bristol Temple Quarter LLP or its appointed development partner.**

22 Quarter 1, Period 2 Finance Outturn Report 2024/25

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 11) that presented information and analysis on the Council's financial performance against the approved 2024/25 budget and the forecast use of resources for the financial year 2024/25. The report also updated the committee on the delivery of planned savings for the financial year 2024/25 and identified required finance key decision approvals or financial adjustments that were required in relation to the Council's approved budget.

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

1. The Chair stressed the seriousness of the financial challenges faced by the Council, as detailed in the report.
2. In terms of investment through the capital programme, it was suggested that, where possible, flexibility should be retained to bring forward opportunities in relation to housing scheme investment options that would help the Council reduce the use of temporary accommodation. It was suggested the approach being taken to housing investment in Islington could be examined and potentially explored.



3. It was noted that work was continuing to improve the Council's performance in managing and improving delivery against the capital programme, which remained an ambitious programme.

4. In relation to savings, it was noted that the overall savings plan target for 2024/25 was £46.8 million. Of these savings, £32.6 million (70%) were currently forecast to be delivered with £14.2 million (30%) at risk of non-delivery in-year as planned. All the policy committees were receiving bespoke finance outturn update reports (in parallel to the financial reporting to the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee) and had an important, ongoing role in the financial management of service areas within their respective areas of responsibility.

5. It was noted that the budget process was being brought forward this year, as per the timeline agreed at the Committee's previous meeting.

The Chair then moved the recommendations set out in the report, noting that firstly there were 13 recommendations for noting, followed by 5 recommendations for approval.

Councillor Gooch seconded this motion.

The Committee **RESOLVED**:

To note:

- 1. The council's General Fund forecast outturn revenue overspend of £12.5 million against the council approved budget at Q1/P2 2024/25.**
- 2. The Q1/P2 2024/25 technical virements (Appendix A1a, Tables 3a-3d).**
- 3. The performance on delivery of savings (Appendix A1a, section 4, Table 4a-4b).**
- 4. The additional weighted net risk of £16.6m per the risks and opportunities register (Appendix A1a, section 5, Table 5a-5b)**
- 5. The council's outturn position of £3.6 million overspend within the Housing Revenue Account to be transferred to the HRA general reserve (Appendix A1a, section 6.4)**
- 6. The council's outturn position of a net £24.1 million overspend in the Dedicated Schools Grant and, following the application of the DfE's 24/25 Safety Valve combined with contribution from the General Fund (totalling £15.9m), that a total £45.4 million is to be carried forward in the DSG deficit reserve (Appendix A1a, section 6.5).**
- 7. The breakeven position on Public Health services (Appendix A1a, section 6.6).**
- 8. The council's forecast underspend of £149.6 million against the Capital Programme revised budget 2024/25, comprised of £15.0 million underspend on the General Fund and £134.6 million underspend on the HRA. (Appendix A1b, appendix A9 and appendix 19).**
- 9. The planned flexible use of £12.0 million capital receipts in support funding of the Transformation Programme. (Appendix A1b).**
- 10. The planned use of £2.4 million Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) to support the expansion of South Bristol Cemetery. (Appendix A1b).**



11. The in-year collection levels for Council Tax and Business Rates as set out in the report (Appendix A1a, section 7).
12. The level of aged debt as at 31 May 2024 (Appendix A1a, section 7).
13. The 1 April 2024 opening balances on the General Fund and Earmarked Reserves and movements to Q1/P2 close (see section 10 in Appendix A1a, section 9).

To approve (unanimously):

1. Revisions at Q1/P2 to the approved Capital Budget to incorporate the reprofiling of £3.5m budget movements following the approval of Cabinet and officer executive decisions and the re-profiling of £2.7m prior year unspent budget carry forward.
2. Further revisions to the Capital Budget prior to P3 to reflect the forecast £149.6m underspend and its reprofiling into future years.
3. The release of £8.0 million corporate inflation budget as approved in the 2024/25 budget but not initially allocated to directorates' cash limits (Appendix A1a, section 3).
4. The forecast release of £15.2 million corporate funds (£4.6m inflation budget and £10.6m optimism bias/savings contingency) to mitigate in part the £28.7 million forecast overspend at service level.
5. The creation of 3 new reserves to account for Early years wraparound childcare, Early years delivery support for early years expansion and Schools in financial difficulty.

Meeting ended at 4.00 pm

CHAIR _____

