

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CO-ORDINATING O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

1000 hours on Friday 10th January 2020, Committee Rooms 3 & 4

Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Carl Rice (Chair)

Councillors Deirdre Alden, Albert Bore, Debbie Clancy, Liz Clements, Roger Harmer, Ewan Mackey, Rob Pocock and Kath Scott.

Also Present:

Cllr Tristan Chatfield, Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources

Joanne Knight, Assistant Director Finance

Michael Furness, Head of City Finance

Emma Williamson, Head of Scrutiny Services

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised that, due to technical difficulties, this meeting would not be webcast; however members of the press/public may still record and take photographs except where there were confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for lateness were received from Cllr Clements.

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

4. ACTION NOTES

(See document No 1)

RESOLVED:

The action notes from the meeting held on 8th November 2019 were agreed.

5. BUDGET CONSULTATION

(See document No 2)

Cllr Rice introduced the item by saying that the item had been deferred from December due to the general election, but the Committee had not lost its chance to comments even though consultation period ended.

Cllr Chatfield told members that uncertainty around national government had caused difficulties as the financial settlement was yet to be confirmed. This would be brought to Cabinet in February.

The headlines from the consultation were:

- The increase in council tax including the social care precept;
- The fact that the level of savings required was considerably lower than previous years;
- However, the financial challenge remains live.

Members then asked a number of questions including:

- How will the council ensure that the long term strategic aims of the council are not undermined by individual decisions in directorates? The Cabinet Member confirmed that whilst that is a risk, there is a robust internal challenge via the budget process; and each Directorate has a Finance officer working closely with them;
- He also noted that there was work on-going to unpick the many council recharges in place, which was inefficient in terms of moving money around the organisation;
- How will extra money included in the settlement be used – to mitigate savings or to invest? Officers responded that it would be a mixture of both, with the budget being considered as a whole;
- It was noted that whilst money had come in in 2020/21, there would be less money available in 2021/22. With regards to some longer term issues, such as regarding the Children's Trust, there are indications of problems in future years. With regards to the Children's Trust, the Cabinet Member responded that the pressures for this year are being met, and a transformation process will yield savings in 2021/22. He also noted that the Government is looking at social care – children's and adults' – and so those proposals will be considered;
- The need for bigger family homes was noted, as was the fact that these would generate more council tax;
- There was also concern expressed that radio adverts before Christmas told listeners that there would be no parking available in the city centre; whilst this was clearly done to encourage use of public transport, it may have put off some people from coming into the city centre;
- In answer to a question about growing the council tax and business rates base, the Cabinet Member said that there had been considerable progress made in the provision of grade A office space;
- All Travel Assist budgets are going above projected assessments, and in Birmingham there are particular circumstances because many special schools

were located outside the city in leafy suburbs. That legacy means an above average cost for transport. That money would be better spent on education. Members asked if we have a capital budget to invest in some of these issues to save money in the long term? The Cabinet Member agreed that it is not in the organisation or children's interest to have to travel many miles to school. He pointed to a recent Cabinet decision to move a special school back into the city from Redditch. That budget was in recognition of that issue and was funded from the capital programme.

- With regards to engaging the public, it was reported that there had been 400 direct responses and 109 social media posts with over 7.5m people reached. The roadshow was praised as a good model, though it was acknowledged that the general election had not helped with engagement. However, some members criticised the document for being inaccessible.
- With regards to engaging with citizens throughout the year, the Cabinet Member pointed to some good work including activities on the high street about how resources are allocated.
- The Cabinet Member was asked about the streamlining of school governor support and safeguarding changes, and how these would impact on the priority outcome with regards to children. He responded that officers had given assurances that these are achievable, and he will look at the wording in terms of ensuring the priorities are properly reflected rather than just the financial impact.
- One area of proposed change is in relation to charging Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) for council services, but the impact on BIDs could be great, and may risk some not being renewed. These are one of the few examples of local management. The Cabinet Member undertook to consider the difference between larger city centre BIDs and local BIDs.
- There was a plea to "ramp up" localisation and that the budget process should reflect this;
- The message that austerity is now "baked in" should be made clearer, and that the Council is faced with doing less with less. The local government sector should collectively lobby for more appropriate levels of resources.
- Concerns were raised about reserves and the impact in particular of overspends on the Commonwealth Games (CWG). The Cabinet Member assured members that currently the CWG was within budget overall.
- The money owed in relation to the Highways PFI should be recovered;
- Cllr Chatfield agreed to provide a briefing note on the finance officers responsible for each service area;
- The Cabinet Member was asked to consider other ways to generate money and he agreed to take that away;
- When reductions in external grant funding are made, are those organisations, for example in the arts, are they given sufficient notice to plan for that? The Cabinet Member responded that that should happen and would like to hear if it had not.
- Concern was raised that there was little evidence of cross directorate working with regards to the Neighbourhood Network scheme and the

localisation of the SEND offer which is resulting in a lot of duplication. The Cabinet Member suggested that scrutiny take a look at that.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and comments fed back as part of the consultation process.

6. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document No. 5)

RESOLVED:

The work programme was noted.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be 7 February 2020.

8. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL-IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)

None. Members raised concerns that they had not been able to request a call-in on the Emergency Report published on 31 December. The matter is to be considered at the next meeting of the Resources O&S Committee.

9. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

10. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

RESOLVED:

In an urgent situation between meetings, the Chairman jointly with the relevant Chief Officer has authority to act on behalf of the Committee

The meeting ended at 1120 hours.