

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

NEIGHBOURHOODS O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

1400 hours on Wednesday, 6 September 2023, Committee Room 6, Council House

Minutes

Present:

Councillor Shabrana Hussain (Chair)

Councillors: Deirdre Alden, Marcus Bernasconi, Kerry Brewer, Marje Bridle and Ray Goodwin

Also Present:

Jayne Bowles, Scrutiny Officer

Sarah Fradgley, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

Wendy Griffiths, Assistant Director, Customer Services and Business Support

Chris Jordan, Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods (Online)

Richard Lloyd-Bithell, Assistant Director, Financial Strategy (Online)

Mohammed Sajid, Interim Head of Financial Strategy

Christian Scade, Head of Scrutiny and Committee Services

Amelia Wiltshire, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised that this meeting will be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Public-I microsite and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received on behalf of Cllr. Izzy Knowles.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded they must declare all relevant pecuniary and other registerable interests arising from any business to be discussed at this meeting, and none were declared.

4. MINUTES

(See document No. 1)

Amelia Wiltshire provided a point of clarification on the Minutes of the 5 July 2023 meeting regarding the references by Darren Share to two outstanding recommendations from the Fly-tipping Inquiry. It was confirmed that the inquiry had been closed last year and what had been agreed was for information to be provided in relation to two of the recommendations and to give the Committee scope to request additional information.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the committee meeting held on 5 July 2023 were agreed.

5. ACTION TRACKER

(See document No. 2)

The following points were raised on actions from the 5 July 2023 meeting:

Fly-tipping Enforcement – it was confirmed the key points from the discussion have been made into recommendations which have been shared with the Committee and they will be incorporated into the relevant agenda item in October.

The action in relation to whether the ward information is, or if not, whether it can be shared with the City Observatory will also be picked up by Darren Share as part of his October report.

Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (BSCP) – the list of local managers for the six locations had not been received and Cllr Bridle requested that this be chased.

RESOLVED:

That the action tracker was noted.

6. SCRUTINY CONTRIBUTION TO THE BUDGET SAVINGS AND RECOVERY PLAN

(See document No. 3)

Mohammed Sajid, Interim Head of Financial Strategy, and Wendy Griffiths, Assistant Director, Customer Services and Business Support, were in attendance for this item. Chris Jordan, Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods, and Richard Lloyd-Bithell, Assistant Director, Financial Strategy, were in attendance online.

The Chair informed the Committee that given the announcement that the Chief Finance Officer had issued a Section 114 notice, it was important that the Committee understood this before discussing the report provided in the agenda pack.

At this point, the Chair invited Richard Lloyd-Bithell to share more information on this with Members and the following key points were made:

- Fiona Greenway as the Council's S151 Officer had issued the Section 114 notice under the Local Government Finance Act 1988.
- The notice had been issued for a number of different factors and the statement made at Cabinet on 5 July was reiterated.
- The reports deferred at that Cabinet meeting will be considered by the Spend Control Panel this week.
- This changes the governance and approval arrangements of the Council, with any delegations now superseded by the Section 114 notice.
- A new manual and framework will be published today on the Council's website. Spending Control Panels will still be in place in consultation with relevant Cabinet portfolio holders.
- Proposals will go to a newly formed S151 Board, chaired by Fiona Greenway, for final ultimate approval of any new spend falling outside of categories of statutory spend.
- Contractual payments will continue to be made, for example payroll and payments for goods and services received.
- Over the next 20 days there will be an extraordinary council meeting held to consider a report from the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service on the budget recovery plan and roadmap to move the Council away from the current financial risk situation and out of Section 114 territory.
- Overview and Scrutiny Committees will provide a valuable contribution in this process in terms of continuing to look at savings and reference was made to the information included in the agenda pack.

Chris Jordan made the following points on the City Operations savings:

- The in-year savings associated with the City Operations Directorate in Appendix 3 of the report are broadly split into two categories – those that sit with City Operations and those that sit with Customer Services.

- With regard to the limited amount of in-year savings within City Operations, the first is an ongoing piece of work around superloos which has been in the savings profile for a number of years and is on track.
- There is a sizeable saving associated with staff vacancies. This is being monitored and is reported as Amber, which is largely down to needing greater clarity on monitoring processes. The Directorate is holding a large number of vacancies but to get an accurate assessment they will need to look at the Period 6 monitoring figures when they come through.
- Fees and Charges - £1.5m in terms of increased income generation – the fees and charges have been increased but, again, they will need to look at the Period 6 figures to assess how close they are to achieving that uplift in income.

Wendy Griffiths made the following points on the Customer Services savings:

- The Customer Services programme is driving up customer standards across the Council. A number of these sit with City Operations – Pest Control, Markets, Bereavement Services and Garden Waste.
- These are flagged Red because some of the technological solutions needed have taken longer than anticipated and they are awaiting information on what the costs will be. An example of this is the automated process for garden waste.
- With regard to Bereavement Services, more scrutiny is needed around numbers.
- There are a number of cross-cutting programmes, for example automation and workforce savings, and they will work with City Operations and Finance business partners on due diligence around those numbers.
- They are working with directorates to see whether there is an opportunity to achieve savings and, if not, they will have to go back to Corporate Finance colleagues in terms of deliverability of those numbers.

During the discussion, and in response to Members' questions, the following were among the main points raised:

- The Chair asked what systems are in place to programme and monitor the changes required to achieve savings, and what happens if Amber savings turn to Red.
- The Committee was told that the Amber saving refers largely to employee turnover and income generation and there will be a need to see how the figures flow through. If the 3% turnover figure was accurate, the expectation would be for that to be achieved, but they do not yet have the monitoring information to confirm that. That saving is within the control of managers as and when vacancies arise.
- Fees and Charges is less certain as it links to the usage of facilities, so whilst prices can be increased by 5%, there needs to be an understanding of whether

that affects the number of users. Again, they will need to wait for the monitoring information.

- With regard to the Customer Services savings, there is a robust governance process in place corporately to provide assurance around the work being done and how risks can potentially be mitigated.
- Concerns were raised in relation to the potential for savings on garden waste by auto renewal, with Councillors knowing from experience from casework that full or partial refunds are being given for missed collections.
- Members were told the level of missed collections would need to be discussed with Darren Share to understand the rebate level and ascertain the scale of income being lost through that process. Chris Jordan confirmed he would be happy to pick that up to understand more about the service failure.
- Wendy Griffiths informed the Committee that there had been a positive reduction in the number of complaints received about missed collections, however there are still reports which are avoidable and complaints are followed up with the depots.
- It was stressed that good communication with residents was important, as they are more understanding if they know the reasons for missed collections.
- It was queried whether the redevelopment of the Lifford Lane depot would still be going ahead and Richard Lloyd-Bithell undertook to look into that and provide a response, pointing out that as part of the new arrangements, anything agreed without contractual commitment will be reviewed.
- It was suggested that when looking at budget savings, O&S needs to be asking a set of questions – where savings are coming from, why they are doing it, what has worked before and what does this mean for our communities.
- There was a discussion about the role of O&S moving forward and Christian Scade, Head of Scrutiny and Committee Services, told Members there had been a conversation with the Chief Executive, the S151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer and there will be future opportunities for O&S to make recommendations to achieve the savings required.
- There is work currently being done with the Chair of Co-ordinating O&S Committee to develop a flowchart, which will provide a clearer picture and a plan of how O&S can contribute and, at the Co-ordinating O&S Committee on 15 September 2023, feedback will be gathered from committees on the September round of meetings.

RESOLVED:

That:

- The report was noted.

- Responses would be provided to Members on the following points:
 - The level of missed garden waste collections and the scale of income being lost through the refund process.
 - The position on the redevelopment of the Lifford Lane depot and whether this would still be going ahead.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document No. 4)

The following matters were raised:

Youth Justice Plan - the Chair referred to the committee meeting held in August to consider the draft Youth Justice Plan and confirmed that the report would be going to City Council next week.

Fly-tipping Enforcement – Members to let scrutiny officers know if they have any further comments on the recommendations to be incorporated into the report for the October meeting.

Customer Services – Waste and Bereavement Services - this work had been commenced by the Co-ordinating O&S Committee in the last municipal year and has now been passed on to the relevant committees to take forward. There is a recommendation in the work programme report for this Committee to agree how it intends to follow up any further action required to ensure the improvements are implemented for Waste and Bereavement Services.

There was a discussion about reviewing the work programme in view of the fact that it was set before the S114 notice was issued. It was agreed that the agenda for the October meeting would be kept as it is at the moment and await feedback from City Council and Co-ordinating O&S Committee as it might be that O&S will be done differently and need to look at timelines and determine the best method of scrutiny.

The Chair was requested to keep members of the committee informed leading up to the October meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme was noted.

8. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted that the next formal meeting will be held on 4 October 2023 at 1400 hours in Committee Room 6.

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

None.

10. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

11. AUTHORITY TO CHAIR AND OFFICERS

RESOLVED:

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

The meeting ended at 14.54 hours.