

**BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL**  
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

Minutes of the Meeting held on 01 October 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Bartlett – Chairman

Cllr S Aitkenhead – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr J Beesley, Cllr L Dedman, Cllr C Goodall, Cllr S Mackrow,  
Cllr L Northover, Cllr K Salmon, Cllr T Trent, Cllr O Walters and  
Cllr G Wright (In place of Cllr P Broadhead)  
Presnet Cllr F Rice and Cllr C Weight  
Virtually:  
Also in Cllr M Cox  
attendance:

45. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr P Broadhead. Cllr F Rice and Cllr C Weight joined online.

46. Substitute Members

Cllr G Wright substituted for Cllr P Broadhead

47. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

48. Public Items

There were no public items on this occasion

49. Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Update

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Board was advised that the Council aimed to ensure that it continued to maintain a balanced 2025/26 budget forecast by considering the impact that changes to the previous assumptions would have on the underlying approved position and taking mitigating action where necessary. The report presented an update on the 22 May 2024 letter submitted by the Director of Finance to Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and Department for Education (DfE) outlining concerns regarding the impact the deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was having on the financial sustainability of the Council. Provides details of the council's r  
The report also provided details of the Council's responses to the government's consultation supporting the 30 October 2024 national Budget.

A number of issues were raised and responded to during the discussion on this item, including:

Voluntary redundancies - That these needed to be targeted to appropriate areas. It was noted that the last time this process had been used there were areas from which voluntary redundancies were not accepted. The payback period would also be considered to see if this should be extended. It was commented that there were often unintended consequences of voluntary redundancy leaving areas short staffed. It was hoped that the scheme would negate the need for compulsory redundancies but this would depend upon the outcome of the voluntary scheme

- Online reporting – It was suggested that Overview and Scrutiny should be involved with improvements to this and perhaps should look to a working group on this issue.
- Dedicated School Grant High Needs Budget – Report advised of the commissioning of a review but there were concerns on the effectiveness of this. The review was being undertaken by Chris West, Advisor to Department of Education. This took place during September and was now in a place where the report was being finalised and the report going back to the DfE. There was a need to receive advice from central government in order for advice to be given to Council on how a balance budget can be set for 2025/26.
- Impact of High Needs Budget – The Council budget was approximately £357m, the high needs budget government grant was £63.2m, the anticipated overspend was £28m. However, the updated overspend increased to £44.5m in the quarter one budget monitoring. Spending was approximately 77 percent more than the grant. In the first quarter of 2025/26 the budget would run out of headroom to cashflow the DSG deficit. Cash flowing the deficit costs approximately £5m per year. The budget for 2024/25 included £38 million of savings which could have been reduced if it wasn't for this need. The Portfolio Holder commented that the current scheme was unsustainable and needed a full review.
- Local MP Letter to government - Issues were raised regarding support from all local MPs for the letter drafted to government regarding the Impact of the High Needs Budget deficit. It was hoped that everyone could be onboard with the issues around this moving forward. Councillors would follow up on this issue.
- Carters Quay – The accumulated interest costs were questioned. There was not currently any further update on this site.
- Stakeholder representation letter to new government regarding the Council Tax Framework Reform. The Portfolio Holder advised that they preferred to have more flexibility around setting council tax in order not to make savage cuts to services. It was confirmed that it was preferred to have ultimate control over all the various Council Tax discounts including Single Person Discount.

The Board noted the report and recommendations to Cabinet.

50. Directorate Budget Presentations

The Scrutiny Specialist introduced this item and presentations, copies of which appear as Appendix 'B' and Appendix 'C' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. As there were a number of different Directorate areas which fell within the remit of the Board it considered three separate budget presentations, from the Resources Directorates, the Operations Directorate and one covering Community Service areas. Each of the presentations outlined the overall budget, the projected outturns and the pressures on services for the Medium-Term Financial Plan. Significant one-off pressures and potential savings and progress on these were also identified.

A number of challenges and opportunities were identified in terms of Budget setting. After considering each of the presentations the Board raised a number of issues, including:

- Residents card - Issues around this proposal were discussed but it was also welcomed as being a benefit for local council taxpayers.
- Review of non-statutory services within the Resources Directorate – it was noted that most of what was done within the directorate fulfilled statutory functions but there could be a challenge on the best use of resources and efficiencies for all services including statutory services. It was noted that it was more difficult to see which areas were non-statutory.
- IT solutions – The Board asked about whether there were any in-house solutions addressed through offers within the Microsoft package. If there were duplicate IT solutions. It was noted that the numbers for IT stood out in terms of expenses whilst it was not necessarily possible to achieve reductions in this area.
- Commercial Operations Overspend - It was noted that the overspend in was driven by parking services fees and charges and seasonal income not quite hitting expectations in the first quarter.
- Impact of strict cost controls – It was noted that this had achieved savings, but it was questioned whether this also had an impact on service delivery. The Board was advised that there was a need to ensure that the asset base was maintained in a suitable condition and didn't go past the point of degradation.
- Operations Statutory Services – It was noted that many of the service areas within the directorate were already operating at a statutory.
- Parking Charges – It was noted that the issue of income from parking was skewed by bad weather and a lack of expected income on parking charges increases. A resident's discount card may encourage more people to use parking and increase income. The overall parking picture was part of a current discussion with the Portfolio Holder and a new parking operations manager was also looking into this. Parking Charges Payments costs were higher than anticipated and it was noted that this needed to be a dialogue with the banks and credit card companies. It was observed that making money out of the parking charges for leisure centre use, e.g. charges at the Dolphin Centre could see a reduction in usage of leisure centres and people not renewing memberships. There was an acknowledgement of this issue, and it was being considered with

the Portfolio Holder. Others suggested that all car park users should pay the same regardless of purpose.

- Information on the PFI contracts – It was a complicated financial arrangement. Eventually the building would come into BCP ownership but at present there was a deficit in the reserve for the payments and more money was being put in to ensure that there was enough in that reserve to pay until the expiry of the PFI in about eight or nine years.
- RNLI situation – Some beaches only had lifeguards from 10am to 6pm. The Board raised issues around the costs for this and was assured that the Council was receiving good value for money in terms of the contract when considering some of the statistics on this from the summer. It was noted that there was ongoing contract negotiation.
- Transfer of Russell-Cotes – It was noted that this was still on track and was expected to be completed by 25 October. There was a parliamentary process to be gone through but no reason why this shouldn't proceed.
- Community Safety – There was support shown for the proposed funding grants for CCTV, particularly with concerns about growing issues in some areas of BCP. It was noted that CCTV was an important deterrent and there were discussions being had on this issue.
- Seasonal Pressures for Police Funding – It was noted that this wasn't included within the funding formula for the Police and this area was under huge pressure in peak season and this was something which should be addressed.

51. O&S Budget working group - scoping report

The Scrutiny Specialist presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'D' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The O&S Board was asked to confirm the establishment of a budget working group, including its membership and key lines of enquiry, to undertake detailed scrutiny work to contribute to the developing 2025/26 council budget during September – November 2024.

The Board considered a number of different topics to be addressed by the Budget working group. There were a number of topics outlined in the report which had been suggested by officers and the Board were also asked to provide their own suggestions. Suggestions included looking at the costs of agency staff and Locums, which had been an ongoing issue across the Council and was a realistic area in which savings could be made, Car Parking charges were also suggested at an area which the working group could make a contribution.

There was some discussion around creating a long list of suggestions which could then be considered further by the working group and narrowed down. It was noted that the working group had limited time available and if possible, it would be preferable to agree the overachieving themes for the working group at the meeting.

A number of Board members put themselves forward to take part in the working group and it was agreed that the lead member would be agreed by

the group. It was noted that the Lead Officer for the group would be determined by who was the responsible budget holder for the topic areas selected.

**RESOLVED that the topic areas selected for the working group were car parking and the residents' card.**

52. Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

The Scrutiny Specialist presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'E' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Board was advised that the report had been through all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees already and would be presented to Council on 15 October. The annual report of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer provided an overview of Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) activity within BCP Council. The report included a summary and analysis of O&S activity during 2023-24, reflections on working practices and an action plan identifying strategic improvements to the O&S function. The Board was asked to comment on the report and in particular the proposed changes to the remit of the Board

The Chair raised some concerns regarding the independence of the Overview and Scrutiny function, the lack of the parity of esteem with the executive and the value of the Board and the Scrutiny function within the Council.

The Board suggested that it would be useful to have greater clarity in how the functions of the Board align to the different service areas within the Council. The Scrutiny Specialist undertook to provide this information to the Board and thanked the Chair and Board members for sharing their views.

53. Work Plan

The Chairman presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'F' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The Chairman noted that the Local Transport Plan would need to be referred to the Environment and Place O&S Committee once the changes to the remit had been agreed. It was noted that the item on Complaints and the item on Council performance had not been fully scoped and therefore it was unlikely that these reports would be able to come to the October meeting.

The Chairman agreed to add an item to the actions from the meeting regarding online reporting. It was suggested that the first step for this would be to have a conversation with the relevant Director to determine how best to approach it.

**RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.**

The meeting ended at 9.07 pm

CHAIRMAN