

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY
SELECT COMMITTEE
09/02/2021 at 6.00 pm



Present: Councillor Ahmad (Chair)
Councillors Stretton, Salamat, Byrne, Haque, Harkness and Shuttleworth

Also in Attendance:

Councillor Chris Gloster	Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group and Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance and Green
Anne Ryans	Director of Finance
Mark Stenson	Head of Corporate Governance
Julia Veall	Director of Workforce and Organisational Design
Matt Drogan	Head of Strategy and Performance
David Shaw	Assistant Director - SEND
Mark Hardman	Constitutional Services
Kaidy McCann	Constitutional Services

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Phythian.

2 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business received.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions received.

5 **LIBERAL DEMOCRATS BUDGET AMENDMENT PROPOSALS 2021/22**

The Select Committee considered a report of the Head of Corporate Governance which outlined the Liberal Democrats' suggested amendments to the Administration's budget proposals for 2020/21. The report identified additional savings proposals totalling £1.109m in 2021/22 and £0.279m in 2022/23 which could be considered individually or collectively. There were also initial investments proposed that would be funded from the savings proposals and suggested amendments to the Capital Programme.

The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group and Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance and Green commended Officers for their assistance in compiling these budget proposals. As an overview, the aims of the Liberal Democrat proposals were in

addressing health, green issues, pavements, and the prosecution of anti-social behaviour and dog fouling, all issues that would feature most in Councillors' casework. Councillor Gloster then presented the proposals and addressed the enquiries of the Select Committee. The effect of Covid was acknowledged, and a hope expressed that light could now be seen at the end of the tunnel with a move to a 'new' normal. The Liberal Democrats did not underestimate the task and financial challenge facing the Council and that facing the Cabinet Member in presenting a budget, but it was believed that the submitted proposals were robust alternatives to enhance the life of residents across the Borough.

In respect of the Committee's considerations, it was determined that the budget reduction proposals be considered first as these would be required to fund any alternate investment proposals that the Committee might wish to recommend to the Cabinet.

Liberal Democrat Alternative Budget Reduction Proposals

OPP-BR1-201 - Additional Vacancy Management factor to achieve greater efficiency including limiting the present use of agency staff and consultants (£0.473m)

The proposal sought to assist in reducing the number of agency staff and consultants used across the Council further by applying an Additional Vacancy Management factor of 0.75% to all Council mainstream employee budgets.

In response to a query as to where the proposed figure had been drawn from, the Committee was advised that this figure had been considered achievable in discussions with the Head of Corporate Governance and Responsible Officers.

OPP-BR1-202 - Reduction in the amount of stationery purchased across the authority (£0.010m)

It was proposed that stationery be centralised in particular locations across the Borough to ensure better value for money through increased understanding of which items are required, volumes etc. It was also proposed this saving could temporarily increase due to the current home working, with a budget reduction of £0.010m for 2021/22, of which £0.005m could be built back into the budget for 2022/23 in the event staff returning to office working.

The location of centralised stores and who would be responsible for collecting stationery was queried. The Committee was advised that the advice from Officers was that this was achievable and as such, taken as correct.

OPP-BR1-203 - Reduce refreshments budget (£0.004m)

It was proposed to reduce the mainstream budget for refreshments by 10% for 2021/22, with a further 10% reduction in 2022/23, it being suggested that pre-Covid several meetings took place every day that incurred extra costs if refreshments were provided. The continuation of virtual meetings provided an opportunity for change.

It was acknowledged that things would change as a result of Covid but, in relation to this and other proposals, it was suggested that the use of some things might increase while others decreased, it being difficult to say.

OPP-BR1-204 – Council-wide review of income generation targets (£0.100m)

It was proposed that a full review of income targets across the Council be undertaken to identify other areas in addition to Section 38 and Section 278 inspections within the Highways service where income targets are overachieved. It was believed that this would reasonably generate around £0.200m but, given the far-reaching nature of the proposal, it was suggested that it be phased over two financial years with £0.100m identified for 2021/22 and a further £0.100m for 2022/23.

Comment was made that, from personal experience, the Council did not have a good history of setting income targets and it was suggested that a balanced budget reliant on income targets would be difficult to achieve.

OPP-BR1-205 - Reduce in mileage budgets to reflect change in work practices (£0.050m)

The proposal was to reduce mileage budgets due to the increased number of staff working from home and the increased use of Teams meetings reducing the need for use of a personal vehicle.

OPP-BR1-206 - Review of car allowances as previously promised to reduce the amount paid as a lump sum to staff doing zero or minimal mileage (£0.037m)

It was proposed that a review of the posts which attract essential car user status be undertaken with the intention of removing the lump sum payment from posts where users routinely record zero or very few miles. It was noted to the Committee that many staff who did use cars regularly did not hold such status. In presenting the proposal, it was further noted that proposal had been before the Committee several times previously, with the promised review failing to appear.

Members acknowledged the reported position with regard to the review of care allowances. The Director of Workforce and Organisational Design advised that a decision had been made to pause the review in March 2020 so as not to upset staff by negotiating a core term and condition while addressing the pandemic. The Committee was advised that this matter would be part of the consideration to reflect new ways of working.

OPP-BR1-207 – Reduction in the subsidisation of Trade Union facilities time (£0.035m)

It was proposed that the trade union subsidy provided by the Council be reduced following a consistent reduction in trade union membership as evidenced by decreasing numbers of staff opting to pay membership through payroll. The Liberal Democrats had reviewed subsidies provided to Trade Unions by

neighbouring Greater Manchester Councils and felt that the reduction proposed would bring Oldham Council's contributions more in line with other areas such as Tameside.



Members noted that the figure quoted for trade union membership relied on payroll data which did not account for those who paid by direct debit or other means, and that the Trade Unions worked with the employer, playing a positive role in, for example, helping get policies through. The Director of Workforce and Organisational Design confirmed that Council records did not show who is a member of a Trade Union; advised that the budget provided facilities time for three unions in a way that reflected their memberships and that the Trade Unions had been instrumental in the Covid response; and commented on the position across Greater Manchester generally. While acknowledging comment made regarding the measure used to determine trade union membership, Councillor Gloster noted the fall in numbers employed by the Council and the infrequency with which meetings of the Local Joint Consultative Committee had been held.

OPP-BR1-208 - Reduction in the General Training Budget (£0.150m)

It was proposed that a one-off reduction made in 2018/19 to the Council's general training budget be made permanent. There were now fewer staff, and more training should be delivered on-line and self-directed training encouraged.

The Chair commented that with new ways of working being developed, more training rather than less would be required.

OPP-BR1-209 - Reconsideration of Council priorities with regards to the Marketing and Communications Service (£0.250m)

The proposal considered there was further scope to reduce spend on this non-statutory service and proposed a redesign of the Communications and research team and the generation of £0.005m through the sale of advertising on the Council website.

The Chair queried whether this proposal would work, noting the many and sometimes varying messages that had needed to be circulated around Covid restrictions, injections etc, and suggested it could be counter-productive to change things at a time when communications were supportive of efforts.

OPP-BR1-210 – Reduction in the scale of the Capital Programme (no pro forma) (£0.133m in 2022/23)

It was proposed that those Capital Schemes funded through prudential borrowing which has a direct impact on revenue budgets should be reviewed, and only those considered a priority should go ahead, it being further considered that delaying just one of the 'Creating a Better Place' proposals by one year would result in a revenue saving of £0.133m in 2022/23. A Member noted that this proposal, as shown in the report, was not supported by a pro-forma.

In concluding the consideration of the Liberal Democrat Budget Reduction proposals, the Committee **RESOLVED** that none of the Budget Reduction proposals be recommended to the Cabinet for adoption.



The Chair noted that the Committee had not objected to the proposals and the Cabinet could be advised to bear these proposals in mind. The concerns about the review of mileage budgets were shared and the position with regard to this would be chased up.

Notwithstanding the decision not to support the budget reduction proposals, the Chair invited the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group to introduce the investment proposals to -

- provide a revenue fund to assist the Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) work up detailed business cases for the proposed new health centres in Shaw, Saddleworth and Chadderton (£0.750m);
- reverse the Administration's reduction in Parish Council Grant funding (£0.015m);
- create a dedicated fund to replace and maintain signage across the borough and other road safety measures (£0.100m);
- increase the investment in tackling environmental crime to combat issues such as fly tipping and dog fouling across the borough (£0.294m); and
- create a reserve fund to increase signage, education and implement light-touch policing around the introduction of 20 mile per hour zones for traffic ("20 is Plenty"), especially in front of Schools and other high-risk areas (£0.200m).

The Liberal Democrat budget proposals had also included the following alternative Capital Programme 2020/21 to 2024/25 measures –

- new health centres in Shaw, Saddleworth and Chadderton to tackle the increasing health deprivation within the borough - provision of £18.000m over the four financial years 2022/23-2025/26 with Shaw being identified as the priority, and that two additional healthcare centres in Saddleworth and Chadderton are developed to ensure consistency of health provision across the whole of Oldham;
- expedite the work around Green Energy and invest in solutions to address Climate change and to ensure carbon neutrality - additional capital of £6.500 million over the period 2021/22 to 2025/26; £0.500m in 2021/22 with £1.500m in each year thereafter up to 2025/26, be made available for this purpose, funding being made available for the priority areas of Create Greener Buildings and Greener Transport; and
- create a specific investment fund for the borough's footpaths and bring them up to standard - a specific investment fund of £2.500m for the period 2021/22 to 2025/26 be made available within the Capital

Programme, equating to £0.500m per financial year over this period.



The Chair thanked the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group and Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance and Green for his work in preparing the papers for consideration by the Committee.

In concluding the consideration of the alternative proposals, it was noted that the Committee was not in a position to give its support to the alternate investment proposals given its prior decision regarding the savings proposals.

RESOLVED that the Liberal Democrat Alternative Liberal Democrat Investment Proposals and Capital Programme proposals be noted.

6

COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT SEPTEMBER 2020

The Committee received a report presenting a review of Council performance as at September 2020.

The presentation of performance commenced with the provision of an 'Oldham Profile in Numbers' comprising basic data in respect of population, housing, education, crime, income and benefits, household information, health, and community in the Borough. Performance against each of the three corporate objectives of an inclusive economy, thriving communities and co-operative services was then reported, it being noted that 23 measures had achieved their target, two were within tolerance, and six were currently outside tolerance. The performance measures were considered in more detail within Appendices 1 and 2 to the submitted report.

The above performance report meant that 74% of measures were now on target and 79% of actions completed. Action Plans for each performance measure and the risks associated with those actions were considered at Appendices 3 and 4 respectively to the submitted report. It was noted that a number of measures were currently suspended due to the impact on reporting as a result of Covid, and these measures were listed within the submitted report. There were no proposed changes to performance measures or actions contained within this performance report. The report also provided performance data related to the HR function and Council finances.

The Committee was advised that, following feedback from this Committee, the suspended performance measures had been reviewed and 13 were being re-introduced. These measures were to be included in the Quarter 3/December 2020 performance report that would be available at the next meeting of the Committee. The Committee was further advised with regard to matters arising that would be included in the Quarter 3 report.

Members noted improved performance on Council Tax processing times and queried whether this would be maintained. The Director of Finance noted the measure related to Council Tax reduction claims performance and advised that it was expected this would be managed as effectively as the peak of pandemic passed. Members further noted the decline in reported sickness absence considering this a credit to the workforce in a year that had been most challenging. A 'red' rating for highways was noted and comment made that the Committee had recently received a positive report on highways. The point was acknowledged, but distinction was drawn between the measure and the service generally, between the primary and secondary road networks etc.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

7

UPDATE ON THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY (SEND) INSPECTION RE-VISIT

The Select Committee received an update on the progress made to date addressing the two remaining recommendations from the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) that had formed the priorities identified in the Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) being monitored by the Department for Education (DfE).

The Committee was reminded that the APP was developed to ensure that significant improvement continued to be made in relation to area 3 (Education, Health & Care (EHC) process and quality of plans) and area 5 (Achievement of children and young people with SEND, including the high rates of fixed term exclusion and persistent absenteeism), the two remaining areas requiring improvement identified following the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reinspection in September 2019

As a result of Covid which had seen the closure of all schools in England during the first national lockdown and the cancellation of national performance tables and national examinations for all Key Stages, the actions identified in area 5 had been updated and agreed with the DfE to reflect the significant challenges presented by this situation. Work to improve the achievement, attendance and reduce exclusions for children and young people with SEND, as identified in area 5, had continued, and a Graduated Response Toolkit that would assist schools and other settings to put in place effective special educational provision through a graduated response had been developed and made available. The Assistant Director was able to advise on positive outcomes from a formal monitoring review meeting with the DfE held on 14th January 2021.

Despite the challenges provided by the Covid, actions related to area 3 had proceeded at pace. Quality standards continued to be reviewed and raised through rigorous audit processes and a quality assurance workshop with the DfE advisor and representation from across the local partnership to review the quality of EHC plans confirmed this view.

Despite the third national lockdown starting in January 2021 with schools reducing their opening to vulnerable children and critical workers, attendance in Oldham schools had been above the national average for children with an EHC plan or supported by a social worker. A strong multi-agency approach to encouraging attendance and safeguarding Oldham children and young people has been introduced to discharge our statutory safeguarding duties alongside schools and other key partners.

Due to the disruption caused by Covid and the refocus towards greater system-wide improvement, the SEND strategy and development plan, including outcomes to be delivered by the end of 2021 updated and approved by the SEND Partnership Board to become operational in January 2021. The Committee received a paper showing the principles and priorities behind the SEND strategy and development plan.

Members welcomed the report and improvements, and expressed appreciation of the staff dealing with vulnerable children. The Assistant Director indicated that the improvement journey was not complete and undertook to report further to the Committee.

RESOLVED that

1. the SEND Local Partnership be commended for maintaining the significant ongoing improvements to quality and consistency of Education, Health and Care plans being delivered and quality assured through effective partnership work. In addition to the strong positive focus on attending schools and settings, despite the challenges presented by the Coronavirus situation;
2. update reports be submitted to the Committee in August 2021 on (i) the completion of the actions identified in area 3 and continuing progress made to improve attendance, reduce exclusions and raise achievement for children and young people with SEND; and (ii) on the SEND strategy and refinements made to deliver strong recovery for children and young people with SEND.

8

WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee gave consideration to the proposed Overview and Scrutiny Performance and Value for Money Select Committee Work Programme for 2020/21 which outlined those issues considered and which would be considered by the Committee during the municipal year.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Performance and Value for Money Select Committee Work Programme 2020/21 be noted.

9

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Performance and Value for Money Select Committee was scheduled to be held on Thursday, 11th March 2021 at 6.00 p.m.



The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.25 pm