

COUNCIL FORUM MEETING
Thursday 25th September 2014

PRESENT –*The Mayor Councillor A. Cottam (in the Chair), Councillors Akhtar H., Akhtar P., Ali, Bateson, Brookfield, Browne, Connor, Daley, Davies, Desai, Entwistle, Evans, Foster D., Foster K., Gee, Groves, Gunn, Hardman, Harling, Hollern, Hollings, Humphrys, Hussain F., Hussain I., Hussain S., Johnson, Kay, Khan M., Khonat H., Khonat S., Lee, Liddle, Mahmood, Maxfield, McFall, McKinlay, Mulla, Nuttall, O’Keeffe, Patel, Pearson, Rehman, Rigby C., Rigby J., Riley, Roberts, Shorrocks, Sidat, Slater Jacqueline, Slater John, Slater Julie, Smith D., Smith J., Surve, Talbot, Taylor, Whalley, Whittle and Wright.*

RESOLUTIONS

25 Notice Convening Meeting

The Chief Executive read out the notice convening the meeting.

26 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Casey, Jan-Virmani, Khan Z., and Walsh.

27 Declarations of Interest

Declarations of Interest were received as follows:-

Councillor Eileen Entwistle (Agenda Item 9 – Preparation for Revenue Budget 2015/16 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 – 2017/18) re Community Transport - Sister is a service user.

Councillor Ron Whittle – (Agenda Item 11.4 – Neighbourhoods Housing and Customer Service Portfolio Update) Re Twin Valley Homes employed by Housing Association in same Company Group as Twin Valley Homes, although no knowledge or involvement in this project.

28 Mayoral Communications

The Mayor, Councillor Alan Cottam, updated Members on a number of events that he had recently attended, which included his Civic Tour for visiting Mayors, showcasing the developments taking place in the Borough, the recent Heritage Weekend, a visit from an Indonesian Delegation and visits outside the Borough to a Remembrance event relating to the Duke of Lancaster Regiment in Warrington and a visit to Manchester for an event relating to Chinese Independence Day.

29 Council Forum

One question had been received under Procedure Rules 10 as follows:

Dear Chief Executive and Leader of the Council

The UN Human Rights Council released a report which studied Israeli settlements. One of the key recommendations was that companies must assess the human rights impact of their activities and take all necessary steps – including by terminating their business interests in the settlements – to ensure they are not adversely impacting the human rights of the Palestinian People in conformity with international law as well as the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

The report also called upon all Member States to take appropriate measures to ensure that business enterprises domiciled in their territory and/or under their jurisdiction, including those owned or controlled by them, that conduct activities in or related to the settlements respect human rights throughout their operations.

Given the above UN recommendation, we ask BwD use its power and platform that they have to make the difference they can and they themselves are comply with the recommendation.

We condemn our governments implicit and explicit support of the illegal atrocities committed by the Israeli state in its inhumane occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people. BwD should use all means available to it to ensure that Bwd condemns the illegal occupation and the inhumane treatment of the Palestinians by ensuring that it will not itself directly/indirectly or by association support Israeli illegality.

Should the council not be considering and passing a motion in line with the UN Human Rights Council recommendation ensuring that, as far as is practical, BwD does not employ or work with companies identified as facilitating Israel's military capacity, human rights abuses or illegal settlement activity, and to actively work to cut ties with those that do?

Any existing contracts with companies stated on the BDS website should be terminated and the councils procurement process should include the aforementioned UN recommendation.

We also respectfully ask the Bwd to refer to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions website (<http://www.bdsmovement.net>) which details the companies who have business interests which are directly or indirectly supporting the illegal Israeli settlements and occupation..

Please confirm receipt and ensure question is raised at the council forum meeting. .

Kind regards

*Asif Mahmud
Drive For Justice
Blackburn*

The Leader of the Council gave a response to the question and supplementary question arising.

30 Motions submitted under Procedure Rule 12

The Chief Executive advised that two Notices of Motion had been submitted under Procedure Rule 12.

MOTION 1

B w D Council condemns the totally disproportionate military action by the Israeli government in the recent conflict in Gaza. Whatever the provocation, there is no justification for the indiscriminate bombing of hospitals and schools and other places of refuge with the resulting high numbers of children among the casualties.

This Council condemns the recent blockade by the Israeli and Egyptian governments. Such actions should never be repeated to collectively punish an entire population. We ask that all blockades are lifted on Gaza without preconditions and to actively work towards a meaningful longer term peace which will allow the citizens of Gaza an opportunity to start to rebuild their lives and to live in a functioning state.

BwD Council calls on all the citizens of the Borough to support the humanitarian activities of the various aid organisations and to boycott produce from the illegal Israeli settlements in order to put pressure on the Israeli government to start to recognise world opinion as expressed by the many UN resolutions that have condemned the continuing illegal settlements.

*Proposed by Councillor Naushad Surve
Seconded by Councillor Phil Riley*

Following a debate, Councillor David Foster moved an amendment, which was seconded by Councillor Karimeh Foster:

“The Council asks that the Leader of the Council write to out two local MP’s urging them to vote in favour of the recognition of the State of Palestine in the House of Commons debate on October 13”.

This amendment was accepted by the Council and the substantive motion now read as follows:

B w D Council condemns the totally disproportionate military action by the Israeli government in the recent conflict in Gaza. Whatever the provocation, there is no justification for the indiscriminate bombing of hospitals and schools and other places of refuge with the resulting high numbers of children among the casualties.

This Council condemns the recent blockade by the Israeli and Egyptian governments. Such actions should never be repeated to collectively punish an entire population. We ask that all blockades are lifted on Gaza without preconditions and to actively work towards a meaningful longer term peace which will allow the citizens of Gaza an opportunity to start to rebuild their lives and to live in a functioning state.

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The Council asks that the Leader of the Council write to out two local MP's urging them to vote in favour of the recognition of the State of Palestine in the House of Commons debate on October 13".

There then followed a vote on the Substantive Motion which was carried.

RESOLVED – that the Motion be carried as amended.

MOTION 2

BwD Council strongly condemns the human rights abuses carried out by the barbaric organisation known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). We utterly condemn the crimes committed against innocent civilians by this organization which is using the veil of the religion of Islam as a pretext for inflicting terror, destruction and committing violations of human rights in pursuit of brutal military conquest. Their philosophy blatantly violates the fundamental principles of peace, tolerance, and unity which are advocated by Islam and, on behalf of all the citizens of the Borough, this Council joins the many countries, both Muslim and non-Muslim, throughout the civilised world that condemn and oppose their barbaric ideology.

This Borough's spirit of togetherness, tolerance and understanding will not allow such divisive, barbaric organisations to prevail. We call upon our residents to collectively further strengthen their resolve by promoting greater unity by loudly and proudly condemning such depraved and uncivilised behaviour.

Proposed by Councillor Mustafa Desai

Seconded by Councillor Mohammed Khan

Following debate there then followed a Vote on the Motion.

RESOLVED – That the Motion be carried.

31. Preparation for Revenue Budget 2015/16 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 – 2017/18.

A report was submitted which updated the Council on the forecast budget position for the three years 2015/16 - 2017/18 which recommended to Council a range of advance budget savings proposals for early implementation to enable Council to deliver a balanced budget for 2015/16 and make further savings in the following two years.

As reported previously, the Council had unprecedented severe reductions in funding each year since 2010. In developing its budget strategies to respond to and manage the reductions in funding for the years 2011-13 and 2013-15, the Council had taken early decisions each time, in January 2011 and again in January 2013, which had enabled it to agree balanced budgets each year at Finance Council and maintain a reasonable financial position as noted by the External Auditors.

At the same time, the Council had to respond to fundamental changes to the financial framework governing Local Authorities which the Government had introduced.

At Finance Council in March 2014, the MTFS indicated a range of future scenarios which had been updated to reflect the latest information available.

This showed a middle, rather than best or worst case, scenario of significant further savings required of £19M in 2015/16 rising to £31M by 2017/18.

Inevitably, having already had to implement large scale reductions since 2010, delivering additional savings of this scale, largely front-loaded into 2015/16 would be much harder and would need earlier decisions to maximise the savings potential in the first year of the strategy.

The report therefore set out the Labour Group's advance savings proposals for early implementation for 2015/16 and beyond, which will enable Council to finalise and agree the Revenue Budget and associated level of Council Tax for 2015/16 together with the MTFS and Capital Programme 2015-18 at Finance Council on 2nd March 2015.

The Budget Strategy being developed for the next 3 years reflected:

- The Local Government Finance Settlement
- Continuing Welfare, Education and NHS Reforms
- The potential impact of planned health and social care integration through the Better Care Fund
- Pay and price inflation
- Changes in specific grant funding

- Financial impact of legislative changes including the Care Bill
- Revenue consequences of capital investment
- Known corporate and portfolio budget pressures

Given the further financial challenges ahead, Executive Members and Officers had again reviewed all services and prepared options to deliver budget reductions over a 3 year period. Wherever possible Executive Members and officers strive to mitigate the impact on the residents of this borough.

The scale of these further budget reductions in 2015/16 and beyond combined with those already implemented since 2010, would inevitably lead to more significant reductions in the services provided to the residents of the Borough. Additional savings will also be identified over the coming months to enable Council to set a balanced budget in March 2015.

In terms of the impact on staff, given the difficult budget position, Members had been advised that the Chief Officer Employment Committee has already agreed a further reduction in Chief Officer (Senior Managers) numbers, merging two Director posts in to one post of Director of Finance and IT. This would facilitate re-organisation and restructure consistent with the proposals set out in this report and contribute to advance savings as set out within the portfolio proposals. As a consequence of these changes, Council was asked to agree the amendment to the Pay Policy to reflect this reduction in posts, and note that the updated Pay Policy would be available on the Council website.

It was unfortunate but inevitable that there would continue to be further job losses, including compulsory redundancies in the coming months and years. Therefore some staff would be formally at risk of redundancy whilst consultation was undertaken and options developed further.

As a consequence of the proposals and the potential number of redundancies likely, i.e. as a minimum in excess of 99, it would be necessary to report formally to the Secretary of State the likely redundancies as required by legislation following this meeting of the Council.

Open applications for ER/VR (early retirement and voluntary redundancy) would continue to be accepted and agreed where there was a financial saving to be made and all vacant posts would continue to be reviewed with a view to deleting wherever possible. In order to assist with the budget strategy, the earmarked reserve for these costs would need to be 'topped up' from general unallocated reserves and current estimates indicated a 'top up' of £1.5M in 2014/15.

The Capital Programme for 2015-18 would be recommended to Finance Council for approval in March 2015. Continued strategic capital investment was important for the long term future of the borough and although the programme was inevitably smaller than in previous years, the Council would continue to place an emphasis on regeneration and economic growth.

In terms of portfolio budget strategies and savings proposals, each Executive Member had considered a range of options for all services in the portfolio, reviewed statutory requirements and the need for all portfolios to deliver savings over the next 3 year period. Some statutory and/or high priority front line service areas had been protected and inevitably not all portfolios will be able to deliver the same level or proportion of savings.

A brief outline of the approach taken in each portfolio was provided in the report submitted and the list of advance savings proposals was attached at Appendix B.

The advance savings proposals presented to Council in the report amounted to c.£16M in 2015/16 rising to c.£26M by 2017/18 should all savings proposals be approved and implemented. This still left a shortfall of c.£3M in 2015/16 rising to c.£4M p.a. over the next 2 years and further options will be developed and reported to Finance Council in March 2015. This would include a review of Council Tax and Business Rates income and collection rates and potential savings contributions from the workforce as we have seen over the past 4 years through each member of staff agreeing to take 4 days leave without pay. Discussions were ongoing in respect of workforce savings once the current arrangements ends in March 2015.

In addition, the usual cycle of budget preparation would highlight any other financial pressures emerging which are not yet factored in to the MTFs for reporting through to Finance Council.

The Director of Finance recommended a minimum level of reserves of £5.9M which Finance Council approved for 2014/15. This would be reviewed over the coming months with recommendations to Finance Council in March 2015.

In addition, the Council also established an earmarked reserve specifically for application where there was a business case to do so - either when full year effect savings cannot be achieved or there is slippage on savings proposals in-year. It was proposed that £4M was transferred from general fund unallocated reserve to the earmarked reserve for part year effect and slippage to provide for the 2015-18 budget strategy and savings proposals. The application of this reserve would remain subject to business case approval.

As the minimum recommended general reserve was £5.9M this would leave true unallocated reserves of just £1.4M.

The proposed revenue budget strategy would continue to focus on delivering on the Council's priorities and would try to minimise the impact of spending cuts with the delivery of quality efficient and effective services to and for the citizens of this Borough, whilst ensuring the Council operated within the financial constraints imposed by central government.

RESOLVED –

1. Approve the proposals for advance budget savings for early implementation for the Revenue Budget 2015/16 and the two years beyond, 2016/17 and 2017/18, as outlined in this report and set out in Appendix B;
2. Note that as a consequence of these proposals, a number of staff will be put at risk of redundancy in a number of service areas in consultation with the relevant Trade Unions and that public consultation will be undertaken in other service areas where required to inform any final decisions;
3. Note that Executive Members will develop further savings options in the coming months for consideration by Council when setting the final balanced budget for 2015/16 in March 2015;
4. Agree a significant review of Adult Social Care services and the appointment of an efficiency partner to work with the department over the budget period as outlined in the report;
5. Approve the transfer of £5.5M from unallocated to earmarked reserves to facilitate delivery of the budget strategy as outlined in the report;
6. Agree the updated Pay Policy Statement prepared in accordance with the requirements of Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011 to have effect for the remainder of the year 2014/15 noting a reduction in the number of Chief Officer posts and recruitment proposals, as outlined in the report; and
7. Note that the approved revenue budget and consequent level of Council Tax for 2015/16, the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme for 2015-18 will be set at Finance Council on 2nd March 2015.

32. Policy and Corporate Resources Committee

The Chair of the Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented an update report on the work of the Committee.

The Chair of the Regeneration and Neighbourhoods made reference to the excellent work of the Scrutiny Team supporting the Committee.

Reference was made by the Chair to the fact that this was the last meeting Andrew Lightfoot, Deputy Chief Executive, would be attending before he took up his new position Strategic Director of Public Service Reform at the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and thanked him for his tremendous support and passed on his best wishes.

RESOLVED – That the report of the Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

33. Reports of Executive Members with Portfolios

Council Forum received and considered reports of the Leader and Executive Member with Portfolios. These were considered as follows:

The Leader, Environment, Leisure, Culture and Young People, Neighbourhoods, Housing and Customer Services, Regeneration, Resources, Schools and Education, Health and Adult Social Care and Children's Services.

In moving their reports, the Leader and Executive Members made reference to the excellent work of Andrew Lightfoot in his 12 years at Blackburn with Darwen, and these sentiments were echoed by the Leader of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties and several other Members.

In moving his report, the Executive Member for Leisure, Culture and Young People paid tribute to the work of the volunteers who had helped made the recent Blackburn Festival so successful. Reference was also made to an error in his report in relation to the Centenary of the Battle of the Somme, which should have referred to the year 2016, rather than 2015.

In moving his report, the Executive Member for Resources made reference to recent issues with the rollout of Members Tablets, and the steps taken to address these.

The Executive Member for Children's Services advised that he wanted to stress to the public and workforce that the Engage, Local Safeguarding Children's Board, Voice and MASH services would be protected from any budget cuts.

RESOLVED – That the reports from the Leader and Executive Members for The Leader, Environment, Leisure, Culture and Young People, Neighbourhoods, Housing and Customer Services, Regeneration, Resources, Schools and Education, Health and Adult Social Care and Children's Services be noted.

34. To Consider any questions received from Members under Procedure Rule 11

The Chief Executive announced that one question had been received under Procedure Rule 11 as follows:

Question from Councillor David Foster to the Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Housing:

"What is the latest estimate of the number of bodies that will need to be reburied to make way for the ring road extension and what are the financial implications?"

A response to the question and supplementary question arising was provided by the Executive Member for Regeneration.

Signed at a meeting of the council
on the day of
(being) the next ensuing meeting of the Council) by

MAYOR