



## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### BURNLEY TOWN HALL

Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2014

#### PRESENT MEMBERS

Councillor Carmichael in the Chair.

Councillors Cunningham, Graham, Johnstone, Kelly, Monk and Reynolds

#### OFFICERS

Steve Rumbelow - Chief Executive  
Colin Hill - Head of Facilities Management  
Caroline Lee - Head of Revenues and Benefits  
David Donlan - Accountancy Services Manager  
Marie Shaw - Markets Manager  
Elaine Newsome - Democracy Officer

#### ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Baker, Harbour and Townsend

#### 29. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barker, Briggs, Fifield, Frost, Lishman, Stringer and Sumner.

#### 30. Minutes

**RESOLVED** The minutes of the meeting held on the 12<sup>th</sup> August were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### 31. Public Question Time

Mr Stephen Wignall addressed the meeting under the Councils Right to Speak process. He spoke on the economic contribution of Burnley Market.

## 32. Markets Review

### IT WAS AGREED

That the order of the agenda was varied to allow consideration of the Markets Review prior to all other agenda items.

Colin Hill gave a presentation on the key issues arising from the strategic review of Burnley Market which was an independent review that had been commissioned by the Council. The report gave a detailed assessment of the markets' future viability and outlined a series of recommendations and options for consideration by the Council. The report highlighted a number of options including the construction of a new market, relocation to a ground floor level and refurbishment of the existing market, all of which required significant capital investment and the potential loss of revenue during development phases.

A fourth recommendation, which had been identified as the preferred option, was to develop ways for the market to become more competitive and financially viable by attracting a wider and varied offer. The Head of Facilities Management outlined associated proposals to work closely with tenants in developing a revised rental structure with enhanced advertising and promotional initiatives. He outlined previous difficulties in encouraging tenants to utilise technology in supporting their businesses and his aims to secure a commitment from them to engage in working towards using internet promotion, social media and card payment options.

Members raised the following:

- The need to make sure that the market had a mix of businesses that would attract new customers. It was noted that the consultants had recommended securing niche stalls and that other successful markets had increased their food offer.
- The importance of the active involvement of market tenants in encouraging new business through the use of technology. Members were concerned that operating on a cash only basis may limit the volume of customers for a number of businesses. Similarly, a reluctance to use social media or internet trading could be limiting. The Committee noted that traders would be fully supported by officers in attempts to use technology in their business practices.
- Incentivising new tenancies: The Committee were advised that officers recognised the need to retain existing tenants whilst building the overall offer to customers. Colin Hill advised that incentives for new tenants were only used where they proposed to bring new products that did not compete with existing businesses.
- Advertising costs: Members noted that tenants were currently asked for a small contribution to advertising costs as part of their service charge payments. The Head of Facilities Management advised that the approach to restructuring fees would look to encompass this element within a basic tenancy package which

aimed to reduce overall costs to the tenant.

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

That the report be submitted to the meeting of the Executive on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2014 with the endorsement and support of the Committee.

**33. Revenue Budget Monitoring Quarter 1**

The report on the forecast outturn position for the year as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 was noted by the Committee

**34. Capital Budget Monitoring Quarter 1**

The report on capital expenditure, resources and budget variances was received by the Committee.

**35. Council Tax Support Scheme**

The Committee considered a report that outlined a range of proposals for public consultation on the council tax support scheme and council tax discounts.

The report outlined a proposed phased increase in contributions for council tax support claimants, raising their level of council tax contribution from 8.5% to 12.5% in the first year and to 17.5% in the second year of a two year scheme.

The report also outlined proposals to change the council tax discounts for unoccupied and unfurnished properties and empty and uninhabitable properties.

The Committee were advised that a public consultation exercise on all changes would commence on the 29<sup>th</sup> September until 10<sup>th</sup> November 2014, subject to approval by the Executive.

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

That the Committee support the recommended public consultations in respect of changes to the council tax support scheme and council tax discounts.

**35. Universal Credit Local Support Services Framework**

Members considered a report on plans for the Council to work with the Department for Work and Pensions to support claimants during the wider implementation of Universal Credit which would take place in October 2014. The Committee noted that the initial phase of the roll-out would be

limited to new claimants who were single with no housing costs. Accordingly, it was envisaged that this would limit the number of people affected locally.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits advised that the majority of support for claimants would be in the form of assistance for the wholly digital application process and budgeting techniques.

The Committee raised the following:

- Appropriate levels of support for claimants: Members were advised that whilst currently anticipating the needs of the small initial client group, the provision of support would be regularly reviewed in order that it met the needs of claimants.
- Support for vulnerable claimants: Members raised concerns for those claimants who were unable to budget and the potential debt implications and associated impact on landlords. Caroline Lee advised that mechanisms were in place that allowed a direct payment to be made to landlords under certain circumstances and landlords had been invited to an information evening to explain the changes arising from universal credit in more detail.
- Staff capacity to support hard to reach groups and those who needed extra help with the digital claims process: It was highlighted that there were no anticipated staffing issues associated with the initial roll-out, due to the predicted small claimant base. Upon wider roll-out of the scheme, partnership arrangements would be explored to provide the required resource.

**IT WAS  
AGREED**

That the Committee support the recommendation to the Executive on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2014 to enter into a delivery partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions from October 2014, to assist people in Burnley claiming Universal Credit for the first time.

<b>36. Discretionary Housing Payments</b>
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Following a request from the Scrutiny Working Group on welfare reform, officers submitted, for information, details of how discretionary housing payments had been allocated to claimants over the period April 2013 to March 2014. It was noted that a total grant allocation of £202,307 had been received from the Department for Work and Pensions and had been used to support 710 claimants following the introduction of welfare reform.

The Committee further noted the proactive work of council staff and partner organisations to support vulnerable groups and provide information on their eligibility to apply for assistance under the scheme.

## **37. Work Programme**

The work programme for the meeting to be held on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2014 was agreed as follows:

- Treasury Management
- Community Engagement Strategy
- Waste/Street Cleaning/Recycling Contract
- Housing Programme
- State of the Local Economy