

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1)
held at 10.00 am on Wednesday, 16 July 2025

Present:

Members: Councillor A Jobbar (Chair)
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor J Innes
Councillor R Lakha
Councillor K Maton
Councillor J McNicholas
Councillor CE Thomas
Councillor A Tucker

Other Members: Councillor R Brown, Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources

Employees:

Finance and Resources: B Hastie, P Helm, T Pinks

Procurement and
Commissioning: R Amor

Law and Governance: G Holmes, C Sinclair

Apologies: Councillor P Male

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 March 2025 were agreed and signed as a true record subject to the inclusion of Councillor L Kelly on the list of attendees.

There were no matters arising.

3. Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources - Key Priorities for 2025/26

The Board received a presentation from Councillor R Brown, Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources, outlining his seven key priorities for 2025/26:

1. To bring a balanced budget with no further service cuts - external pressures still existed e.g. children's and adults and homelessness. However, £30m savings had been made in the last year through relentless budgetary control.

2. To address the underfunding of the City Council, lobbying hard for a fair deal including responding to the consultation on Fair Funding through WMCA and SIGOMA
3. To undertake medium-term financial planning promised as a result of the Fair-Funding Review
4. To utilise an additional £2m for 2025/26 to address, for example, fly tipping, fixing potholes and community involvement programmes to show the benefit impact of incrementality
5. To ensure the efficient and effective use of public funds in the procurement of services, goods and works and welcome the Scrutiny Board's input in this work.
6. Diversity and Inclusion – to be more reflective of the communities that we serve.
7. Interaction with customers – to focus more on the customer experience.

The Board asked a number of questions arising from the presentation including plans to redesign Customer Services; partnerships with the private sector and the expected benefits from doing so; Council Tax levels for the coming year, and, in respect of underfunding for the City Council compared to other local authorities, the Cabinet member referred to a leaflet which set out the levels of funding of neighbouring authorities and agreed to circulate it to members of the Board.

RESOLVED that, in noting the report, the Board:

- (a) Agreed to receive a written report from the Cabinet Member on his 2025-26 Key Priorities outlined at the meeting.**
- (b) Agreed to receive the leaflet referred to at the meeting which detailed levels of funding for West Midlands Authorities**
- (c) Requested that, in future and in order to facilitate a productive meeting, Members would welcome a written summary of Annual Key Priorities ahead of the meeting so that Members have the opportunity to consider the details and formulate questions and suggestions.**

4. Reserves Balances 1 April 2025

The Board considered a briefing note detailing information on the position in relation to the City Council's reserve balances. Information had been provided at Appendix 1 of the Note which showed balances held on 1st April 2025 and which was consistent with closing balances reported in the Revenue and Capital Outturn Report 2024-25. A brief description had been provided for each balance.

The Board asked questions and received responses from Officers and the Cabinet Member on a number of matters including use of the interest generated from Reserves; and the anticipated use of Public Health Directorate Reserves.

In respect of the latter, Officers agreed to provide this information to Members together with information on the details of balances over £5k held under the heading of "Other Directorate".

RESOLVED that the Board note the content of the Briefing Note and commended officers for their prudent and responsible approach to managing the Council's reserves balances.

5. Procurement Strategy 2025-2030

The Board considered a briefing note setting out the proposed Procurement Strategy for 2025-2030 and Action Plan to be delivered by Procurement Services during said term. The briefing note detailed the background and context of the Strategy and the key areas of focus.

The Procurement Strategy 2025-2030 built on previous strategies following significant legislative changes with the introduction of the Procurement Act 2023 and Health Care Services (Provider Selection Regime) Regulations 2023 - the new legislation which governed the way in which public sector procurement activity is undertaken.

The transition arrangements of the new legislation meant that the Council would be managing contracts under five sets of legislation for the next 10+ years.

The overarching purpose of the Strategy was to ensure that the Council's procurement activities were undertaken consistently and to the highest standard, setting out the Council's approach to procurement activity through the legislative frameworks and the Council's own internal governance processes.

The Strategy set out the focus for Procurement Services for the next five years, aligning through the legislation, National Procurement Policy Statement and the Council's One Coventry Plan in its areas of focus, whilst mindful of the various individual strategies at directorate and service area level.

The following key areas of focus were summarised in the briefing note: Contract Management, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Professional Development, Social Value and, Transparency.

The Strategy outlined 15 key objectives set out by Procurement Services to be achieved during the term of strategy, aligning through the key areas of focus and attributable 'One Coventry' values.

Following the presentation, Members raised the issue of the contract with Palantir in association with the recent resolution at Council and the strategy's commitment to an Ethical Supply Chain. Councillor Tucker then moved the following recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Lakha and carried:

"That the contract with Palantir be urgently reviewed in line both with this strategy's commitment to an "Ethical Supply Chain" and also this Council's resolution of 24 June condemning the ongoing conflict in the Middle East"

In addition, the Board asked questions and received responses from Officers and the Cabinet Member on a number of matters including:

- Whether there could be an explicit reference to Coventry post codes within the strategy and the complexities of procurement legislation in doing that.

- Collection of EDI data and working being done to address that – getting data from the tender process.
- How the move to the TOM's (Themes, Outcomes and Measures) approach will improve data collection on social value added through a contract.

RESOLVED that the Board:

- (a) Note and endorse the Briefing Note, Draft Procurement Strategy (Appendix 1) and Presentation (Appendix 2) prior to Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources' sign off and launch.**
- (b) Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources consider the tabled recommendation: "That the contract with Palantir be urgently reviewed in line both with this strategy's commitment to an "Ethical Supply Chain" and also this Council's resolution of 24 June condemning the ongoing conflict in the Middle East".**

(Note: Councillor J Blundell voted against the tabled recommendation and asked that his vote be recorded).

6. SME/VCSE Inclusion 2024/25

The Board noted a Briefing Note which provided an update following an item on 'Procurement Process' that came to the Board on the 12 February 2025. The presentation provided a summary and highlighted the changes taking place to create a baseline of SME (Small and Medium Enterprise)/ VCSE (Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprises) inclusion.

The Board asked questions and received responses from Officers and the Cabinet Member on a number of matters including:

- ME data for Coventry postcodes outside of the CV1-CV6 area referred
- Steps taken in addressing the barriers faced by SME's and VCSE's in applying for contracts, such as increasing the minimum number of quotes and use of FreePay to assist with cashflow.

7. Work Programme 2025-26 and Outstanding Issues

The Work Programme for 2025/26 was noted.

There were no outstanding issues.

8. Any other items of Public Business

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.50 am)