

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday, 10th November, 2014

Present:- Councillors John Bull (Chair), Roger Symonds (Vice-Chair), Colin Barrett, Charles Gerrish, Barry Macrae, Nigel Roberts and Patrick Anketell-Jones (In place of Paul Myers)

45 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

46 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Paul Myers sent his apologies and was substituted by Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones.

48 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

49 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

50 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE DEPUTATIONS, STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING

There was none.

51 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meetings (dates below) as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chairman.

- 15th September 2014
- 29th September 2014 (Call-in Meeting)

52 IMPACT ON CUSTOMERS OF ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND

WORKPLACE PROGRAMMES - UPDATE

Ian Savigar – Divisional Director Customer Services showed a short video on Keynsham Civic Centre and outlined the new draft Customers Standards (*a copy of the Customer Standards is appended to these minutes*).

Panel members asked the following questions and made the following points:

Councillor Gerrish stated that overall the new building is a great asset and generally the staff are happy. He went on to mention a few teething problems: the Library signage needs some work – it is not clear that there are more books upstairs; self-service kiosks are not easy to use; users of the community room are not using the curtains and the informal space for large gatherings outside the community room is quite noisy. He also noted that there is highways work to be completed. The officer explained that he is seeing the suppliers of the kiosks this week so he will mention this feedback. He noted the other teething problems raised by Councillor Gerrish.

Councillor Macrae agreed that it is early days and that teething problems will be addressed. He stated that the trends of the concerns raised by residents are more important than the fabric of the building and asked about a report on this. The officer explained that there used to be a report on the queries raised in the contact centre but it was very cumbersome to produce and difficult to use. He explained that the new system (the CRM system) should be able to produce area based information in a much more informative way later this year. He noted Councillor Macrae's request.

Councillor Barrett mentioned that Council Connect do not always get feedback after the query is passed on to the relevant department. The officer stated that he is aware that there are times when messages are not responded to and he is working on a system where the progress of a query can be tracked.

Councillor Bull asked if bus passes can now be provided in libraries. The officer responded that this can be done in the Keynsham One Stop Shop (OSS) as it is co-located with the library, he will look into the possibilities of doing this elsewhere.

Andrew Pate – Strategic Director of Resources, stated that the new building in Keynsham is generally seen by staff and partners as a great facility, replaces a life expired facility and there are now three multi agency public service One Stop Shops in the district. He explained that Ian Savigar is now responsible for libraries so there are opportunities to look at more links with this service. He also explained that the goal was that more people serve themselves using the web and scarce staff resources are focused on support and face to face contact for people that most need it. He asked that Members feedback on the draft customer standards to Ian Savigar.

The Chair thanked officers.

53 MEDIUM TERM SERVICE & RESOURCE PLANS

Andrew Pate – Strategic Director of Resources introduced the report and explained that it presents the “year-3” update in a three year budget planning process. He highlighted only three areas where the report shows savings are not on track:

- Corporate Assets Consolidation;
- Tourism Levy;
- Additional Advertising Income (only a proportion of this).

Panel Members asked the following questions and made the following points:

Councillor Macrae asked about the impact of the three areas above. The Strategic Director explained that not delivering these amounts has been allowed for.

Councillor Gerrish asked about the 20% reduction in the educational support grant from the government – he asked if this is due to academies. The Strategic Director explained that this reduction is across the board. The Cabinet Member stated that the government has cut 20% of the local authority support grant but much of the work continues such as admissions.

Councillor Gerrish stated that the commercial estate income has not increased but it has been offset by the rise in housing benefits – he feels that these two areas should not be connected. The Strategic Director explained that the Property situation should be largely on track by the end of the financial year. One area does offset the other one on the bottom line.

Councillor Gerrish referred to page 33 in the report and asked questions around the following:

- ICT Corporate – is there an update?
- Customer Service – are their staffing implications?
- HR and Payroll – are savings in line with reductions?
- Libraries – is this just through streamlining?
- Finance – what is the ‘higher risk item’ mentioned?
- Policy and Partnerships – is the information contradictory?

The Strategic Director explained that the central column is a repeat of what members have seen before and the right hand column is the updated information. He addressed the points raised above:

- ICT Corporate – there has been a centralisation of budgets and the service is back in house, this is on track and very good progress made.
- Customer Service – there are no staff impacts.
- HR and Payroll – yes savings are in line with target reductions.
- Libraries – there has been a lot of staff turnover and positions are evaluated each time. This is being picked up by the customer service programme.
- Finance – the demand on this service is increasing rapidly and there is regular reporting. This needs further analysis and is a higher risk saving.
- Policy and Partnerships – estimates now allow for this, the saving on Christmas lights is not going forwards.

Councillor Gerrish thanked the Strategic Director for the information.

(Note: Councillors Bellotti and Roberts left the meeting at 7.10pm)

Councillor Anketell-Jones asked about the Tourism Levy and why the voluntary contribution has not been considered. The Strategic Director explained that the visitors have to “opt in” to pay this contribution and the view has been taken that this new legal requirement means it would not even generate enough income to cover the administration costs.

Councillor Barrett asked about reductions in the Christmas Lights budget, he also asked if businesses are paying towards the lights. The Strategic Director explained that business within the remit of the Place directorate. He stated that there is no plan to remove funding for the lights and business contributions towards the lights should be explored. Councillor Macrae added that at some point the way Christmas lights are funded must be addressed as some residents effectively pay twice as a result of the way parish precepts work.

The Chair thanked the officers.

54 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Bellotti, Cabinet Member for Community Resources updated the Panel on the following:

- Regarding the Keynsham One Stop Shop, he agreed that there should be scrutiny of the outcomes but he explained that the new facility has been provided so that customers feel comfortable in the environment and can speak freely about what it is they need.
- He explained that Council borrowing is at £78m at present but will need to be increased. He explained that there is Council authority to borrow up to £215m.
- He explained that revenue performance continues to be on budget.
- There have been four budget fairs and different discussions at each;
- There are no new proposed service cuts in the budget, a further £9m had to be found. Following a question from Councillor Bull on how the £9m is made up, the Cabinet Member explained that it is all from increased corporate income, not budget cuts;
- There has been substantial new investment in the area and yet BANES has had Council Tax frozen for the last three years. There have been steps to address the poverty in some areas of the authority such as abolishment of zero hour contracts; the budget will consider measures such as how to combat payday loans and more money for food banks.
- The Government settlement comes out around Christmas time and budgets are subject to this. The final budget will be agreed in February 2015.

Panel members asked the following questions and made the following points:

Councillor Gerrish asked if there is extra money for flood defence this year or is it the money that was not spent last year; he commented that the work on Bath Quays will not improve up stream but would just have no adverse impact. He also encouraged the Cabinet Member to address loan sharks along with the payday loan issue.

Councillor Macrae commented that the local procurement policy may be very short sighted in that it may preclude Bristol companies from being used even though they may employ BANES residents.

Councillor Barrett made three points about areas of deprivation in the city and how it is being dealt with; public convenience provision and the appearance of the streets. He stated that he felt the Council is going backwards on these issues.

Councillor Nigel Roberts stated that he is in favour of local procurement as it gives companies in this area chance to grow and £50k contracts are not the biggest.

Councillor Anketell-Jones asked if income retained from business rates can be projected over the next 5 years.

Councillor Bull asked the Cabinet Members view on the implementation of the living wage.

Councillor Bellotti addressed the points made above:

- Regarding flood defence - there is new money and also the old money is not fully spent.
- Regarding loan sharks – the Council cannot give financial advice and very few people will volunteer information around use of loan sharks. We have joined Curo to work on this.
- Procurement – The EU procurement directive kicks in at a certain level. We still get some small contracts from further afield.
- Poverty – the Connecting Families programme is beginning to show some dividends eg. working with families around unemployment. The social fund is helping people at an emergency level.
- Public Conveniences – there are no proposals for further reductions, it is open to anyone to move extra money for this, if they can find a good source of funds.
- Projection of business rate income – the number of households are going up so the amount of council tax goes up. Also, collection rates are going up. Officers could give you exact information.
- Living Wage – Raising tax thresholds could also be considered and also there are national pay negotiations will raise wages. Cost factors around the living wage is not known and it could put some independent and small companies out of business.

The Strategic Director pointed out that the national pay award has not yet been agreed so there will be more detail in the budget report. The Cabinet Member stated that it is impossible to calculate the cost until pay bargaining has finished.

55 PANEL WORKPLAN

Panel members noted the Future Workplan.

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services