

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday, 26th March, 2012

Present:- Councillors John Bull (Chair), Manda Rigby (Vice-Chair), Colin Barrett, Dave Laming, Nigel Roberts and Patrick Anketell-Jones

Also in attendance: Michaela Gay (Senior Democratic Services Officer), William Harding (Head of Human Resources), Vernon Hitchman (Divisional Director Legal and Democratic Services), Tom McBain (Divisional Director - Property), Andrew Pate (Strategic Director – Resources), David Thompson (Divisional Director - Improvement & Performance) and Jeff Wring (Divisional Director - Risk and Assurance Services)

54 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that he would vary the agenda to take item 12 'Council Website' as the first major item.

55 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

56 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillors Gerrish and Watt had sent their apologies to the Panel. Councillor Gerrish was substituted by Councillor Anketell-Jones.

57 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Councillor Anketell-Jones declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in item 9 'Property Board Operation and Direction of Travel' as he owns property in the area.

58 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

Councillor Jackson made the following statement regarding item 9 'Property Board Operation and Direction of Travel':

"It is, of course, always a good idea to catalogue the family silver and get a valuation for insurance purposes. There is much in this report on the Council's Property Assets to commend it, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the ethos of the 'Commercial Property' section is washing over into the 'operational property' section. For a start, how does one judge impartially whether a particular asset, such as for example, the Victoria Hall, Radstock, has a purpose which fulfils the Council's vision, or not? What commercial value does one set upon the fact that 14-19 boys play snooker on tables of a very high standard withholder plays of regional standard acting as role models? Is what matters the nurturing of future stars, or the low levels of vandalism in Radstock because there are safe and interesting hobbies available here and at the youth club? Or what about the Pentecostal Church meeting there? It is always good to have God on your side, but sociologists of religion have drawn attention to the important role of such churches as substitutes for family for the young and lonely. Believers live on average 5 years longer than non-believers because of their positive attitude to life. In a ward with poor life expectancy rates for males, this is also important in social and financial terms. Or what about the Susan Hill School of Dance? A thriving business employing 17 people, but more importantly giving children confidence and health in a ward with high rates of childhood obesity. Converting buildings like the Victoria Hall for commercial use is a false economy. They are iconic. Since 1866 The Victoria Hall has been defining the identity of 'hard working families' in Radstock and giving them a community focus. The sight of secularised church buildings always grieves me. The Victoria Hall as flats or a pub would be just as bad. Therefore I ask you to see 'liabilities' as assets – for the community and an opportunity for B&NEs Council to engage with community volunteers. But community management of council assets is to be the subject of another study. All I can do is plead with you to engage with local societies and keep the family silver from the pawn broker".

The Chair thanked Councillor Jackson for her statement and informed her of the planned 'Community Asset Transfer' item on the Panel's future workplan.

60 MINUTES - 6TH FEBRUARY 2012

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record with the following addition:

Page 25, paragraph 3 after '...three parishes...', insert:

"Radstock, Westfield and Midsomer Norton"

61 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

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

- He explained that the anticipated outturn on March 31st should come in inside the budget which is good news. The Panel were informed that the expected underspend would be between £0-£300,000.

- He stated that the budget meeting had been successful and that this Panel's concerns regarding the savings in residential care for adults with learning difficulties had been taken into account. The Cabinet will now receive quarterly updates to allow them to monitor the situation.
- He explained that the Keynsham Redevelopment planning application has been submitted and he had attended the last meeting of Keynsham Town Council who were happy with this.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for this update.

62 PROPERTY BOARD OPERATION AND DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

Panel members noted the statement from Councillor Jackson (see minute 54).

The Panel received a presentation from Tom McBain – Divisional Director of Property and Chief Property Officer, which covered the following:

- The Property Portfolio
- Property Board – Terms of Reference
- Policy and Strategy
- Corporate Asset Management Plan
- What has the Asset Management Plan delivered to date?
- What is the future value of the Asset Management Plan?
- Opportunities for added value?
- Programmes
- Condition Surveys
- Repair and Maintenance
- Repair and Maintenance Initiatives
- Asset Reviews
- Performance models
- Capital Receipt Programme – Disposals
- Revenue Programme
- Future Asset Management Priorities for 2012
- Activities beyond the scope of this report but delivered by Property Services.

(A full copy of the presentation is held on the minute book for this Panel, Democratic Services, Guildhall)

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

Councillor Laming asked about the Place Making Group and whether it was concerned mainly with maximising value or considering the social benefit of a piece of land or property. He also asked about the following: economic development input; sites such as Avon Street Car Park; the Collonades and Lower Bristol Road. Tom McBain – Chief Property Officer addressed these points, he explained that his department advises the Property Board on financial value but it would be up to the Board (and the Cabinet) on the form of development. He explained that he works closely with colleagues from Economic Development and their advice is sought on the best use of sites.

In response to a question from Councillor Roberts, the officer explained that the Council does not land bank but can purchase sites for delivery.

Councillor Barrett asked if the Council consult with other property owners on aims and objectives. The officer explained that yes, he did speak to public bodies and private owners about objectives and they discussed things such as licensing and pedestrianisation.

In response to a question from Councillor Barrett regarding independent traders, the officer explained that it was the many independent traders that made Bath unique and that his department worked closely with tenants, each of which had their own named officer to discuss any issues. Councillor Anketell-Jones suggested that Property Services define the relationship they would like with tenants in a 'Landlord/Tenant Protocol'.

Councillor Rigby explained that there were four major developments in Abbey Ward and asked for some mindfulness regarding residents. She explained that the authority did encourage residents to live in the centre so she would not like to go down a purely financial route in the number of developments planned.

There was some discussion about the role of the Place Making Group. The Director explained that the Development Board champions developments, the Property Board champions disposals and the Place Making Group puts this together to balance competing needs and pressures. He further explained that it was not a decision making group and any decisions would go to a public meeting of the Cabinet. Councillor Bull stated that he wished the Panel's view that social aspects should be considered at the Place Making Group to be passed on. The officer noted this. There was some discussion around how all political parties could have access to information that is discussed at the Property Board and Place Making Group. Councillor Bull reminded the Panel that they could ask any questions they may have of Councillor Bellotti (Cabinet Member for Community Resources) under the regular item 'Cabinet Member Update' at each meeting. The officer stated that Property Board information (including the agendas for the Development Board and Property Board) could be made available to Panel members in an appropriate way.

The Chairman thanked the officers.

63 USE OF CONSULTANTS WORKING GROUP FEEDBACK

Councillor Bull introduced the item and thanked Lauren Rushen (Project Officer, Overview and Scrutiny) for her work on this.

The officer confirmed that the Panel's recommendations would be sent on to the Corporate Audit Committee and the Cabinet Member.

The Panel recommended that:

1. Regarding Service Action Plans – to strengthen transparency and accountability, these plans should detail the existing and proposed service needs for consultants within the ‘workforce planning’ section; and
2. The Panel receive an informal briefing on the Staff Survey.

(Note: the word ‘compulsory’ be removed with regard to training on page 3 (page 61 of the agenda papers) of the report (bottom paragraph)

64 ELECTIONS WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

Councillor Bull introduced the report and ran through the recommendations on page 5 of the report.

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

Councillor Roberts asked that the Council do more to get more people to register.

Councillor Laming suggested liaising with British Waterways to raise the numbers of boat owners who are registered.

The Panel agreed to refer the report to Vernon Hitchman (Chief Elections Officer and Divisional Director of Legal and Democratic Services).

65 COUNCIL WEBSITE

The Panel received a presentation from Jonathan Mercer – Communications and Marketing Manager on the ‘Council Website’ which covered the following:

- Council Website and Digital media
- Objectives
- Top Improvements to the site
- Benefits of the site
- Key Developments in the pipeline
- Testing and Accessibility

(A full copy of the presentation is held on the minute book for this Panel, Democratic Services, Guildhall)

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

Councillor Laming asked how economic development would be promoted on the new website and also asked that information on public loos be included. The officer explained the economic development information could be accessed from three different pages. The officer acknowledged the point about the public loo information and explained that the website was constantly evolving and suggestions were welcome. In a response to a further question from Councillor Laming, the officer confirmed that it was possible to have a forum on the site. Regarding the question of whether it was possible to have a page for each member champion, the officer

explained that he was not sure if members of the public looking for information on the river, for example, would go to a members champion page.

Councillor Laming asked how the website would be marketed. The officer explained that it would go live in May/June 2012 and the launch would be publicised in the local press. He also asked that officers and members refer to the website. He confirmed that the website was compatible with AppleMac Computers.

Councillor Colin Barrett asked how the £200,000 saving was being made. The officer explained that there was a planned reduction in the size of the web team and the use of 'open source' (no license) contributed towards the savings. In response to a further question about the maintenance of the website, the officer explained that the number of web authors was being reduced from 200 to 50 which would enable better quality training. He further explained that each department would be responsible for updating its own content so that the website will be self-managing.

Councillor Roberts asked if sustainable transport options could be included when directions are given on the website. The officer noted the suggestion. Councillor Roberts asked if all departments were enthusiastic about the website, the officer explained that all Divisional Directors realised the importance of the website. Andrew Pate – Strategic Director for Resources suggested that the Panel receive an update report in six months and added that members could monitor the quality of the website themselves.

Councillor Rigby suggested that the officer considers streaming on the website so members of the public could navigate it as a 'resident' or a 'visitor'. The Officer agreed to consider this.

The new website was favourably received by the Panel. The Chair thanked the officer for the presentation

66 PANEL FUTURE WORKPLAN

The Panel noted the future workplan.

The meeting ended at 7.35 am

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services