

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL

HOUSING AND MAJOR PROJECTS POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Tuesday, 29th July, 2014

Present:- Councillors Eleanor Jackson (Chair), Steve Hedges (Vice-Chair), Brian Simmons and June Player

12 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

13 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Tim Ball (Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning) sent his apologies to the Panel.

15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Steve Hedges declared an 'other interest' as his son works for Curo.

16 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

David Redgewell – South West Transport Network made a statement to the Panel. He stated his concern over the Southgate development in that while the toilets had been brought back into use, the café was still not open and there appears to be no CCTV in action. He asked that an officer be put in place to be responsible for queries on this issue. He stated that he would like to see Southgate finished and working. He went on to speak about economic regeneration work in Radstock and Midsomer Norton and asked that transport issues should form part of such plans. He asked for joined up thinking on major projects and that transport issues be fully dovetailed.

The Chair stated that she felt these issues could be taken to the Planning Transport and Environment or Economic and Community Policy Development Panels.

Councillor Simmons asked that the statement be sent to the Cabinet Member for Transport.

This was agreed by the Panel.

18 MINUTES - 27TH MAY 2014

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chair.

19 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Housing Services Update – The Head of Housing introduced this item in the absence of Councillor Ball.

Panel members received a written update on current issues (*a copy of the update is on the website attached to the relevant item on the agenda*). Councillor Simmons asked that Cabinet Members attend Panel meetings so that Panel members can ask questions – other Panel members agreed.

Councillor Hedges asked how many empty homes had been brought back into use in the last 3 years. The officer stated that 89 had been brought back into use over the last year. He did not know the exact figure for 3 years but felt it was broadly similar figure. Regarding a question from Councillor Hedges on compulsory purchase, the officer responded that this process was only just starting and would be concluded in this financial year.

Councillor Player asked if gardens fell under the 'Additional Licensing Scheme'. The officer replied that the Council only had minimal influence in this area. He explained that the Act was not designed for gardens but to ensure that tenant's facilities are adequate and safe. He gave his support around improving the appearance of gardens and stated that his department can contact landlords if problem gardens are reported to them. Councillor Jackson stated that there can be similar problems with gardens in private residences; she explained that there had been use of a compulsory garden clearance order in her area.

There was some discussion around fire regulations in HMO (Houses of multiple occupation) properties. The Chair congratulated officers on bringing properties into use that had been found in a dangerous state.

Councillor Hedges commended the team on their work in the area of bespoke housing solutions (*Housing adaptations for special needs*). There was some discussion around expensive adaptations made to houses and how these houses are used in the future. The officer explained that when adaptations are made, exit strategies are designed in for the property. He explained that there is not a simple resolution to this issue but that significant adaptations only related to a few properties. He stated that stair lifts are the most common adaptation and they are easily removed. He stated that adapted properties get put through the normal system but people are made aware of the adaptations in a property.

Councillor Jackson referred to a site visit to a Gypsy and Traveller site in Bristol and thanked officers for arranging this. The officer updated the Panel on the families still on the Lower Bristol Road site and explained that they had moved to another site today and that bailiffs would be going in tomorrow to remove remaining caravans.

Development, Regeneration and Project Delivery Update Tim Hewitt – Regeneration Team Manager answered questions on this paper in the absence of Councillor Stevens.

Panel members received a written update on current issues (*a copy of the update is on the website attached to the relevant item on the agenda*).

Councillor Jackson asked that Radstock be put back on the list. She also asked why Radstock and Westfield Economic Forum had been abolished. The officer explained that the group had been wrapped up to make way for a more general development advisory group with a broader remit for which the terms of reference were currently being drafted. Councillor Jackson stated that such a decision should not have been announced out of the blue and without consultation.

Councillor Simmons asked about rumours that the ventilation system in the Keynsham development were not working. The officer stated that he would check with John Folly as there were no officers present to answer this query.

Councillor Jackson asked about the roof of the Guildhall, the officer stated that there would be a reply at the next meeting.

Councillor Hedges asked that his thanks be passed on to officers regarding Odd Down 3G Pitch.

Councillor Jackson mentioned that the real time information at bus stops in Midsomer Norton and Radstock is not triggered by all buses. Councillor Hedges mentioned that this was also the case with a bus stop in Newbridge.

20 COUNCIL STRATEGIC RIVER GROUP

Tim Hewitt – Regeneration Team Manager introduced the report.

Councillor Jackson referred to the Task and Finish Group mentioned on page 17 where it is stated that recommendations would be progressed by the Autumn, she stated that she was not happy with the lack of progress on this. The officer explained that there would be more impetus when the river co-ordinator is in post.

Councillor Simmons asked if floating plastic pontoons had been considered. The officer explained that all options are being considered with the river corridor funding and partnership working.

Councillor Jackson stated that the information on comparisons with other authorities is very useful.

There was some discussion around vandal proof life belts, Councillor Player asked how they are accessed. The officer explained that there are examples around the country of life belts in emergency lockers that can be unlocked via a phone call and a code. The officer agreed to give some examples of how this would work at a future meeting.

Councillor Hedges stated that the report did not ask the Panel to comment or note. The Chair asked for a clearer cover report next time and no print smaller than 12point.

21 MIDSOMER NORTON - PROJECTS UPDATE

Jonathan Medlin – Senior Development Officer introduced the report.

Councillor Jackson asked if there were any plans for improving North Road access/plans to improve the bus service as the Stones Cross roundabout is perilous. She stated that she was also concerned about a series of planning applications resulting in a loss of retail sites in favour of flats and asked the officers view. The officer stated that it is hard to protect retail but that improvements outlined in the report will strengthen it. Regarding access, he explained that if there was a supermarket on South Road, this would improve access as there would have to be road improvements and money towards improvements in the access.

Councillor Jackson asked about Radstock Road depot and if there are any plans for development. The officer said he had no update on this and would report back.

22 ANNUAL HOUSING REPORT

Graham Sabourn – Head of Housing gave a presentation to the Panel (*a copy of the presentation slides are attached to the relevant item on the agenda on the Council website*). The presentation covered key facts including some of the following:

- Customers receiving help and advice
- Households housed
- Average cost for a 2 bed property
- Developing new homes
- Improving old homes
- Regulating the private rented sector
- Allocating social housing
- Helping homeless households
- Creating Independence
- Excellent Customer Service

The Panel thanked the officer and his team for their hard work.

23 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted the future workplan.

Councillor Jackson asked for a report student accommodation to cover the following:

- Is the Council is providing enough through the planning system – to include information on the total need and how the university plans to house their students.
- Why students blocks *are* only for first year students
- Information on post graduate accommodation

The Head of Housing said that he would speak to planning colleagues to see if there is scope for them to bring a paper to the panel on this.

The meeting ended at 7.45 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services