

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL

HOUSING AND MAJOR PROJECTS POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Tuesday, 18th November, 2014

Present:- Councillors Eleanor Jackson (Chair), Steve Hedges (Vice-Chair), Brian Simmons, Gerry Curran and David Veale

Also in attendance: Derek Quilter (Divisional Director for Project Management), Graham Sabourn (Head of Housing) and Louise Fradd (Strategic Director - Place)

38 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

39 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor June Player had sent her apologies to the Panel.

41 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Steve Hedges declared an 'other' interest to the Panel as his son works for Curo and his wife works for Mencap.

42 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

Vicky Drew and Ben Draper had given notification that they wished to address the Panel regarding Agenda Item 11 and would speak directly before that item.

David Redgewell addressed the Panel regarding the maintenance of the Bath Bus Station. He said that he was still seeking answer as to whose responsibility it was to carry out works to enable the toilets and café on site to open again.

The Chair asked Councillor Ben Stevens, Cabinet Member for Economic Development if the bus station came under his portfolio.

Councillor Stevens replied that it did not as the project had been completed.

The Chair asked for Councillor Caroline Roberts, Cabinet Member for Transport to respond to Mr Redgewell.

Councillor Gerry Curran asked for the Strategic Director for Place, who was present, to pursue an answer as he had heard the same question from Mr Redgewell on a number of occasions.

The Strategic Director for Place replied that discussions had already taken place with Bath BID (Business Improvement District) relating to street cleaning. She added that she would pursue the matter of whose responsibility it now was for maintenance of the bus station and the question of the provision of disabled toilets.

44 MINUTES - 23RD SEPTEMBER 2014

The Chair requested an amendment to page 19 of the minutes. She asked for a sentence in the seventh paragraph to read 'He added that projections show that we could *see an increase of 3,200 over 15 years*'.

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

45 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

A WRITTEN STATEMENT HAD BEEN SUBMITTED TO COUNCILLORS IN ADVANCE

Councillor Steve Hedges asked how many landlords had been prosecuted in relation to the licensing of HMOs.

Councillor Tim Ball, Cabinet Member for Homes & Planning replied that only one had been prosecuted so far for failing to licence an HMO under s72 Housing Act 2004.

The Chair asked if he would like to offer any further information on the Gypsy and Traveller site.

Councillor Ball replied that the site was one week ahead of schedule and due to open at the end of February 2015. He added that a consultation document relating to the site would be issued soon and that they were looking to name the site with the current proposal being Carrs Wood View.

The Chair asked how many empty properties were there in B&NES.

Councillor Ball replied that there were around 430.

The Chair commented that she was pleased with the figures of 91.7% Equalities Impact Assessments are now in place and 58.3% of complaints responded to within 15 days of receipt, but asked why it seems to take on average 34 weeks to complete a disabled facilities grant.

The Head of Housing replied that the figure of 34 weeks begins from the moment that the client first contacts the Council and that from that point there are many steps. He stated that the figure of 34 weeks was actually a very good timescale.

He explained that an initial assessment of the client is made and then a schedule of works is formed before receiving a number of quotes. Assistance is then given to the client with regard to application forms and then a contractor is assigned before work can begin on site.

He stated that around half of grants are completed within 16 weeks and that the Council was only directly involved in a third of the process.

Councillor Ben Stevens, Cabinet Member for Economic Development addressed the Panel.

He wished to highlight to the Panel the bullet points within his update on Bath Flood Mitigation:

- £1.12m Local Levy and Flood Defence Grant in Aid funding now secured following successful Environment Agency Project Approval Board in September 2014.
- Planning application and listed building consent applications all now registered. Decisions expected in January 2015.
- Detailed design progressing.
- Works commencement envisaged early 2015 (vegetation removal) and mid 2015 (construction works).

He informed the Panel that the Victoria Bridge would need to be closed for one extra week in order for the temporary truss to be removed.

The Chair asked if any flood mitigation had yet been investigated regarding the east of Bath.

The Strategic Director for Place replied that with the Strategic River Group now in place the river was being addressed in a collective way, beginning with the work relating to the Enterprise Area. She added that the Council was currently looking for the most appropriate site for a Park & Ride to the east of Bath.

The Chair asked if any update was available regarding the waterlogged floor at St. Nicholas School, Radstock.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that work had taken place over the summer to replace it and that it was now being monitored.

Councillor Gerry Curran asked when the last remaining gas holder would be removed from the BWR site.

Councillor Ben Stevens replied that removal of the holder had begun earlier today.

The Chair announced that the new road in Radstock would open on December 13th. She said that some of the local traders were still experiencing difficulties regarding paperwork for their compensation and asked if they could receive some further support.

Councillor Ben Stevens said that he would discuss the matter with officers.

Councillor Brian Simmons asked why the Sainsbury's attached to the new Keynsham Civic Centre had not opened as planned this week. He also asked if any other traders had been identified for the site.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that a BT problem had prevented Sainsbury's from opening and that it now planned to open at the end of next week. He added that three further traders had been identified, an estate agents, a pet shop and a café.

Councillor Brian Simmons asked if the Bath Hill road would be resurfaced.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that any road works had been deferred until January 5th and that re-surfacing would take place over a couple of nights.

46 SAW CLOSE CASINO & HOTEL

The Divisional Director for Project Management introduced this item to the Panel. He explained that the Sawclose project is currently a conditional development agreement between the Council and the developer and adjoining landowner (the former clinic) Deeley Freed Penhalt (DFP).

He stated that the development will comprise of a hotel, a Casino and two restaurants. He added that the current programme anticipates the contract between the Council and DFP becoming unconditional at the end of 2014.

Councillor Gerry commented that he would like to see these works tied into the Public Realm work involving the areas of Seven Dials and Kingsmead Square.

The Chair asked if the matters of disabled access and disabled parking had been taken into account regarding the development.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that he had not had sight of their full documentation, but would expect them to comply with all planning regulations as necessary.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report.

47 REGISTERED PROVIDERS PRESENTATION - KNIGHTSTONE

Mike Day, Director of Development & Home Ownership gave a presentation to the Panel on behalf of Knightstone. A copy of the presentation will be attached as an appendix to these minutes, a summary is set out below.

Knightstone Housing Association

- Founded in 1975 - Heartland is now redefined as West of England and Somerset
- 12,000 homes in management – general rented, supported housing, low cost home ownership, open market housing for sale (Arc Homes)
- Developer of new homes – 300 to 400 a year
- £65 million turnover – 420 staff, 23,000 residents, 365 communities and neighbourhoods

Our Housing in B&NES

Second largest landlord in BANES behind Curo

- General Needs : 654 homes
- Supported Housing : 143 homes
- Leaseholders : 84 homes
- Service Charge Only : 76 homes
- Total : 957 homes

(149 homes acquired from Spectrum Housing group in 2013)

City Centre Georgian Properties / New build estates and one off purchases.

Current Developments in B&NES

- Alcan site in Midsomer Norton– 59 homes
- Charlton Road Keynsham – 2 homes
- Old Lane Farmborough – 4 homes
- Bidding for: County Infants School, Radstock -20 homes

Supported Housing in B&NES

Rockhall House, The Paddocks and the Orchard

- 48 units of sheltered and extra care provision working closely with Sirona Care
- Invested £1.5 million in the schemes last year

Pennard Court

- 35 unit mixed scheme for people with sensory impairment and people with learning difficulties working closely with Action for Hearing Loss and Freeways

Various properties in Bath, Keynsham and Paulton

- Working closely with Developing Health and Independence, Dimensions, LIFE

Individual and Community Empowerment Investor

- Because our purpose – creating better futures together – means more than being a great landlord, building new homes etc

- We offer a hand up not a hand out and we help people and communities find their own solutions by working in partnership with us. A something for something deal – the ‘together’

Individual Empowerment

- Support customers on a 1-1 basis throughout BANES to help sustain their tenancy
- Troubled families initiative in Bath

Community Empowerment

- Delivering Children’s play ranger activities – Newton Road, Twerton and Kaynton Mead
- Community clean-up days
- Door knock consultations
- Clean Slate – debt , employment and personnel planning support
- Combe Down Digital Inclusion Programme

Future Aspirations for B&NES

- Develop more Homes at least 30 to 50 a year
- Invest in our existing stock – new Asset Management Strategy
- Rationalise some of our very expensive to maintain and live-in central Bath properties
- Further invest in our communities and build capacity

What the Council can further do to assist us?

- Resolve corporate tensions between wanting best value for land/properties and the provision of affordable housing.
e.g. Living over the Shop Properties in central Bath
- Speedier decisions on property disposals
- Make more council land available for affordable housing.
- Intervene on Section 106 bidding wars between RPs.
- Assist where possible on Central Bath listed building planning restrictions on affordable housing.
- Further assistance on rural exception sites where possible.

The Chair asked if they had a formal scheme for consulting with residents.

Mike Day replied that there was no formal scheme in place, but that various forums exist across their range of housing stock.

Councillor Gerry Curran asked if they would be interested in developing on larger sites.

Mike Day replied that they would be interested and have made bids for larger sites, but have not been successful.

The Chair thanked him for his presentation and attendance at the meeting on behalf of the Panel.

48 FACING THE CHALLENGE OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Vicky Drew addressed the Panel. She stated that she was further concerned by Curo's Passport to Housing scheme. She said that she was worried about data protection issues and that the letter she had received appeared to give no option to opt out of the scheme.

She said that the letter also talks of the need for pre-tenancy checks to take place and to take part in a 45 minute to 2 hour interview. She added that she was very surprised to have been contacted by the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to have a discussion despite no offer of new housing. She said that the CAB had also requested that she submit her financial details to them.

She asked how tenants on zero hours contracts would be affected by these measures.

She stated that the communication regarding the scheme by Curo was shoddy at the very least and called for an unpaid B&NES representative to have a place on their board.

Ben Draper addressed the Panel. He announced that he was intending to stand for Labour in the ward of Walcot in the local elections next year and that he wanted to speak about the problems the residents in that area faced.

He said that some of the residents may be stuck in low-paid work; some may have always struggled with the bills or suffer from long-term financial difficulties; some may have been forced to payday loan companies as a result of recent benefit changes.

He said that Curo had historically performed valuable work housing its most needy residents. However, recent steps taken by the group indicate a fundamental – and troubling – shift in their core principles.

He stated that Curo is currently one of the most important institutions in the area working towards housing those who most need it. He hoped that their policies would remain true to that mission. But he said he was concerned by these changes and must ask:

- Has B&NES formulated a safeguarding measure to make sure these eligible families are housed elsewhere?
- Has B&NES calculated how much it will cost house these residents elsewhere?
- Does the Committee and Curo itself agree that this move represents the marketisation of social housing in this local authority?
- At what level will this credit threshold for housing be set and by who?
- How many families does Curo anticipate will be refused housing on the basis of bad credit?

Councillor Steve Hedges asked for the answers to Mr Draper's questions to be circulated to the Panel when available.

Julie Evans, Sarah Segar and Louise Swain were present on behalf of Curo and gave a presentation to the Panel. A copy of the presentation will be attached as an appendix to these minutes, a summary is set out below.

Impact of Universal Credit – Tenants

- DWP Processes – new and digital default
- When will it happen?
- Transition arrangements and the impact upon their income
- Curo rent – how much and how they pay
- Lack of access, skills and competency with IT, numeracy and budgeting – big personal hurdle for many
- Other creditors (eg Wonga) – many are in multiple debt

However, positive feedback from tenants in receipt of UC that it helps manage income fluctuations and transition into work, so doing what it was intended to do in this respect.

Impact of Universal Credit - Curo

- In the region of £34m Housing Benefit will be paid to customers rather than currently paid to Curo.
- Increased costs of transactions and collections.
- Average arrears for UC customers £1000 / Average arrears for non UC customers £360.
- Customer debt could quadruple if we do nothing – would impact on service delivery.

Solutions Currently in Progress

- Increased Customer Accounts Resource, including recruitment of Employment, Training & Skills Co-ordinator, Money Manager and Tenancy Sustainment Officer.
- Information & Management System enhancements.
- Curo migration into Keynsham & MSN One Stop Shop.
- Introduction of pre-tenancy risk assessment (Success Plan).
- Passport to Housing pilot until March 2015

'The Right Home for the Right Person at the Right Time'

- Earlier contact with applicants
- Adverts informing of rent in advance
- Credit checks for all applicants – All market rent lettings will ask for credit checks
- Success Plans for new tenants to assess tenancy resilience
- Passport to Housing pilot – Curo tenants

Success Plans

- Risk Assessment to understand likelihood of tenancy success - Focuses on financial capability & resilience
- A tool to keep people in their home not to prevent them from getting one
- Responsibility of landlords to ensure people are not worse off as a result of getting a tenancy

Julie Evans stated that participation in the Passport to Housing pilot was voluntary.

The Chair thanked her for the clarification but said that that appeared to conflict with the letters that had been received by residents.

Councillor Steve Hedges commented that he felt that it looked like Curo were finding ways to refuse people. He said that he was extremely nervous regarding the data protection matters that had been raised and that he would advocate that the Council does not issue its housing list to Curo. He asked how the CAB had the information to contact residents.

Sarah Segar replied that the intention of the scheme is to help residents manage their budgets appropriately. She added that Curo pays the CAB to supply services to them and that they issue them with the information regarding residents. She stated that at the point of contact if the customer does not want to take part in the scheme then the CAB will destroy the information.

The Chair commented that she found it difficult to understand why only the CAB were being used in relation to debt management as they are not professionals within this work area.

Councillor Steve Hedges commented that he felt that Curo should gain permission from the resident before supplying the information to the CAB.

Julie Evans replied that Curo had worked with the CAB for many years, but added that if the pilot were to continue after March 2015 that service would be put out to tender.

Councillor Steve hedges asked what consultation had taken place with residents and Councillors prior to the introduction of the pilot.

Sarah Segar replied that as it was a pilot scheme a consultation as such had not taken place. She added that presentations regarding the pilot had been given to the tenant participation group.

Councillor David Veale asked how many tenancies break down.

Sarah Segar replied that around 4,000 residents will owe money to us at any one time.

Julie Evans added that Curo has a very low eviction rate though with only 11 – 15 households evicted per year as we see it as a very last resort.

Councillor David Veale commented that he shared some of the concerns raised by Councillor Hedges, but he believed that this was a necessary service that Curo were providing.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their presentation and said that she appreciated that the situation was changing for Curo as well as for their residents. She added though that the very least the letter that had been sent out should be redrafted.

The Head of Housing addressed the Panel. He said that in the current challenging times it was not appropriate for Curo to simply do nothing and credited them with looking to engage with problems as soon as possible and said that he felt the pilot was a good initiative.

Councillor Tim Ball addressed the Panel. He said that he thought the pilot could be very valuable and that the wording of the letter to residents was unfortunate. He stated that the Council would not be giving the public's data away. He proposed that the Council should write regularly to Homeseach members to make them aware of the Curo / CAB offer and provide details of how residents could contact them.

The Chair agreed with this proposal but said that there should be a line in the letter that states that other agencies are available to provide this service.

49 MEDIUM TERM PLAN AND 2015/16 BUDGET UPDATE

The Strategic Director for Place introduced this item to the Panel. She explained that as the Core Strategy had now been adopted it provided the Council a platform to progress the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and complete the Placemaking Plan. She stated that the CIL is required to ensure that the Council continues to receive relevant developer contributions in order that key infrastructure requirements can be met. She added that it is proposed that this will be in place by April 2015.

She stated that the adoption of the Bath City Riverside Enterprise Area masterplan and its incorporation within the Placemaking process will ensure that grants and other forms of external funding can be effectively targeted as well as provide developer confidence. She added that the development of these sites is crucial if the Council is to meet its housing and job creation targets.

She informed them that the Place Directorate continues to work with the HCA and key registered social landlords to provide affordable housing particularly in relation to Bath Western Riverside, the former Ministry of Defence sites and Radstock.

She explained that the Place Directorate had gone through a fundamental restructuring process and that the implementation of the new senior management structure had enabled the Directorate to review values and priorities through the development of a Directorate Business Plan.

She stated that there were potential funding opportunities through new housing including an increasing New Homes Bonus.

She informed them that there are significant efficiency targets in the plan and those arising from the changes in management and service restructures and the need to increase income opportunities are very challenging to achieve, especially when the call on many services was increasing.

The Chair asked for parking to be considered in the context of regeneration. She also asked officers to investigate the merits of charging Council Tax to people living on the waterways within the Council.

She also acknowledged the risks identified by the changes in management and service restructures.

Councillor David Veale asked how the CIL was to be evaluated.

The Strategic Director for Place replied that a paper was out for consultation currently and had been seen by the Local Development Framework Steering Group. She added that a hearing would take place in December to qualify the judgement that the Council makes.

The Chair commented that she was unhappy in the proposed reduction in the Planning Policy Team because of the upcoming five year housing need review and the implications of Placemaking.

The Strategic Director for Place replied that it was anticipated that this saving would be achieved across the broader Development services.

The Chair asked for the Panel's comments to be passed onto the Resources Panel.

50 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Chair introduced this item to the Panel. She asked for the newly appointed River Co-ordinator to attend the next meeting to discuss amongst other things the Panel's review of Boat Dwellers & River Travellers.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services