

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Tuesday, 23rd July, 2024

Present:- **Councillors** Robin Moss, Lucy Hodge, Ian Halsall, Toby Simon, Malcolm Treby, Colin Blackburn, George Tomlin and Duncan Hounsell

Apologies for absence: Councillors: Hal MacFie

79 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Councillor Hodge (Vice Chair) chaired the meeting.
The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

80 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

81 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor MacFie gave his apologies.

82 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hodge explained that she had a project role related to the Cabinet but had not contributed to agenda items on the agenda today.

There were no declarations of interest.

83 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

There were none.

85 MINUTES

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

86 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Cabinet Member for Economic and Cultural Sustainable Development - Councillor Paul Roper gave an update which covered the following:

Note: The Corporate Estate falls under this portfolio. The Commercial Estate fall under the Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Mark Elliott.

- Visitor Attractions – the Corporate Estate includes Museums and Art Galleries which are on target to deliver budgeted numbers. Shop performance is 6% up and going well.
- Roman Baths – visitor enjoyment is stronger than last year and is in the top 1% of attractions worldwide on Trip Advisor.
- Victoria Art Gallery – the roof repairs needed are not structural, only glazing so the upper gallery engagement space is expected to open in November.
- Corporate Estate – significant work is being done on improving risk conditions/RAGON surveys/asset conditions surveys/repair and maintenance programme.
- Working towards the Corporate Landlord Model
- Asset Challenge Framework is being developed, initially with 30 assets looking at financial performance/alternative uses.
- There are service pressures such as the holding costs for Culverhay site/Post Office/Lewis House.

Councillor Halsall asked about Marks and Spencer moving to the Debenhams building. Councillor Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources, explained that Marks and Spencer has a long leasehold so it is up to them who replaces them in the building.

Councillor Halsall asked about the Hindu Temple at Culverhay. Councillor Roper, Cabinet Member Economic and Cultural Sustainable Development, explained that it was always known that they would need to leave the site. During the demolition, we can leave their building in situ and any relocation would be arranged to fit religious dates. They may have use of a temporary site. We have advised them to get professional advice. When the outline plan for the site is finalised, we will be able to see if there is spare space onsite.

Councillor Blackburn asked if we check when tenants carry out their mitigation work. The Cabinet Member stated that he would check back on this, he added that he understood that there would be a complete estate wide review.

Councillor Moss asked if we could make sure a tenant is able to do necessary repair work. He added that it would be useful to see a list in terms of the Asset Challenge Framework. Councillor Moss asked if it was possible to swap the paintings in the Guildhall with those in storage.

In response to a query from Councillor Halsall, the Cabinet Member stated that he would look at the figure regarding lost revenue with regard to works being carried out at Victoria Art Gallery. Councillor Simon pointed out that the upper floor was never chargeable.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Members.

87 2023/24 OUTTURN REPORT

Cabinet Member for Resources - Councillor Mark Elliott – introduced the item. He explained that the year was finished essentially in balance which is something to be celebrated. There was a lot of variance between departments and some mitigating actions have been taken.

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

Councillor Treby asked for information on how the gap regarding the Capital Programme can be addressed in the future. The Cabinet Member explained that it was improving this year and some areas are managing to deliver more than before such as the Highways Improvement Programme. The aim is to reduce the gap.

Councillor Blackburn asked about the underspend with regard to Western Riverside. The officer explained that this was related to the public realm following the removal of an old bridge. There was some funding from WECA (West of England Combined Authority) which released Council funding.

Councillor Tomlin asked about the overspend regarding elections costs. The officer explained that General Election costs are covered by the Government and the Council funds local elections – on this occasion costs were higher than the amount that had built up.

In response to a query from Councillor Hodge about mitigations, the Cabinet Member explained that Capital Programme investments had been slowed, vacancies held and costs on care home agency staff had reduced. Also some contingency funds had been used.

Councillor Hodge asked about the overspend on home to school transport. The Cabinet Member explained that the budget had been rebased and was not showing any problems this year. The Heritage budget had also been rebased based on a positive last year.

Councillor Hodge asked about the capital underspend and about steps in place for more capital delivery. The Cabinet Member explained that there had been a restructuring of Corporate Services which has been centralised with the aim of improving delivery.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member.

88 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING, CASH LIMITS AND VIREMENTS - APRIL 2024 TO JUNE 2024

Cabinet Member for Resources - Councillor Mark Elliott – introduced the item. He explained that the pressures regarding Children's Services showed no sign of abating. Another area of pressure has been the operation of the Council's estate – assets are being brought back into use where appropriate. He stated that there had also been pressure in Waste Services due to the use/cost of agency staff. He explained that he regularly meets with the relevant Cabinet Member and Head of Service to better understand budget pressures and to look at mitigations.

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

Councillor Simon stated that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was broadly on budget which was good considering it had been a significant change. He suggested that the Panel look at the scheme again in the future.

Councillor Hounsell asked about the wording around the dual running of Waste depots. The Cabinet Member explained that there was an overlap while waste management services moved to a centralised service. It is not expected that this will be repeated.

In response to a query from Councillor Halsall regarding the 'safety valve', the Cabinet Member explained that it refers to the school's budget, part of which is ringfenced and paid for by the schools grant and there is a statutory override. The Council is a delivery mechanism between the Government and schools.

Councillor Hounsell stated that overspends are concerning and asked if robust conversations are being held with Service Directors. The Cabinet Member assured the Panel that this is happening

The Chair stated that the Panel would like a future update on two areas in particular – the use of agency staff in Waste Services and the measures to address the maintenance and refurbishment of the Commercial Estate (Panel agreement).

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member

89 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

Cabinet Member for Resources - Councillor Mark Elliott – introduced the item.

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

Councillor Halsall stated that it was positive that the CQC had rated most Council care homes as 'good'. He stated that in terms of the report, it would be useful to know comparisons with previous years.

Councillor Hounsell agreed that it would be useful to see values over a period of time rather than a promotional report. He asked about 'Clean and Green' weeks which no longer happen. The Cabinet Member stated that the intention is to imbed this work in the regular round of work for the team.

Councillor Hounsell stated that there were disappointing figures on resident satisfaction. He asked how the Communications Team could help to address the gap between achievement and perception. The Cabinet Member agreed, he stated that our value for money is good but that there is a gap between public perception and reality. It is ok to have legitimate criticism. He agreed there could be more impact from Communications which has recently been restructured.

Councillor Treby echoed the plea for a document that would allow more effective scrutiny (either offline or online). He stated that the Panel need to see Amber markers and plans to bring them back on track eg. Renewable energy. The Cabinet

Member stated that he was happy to take this feedback away. He stated that the Cabinet have recently considered revised PI's which can be shared.

Councillor Blackburn agreed that context information was needed in order that the Panel can do its work.

Councillor Moss asked if any analysis was done on the comments that come in after press releases. The Cabinet Member stated that he was not aware of any analysis of social media, he stated that there was a lot of negativity from a small percentage of people.

Councillor Simon agreed that the red/amber/green system was useful to monitor plans.

Councillor Hodge stated that the Panel have asked for this information before and there are no changes to how the numbers are presented. She proposed that the issue is taken outside of this meeting so certain indicators can be focused on (Panel agreement).

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member.

90 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted their future workplan and the following suggestions for future items:

Councillor Simon – New Library IT contract/Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Councillor Treby – City Centre Security Scheme Review

The meeting ended at 5.30 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services