

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Wednesday, 22nd January, 2025

Present:- **Councillors** Andy Wait, Grant Johnson, Jess David, John Leach, Deborah Collins, Saskia Heijltjes, June Player, Duncan Hounsell (in place of Alex Beaumont) and Toby Simon (in place of Anna Box)

108 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

109 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

110 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Anna Box gave apologies and was substituted by Councillor Toby Simon.

Councillor Alex Beaumont gave apologies and was substituted by Councillor Duncan Hounsell.

111 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

112 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

Sol Green (Vineyards Residents' Association) made a statement regarding 'London Road and Snow Hill Liveable Neighbourhood'. The statement is appended to the minutes for the meeting.

David Redgewell (South West Transport) made a statement regarding Transport. The statement is appended to the minutes for the meeting.

114 MINUTES

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

115 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The update from the Cabinet Member will be covered in the item on the agenda.

116 HOUSING PLAN UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Built Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development – Councillor Matt McCabe introduced the report, he underlined that the item related to the Housing Plan rather than the Local Plan. The officer gave a presentation which covered the following:

Bath & North East Somerset Housing Plan 2025-2030

Background: The Council's Ambition for Housing

Key Focus Areas: 5 Pillar Approach

Pillar 1: Releasing Land for Housing

Pillar 2: BANES homes and affordable housing

Pillar 3: Affordability Across the Housing Market

Pillar 4: Housing Support

Pillar 5: Housing Suitability

What does the Housing Plan do?

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

Councillor Collins stated that she was pleased to see the report which covers the important areas and outlines the excellent work being done regarding supported housing and BANES homes. She also stated was disappointed about the lack of measurable targets. She asked that, when the report comes back to the Panel it would be good to see progress, but it is hard to see how we can hold the Cabinet Member to account regarding progress. Councillor Collins referred to page 41 that mentions 'slowly' which she stated is not the approach we would like to see. She concluded that there is a real housing crisis, we need urgent and dedicated action and we want reassurance on this. The officer explained that there is a suite of KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for the area. He explained that 'slowly' means incrementally (re page 41).

Councillor David stated that this was a useful document and framework. She agreed with the point made above regarding measurable targets. She asked about the shortage of 4-bedroom homes in the social rented sector and any challenges around the delivery of them. The officer explained that if a family is on the Housing Register for a 4-bedroom property, they could in principle be waiting 200 years so this is a major issue. He explained that that 4-bedroom properties have been very attractive in the right to buy scheme, and they are also expensive to build. He explained that work is being done to make sure 4-bedroom properties are efficiently used and that people can be incentivised to move on if they do not need 4 bedrooms. He added that he is working with Housing Associations to provide a proportion of 4-bedroom properties and also regarding projects where houses can be converted.

Councillor Heijltjes asked how long families (and children) wait for houses on the search register and how many social houses have been made available since 2019. The officer explained that around 1000 families (on the search register) are in urgent need and around 4000 wish to move (but have adequate housing). The Cabinet Member added that the target is that the Council own 1000 units by 2033.

Councillor Johnson stated that we are moving in the wrong direction on waiting times and asked how this relates nationally and against other authorities. The officer explained that we compare well nationally. The trend in the wrong direction is a national issue. We have the highest number of people (and children) in temporary accommodation as we have every had nationally. In term of reasons for this – he explained that families are coming in with multiple challenges (eg. Rent arrears, bigger number of larger families and also chaotic lifestyles). This matches patterns in other authorities as well as the national picture.

Councillor Wait asked if the referrals from outside BANES was a reciprocal arrangement. The officer explained that people fleeing domestic abuse often need to move out of the area. There is roughly a balance.

Councillor Simon asked about loft conversions in 3 bed houses. The officer stated that individuals are engaged with this rather than it being a strategic issue.

Councillor David asked if we track levels of HMOs (Houses of Multiple Occupation) and do they affect the housing stock. She asked if we incentivise landlords to offer properties to families rather than HMOs. The Cabinet Member explained that the planning system states that HMO density cannot be more than 10% and that family homes cannot be sandwiched between HMOs. The officer stated that it is harder to track HMOs since the cessation of the smaller HMO licensing scheme. He stated that landlords must register their properties online now but there is not a level of detail. The Cabinet Member added that we had a small HMO registration scheme to bring up the standard but we cannot run another registration scheme at present.

Councillor Collins asked if we liaise with Bath Universities to make sure students have enough accommodation. She also asked what we do to incentivise older people to downsize. The Cabinet Member stated that this was a planning consideration which can be discussed in another context. He explained that there are planning rules on student accommodation.

Councillor Johnson stated that infrastructure is important with large developments for the current community as well as new residents. He explained that there is an example in Paulton where infrastructure was promised but not delivered. The Cabinet Member agreed.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers.

117 AEQUUS BUSINESS PLAN REFRESH

The Cabinet Member for Built Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development, Councillor Matt McCabe introduced the report. Aequus officers Tim Richens

(Managing Director) and Andrew Johnson (Director of Operations) gave a presentation which covered the following:

Aequus Group Strategic Business Plan 2024-2030

Short/Medium/Long Term Objectives

Our Purpose

Company Analysis

Aequus Construction Ltd – Pipeline Analysis

Aequus Construction Ltd – Property Analysis

Financial Forecast

Financial Overview

Revenue Analysis by Workstream

Sensitivity and Scenario Planning

Overhead

Profit Growth

Key Dependencies/Key Risks

Cash Management

Capital Loan Requirements

Strategic Forecast Summary

Shareholder Returns

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

Councillor Johnson asked why there was such an emphasis on non-affordable housing as this does not align. The officer explained that there was a balance between social and market housing. Some schemes are 100% affordable. Social housing must be paid for with market homes. Market homes are driven by Council aims. We deliver a financial return to the shareholder (Council). The Cabinet Member added that normal commercial companies would extract 20% but Aequus extracts 4%. Funds are need to subsidise affordable housing.

Councillor Collins asked how the risk is managed. The officer explained that the scale being delivered is ambitious and there are many different types of project. We are developing a more standard house/apartment style.

Councillor Leach asked how much of a drag is the financial return to the shareholder on the outcomes. The officer explained that there is an element of impact. The Cabinet Member added that the money to the shareholder does effect the delivery of units. It is complex, the Council is responsible for land supply. He added that, once the company is delivering bigger volumes then the pressure of shareholder payment is not so much.

Councillor David asked if there was confidence that large projects will move forward. The officer explained that there is a clear vision on the pipeline and the development stages are frequently monitored.

Councillor Simon asked how much use there is of windfall sites. The Director explained that there are around 1000 assets (plots of land), asset reviews are carried out. The land supply pipeline is really important. In terms of privately owned sites,

the Cabinet Member explained that he meets with officers biweekly so sites are monitored.

Councillor Heijltjes asked if the £1million financial return to the Council is ringfenced for anything. The Director explained that the return goes into the Council balance sheet as an income stream, it is not ringfenced.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Members and officers.

118 BUDGET REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Built Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development, Councillor Matt McCabe, introduced the report.

Councillor Wait stated that there was a small amount of information in the report and he would give this feedback at the Corporate Panel on 28th January 2025. The Executive Director explained that the Budget Report for the Corporate Panel had now been published which contains more information. Councillor Wait stated that he understood the pressures, but more information was needed for scrutiny.

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

Councillor Simon explained that Corporate Panel (14th January) had been told that the process was around 2 weeks behind for various reasons. The budget will be revisited next week at Corporate Panel (28th January).

Councillor Heijltjes asked about National Insurance costs regarding highways and climate emergency. The officer stated that the National Insurance cost for the Council is £2.6m and the Government pays £1.3m.

Councillor Johnson asked about the 22% increase in the cost for green waste collection (per year) in the light of the service often being cancelled or delayed. The Executive Director explained that the increase is benchmarked and reflects the cost of the service. She stated that she would take the comment on the quality of the service back.

Councillor Johnson asked how much the likely income to the Council would be from the producer responsibility regulations. The officer reported that it will be £2.7m for the 2025/26 financial year.

Councillor Wait asked about the sickness/holiday cover increases in Waste Services. The officer explained that the overspend on salary is no longer being mitigated.

Councillor Wait asked about the Corporate Estate reduction. The officer explained that budgets are being centralised and efficiencies made. We hold a lot of estate that is not utilised, some of which can be released to reduce running costs (Lewis House as an example). Also, land can sometimes be reused or redeployed.

Councillor Hounsell mentioned that 'Saltford for Nature' had been doing some clearance work in the area. He noted that BANES only does basic maintenance now

but no beautifying parks and green spaces. Are we happy that enough funds are available for this. The Cabinet Member stated that this was very important to every ward Councillor and hopefully this issue will be addressed in the next week.

Councillor David asked about basic play equipment deterioration. The Executive Director explained that there will be funding in the Capital Budget over the next few years.

Councillor Collins asked that benchmarking be included in the papers in the future as it is hard for the Panel to consider what isn't being presented and see comparisons with other authorities. The Executive Director explained that there are conversations throughout the year on benchmarking.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers.

119 PANEL WORKPLAN

Panel members noted the future workplan and the following suggestions for future items:

Movement Strategy – Councillor Heijltjes

The meeting ended at 12.02 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services