

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday, 16th January, 2012

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

Also in attendance: Michaela Gay (Senior Democratic Services Officer), William Harding (Head of Human Resources), Vernon Hitchman (Solicitor to the Council Monitoring Officer Electoral Returning Officer), Tom McBain (Divisional Director - Property), Angela Parratt (Head of Transformation), Andrew Pate (Strategic Director – Resources), Tim Richens (Divisional Director - Finance), Ian Savigar (Divisional Director for Customer Services), David Thompson (Divisional Director - Improvement & Performance), David Trethewey (Divisional Director - Policy & Partnerships) and Jeff Wring (Divisional Director - Risk and Assurance Services)

34 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

35 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Chris Watt sent his apologies and was substituted by Councillor Paul Myers.

37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

There were none.

38 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

There was none.

40 MINUTES

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

41 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Community Resources, Councillor David Bellotti updated the Panel on the following:

Regarding Keynsham Regeneration Project, the Council has appointed a delivery partner – Willmott Dixon. The project is moving forward although some of the details are still open for discussion.

Buoyancy of the retail portfolio in central Bath remained with a high level of occupancy. Income from this area underpinned much of the expenditure of the Council.

The concerns raised by the Panel at their last meeting regarding potential cuts in expenditure on Community Safety have been looked at by the Cabinet members who felt that they also wanted to keep CCTV and taxi marshals. Also, the anti-social behaviour post will now be located in the Education Department. The Cabinet Member reported that £40k had been put back into this area.

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

Councillor Gerrish asked about the CCTV and if there was any expansion planned. The Cabinet Member explained that the Government had reduced the Local Government Grant by 28% so the authority must continue to reduce costs. He explained that CCTV is a priority but was not sure that funds could be found for any expansion.

42 MEDIUM TERM PLAN ISSUES

The Chairman took questions on each service area in turn:

Customer Services Revenues and Benefits

Divisional Director Ian Savigar updated the Panel. He informed them that the workshop on Universal Credit and New Tax Benefit would now take place in March.

Councillor Gerrish asked if there had been any progress around the area of accessing the new system (The panel had previously raised concerns about the level of internet use that was expected). The officer assured the Panel that he was putting forward their concerns.

Councillor Bull stated that some of the Service Plans mentioned the use of the internet to save money. The Strategic Director of Resources explained that they tried to offer a choice between digital and face to face service but if the balance was wrong, Councillors should say.

The Divisional Director explained that there had been no change in the implementation date in response to a question from Councillor Barrett.

Electoral Services

The Chair pointed out that the Panel would be getting a report to their March meeting on the outcome of the Elections workshop.

Councillor Paul Myers mentioned a lack of resources at polling stations – The Chair asked that he forward comments to the Overview and Scrutiny project officer for incorporation in her report to the Panel in March.

Improvement and Performance

In response to a query from Councillor Bull, David Thompson – Divisional Director for Improvement and Performance explained that the Horizon Scanning intelligence function was used for different purposes in his and the Policy and Partnerships service. He explained that in his service it was used to keep abreast of the raft of new initiatives and our response to them and also for benchmarking purposes. David Trethewey – Divisional Director for Policy and Partnerships explained how this intelligence function was used in commissioning in his service.

Information Technology

Councillor Nigel Roberts stated that there should be a link made between what is spent on IT and what we get as output and what the end user gains. Angela Parratt Head of Transformation explained that the strategy does take account of the fact that not everyone will use everything on their desktop. She explained that service specific training is being looked at and the customer satisfaction survey is being amended to cover IT capability. The Chairman pointed out that there would be an update report on IT at the Panel's May meeting.

Equalities

Councillors had concerns about the impact of the reduction in the budget in this area. Councillor Gerrish stated that he had doubts that general officers would have a full understanding of Equalities issues. David Trethewey – Divisional Director Policy and Partnerships explained that work had been done with services on their Equalities Impact Assessments. Cabinet Member David Bellotti explained that there will always be a need for a central Equalities team but it was the size of the team which is the issue. He explained that there is a need for more ownership of the issues throughout the organisation and that there was a balance to be struck between a central function and wider training.

Councillor Barrett explained that he had used the team's expertise in a case and that their advice had been crucial, he asked if the 40% cut was too much. The Strategic Director for Resources – Andrew Pate explained that it is a choice for the administration as it is a valuable service but the issue is getting the quality of advice to the right people at the right time.

Councillor Gerrish stated that he accepted the judgement that the administration had made and was reassured regarding the on-going training. He stated that while the Panel did not welcome the saving in this area it was recognised that it has to be made. Managers must take ownership of the Equalities brief and self-refer if they need guidance or training.

The Chairman thanked officers for the updates.

43 SERVICE ACTION PLANS

The Strategic Director for Resources – Andrew Pate referred to the fact that Panel members had access to the Equalities Impact Assessments for each service and asked members to highlight any equalities issues in their review of the Service Action Plans.

The Chair looked at each Service Action Plan in turn:

Customer Services

Ian Savigar – Divisional Director gave a short introduction explaining that the service was facing unprecedented change. There were also a number of customer service projects in the next year such as the One Stop Shop at Lewis House. He explained that this was going on alongside business as usual work in the context of the budget savings.

Councillor Nigel Roberts commented that the Council Connect Service was excellent.

The Officer explained that Council Housing Benefit claims increased by 10% on last year in response to a query by Councillor Gerrish.

Finance

Tim Richens – Divisional Director gave a short introduction explaining that the service was being restructured as detailed in the Medium Term Plan. He also drew member's attention to the change in the way local government is funded (2013/14).

Councillor Gerrish stated that Avon Pension Fund was set out in the Plan but this should be shown separately.

Improvement and Performance

David Thompson Divisional Director gave a short introduction explaining that the services are changing at different rates and that part of his portfolio was to support people through these changes.

Councillor Laming asked about the statistic that 85% of the population had internet access. Officers explained that this was gathered from a survey but that in terms of specific groups, such as vulnerable people, internet access was a lot lower.

Legal and Democratic

Vernon Hitchman, Division Director gave a short introduction and updated Panel members on the figures (The Full Time Employee figure is 52; 16.5 Legal; 17 Democratic Services and 13 Regulatory). He explained that his overall emphasis was to reduce the level of cost while maintaining service.

Councillor Gerrish asked how often external legal advice was used. The officer explained that the Council does use external lawyers on areas such as Major Projects and High Court Challenges for which they get a 20% discount.

There was some discussion around the Key Performance Indicators, the officer explained that some work is measured such as standard transactions. Councillor Roberts asked to see some information that did not fit into the report template such as the new Standards Regime which has to be implemented.

Policy and Partnerships

David Trethewey, Divisional Director gave a short introduction explaining that the key function is to help the Council with the localism agenda; health and wellbeing and climate change.

Councillor Barratt asked if the service had a proactive role around carbon reduction schemes. The officer explained that the service would not advocate types of renewable energy but worked with the community around solutions.

Councillor Myers asked, regarding the localism agenda, how the service helps people to do things for themselves rather than BANES being responsible. The officer agreed that this was important and this was what the service sought to do.

The Chair reminded the Panel that they would have a report on Carbon Reduction to their May meeting.

Property

Tom McBain, Divisional Director gave a short introduction explaining that there had been increased income through the recession; flexible working implementation and ongoing work on the Keynsham Town Centre Regeneration Scheme. He explained that in the future he would be looking at enhancing capital receipts; the economic climate; a review of trading services and carrying out a zero based budget exercise.

Councillor Paul Myers asked about community groups running community buildings, he explained that there were many opportunities here. The officer agreed but stated that there would have to be a culture change for these community asset transfers. The Strategic Director explained that this was a big challenge and if it was something members felt was worth pushing, the Executive member could take this message away. Councillor Myers stated that he realised it would be on a case by case basis. The Cabinet member agreed and said he was receptive to taking this forward.

Councillor Barratt asked for a breakdown of FTE's for Property.

Risk and Assurance

Jeff Wring, Divisional Director gave a short introduction explaining about the new bunker where information is stored.

There was some debate around the length of time records are kept.

Transformation

Angela Parratt, Head of Transformation gave a short introduction explaining that the key challenge with the change programme was to maintain momentum.

Councillor Barratt stated that credit should be given to officers as this Council is often held up as a Beacon.

The Chair thanked all for attending. There was some debate around the style of reporting. Members felt that they wanted to know the effects of cuts that had been made.

Members noted the Equalities Impact Assessments which they used in their consideration of the report.

44 PANEL FUTURE WORKPLAN

The Chairman explained the updated workplan. Members noted the workplan.

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services