

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

### **RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Monday, 17th September, 2012

**Present:-** Councillors John Bull (Chair), Manda Rigby (Vice-Chair), Charles Gerrish, Barry Macrae, Nigel Roberts and Bryan Chalker (In place of Colin Barrett)

#### **25 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **26 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillors Paul Myers and Colin Barrett sent their apologies. Councillor Bryan Chalker substituted for Councillor Barrett.

#### **28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

#### **29 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

There was none.

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

A member of the public, Mr Robert Morgan, made a statement to the Panel on the subject of 'A Better Market Strategy for Bath'. The Chairman thanked Mr Morgan and stated that he would make sure that the points raised would be investigated. *A copy of the statement is available on the minute book, held by Democratic Services, Guildhall, Bath.*

#### **31 MINUTES - 16TH JULY 2012**

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.

## 32 COUNCIL WEBSITE - UPDATE

Jonathan Mercer, Communications and Marketing Manager gave a live demonstration to Panel members of the Council's new website ([www.bathnes.gov.uk](http://www.bathnes.gov.uk)). He explained that the new website went live on 29<sup>th</sup> August 2012. He explained that there was a feedback form on every page and that comments could be responded to quickly as the new website was very flexible.

He ran through various ways that the website could engage the community such as the events calendar; online consultations; a place to publicise clubs and societies and links to social media such as Facebook and Twitter. He further explained that he was currently developing the ability to manage forums and groups.

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

Panel members asked if any events or groups would be precluded from the website. The officer explained that each entry was vetted by the team.

Councillor Gerrish asked that clubs and societies be listed in alphabetical order.

Councillor Macrae welcomed the increased transparency and asked that the officer come back to the Panel if there are any problems.

There was some discussion around the panel looking at the Council booking and events policy.

The Panel thanked the officer and his team for the work on the new website.

It was agreed that the Panel would receive an update on the website in six months and that 'Booking and Events Policy' would be added to the Panel future workplan.

## 33 UNIVERSAL TAX CREDIT - PILOT

Ian Savigar – Divisional Director Revenue, Benefits and Council Connect introduced the report. He explained that the authority's bid for pilot status had been successful. He explained that after a meeting with the district manager of Job Centre Plus, it had been agreed that they would provide a resource for the One Stop Shop to support the pilot. He explained that he hoped the pilot would be up and running in October and that a project plan was already in place.

He further explained that there was a need to see where the new system does not work for example if people will not claim online. He also explained that there was a need to see if problems would be caused with people being paid lump sums. He explained that such issues would be reported to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) on a monthly basis and he would also get feedback from other authorities.

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

Councillor Rigby referred to the visit to the One Stop Shop for members earlier in the day and explained that she was very impressed and that the facility would help with the pilot.

Councillor Bull asked if the funding for the pilot was adequate and what was the prospect of the pilot becoming permanent. The officer explained that he did not expect there to be problems with the funding. He stated that he could not guarantee that the pilot would become permanent.

Councillors congratulated the team and their achievements.

#### **34 COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER - NEXT STEPS**

Councillor Bull explained that a small group (himself along with Councillors Rigby, Barrett and Myers) had been set up at the last meeting and he had asked for this report to give a brief survey of the situation and some pointers on background reading and places to visit before the group starts its formal work later in the year. He also explained that he had suggested that a member of the Economic and Community Development PDS Panel be offered a place on the group.

Andy Thomas, Group Manager Partnership Delivery, introduced the report.

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

Councillor Gerrish stated that not all community assets were owned by the Council and there needed to be some thought on how this was handled.

It was **agreed** that the officer would circulate some ideas on site visits to the group.

#### **35 IMPLICATIONS OF POOLING BUSINESS RATES AMONG WEST OF ENGLAND AUTHORITIES**

Andrew Pate, Strategic Director Resources introduced the report.

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

Councillor Gerrish raised a concern over local authorities dealing with the LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership). He stated that more clarity was needed regarding the distinction between the city deal 'business rate growth' and the implications of a 'Regional Infrastructure Fund' (RIF). He added that he was not clear who the accountable authority would be regarding transport devolution. The Director explained that RIF funding is meant to be paid back and although it is not a legal requirement, it would be in our best interest to do so as failure to do so would affect future entitlement. Regarding transport devolution, he explained that the authority has not been asked to take on the accountable body role.

Councillor Macrae stated that he felt reassured to hear the Director's explanations and shared his caution about aspects of City Deal on this. He had a concern that this was similar to the regional development agencies.

Councillor Bull asked about the timescale. The Director explained that there would be a 2014/15 implementation on City Deal. A report about transport devolution is likely to be produced around the end of the calendar year.

Councillor Gerrish asked about the implications if this authority pulled out. The Director explained that it would be damaging.

## **36 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

Councillor Bellotti – Cabinet Member for Community Resources – updated the Panel on the following:

- Referring to the previous item, the City Deal had been signed in principle but there was no legal contract.
- Regarding Keynsham Regeneration Project, things were back on track and eight changes had been made to the plans. It goes back to the planning meeting (Development Control Committee) in October. He hoped the Committee's concerns were addressed and hoped to get approval. He explained that the opening date was autumn 2014.
- Referring to the One Stop Shop visit organised by this Panel, the Cabinet Member thanked members of the Panel for their kind words and added that three partners had expressed how much they value being there.
- The authority is alive to purchasing buildings as well as selling, for example a bank building had been purchased recently.
- Regarding the budget, there was still the aspiration of zero rise in Council Tax but the budget would be a difficult one as there would be less money from the Government. He explained a 'new burden' fund and also that the Government may say that the authority no longer needs to provide services in certain areas such as in Connections and Youth Offending.
- The property 'Cemetery Lodge' on Lower Bristol Road should come back into use by a family now the authority has possession of it.
- On London Road, 3-4 Longacre has been sold and would be developed. He explained he was looking at a report sent to him by a Community Group.

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

Councillor Gerrish raised concern about ending the funding to Connections, he stated that the authority had a corporate responsibility. The Cabinet Member accepted this point.

There was some discussion about zero based budgeting, the Cabinet member explained that a number of departments would carry out zero based budgets this year.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member.

## **37 PANEL FUTURE WORKPLAN**

The Panel noted the future workplan with the following additions:

- Council website update – March 2013
- Bookings/events Policy – tbc

The meeting ended at 7.50pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**