

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

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

Monday, 11th February, 2013

**Present:-** Councillors John Bull (Chair), Manda Rigby (Vice-Chair), Colin Barrett, Paul Myers, Charles Gerrish, Barry Macrae and Nigel Roberts

#### **49 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **50 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were none.

#### **52 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

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

There was none.

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

Councillor Jackson read a statement to the Panel from a member of the public, George Bailey on the subject of the Frome/Radstock railway. *A full copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book.*

Sue Pendle – Chair of Trustees of First Steps (Bath) made a statement regarding the proposed 40% reduction contained within the Council's budget proposal in Early Years and Children's Centres. She asked that this proposal be reconsidered as it would affect the Council's front line service regarding young children and their families. She asked that this service be protected and that universal service be preserved. *A full copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book.*

Councillors Jackson and Hardman also made statements but chose to defer their statements until item 8 'Council Budget 2013/14 and Medium Term Plans' on the agenda.

## **55 MINUTES - 12TH NOVEMBER 2012**

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

## **56 COUNCIL BUDGET 2013/14 AND MEDIUM TERM PLANS**

The Chairman invited Councillor Liz Hardman to make a statement regarding 'Children's Centres'. Councillor Hardman referred to the proposed budgetary cuts to Early Years and Children's Centres, she explained the work done in these centres and urged that a brake be put on these cuts. *A full copy of this statement can be found on the minute book.*

The Chairman invited Councillor Eleanor Jackson to make a statement. Councillor Jackson supported the points made by Councillor Hardman and explained that her residents were concerned with the proposed cuts to Children's Centres and Early Years. She urged that universal access to these services should be maintained. *A full copy of this statement can be found on the minute book.*

The Chairman thanked the Councillors for their statements and explained that the Panel would debate the Early Years budget proposals first.

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

### Early Years and Children's Centres

Following a questions from Councillor Gerrish about how concrete the plans are for 2014/15, Andrew Pate – Strategic Director Resources explained that it is the job of the Council to agree a budget for 2013/14 but that there was also a three year plan to go with the budget. He explained that there is an opportunity to look in depth at certain issues and set a clear direction for following years. Councillor Bull stated that the Labour Group would be looking to do this on the issue of Early Years and Children's Centres. Councillor Gerrish stated that he was also concerned with the proposal to target those in need and move away from universal access. He stated that there were problems with the process of targeting services in areas of deprivation as this was not always an accurate indicator of where problems are. He stated that children's services must have universal access.

Councillor Bellotti, Cabinet Member for Community Resources addressed the points raised above. He explained that the bulk of the savings are programmed for 2015/16 and that the budget for year three is an indicative budget. He explained that the Education Department offered these savings after serious consideration of the issues. He explained that there is no proposed reduction in spending on Youth Services and that the careers funding would go to schools. He explained that the Cabinet have taken the view that where the Government have given funding elsewhere for a service, the Council will not continue to provide that service so that

there is no double funding. He explained the Government view that health visitors are the first important point of contact for families and young children and that the Government are employing more health visitors. He explained that by November of this year the Cabinet will have a plan to go forward and will ask the PDS Panel to help look at the issue in detail. Councillor Bull thanked the Cabinet Member for the reassurance.

### Property

Tom McBain, Divisional Director and Chief Property Officer made a presentation to the Panel following the Panel's request for feedback at their last meeting. The following issues were covered (A full copy of the presentation is on the minute book):

- The Property Portfolio
- Current Budget
- 3 Year Savings Targets
- What services will remain unaffected?
- What will be delivered differently?
- Commissioner/Provider
- Corporate Landlord Role
- A Centralised Property Function
- Delivering Property Services
- Acquisition of income generating opportunities
- Application of the Asset Management Plan – Condition Surveys

### The Panel raised the following points and asked the following questions:

Councillor Myers asked about the value of £1million for the community infrastructure. He asked if this was accurate. The officer explained that it was very difficult to estimate what the exact value would be on the open market. Councillor Myers stated that he was disappointed by the lack of reference to community in the presentation. The officer explained that the presentation had been deliberately focused on the commercial estate following a request from the Panel.

Councillor Macrae stated that he was pleased to see the concerns of the Panel addressed. He stated that he had some concerns on the policy development and that the Panel could work with the officers in the change from provider to commissioner and asked for regular briefings on this. It was agreed that a regular item would be added to the workplan. Councillor Rigby asked that the trade-off between capital receipts and revenue form part of the update.

Councillor Bellotti, Cabinet Member for Community Resources agreed that it was useful to have a regular update report. He pointed to Appendix 2, Annex 2 'Community Assets', and explained that this list would be added to every year with the help of the scrutiny panel.

Councillor Nigel Roberts explained that services should understand that the property they work in has a value. He noted that there was a move to less office space.

Councillor Barrett asked about repairs and maintenance and if the Council's property would be kept up to the level that it should be. The officer explained that the proposed cut in this area was possible due to the fact that there was less office space to maintain now. Councillor Bellotti asked that any figures on this be given in a square metres basis as well.

### Democratic Services

Vernon Hitchman, Division Director Legal and Democratic Services explained that the proposed savings in this area had been reduced from £107K to £35K. He explained that the saving would be made through changes and efficiencies so there should be minimal impact on support for meetings. Councillor Macrae and Bull stated that this was welcome.

### Budget Report Appendix 1 – Aims and Ambitions (p13)

Councillor Gerrish stated that the sentence '...the Council is also experiencing significant population growth...' should read '...some population growth'. (p13)  
Councillor Bellotti agreed.

Councillor Gerrish stated that the revamp of Keynsham figure is quoted differently in three places. Councillor Bellotti commented that he would get the consistency sorted out and that the figure had been cut back.

### Appendix 2 (p17-33)

Councillor Gerrish stated that he was concerned with the level of investment in highways maintenance and the increased deterioration of the road network. He explained that the Council had topped up the funding in previous years but that this had not happened this year and the condition of the highways had been made worse by the recent bad weather. Councillor Bellotti stated that he would consider the point but he did not think it was the Cabinet's highest priority but that money had been put in the budget for 20mph schemes and cycle lanes.

Councillor Gerrish asked about schools funding (p29) and pointed to the statement that it was difficult to assess how many schools would become academies in the following year, he disagreed saying that the schools could have been asked. Councillor Bellotti replied that 10 secondary schools are academies. He explained that primary schools had indicated that they would not seek academy status in the next year. He reported an on-going good relationship with schools and the school forum.

Councillor Macrae spoke about the report itself and how he was disappointed to receive it only three days before the meeting and that the report was regrettably duplicative. The Director explained that the report was published on the website on the same day as it was for the Cabinet. He explained the layout of the report. Councillor Bull explained that the Government settlement was late this year. Councillor Roberts stated that he disagreed with Councillor Macrae in that, to write a budget there has to be a level of detail in order to make the decisions. It has to be legal. He explained that Panel members could request a presentation on the budget if that would be clearer. Councillor Bellotti further explained that the size of the

document is relative to certain legal requirements and that a lot of the information contained in the report had been available at an earlier stage. He stated that he did not accept that the information had been late. Councillor Gerrish explained that he picked up his papers on the day they were published and that this was always an option. He commended the very thorough document and agreed that it is easier to read the information when it is all in one document.

Councillor Macrae stated that the comments shown from the PDS Panels did not show any proper scrutiny. Councillor Bellotti stated that it was up to each PDS Panel to decide whether to send comments. He further explained that some changes had been made as a result of these comments. Councillor Gerrish added that it was worth reminding PDS panels that there is a three year plan that they can look at.

#### Appendix 2 – Capital Budget

Councillor Gerrish asked about the Bath Transport Package (p41) being shown as fully approved, he stated that there was an outstanding planning application. Councillor Bellotti explained that 'fully approved' was a statement of budget only.

Councillor Gerrish asked about Oddown Playing Field (p43) and if there was full approval or provisional. Councillor Bellotti explained that it should not say 'provisional'.

Councillor Gerrish asked about Riverside, Keynsham (p50) and the plans for the Leisure Centre. Councillor Bellotti explained that if the Council took over the plot of land, the swimming facility will be re provided.

#### Section 4 (p55)

Councillor Gerrish pointed to the revenue budget contingency and stated that if the same is spent this year as last year, there will not be enough. Councillor Bellotti explained that on the page after the revenue budget contingency, all other reserves are listed and that he felt they were adequate.

Councillor Macrae asked about the New Homes Bonus Grant (p63), he stated that he hoped that this would not be a target that would encourage large housing developments. Councillor Bellotti stated that it was not a target but an honest assessment.

Councillor Gerrish asked about the impact on service delivery regarding highways (p96) which stated '... some equalities issues as traffic management supports minority groups, including people with disabilities...'. He asked for an explanation and reassurance. Councillor Bellotti stated that he would get the answer in time for the Cabinet meeting (13<sup>th</sup> February 2013).

Councillor Gerrish asked about the 'Community Asset Transfer' information (p117) and asked why it was in the budget papers if there were no figures. Councillor Bellotti explained that it had been deliberate to not include figures as organisations may not want this information in the public domain.

Councillor Gerrish referred to climate change (p24) and queried why only carbon consumption was referred to and not flooding. Councillor Macrae stated that building homes near jobs restricted commuting and was beneficial in terms of climate change. Councillor Bellotti took on board the point on flooding and stated that the core strategy mentioned the need for local jobs.

#### Equality Issues (p25)

Councillor Bull stated that Equality Impact Assessments are important. Councillor Barrett asked about the equalities impact regarding the potential closure of public conveniences. Councillor Bellotti explained that there was no legal obligation to provide public conveniences. The Equalities officer, Samantha Jones was asked to send this information to Councillor Barrett.

#### Eric Pickles "50 Sensible Savings Ideas"

The Panel noted B&NES reasoned response to each point.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions and the officers for the report. He explained that he would be taking the Panel's views to the Cabinet meeting on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The Panel expressed concerns about the movement away from universal access with regard to Children's Centres. The Panel request that this issue be considered by the Cabinet on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2013 as well as being scrutinised by the Early Years, Children and Youth PDS Panel; and
2. The Panel noted the conclusions and resolutions from the other PDS Panels and refer them on to the Cabinet on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2013 for consideration. The Panel noted in particular:
  - That the Housing and Major Projects PDS Panel ask the Cabinet to consider whether investment in the Public Realm and Affordable Housing should be shown within the Medium Term Service and Resource Plan for future years, following 2013/14; and
  - That the Economic and Community Development PDS Panel asked that the Council have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and that the latest statement from the Prime Minister be circulated. Also that the ECD Panel asked for a report on how a Tourism Levy will work in practice; and
  - That the Planning, Transport and Environment PDS Panel had raised the issue of car parking charges and noted that this had been resolved; and
  - The resolutions of the Wellbeing PDS Panel. On their request for the budget being presented earlier, the Panel noted that in the three year plan approach to the budget, Panels could raise issues and add them to their workplan where there are concerns (there was no need to wait

until the Medium Term Service and Resource Plans were updated in Autumn 2014);

- That the concerns raised by this (Resources PDS) Panel in the November 2012 meeting had been addressed in that the Democratic Services savings had been greatly reduced and that, following a presentation on the effect of the proposed savings in Property, the savings would not jeopardize income.

**57 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

This was contained within the debate on item 8 on the agenda.

**58 PANEL FUTURE WORKPLAN**

The Panel noted the future work plan with the following additions:

- Property Update Report
- Staff Resources Report (Q4)

It was also noted that the meeting scheduled for 20<sup>th</sup> May 2013 would be moved to 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**

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**STATEMENT – Re: Frome / Radstock Branch  
11/02/2013**

At the last Cabinet meeting there was broad agreement that re-opening the branch would be a “good thing” and that the door is “not locked”. Unfortunately, the feasibility report by Halcrow contained many errors and omissions which I have mentioned previously. A copy of that document is also available.

It appears possible that the Radstock branch will be part of the Greater Bristol Metro development by the end of this decade: so because of the planning and integration timescales involved, it is imperative that a better study is conducted soon.

It is estimated that a re-work of the Feasibility Study would cost about £10,000 so currently we are looking for that amount to be allocated in the current budget. We anticipate delivery of the project to be towards the end of the Greater Bristol Metro, Phase 2, perhaps 2019.

George Bailey

Radstock Action Group

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## **Children's Centres – Statement from Cllr Liz Hardman**

B&NES Children's Centres and Early Years have been targeted for one of the largest budgetary cuts, losing £2,337,000 over the next three years, or in other words, 40% of their budget. It is planned to cut £273,000 in 2013/14, £228,000 in 2014/15, rising to a massive £1,836,000 in 2015/2016. There will be a complete restructuring of services to move to a wholly targeted model. Children's Centres will cease all council funded "universal" access services, with services targeted upon the most deprived children and families. The cuts will lead to the loss of 30 full time jobs with the result that there will be huge cuts in the services they provide.

Whilst it is absolutely essential that the most needy families should receive our services, research has shown that where there are universal services, far more needy families are reached. These families do not feel "stigmatised". Evidence from the Children's Centres tells us that 50% of their referrals come from these universal services.

So what services are offered? Firstly a universal service for all children with their parents/carers under school age. These range from parenting groups, to a drop-in baby clinic, to a careers service, to a support group for families with children with special needs, a young parents' group and opportunities for pre-school speech and language therapy and much more.

They are working in partnership with health visitors, social workers, the CAB and job centres attracting these services to the Children's Centres so that families can readily access these services.

Social care thresholds are high. Children's Centres do the essential work which helps to prevent families requiring more help and support and costing more money further down the line.

So let me end with some figures: In B&NES the number of families seen from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2011 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2012 were 3,374. For the same period, almost two thirds of the total estimated number of children aged 0-4, living in the 30% most deprived areas across B&NES have been seen by Children's Centre services.

On behalf of the Labour Group I'd like give notice that if these cuts remain in the budget proposal, the Labour Group will be moving an amendment seeking to put a brake on these cuts.

We would look at taking money as a one-off from reserves and from unexpected funding that we have received in the final settlement from the New Homes Bonus. We would pay the money back into reserves from cuts to other services that haven't borne the same level of reductions, for example Major Projects. We'd also like to see an increase in the income generated by the Children's Centre buildings.

On behalf of the Labour Group, I would urge you to support us in trying to prevent these cuts.

The Administration has promised us that it will be protecting frontline services. Tell me: How can cuts of this scale to services used by the youngest and most vulnerable members of our community possibly be considered anything other than a huge cut to a frontline service?