

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

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

Monday, 17th March, 2014

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

#### **64 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **65 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **66 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were none.

#### **67 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

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

There was none.

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

Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones made a statement regarding Victoria Art Gallery. He asked that the Panel request that Cabinet review the business model that was imposed on the Gallery in 2012 to assess if it is sustainable. If this business model is found wanting, Councillor Anketell-Jones asked that a substitute is found which could include working with other museums in the city.

In response to a query of whether this was in the remit of this Panel, Andrew Pate – Strategic Director of Resources, explained that budget issues are part of the Resources Panel overview but specific issues regarding the Gallery are in the remit of the Economic and Community Development Panel and that is the Panel who should make the Cabinet referral.

David Bellotti, Cabinet Member for Community Resources, congratulated the staff at the Gallery for reducing the budget. He explained that there was no intention of seeing the Gallery close. Councillor Macrae stated that he took comfort from this assurance.

Following a proposal from Councillor Gerrish, it was **RESOLVED** that the appropriate scrutiny panel (Economic and Community Development) be asked to monitor the progress of the plan regarding the Victoria Art Gallery and that they should highlight any problems, issues and concerns.

## **70 MINUTES - 10TH FEBRUARY 2014**

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

## **71 WELFARE REFORM - REPORT**

Ian Savigar, Divisional Director for Customer Services, introduced the report and also introduced the Panel to Helen Holbrooke from the Department of Work and Pensions who attended part of the meeting.

### Council Tax Support Scheme (paragraph 3)

The Divisional Director reported that he had been concerned about collection rates but they had in fact held up.

### Social Fund (paragraph 4)

The Divisional Director explained the difference between the emergency support and non-emergency support. He reported that there had been no overspend on the social fund and that it continues at the same level next year. Councillor Bull expressed his support for this continuation.

Councillor Macrae asked if social landlords realize that the Council supports people struggling to pay rent. The Divisional Director explained that the Council works closely with Curo and shares data around arrears. He reported that a lot of people who are struggling are not on benefits.

### Size Criteria (paragraph 5)

The Divisional Director explained that the cases had reduced, some people had been supported. Mike Chedzoy, Housing Services Manager, reported that a lot of people have not moved through choice.

### Universal Credit (UC) (paragraph 8)

Helen Holbrooke, Department of Work and Pensions, explained that UC had landed in Bath on 24<sup>th</sup> February. She reported that there had been a mainly positive response and of the 50 customers in receipt of UC, some had already gone back into work.

Councillor Bull asked why UC lead to more people getting back into work. Helen Holbrooke explained that it is easier than under the old system, under UC it is worthwhile to take on hours of work.

Councillor Bull asked if the online support would continue after the pilot. The Divisional Director explained that the pilot had finished but that support can be provided.

Councillor Gerrish explained that he has been helping his son through the process and the authority (not this authority) has insisted that everything is done online which is ill advised. He stated that he hoped that this authority would not do this. Helen Holbrooke explained that, of the current cohort, most people can claim online but clearly there needs to be additional support as scheme widens. Councillor Macrae asked for reassurance that the Hollies and Keynsham have similar support available as Bath. The Divisional Director confirmed this and stated that support may also need to be wider for example, in libraries.

#### Housing Services (paragraph 9)

Mike Chedzoy, Housing Services Manager, explained that the key function is advice and dealing with homeless. He reported an increase in single homeless rough sleepers.

Councillor Macrae asked if speculative housing developers are aware of the size of houses that are actually needed, he asked if there should be greater provision of single person residences and bungalows. He stated that plans should be matched to housing need. The officer stated that there is a conversation on details with social housing providers.

Councillor Gerrish pointed to the possession notices and stated that everybody needs to live somewhere. The officer stated that it can come down to 'intentionality' but that if there are children involved, somewhere will be found for them to live with only occasional need to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

#### Connecting Families (paragraph 10)

Paula Bromley, Connecting Families Manager, reported that there is positive news, that 215 families have been engaged, 43 families in depth (186 people), 34 of which are single families. Each of these has been allocated a worker from the matrix team.

Councillor Bull thanked the officer.

#### Housing Benefit (paragraph 11.2)

The Divisional Director explained that more is being spent on Housing Benefit and the main reason is the increase in rents.

Andy Thomas, Group Manager Partnership Delivery, explained that there is potential for this to be a complex system and he is focusing on how it can be made easier for people. He explained that it was important to try to intervene before people need food vouchers.

There was some discussion around the chart regarding food bank use. The general message was that food bank use is going up nationally but this area is seeing a drop of 10%.

Councillor Macrae thanked the Divisional Director and his team for their work. He stated that he would like further updates in the future around the problem areas.

It was noted that the Divisional Director would arrange a trip for Panel members to the DWP.

## **72 GRAND PARADE AND UNDERCROFT REPORT**

Tom McBain, Divisional Director Property and Jon Folly – Capita gave a presentation on the Grand Parade and Undercroft (a copy of this presentation is on the website with the agenda papers for this meeting). The presentation covered the following points:

- Pre-Let Agreements - Phase 1 – The Colonnades
- Planning Application
- Design Development
- Highways
- Timeline
  
- Progress Update – Phase 2 – Guildhall Market
- Progress Update – Phase 3 - Newmarket Row

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

Following Councillor Macrae's query regarding the consultation of specific residents, The Divisional Director explained that all relevant tenants have been engaged.

Councillor Macrae asked about parking with regard to disabled people, people attending weddings and elected members. The Divisional Director explained that there will be a parking area for disabled people and parking for the registration service at the front of the building. He further explained that there will be parking available for elected members in Manvers Street Car Park.

Following a query from Councillor Macrae, The Divisional Director explained that the issue regarding waste was a strong part of the lease which stipulated that refuse collection could only be carried at specific hours by private contractors and that the lifts should be used.

Councillor Gerrish stated that the entrances were improved on the plans but may need further improvement. He stated that there were still unallocated restaurant premises by the station and that this development may affect this. The Division Director explained that the development was totally unique and would not cover the same market as restaurants by the station.

Councillor Gerrish stated that he was disappointed that the public had not been engaged before the planning application. He explained that most developers engage before the planning application stage and he was disappointed that the Council had not also done this. The Divisional Director explained that consultation had been ongoing for 12 months with 8-10 groups in the centre as well as English Heritage, the Empire residents and others. He further explained that there had been more consultation on this than any other development. The Cabinet Member added that there had been widespread publicity on the scheme. Councillor Paul Myers asked for a list of consultees.

Councillor Gerrish asked about the impact on lettings at the Guildhall as a wedding venue as a result of the proposed extension of the market. Jon Folly (Capita) explained that he took this point but there had been full liaison with facilities management at the Guildhall.

Councillor Colin Barrett asked if the fire authority had been consulted. Jon Folly (Capita) explained that both Building Control and the Fire officer had been consulted.

Councillor Barrett asked if the market would be retained as it is now, the Divisional Director explained that he had had several meetings with the Guildhall market traders and they are keen to extend the market.

Councillor N Roberts stated that comments had been negative so far, he asked about the projected rise in business rates that this scheme would create. The Divisional Director explained that the scheme would bring derelict buildings back into use, create jobs as well as being hugely financially positive for the area. Andrew Pate, Strategic Director for Resources, summarized that the Panel had registered their point regarding consultation and the Cabinet can consider it. The points have been logged, taken and can be reflected on.

Councillor Symonds stated that he felt it was a brilliant scheme and that the people of the city would welcome the development, he stated that it would be a fitting end to the career of Tom McBain. John Bull, Chairman offered best wishes to the Divisional Director for a long and happy retirement.

## **73 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

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

- Community Assets – there are 4 new and 6 of the 10 from last year are signed off.
- Shared Services – there is now a shared audit service with North Somerset. The Cabinet are looking at shared services.
- Cattle Market – there have been 8 applications. The plan is for a mixed development.

Councillor Gerrish flagged up the unique nature of Walcot Street and asked that any new premises be 'in keeping'. Councillor Symonds mentions 'Walcot Street Works' as some protection of this.

- Keynsham redevelopment – on time for opening in October 2014.

**74 PANEL WORKPLAN**

With the following additions, the Panel noted the future work plan:

- Office Space Allocation – update
- Keynsham Town Centre scheme – retail update
- Welfare Reform – update

The meeting ended at 8.05 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**