

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

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

Monday, 16th March, 2015

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

#### **66 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **67 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **68 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillors Bull and Roberts sent their apologies.

Councillor Symonds chaired the meeting.

#### **69 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

#### **70 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIR**

There was none.

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

There were none.

#### **72 MINUTES: 9TH FEBRUARY 2015**

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting with the following additions:

- Minute 63 – ‘Councillor Barrett asked the Council Leader why York will not implement 20mph limits. The Council Leader stated that he would try to find out but that 20mph limits are not universally popular’;

- Minute 65 - Councillor Barrett asked why it had taken so long to get the information on consultants when he had got the information from Hacked Bath?

### **73 OFFICE SPACE ALLOCATION - CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK - UPDATE**

The Strategic Director gave a presentation on the Workplaces Programme.

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

Councillor Gerrish asked if Abbey Chambers is Council owned and if it was due for any enhancements before it is used for meetings. The Director confirmed that it is Council owned and that work will be done on the building if it is used as part of the answer to the shortfall in meeting rooms.

Councillor Gerrish asked that the Council make a public statement in light of the problems with contractors and the lights being kept on on the top floor north in Keynsham. He stated that the lights are on all the time for understandable reasons but that it would be helpful to explain to residents that Council Tax is not being spent on this. The Director noted the point.

Councillor Gerrish stated that some officers working in the new building are concerned about the heat of the building in the summer. The Director explained that windows can be opened and that it was too early to make assumptions and the building management system isn't yet fully commissioned.

Councillor Barrett stated his concern about many officers working from home. He asked that calls be transferred to the correct person. He asked how many people working from home last month and whose insurance covers them. The Director explained that staff are enabled to work from home, not required. He stated that he did not have the figures yet but they should be collected. He explained that staff work in their own domestic environment and their own insurance covers them.

Councillor Barrett asked how many staff have mobile phones and at what cost. The Director explained that staff can use their own mobile phones and not as many phones are issued now as were in the past. He stated that more information could follow on this.

Councillor Myers asked about unused space. He gave the example of the Hollies Council Chamber that he has requested to use out of hours. He explained that there is not a good process for this. He also agreed with the point made about staff hot-desking and not always being able to reach people on their desk phones. The Director stated that he would get more information on the Hollies. With regard to the phones, he stated that it is a new system and teething issues are being worked on and there is also a continuing staff training issue.

Councillor Macrae asked about the Wifi in Council buildings, the Director stated that he would follow this up.

Councillor Macrae stated that there are 20/30 desks in the Hollies and asked if local staff members could work there rather than travel to Bath and Keynsham. The Director stated that this could be encouraged.

#### **74 WELFARE REFORM - UPDATE**

Ian Savigar – Divisional Director Customer Services gave a presentation to the Panel on Welfare Reform and asked that Panel members asked any questions on particular issues.

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

Councillor Gerrish spoke about the postcode anomaly regarding Universal Credit (eg. BA14 postcode). The officer stated that there is a need to speak to neighbouring authorities to get this ironed out.

The officer stated that the Care Act had effects regarding Housing Benefit. There will be problems recruiting staff.

Councillor Macrae stated that he felt comfortable with the information in this update. Councillor Barrett stated that he felt the officer is always ahead of the game and thanked him.

#### **75 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

The Strategic Performance Manager – Steve Harman gave a presentation on Performance Management.

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

Councillor Macrae asked if data could be grouped by area so members can see what is happening in their wards and compare. The officer said he would look at the request.

Councillor Gerrish stated that he is pleased to see the large jump in library usage and asked if it was mainly the library in Keynsham that affected this figure. The officer explained that increased footfall is not always based on books being borrowed, sometimes the space is used for Wifi and other things.

Councillor Gerrish stated that it would be more helpful to have some more explanations around the figures, for example the unemployment figures.

Councillor Gerrish stated that while Council Connect acknowledge queries, the email does not tell you the title of the query so members are unable to track several at a time. Ian Savigar – Divisional Director Customer Services stated that he would follow up on this.

Councillor Barrett stated that sometimes officers do not follow up on information passed to them. The officer stated that the system is being worked on.

Councillor Myers stated that he had had reports of people whose query had not been dealt with by Council Connect. He asked if any feedback is gathered and if he could see it. The officer stated that there is individual feedback and surveys. He agreed to bring information back to the Panel.

Councillor Macrae asked that new Councillors are briefed on Council Connect, how it works and how to use it. Councillor Barrett stated that he used to get information on ward complaints and that it was useful. The officer stated that he is looking in to how this can be produced.

## **76 IMPACT OF TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - RESOURCES PDS PANEL**

Richard Howroyd – Corporate Procurement Manager introduced the first part of the report on ‘Impact and progress made on the use of Consultants and agency staff within B&NES’.

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

Councillor Barrett referred to a figure of £7.5million regarding spend on agency staff as reported on in ‘Bath Hacked’. The officer reported that between January 2014 – December 2014 there had been a £3.7million spend in this area. He explained that the figure Councillor Barrett refers to possibly takes account of some specialist social services figures and that he would check this.

Councillor Barrett stated that the Task and Finish Group aimed to reduce the use of consultants. Andrew Pate – Strategic Director for Resources explained that there are umbrella arrangements for the use of agency staff so that cover can be provided on a short term basis for staff shortages, he confirmed that the authority is not shifting away from staff to agency. Councillor Macrae asked about ‘Bath Hacked’, the Director explained that it is a group of individuals, not an organisation and has no kite mark. He confirmed that the Corporate Procurement Manager would look into their data on this subject. Councillor Gerrish stated that a figure on the number of full time equivalent posts would be more meaningful and that he realised that sometimes specialist help must be bought in in the form of consultants.

The officer reported that there are 125 assignments active at one time, often to cover operatives eg. waste operatives. He reported that there is a growth in the social and health care area as there is a difficulty recruiting in this field which is reflected nationally.

Councillor Macrae stated that he is in favour of using consultants where appropriate. It was stated that there are no BANES officers working as consultants.

Regarding the issue of employing local - Councillor Macrae stated that he is concerned at this policy as he believes that residents deserve access to the best services and this policy may not ensure that. The officer assured the Panel that a level playing field has been created between big and small businesses. Councillor Symonds stated that he is glad that more local firms are being employed as they are more likely to know the area.

Councillor Macrae stated that consultants are employed to covers where the authority does not have the relevant skills, he asked how many short term consultants do the same job and requested that this be monitored. Councillor Macrae asked for an update to be reported back to this Panel (or its equivalent after the May 2015 elections) in 6 months. Councillor Barrett asked for an update on Consultants. The Director stated that this new analysis can be linked in with workforce planning for the new Council.

Richard Long – Head of Property introduced the second part of the report on 'Community Asset Transfer – Scrutiny Impact Report'.

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

Councillor Macrae stated that he is comfortable with the thrust of the Community Asset Transfer policy. He stated that he is surprised that Midsomer Norton Swimming Pool is not on this list, he registered his concern that ward members are not consulted. The officer stated that the swimming pool is part of Leisure procurement rather than Property but agreed that ward members should be consulted.

Councillor Myers stated that he is concerned about the way some Community Groups are taking things on and that he is advising them to take legal advice before signing long leases. The officer explained that groups must demonstrate that they have the facilities and skills to run a building before a lease is signed, he recommends that groups obtain advice. He further explained that there are options for tenants to break a lease at certain stages. He agreed that the nature of some buildings mean they need tender care and groups must be strongly supported. Councillor Myers stated that some legal groups are advising tenants not to sign leases as some are for 99 years and groups could face a substantial liability. The officer stated that it had been a learning curve and experience has led to some clauses being tempered.

Councillor Myers stated that Midsomer Norton Skate park transfer had not been publicised, he asked that there be a place or system where members are notified. He also asked that officers carry out the initial negotiations (and minutes be taken) rather than Cabinet Members. The officer stated that officers are likely to be leading negotiations moving onwards.

Councillor Barrett asked about the status of Fairfield House and the officer explained that there is no restrictive covenant on the building.

Councillor Gerrish stated that he felt it was valid that negotiations are moved away from member involvement but it is ok if a transfer is member initiated. He reported that he had been involved in two Community Asset Transfers and that there had been constructive advice and a clear indication of liabilities. The Director reassured the Panel that final decisions are put through a proper checking process with 151 officer and monitoring officer involvement.

Councillor Myers asked for an update on this policy, he asked that the comments from the Panel be enshrined in the policy.

**77 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

There was no Cabinet Member Update.

**78 PANEL WORKPLAN**

There was no future workplan as this is the last scheduled meeting of the Panel before the May 2015 elections. The following items were requested at the meeting to be brought back to the Panel with the Resources remit in the new administration:

- 6 monthly update on the use of consultants and agency staff;
- Update on Community Asset Transfer;
- Performance Management – feedback from Council Connect Users.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**