

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

CABINET

These minutes are draft until confirmed as a correct record at the next meeting.

Thursday, 7th November, 2019

Present:

Councillor Dine Romero	Council Leader and Liberal Democrat Group Leader
Councillor Rob Appleyard	Cabinet Member for Adult Services
Councillor Tim Ball	Cabinet Member for Housing, Planning, and Economic Development
Councillor Neil Butters	Cabinet Member for Transport Services
Councillor Paul Crossley	Cabinet Member for Community Services
Councillor Kevin Guy	Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Councillor Richard Samuel	Deputy Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources
Councillor Sarah Warren	Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Neighbourhood Services
Councillor David Wood	Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Joanna Wright	Cabinet Member for Transport Services

30 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

31 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Senior Democratic Services Officer drew attention to the evacuation procedure as set out in the Agenda.

32 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

During the debate on agenda item 16 Council House Building Programme Update the Council Leader declared an other interest in this item as she is the Council's shareholder representative for Aequus Development Limited. The Council Leader would abstain from debating and voting on this item.

34 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

There was none.

35 QUESTIONS FROM PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

There were 8 questions from Councillors and 2 questions from members of the public.

[Copies of the questions and responses, including supplementary questions and responses if any, have been placed on the Minute book as Appendix and are available on the Council's website.]

36 STATEMENTS, DEPUTATIONS OR PETITIONS FROM PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS

Robin Kerr made a statement (attached as Appendix to these Minutes) about two recommendations from the LGA Peer Review.

Councillor Shaun Hughes presented to the Cabinet a suggestion/idea for Somer Valley mass transport solution.

The Council Leader and Councillor Neil Butters (Cabinet Member for Transport Services) thanked Councillor Hughes for his statement and said that they would consider this matter after the General Election.

Councillor Sarah Moore made a statement about student purpose built accommodations where she invited the Cabinet to take action against those property developers who may take advantage of demand, and overcharge students with the rent fees. Councillor Moore expressed her concern that, for those reasons, social housing could be put in jeopardy.

Councillor Tim Ball (Cabinet Member for Housing, Planning, and Economic Development) thanked Councillor Moore for her statement and invited her to discuss different policies related to this matter.

Councillor Eleanor Jackson presented a petition asking the Cabinet to reconsider closure of 11 children's community playgrounds. Councillor Jackson read out a statement in support of the petition (attached as Appendix to these Minutes).

Councillor Paul Crossley (Cabinet Member for Community Services) said that 11 children's playgrounds have not been closed. Some of them have been re-purposed. The Council would be looking to imaginative playgrounds by providing new play area equipment so that a range of children could use these facilities (such as the first wheelchair friendly roundabout). In some instances the Council would consider working with Town and Parish Councils. Councillor Crossley also said that there has been consultation with a wide range of people and no decisions have been made yet.

Councillor Richard Samuel (Cabinet Member for Resources) said that the Council would be spending £325,000 on improvement of play facilities in this financial year.

Councillor Eleanor Jackson added that residents may not be aware of the future spending on improvement of play areas and suggested better communication with the residents.

37 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS CABINET MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 12th September 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

38 CONSIDERATION OF SINGLE MEMBER ITEMS REQUISITIONED TO CABINET

There were none.

39 MATTERS REFERRED BY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY BODIES

There were none.

40 SINGLE MEMBER CABINET DECISIONS TAKEN SINCE PREVIOUS CABINET MEETING

The Cabinet agreed to note the report.

41 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING, CASH LIMITS AND VIREMENTS - APRIL 2019 TO SEPTEMBER 2019

Councillor Richard Samuel introduced the report by taking the Cabinet through the Executive summary of the report.

Revenue budget

The Revenue budget outturn was forecast to be £0.08m under budget, which was a favourable movement of £1.76m from Quarter 1.

Nevertheless, there continues to be further adverse movements in service revenue budgets; key areas of risk were additional demand in Children's Services £0.84m, and £0.35m shortfall in income from the Councils Housing Delivery Vehicle. The Children's Services budget has a forecast £1.9m over budget position after 2019/20 budget rebasing; this was due to increases in specialist Health and Social Care placements. Also, Commercial Estate income has not increased in line with budgeted income levels due to a slowing down of high street retail income and fewer acquisition options creating a £1m budget pressure. Across all portfolios the forecast over budget position excluding corporate budgets was £2.68m.

This adverse position has been mitigated by a £2.76m favourable forecast on the Councils Corporate Budgets largely attributable to an under budget position on capital financing from re-phasing of capital expenditure and lower than budgeted cost of capital from beneficial interest rates for borrowing.

Of the overall savings target for 2019/20 of £8.9m, £0.9m (10%) would not be delivered and would impact on the 2020/21 budget; £5.1m (57%) was forecast to be delivered by the year-end, and £2.9m (33%) has been delivered. To provide mitigation to delays in delivering savings and over budget areas Directors have put cost reduction plans in place to minimise spend wherever possible, which would further improve the year-end position. These would need to continue to be reviewed to ensure that the Council remains within the approved budget by the year-end.

Capital budget

The capital budget was currently showing an expected under budget position of £34.6m mainly due to re-phasing of Bath Quays, ACL/ADL loan drawdowns and Roman Baths Archway Project into future financial years to reflect revised project spend profiles.

Following a review of the Modern Library programme options for Central Bath, which were paused last year, it has been proposed not to proceed with the remodelling of the Podium site and closure of the existing one stop shop in Manvers Street due to financial viability. The Modern Libraries project has saved £0.45m in recurring savings to date but the further £0.35m outlined in the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2020/21 would no longer be delivered and would be reflected in next year's budget. The Capital Programme would be adjusted as a result to remove the £3m allocated to the scheme. Capital spend to date of £0.362m would revert to revenue and would be funded from the Capital Financing Reserve

Council Tax and Business Rates

The current forecast Council's share of the year end Collection Fund position was:

- Council Tax – Surplus of £0.82m (2018/19 Surplus £0.69m)
- Business Rates – Surplus of £1.21m (2018/19 Surplus £0.76m)

Council Reserves

The current forecast revenue position would not require use of the Budget Contingency Reserve (which was set up to mitigate budget risk). The Council's reserve levels would continue to be monitored during the remainder of the financial year.

Councillor Richard Samuel thanked the officers who prepared the report

Councillor Richard Samuel moved the recommendations.

Councillor Dine Romero seconded the motion by saying that she was delighted that Public Libraries scheme would be abandoned. Councillor Romero also thanked the officers who prepared the report.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Cabinet agreed to:

- 2.1 To note the 2019/20 forecast under budget of £0.08m (as at the end of September 2019) and the recovery plan actions outlined in Appendix 1;
- 2.2 To note that Recovery Plans are in place and these will continually be reviewed to ensure that the Council remains within the approved budget;
- 2.3 To approve the revenue virements listed for approval in Appendix 3(i) and to note those virements listed for information only;
- 2.4 To note the capital year-end forecast detailed in paragraph 3.14 of this report;
- 2.5 To note the changes in the capital programme including capital schemes that have been agreed for full approval under delegation listed in Appendix 4(i);
- 2.6 To approve the removal of £3.0m provisional capital scheme for Modern Libraries relating the Podium re-modelling as an integrated Library and One Stop Shop;
- 2.7 To note that the associated one-off revenue reversion costs of £0.362m of the Library scheme will be funded from the Capital Financing Reserve;
- 2.8 To note that the remaining savings target of £0.35m for the Modern Libraries programme will be removed as part of the 2020/21 revenue budget proposals.

Councillor Richard Samuel introduced the report by saying that this was a regular report that the Cabinet have received in accordance with CIPFA code of guidance for the first 6 months of this financial year.

Councillor Samuel said that borrowings have remained well within Prudential limits that the Council has set; the credit rating was at AA, which was above the benchmark of A- ; £61m have been invested by the Council; investments in money market funds have increased in the last quarter by £9.4m due to re-investment. Overall, the performance has remained sound against the benchmarks.

Councillor Richard Samuel moved the recommendations subject to changes in recommendation 2.3 which should read: 'This Treasury Management Report and attached appendices are reported to the next meeting of the Full Council and Corporate Audit Committee.'

Councillor Neil Butters seconded the motion by welcoming the comprehensive report from officers.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Cabinet agreed to:

2.1 The Treasury Management Report to 30th September 2019, prepared in accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Code of Practice, is noted.

2.2 The Treasury Management Indicators to 30th September 2019 are noted.

2.3 This Treasury Management Report and attached appendices are reported to next meetings of the Full Council and Corporate Audit Committee.

43 LGA PEER REVIEW ACTION PLAN

Will Godfrey (Chief Executive) said that the LGA Peer Review process was really important for the Council to get some external perspective on how the organisation was performing. There were some really strong and positive messages in the report about performance frameworks, Medium Term Financial Plan, and those were the issues that the Council should be focused on getting them right. Will Godfrey also said that the Council should embrace positively the recommendations in the report over the next few months.

Councillor Dine Romero introduced the report by saying that she was grateful to have this review with this administration as a baseline to develop and build Council's commitment to its residents, which includes better engagement with residents. The action plan would need a proper 'buy-in' from officers of the Council and also from all elected Members of the Council. The LGA Peer Review team identified quite a few strengths which the Council can be proud of. Councillor Romero thanked the LGA Team for their hard work for producing a fair assessment.

Councillor Dine Romero moved the recommendations.

Councillor Paul Crossley seconded the motion by saying that the LGA process had started over a decade ago, and it had become a real part of Local Government. As a Council we should be proud that many of B&NES Councillors have become LGA Peer reviewers and have participated in reviews of other Councils. This reflected credit on all Councillors in B&NES. Councillor Crossley highlighted the engagement of 3rd sector and volunteers in everyday life of B&NES, such as litter picking and maintenance by Friends of Henrietta Park group.

Councillor Richard Samuel said that this was a good report with a message that this was a well-run Council although there were some areas where the Council could improve. Councillor Samuel also said that it was always difficult when the administration of the Council change, and aspirations have to adjust, but many things continue to operate such as day to day services to residents.

Councillor Eleanor Jackson commented that residents suggested that Fix My Street did not work, and she asked if that could be looked at.

Councillor Neil Butters said Fix My Street issues had been picked up and it should be sorted shortly.

Councillor Dine Romero added that aspirations of the new administration would depend on available resources and funding.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Cabinet agreed to:

2.1 Endorse the recommendations outlined in the LGA Peer Report and agree for the report and action plan to be published on the Councils Website;

2.2 Agree to receive a six monthly monitoring report on progress against the Action Plan as outlined in Annex B;

2.3 Agree to invite the LGA Peer Review team back or a follow up visit in the summer of 2020 to review progress.

44 HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY (2019-2024) UPDATE

Councillor Tim Ball introduced the report by saying that this was a draft report which would return to the Cabinet in January 2020 for adoption. The relevant PDS Panel would have the opportunity to scrutinise this strategy.

Councillor Ball also said that Comments received about people resorting to living on the waterways as an alternative to rough sleeping or other forms of homelessness have been received. This was an area for further investigation, which was already being looked at and would be included in the updated action plan. A query has been raised about female-specific one-stop advice support and training provision along the lines of the Nelson Trust in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. Provision in that service has included housing and accommodation, prison in-reach, employment & training, prevention of child sexual exploitation and sex-working. Cross-directorate (Housing, Community Safety, Equalities, Children & Families) and multi-agency (Voluntary Sector, Offender Management) discussions were needed to look at the gaps such a service might fill and, if agreed that it would be of benefit, how financial resources might be found. The Nelson Trust has been receiving funding from a range of national and local sources and a similar approach would need to be taken in Bath & North East Somerset. It should be noted that local services were already offering support and advice on these issues, albeit not in one venue. Funding for 2020/21 for rough sleeping services was yet to be confirmed but assurances have been recently given that similar levels of funding could be expected. A business plan has been submitted to MHCLG setting out how this would be spent and a response was expected imminently. Further underwriting of day services to ensure rough sleepers have somewhere to go at any point of the day was also being considered by MHCLG.

Councillor Ball invited all Members of the Council to get engaged and comment on the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy before the next Cabinet meeting on 16th January 2020.

Councillor Tim Ball moved the recommendations.

Councillor Kevin Guy seconded the motion by encouraging as many people as possible to take part in the consultation. Councillor Guy also said that he has had pleasure of seeing officers from this Council and other organisations helping people. Councillor Guy added that sofa surfing, in particular with young children, was something that was overlooked in the report.

Councillor Richard Samuel said that it should be our aim to remove homelessness and rough sleeping from our authority, and house all of our citizens. Our aspirations should be ambitious – nobody in 2019 should be without a roof over their head, and we must do everything we can to help people.

Councillor Dine Romero agreed that the Council must ensure that nobody in B&NES should be without a roof over their head.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Cabinet agreed to note the current consultation exercise and approach in regard to tackling homelessness and the priorities set out in the draft document.

45 COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME UPDATE

Councillor Tim Ball said that this was a high level report and a more detailed report would come to future Cabinet and Council meetings. The programme would enable Council to have greater control over the homes being delivered, including:

- design and environmental standards, (eg carbon neutral)
- rent, (eg social rent)
- allocations and management. (eg greater control over who goes in)

Councillor Ball also said that after considering various options it was decided to investigate further the option to register with Homes England as a “developing Registered Provider”. This approach has had a number of benefits, including being able to access Government funding for affordable housing. The Council would commission independent advice on financial, legal and operational matters. Any established Registered Provider would work in partnership with ADL/ACL (who would take Council sites forward) with the resultant affordable housing being kept by the Registered Provider. The Council would be looking at some other options which may help local residents with housing, including shared-ownership schemes; equity partnership schemes and using empty properties for local cost rent.

Councillor Tim Ball moved for report to be noted.

Councillor Rob Appleyard seconded the motion by saying that thousands of people were looking to move into permanent homes which would not only help their health and wellbeing but also their children and families.

Councillor Richard Samuel said that this report has shown that good progress has been made in terms of the Council House Building Programme, and that he was looking forward for the Council having greater control over the homes being delivered.

The Cabinet noted the high-level programme plan and the options shortlisted for further investigation and detailed analysis.

NOTE: Councillor Dine Romero abstained from voting.

The meeting ended at 7.30 pm

Chair _____

Date Confirmed and Signed _____

Prepared by Democratic Services

CABINET MEETING 7th November 2019

REGISTERED SPEAKERS

Where the intention is to speak about an item on the Agenda, the speaker will be offered the option to speak near the beginning of the meeting or just before the Agenda item.

1. Robin Kerr (Chairman of Federation Of Bath Residents' Associations) – Peer Review
2. Councillor Shaun Hughes - Mass transport solution for the Somer Valley
3. Councillor Sarah Moore - Purpose built student accommodation
4. Councillor Eleanor Jackson – Preservation of 11 BANES playgrounds

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - COUNCILLORS

M 01	Question from:	Councillors Vic Pritchard
<p>What are you planning on doing for the air quality in Farrington Gurney / Temple Cloud which has been recorded as one of the worst in B&NES?</p>		
Answer from:		Councillor David Wood
<p><i>In 2018 the concentrations of nitrogen dioxide in certain locations in Temple Cloud and Farrington Gurney were found to be above the national objective standard of 40 micrograms per metre cubed as an annual average. This led to the declaration of an Air Quality Management Area in both areas as required by the Environment Act 1995.</i></p> <p><i>Earlier this year, Community Infrastructure Levy money was successfully applied for to fund a study to identify and quantify the options that, if implemented, would lead to a reduction in the concentrations of nitrogen dioxide to below the objective standard. Each option will be assessed for feasibility, and if deemed to be feasible, the resulting post implementation reduction in concentrations will be quantified. This report is expected to be complete by December this year.</i></p> <p><i>These options will be taken forward, and will form the draft Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP). Then will follow a 12 week public consultation period where members of the public will have their chance to ask questions officers at drop in sessions locally in both locations. Residents of Bath and North East Somerset have actively engaged in Air Quality consultations which have led to the creation of meaningful plans. The results of the consultation will then be fed into the final AQAP, which is anticipated to be in May/June 2020.</i></p> <p><i>The team will continue to review the current monitoring being undertaken at both locations, and if any Councillor or member of the public have any further questions, they can look at previous air quality monitoring results in the 'Annual Status Reports' at this link https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/environment/pollution/air-quality/reports or contact the Environmental Monitoring Team environmental_monitoring@bathnes.gov.uk</i></p>		
M 02	Question from:	Councillor Paul Myers
<p>What is the latest update regarding the reversion of the Assembly Rooms to the National Trust and what plans are being developed for the future for the Fashion Museum?</p>		
Answer from:		Councillor Paul Crossley
<p><i>The Fashion Museum is widely acknowledged as one of the top ten museums of its kind in the world. Its collection is designated by government as one of national / international</i></p>		

pre-eminence.

Following notification from the National Trust that it will implement the 10-year break clause in the Assembly Rooms' lease in 2023, work has begun to find a new home for the Fashion Museum. This is an opportunity to move it to a more suitable and more central location. The Museum can continue its thriving partnership with Bath Spa University's School of Fashion and Textiles and also make the collection accessible to other students and researchers.

The Fashion Museum will close its doors, and all room hire activities in the Assembly Rooms cease, at some point in 2022 to allow a programme of dilapidations to be undertaken in advance of the break in the lease in March 2023.

M 03	Question from:	Councillor Paul Myers
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Could you identify where negotiations are at with the National Trust for the transfer to them of all council-owned land on the Bathampton Meadows?

Answer from:	Councillor Richard Samuel
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I have been working closely with National Trust on the proposed community asset transfer of Bathampton Meadows. The Leader of the Council wrote formally to the National Trust on 2nd October 2019 and the Trust is now taking the proposal to their SW Regional Management team and if this is supported it will then go to the National Executive for a decision. Once approval has been given by the National Trust executive the Council will enter into negotiations on the detail of the community asset transfer of Bathampton Meadows.'

M 04	Question from:	Councillor Karen Walker
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As you leave Bath going up the Wellsway on the A367, between the turning to the B3110 and A3062 there is a small stretch of 24 hour bus lane.

I would like to ask the Cabinet Member to consider converting this stretch of 24 hour bus lane to a 'peak time only bus lane' this would help the flow of traffic leaving Bath at this well-known pinch point?

Answer from:	Councillor Joanna Wright
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This bus lane was part of the Greater Bristol Bus Network scheme some years ago and it gives outbound buses (including Park & Ride) priority over traffic queuing back from the A367 / A3062 junction. Wherever possible, we make bus priorities applicable at all times to avoid confusion but more limited restrictions are used in places where, for example, on-street parking or access to premises for loading and unloading is needed at off-peak times. There are no premises fronting the highway here, so no such need arises.

The traffic queue on this stretch of the A367 southbound occurs principally in the evening peak hour and it often extends back over the B3110 junction. This creates a

pinch point for buses - which have to queue in the single lane across the junction to access the bus lane. We will be looking to address this problem in the future, to reduce delays to buses.

At other times of day, traffic flows quite well and we have no evidence that indicates it is impeded by the presence of the bus lane. So we do not propose to change the hours of operation.

M 05	Question from:	Councillor Vic Pritchard
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What is the administration's position on 5G rollout across Bath and North East Somerset? Bearing in mind the concern amongst some residents about the potential negative externalities on health, the petition signed by over 1000 people online and the decision made by neighbouring local authorities in Frome, Glastonbury and Shepton Mallet to not implement any measures that will lead to the introduction of 5G in their locality.

Answer from:	Councillors Paul Crossley
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Public Health England have produced a recent guidance note specifically about 5G technology, and their view is that 5G radio-wave technology will not bring any likely risk to the public's health. There is often in any discussion of a new technology and its possible health risk, the invocation of the precautionary principle. Insofar as this guidance is based on the detailed guidelines on the use of mobile technologies from the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation, which will underpin UK policies, PHE would assert that they are applying the precautionary principle in an appropriate fashion. They also commit to monitor emerging evidence and revising policy in line with new findings.

The Government's latest planning advice on telecommunications is available in the National Planning Policy Framework 2019, Paragraph 116 of which states:

Local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds only. They should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for an electronic communications system, or set health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure. The 3 councils referred to are Town Councils and do not have the powers of a local planning authority, therefore they would only be consultees on any proposals.

As such, if the Council were to refuse planning permission on health grounds when an application was accompanied by the necessary health certification (ICNIRP), the decision would be open to successful challenge at appeal with the possibility of having full costs awarded against the Council.

M 06	Question from:	Councillor Brian Simmons
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Will any of the proposed apartments on the Homebase / Pines Way site be available for social rent by B&NES Council / CURO and will it be a sustainable carbon-neutral building with solar panels / ground heat sources?

Answer from:	Councillor Tim Ball
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Proposals for this site will be considered through the planning process having regard to the Council's planning policies and the views of consultees and other contributors.

M 07 **Question from:** Councillor Paul Myers

Could you explain why the decision was taken to scrap the Bath City Forum and what process with timescales is being followed to consider replacement representation arrangements to address the democratic deficit in Bath when compared to the rest of B&NES which continue to have Forums?

Answer from: Councillor Paul Crossley

No decision has been taken to “scrap” the Bath City Forum. However, given the unparished nature of the City, we believe that Bath requires a bespoke approach to community engagement. We are therefore working with residents, voluntary organisations and community groups - who have come together as “Involve Bath”- to review the Forum’s structure and make recommendations. This group is making good progress and findings will be reported to elected members when ready.

M 08 **Question from:** Councillor Brian Simmons

The Kingsmead Square Car Park generated over £465,000 last year (2018/19), if closed down as being widely suggested in future plans for the area, how do you intend to recoup the lost revenue?

Answer from: Councillor Joanna Wright

There are no current proposals to close this popular short stay location.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - PUBLIC

P 01 **Question from:** Will Sandry

Facial Recognition Cameras

Does Bath and North East Somerset Council, or any of its partner agencies (if known) operate any facial recognition CCTV systems within the Bath and North East Somerset area?

Answer from: Councillor Neil Butters

Neither Bath and North East Somerset Council, nor any of its known partner agencies, operate any facial recognition CCTV systems within the Bath and North East Somerset area

P 02	Question from:	Will Sandry
<p>Moorland Road Air Quality</p> <p>Please could you provide the data collected thus far from the sampling location on Moorland Road, Bath? If possible, please would you provide a brief commentary to the data?</p>		
Answer from:		Councillor Sarah Warren
<p><i>The annual average nitrogen dioxide concentration data for Moorland Road is: 2018 – 24 µg/m³ and Provisional (Jan-Sept average) 2019 – 23 µg/m³. The 2019 data is provisional as there is not a full calendar year of results available and the data has not been corrected to the continuous analyser (bias correction). Both years results are well below the annual average nitrogen dioxide objective of 40 µg/m³.”</i></p> <p><i>The monitor is located at the building façade of a property on Moorland Road.</i></p>		

Peer Review - statement by Robin Kerr to Cabinet 7th Nov 19

Leader and Cabinet Members,

I read with interest the feedback from your Corporate Peer Challenge last July, which you are going to discuss later. I note two of its recommendations:

- Firstly, development of a vision and plan for Bath. I welcome this and offer the help of FoBRA in drafting it, but I remember several attempts to do this in the past, none of which seemed to survive!
- Secondly, a review of governance arrangements. The report points out that the “lack of parish councils in the city has implications for community governance”, and goes on to praise the Bath City Forum, though all of this seems to have been omitted from the chapter on “Engagement with Communities”. I am a founder, co-opted member of the City Forum and therefore encourage you to drive its reform or replacement with energy and despatch, as I know you intend to do.

Robin Kerr, FoBRA Chairman – dated 6th Nov 19

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Cabinet: November 2019. Outsourcing, transparency and accountability.

'We, the undersigned residents of Bath and North East Somerset petition the Cabinet and Administration to re-consider the decision to dispose of the family silver, ie 11 children's community playgrounds.

These well-loved, much used areas are essential to young people's mental health and physical well-being, and the creation of community spirit both in long established villages and new estates. The safety and security of children is our highest priority, and we expect the professional standards of care and maintenance to be retained.'

These are the words of a petition gathering signatures in my area, but which with 'purdah', I am assuming cannot now be presented to Full Council. Even in the pouring rain last weekend, BANES residents of all political persuasions in Midsomer Norton were eagerly signing it, and that for two reasons.

Firstly, as any seasoned campaigner in the Somer Valley knows, for the local community it is children and young people who matter most. If the opportunities for outdoor play are reduced, the likelihood of their health problems is increased – not to mention that of parents and grandparents having to deal with all the pent up energy children and young people have. Secondly, they pay their council tax, and along with grit bins, rubbish collections and recycling, and pothole repairs, they expect the council to deliver for the welfare of their children. Where the play equipment has been provided by their own fund-raising, as in the case of Colliers Way, Haydon, or from Section 106 money covered by the developers' sales of over-priced houses to them, they are the more offended.

We have seen a continual process in B&NES since 2000 of outsourcing. First it was council housing to what is now Curo. Other housing associations also take over the required percentage of 'social housing' to be delivered through the council's Homesearch system. Then it was re-cycling, which was such a disaster it had to be brought back 'in house'. Successive administrations cheerfully backed the government's academisation of 'state' schools. Home care and other community medical services went the same way, and now it is litter collection. Parish councils are increasingly expected to take up the burden and raise precepts which residents see as 'double taxation'. Now it is parks and play areas. What all these areas have in common is the lack of transparency, residents being told what will happen, not properly consulted and scrutiny processes being cut to the bone, so that challenge is virtually impossible.

You are all probably aware of the failings of VirginCare, so I will not add my dreadful experience at a clinic at St Martin's Hospital to the litany of failings.

Recently I had a holiday staying in Avila, Valladolid and Salamanca in Spain. I could not believe how clean everywhere was, except for cigarette ends, and what beautiful parks and green spaces there were. I was told that the town council precept was 50% for the parks departments. We are told the problem here is adult social care. Could it possibly be that Spanish children and indeed adults get so much fresh air and exercise that their old people need less care? I only ask
Eleanor Jackson.

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