

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Monday, 23rd November, 2020

Present:- **Councillors** Paul Myers, Winston Duguid, Mark Elliott, Andrew Furse, Alastair Singleton, Shaun Hughes, Karen Warrington and Lucy Hodge

Apologies for absence: Councillors: Hal MacFie

33 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were none.

35 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

36 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

David Redgewell, South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside, made a statement to the Panel regarding transport matters, especially with regard to Covid issues. He stated the importance of Covid marshalls in towns and on transport services to encourage social distancing.

38 MINUTES

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 28th September 2020 as a true record.

39 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Richard Samuel, Cabinet Member for Resources, updated the Panel on the following:

- Regarding the budget, we are currently going through an exercise to review expenditure plans for each portfolio.
- Wednesday 25th November – the Chancellor will announce the spending review.

- We are currently unsure if a public sector pay freeze will apply to Local Government.
- 3 public webinars on the budget are being planned for 15th, 16th and 22nd December. Panel members are welcome to attend. The Panel may also wish to request an advanced sight of the information.
- Regarding Property, there will be a report on the review of Property Services to Cabinet in December. In response to a query from Councillor Duguid, the Cabinet Member explained that this would be an internal report. There has also been an external company appointed to review how the Council is managing its Commercial Estate – this will report in the new year.

40 COMMERCIAL ESTATE

Andrea Frow, Landlord and Tenant Team Manager and Cleo Newcombe-Jones, Renewal Programme Lead (High Streets Reopening & Renewal Programme), gave a presentation to the Panel which covered the following:

- Introduction – Commercial Estate Review
- The Council's Property Portfolio
- The Commercial Estate – Origins
- The Commercial Estate – Holdings
- Commercial Estate Income – by Unit Type
- Commercial Estate – Forecast
- Commercial Estate – Voids
- Commercial Estate – Arrears
- Current Challenges and Debates
- Support and Actions – Estates Section
- Budgetary Implications – Strategies
- On-going work and current initiatives
- Reopening and Renewing High Streets Safely
- Milsom Street – Renewal Programme
- Immediate and Short-Term Interventions Proposal
- Bath City Centre Vacant Unit Action Project

Panel members asked the following questions and raised the following points:
(Officer responses are shown in italics)

Councillor Hughes stated that the retail sector had been on the decline for years, so he was surprised that there had been a flurry of activity in response to Covid when this was an ongoing issue. *The officer explained that work had been ongoing for a number of years and there was an 'Estates Strategy'.*

Councillor Duguid asked if this authority is on the front foot regarding turnover rents which are used elsewhere. *The officer responded that each case is considered on its own merits, but generally turnover rents are avoided as they are difficult and complicated to administer.*

Councillor Furse raised the issue of street traders such as burger vans working outside of high-end businesses. He asked that consideration be given to specific

areas or times for street vendors. Councillor Hodge agreed that street vendors can have a negative impact and asked if there is a plan to manage this.

Councillor Furse stated that there are many residents who live in the city centre and this must be kept in mind in decision making.

Councillor Elliot raised the following points. *Officer responses are shown in italics:*

- What is being learnt from other cities? *The officer agreed that this was useful and confirmed that she had been in touch with York and other similar cities.*
- How are pop ups marketed to local firms? *The officer explained that we are being more proactive and flexible, for example a consortium of 8 businesses have taken up a unit where they could not have done so on their own. It is hoped that this can continue.*

Councillor Warrington asked what percentage of the commercial estate is held in North East Somerset (outside of Bath). Councillor Furse asked what the figure was for outside of the authority. *The officer responded that she would find out and circulate the figures to the Panel.*

The Panel **RESOLVED** to set up a Task and Finish group to consider the internal report on Property (which reports by the end of this year) and the external report on management of the Commercial Estate (due to report in the new year) and bring a summary back to the Panel (possibly March 2021 meeting).

41 BUDGET SETTING 2021/22

Andy Rothery, Director of Finance (S151 Officer), introduced the report and gave a presentation to the Panel which covered the following:

- Financial Outlook 5 year view
- Budget Structure by Portfolio
- Next Steps
- Budget Engagement
- Budget Engagement themes
- High level timetable

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

Councillor Myers asked for information on staffing levels – a base level and levels looking forward for broad portfolio areas. *The officer stated that he would forward information on staffing budgets to the Panel.*

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the Medium Term Financial Strategy; the 2021/22 Budget presentation and budget engagement themes.

42 TASK AND FINISH GROUP - COMMERCIAL MARKETS

The Panel discussed the way ahead regarding the key findings of the Task and Finish Group on Commercial Markets and **RESOLVED** that the following recommendations be forwarded to the relevant Cabinet Members:

1. **Heritage and Tourism** – that detailed research in this area be discussed with the relevant Cabinet Member.

2. **Parking** –
 - that the pressing concern of making Park and Ride sites fit for purpose (in terms of opening hours and lighting) be addressed.
 - That the use of tariffs to change travel behaviour be explored.
 - That parking enforcement be strengthened;
 - That on street parking be reduced for visitors (and they be encouraged to use the Park and Ride or car parks)

3. **Commercial Estate** –
 - That more research be done to understand the cultural and behavioural shift in retail.
 - That we understand the different sectors of the city and encourage unique characteristic activity for these areas.
 - That these market sectors be linked together in the future.
 - That re purposing and diversification in the high street be explored.
 - That a strategy be put in place to improve the night-time economy (so that it caters for a wider group).

43 PANEL WORKPLAN

It was noted that an item on ‘People Strategy’ was likely to be brought to the next meeting.

It was noted that the January/February 2021 meeting was likely to be mainly concerned with the budget report and discussion.

Councillor Myers thanked the Panel for their work on the Council Tax Contribution Fund at the last meeting.

Councillor Myers asked Panel members for forward any suggestions for future items to the Democratic Services Officer and these will be discussed at the agenda setting meetings with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Panel.

The Panel noted their future workplan.

The meeting ended at 5.46 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services