

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Monday, 9th May, 2022

Present:- **Councillors** Karen Warrington, Winston Duguid, Mark Elliott, Andrew Furse, Lucy Hodge, Shaun Hughes, Hal MacFie, Alastair Singleton and Sally Davis

98 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

99 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

100 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were none.

101 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

102 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

Councillor Joanna Wright made a statement regarding Cleveland Bridge. *A copy of the statement is attached to the minutes.*

Councillor Hughes stated that he shared the frustrations and asked why Councillor Wright had brought the statement to this Panel. Councillor Wright explained that the finance for the repairs sits with this Panel, the work has overrun so the Government Grant may have ended. Councillor Wright added that the bridge work may impact on the Clean Air Zone targets which could have financial implications.

Councillor Duguid proposed that the statement be referred to the Climate Emergency and Sustainability PDS Panel as transport sits within their remit. Councillor Wright stated that she found further delay challenging as the next meeting of the relevant Panel is 27th June 2022. Councillor Warrington stated that she would forward the statement to the CES Panel and ask them to address the issues raised.

Cllr Wright statement 20220509

104 MINUTES

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

105 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Resources, Councillor Richard Samuel, updated the Panel on the following:

Finance

- Work is ongoing on the outturn report which will be reported to Cabinet in July 2022.
- Regarding the Council Tax energy rebate – direct debit payers should receive their payment this week. The officers are working on payment for the non direct debit payers.

Economic Development

- The Milsom Quarter Master Plan was launched last week, there was also a Councillor briefing. It is a comprehensive package and there will now be a 3 month consultation period as it is the public's city and they should have a say. The Cabinet will receive the outcomes of the consultation and will consider the proposals for adoption. This will then feed into the Local Plan.
- The Somer Valley Enterprise Zone proposals will be going out to consultation on 19th May 2022 for 28 days.
- Bath Quays South – two tenants have already signed up but it is difficult to market a building when it is a building site.
- Avon Street Car Park – we are expecting demolition in July.

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

In response to a query from Councillor Duguid, The Cabinet Member explained that the bridge would initially be open for tenants of the two building spaces at Bath Quays South. It is likely that contractors will leave the site at the end of December and public access will be at the start of next year.

Councillor Furse urged the Cabinet Member to ensure that there is a robust system to prevent fraud regarding the Council Tax energy rebate scheme and any software patch must be tested. The Cabinet Member stated that it was a balance to get the payments out but avoid fraud. He explained that while we were slower to get the Covid grants out, we avoided a lot of fraud in that process. There was no warning from the Chancellor on this, very short notice. All Council's are in the same situation. We will test the systems.

Councillor Furse asked that, in the development of the Milsom Quarter, it is remembered that we have residents in the city centre along with businesses.

Councillor Hughes thanked Councillor Samuel for his work in resolving the issues that were raised in the previous meeting regarding the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone.

106 CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS

Amanda George, Director of Business Change and Customer Services, gave a presentation to the Panel which covered the following:

- Customer Contact Strategy – What we know
- Customer Contact Strategy – 10 Principles
- The Strategy – by channel, we will ...
- 'Agile' Methodology for Projects
- Customer Contact Strategy – Current Programme
- Programme Progress – High Level Plan
- Customer Contact Strategy Governance
- Summary and Next Steps (Focus always on user needs)

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

Councillor Elliott stated that 'Agile' methodology suits some projects but not all. The officer agreed and explained that it was used for testing and trials.

Councillor MacFie explained some frustrations as a user/consumer of the system, he gave an example of waiting 5 hours for a phone response. He stated that while the organisation may be saving time, is this resulting in taking up the consumer's time. The officer responded that part of the methodology is to talk to service users and that information will feed into the process redesign. She explained that the goal was to improve user experience. Councillor Furse stated the importance of training and culture and also that there are internal customers who may struggle with some of the digital systems. The officer explained that any redesign must be fully embedded, there is a training and culture workstream which should benefit internal and external customers.

Councillor Duguid stated that 'Councillor Direct' was very valuable and asked about 'Fix My Street'. The officer explained that the system is perfectly good but needs some further development as some of the scripting is not up to standard. Most issues are relatively easy to resolve and most customer feedback is positive.

Councillor Singleton asked where Councillors sit in terms of customers. He stated that a lot of phone calls and emails go unanswered, he stated that this is inefficient and concerning. He stated that a resident had tried a Council number three times and it had rung out. The officer explained that there were currently too many numbers on the website and these contact points will be reduced. She stated that the volume of emails received can be extremely high. 'Councillor Direct' is a dedicated service.

Councillor Hughes stated that the email volume may be high because people have not had a response on the phone.

Councillor Hughes asked how surveys are carried out, are they all online. The officer explained that the Voicebox survey goes to a random selection of BANES residents and is paper based.

Councillor Hodge stated that she would rather look up the correct number than have the automated choices. She asked if the 'out of office' message is used for annual leave or when someone is busy. The officer responded that this would predominantly be used for annual leave.

Councillor Warrington stated that people want to phone a person if they get stuck with online systems. Online forms are frustrating if you are unable to save changes. She also pointed out that the figure of 94% quoted regarding internet access does not mean people can always get online due to issues such as rural broadband.

Councillor MacFie stated that when this item comes back to the Panel in 6 months, there will be the first dashboard of Performance Indicators which we can track. The officer agreed that progress can be shown.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the presentation.

107 CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS PROCESS

David Langman, Customer Feedback and Standards Manager, gave a presentation to the Panel which covered the following:

- Requested discussion today – Overview of BANES policy and procedures for handling Customer Feedback with focus on complaints
- Customer Feedback
- Overview
- Complaint Process Stages
- Response Timescales
- Outcomes and Resolutions
- Statistics – Stage 1
- Statistics – Stage 2
- Statistics – Annual Trend

The officer explained that all information presented is in the public domain.

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

Councillor Macfie asked how happy consumers are with the handling of complaints. The officer explained that users are contacted at the end of their journey and asked about this, feedback can be affected by the outcome of the complaint.

Councillor Hodge asked if the complaints officers had other areas of work. The officer explained that this function was added on to their main role and it depends on the size of the service as to how many complaints officers there are. It is a responsive role and there are varying volumes of work.

Councillor Hodge asked what percentage of cases are left open. The officer explained that the vast majority are closed in 15 days.

Councillor Hodge asked how it is decided when moving from Stage 1 to Stage 2. The officer explained that there is a suite of response templates including sign off protocols for what the customer can do if they are not satisfied with the result. We give information at each point on the next stage process.

Councillor Hodge asked if Councillors should direct people to the complaints process. The officer explained that there needs to be a triage process to sort out the difference between a request/reporting of a problem and a complaint.

Councillor Hughes asked how to find out why there has been a substantial increase in complaints in the last 2 years. The officer confirmed that there had been an increase in this time of lockdowns and Covid. This is in line with most other Councils and also the Ombudsman. People have spent more time at home and in their local environment/Council.

Councillor Hughes stated that 'Fix My Street' says a complaint is closed when it is not and asked how complaints are closed. The officer explained that letters are clear, if we do not hear back from someone in 30 days, we consider the complaint closed.

Councillor Singleton asked how vexatious complaints are dealt with. The officer explained that this is decided by the Council's Monitoring Officer. He added that there were a very small number of these cases.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the presentation.

108 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted the future workplan with the following request:

Councillor Duguid asked that an item on 'Aequus' be brought to the 11th July meeting and the item on 'Emerging Digital Data' be moved to the 26th September meeting.

The meeting ended at 5.52 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services

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Statement to Corporate Panel – 9th May 2022 – Councillor Joanna Wright

Fixing Cleveland Bridge

As Ward Councillor for Lambridge, many residents on the east of Bath are repeatedly asking why are the renovation works on Cleveland Bridge taking so long?

The disruption of these works is significant to all sections of society. From local residents impacted by long lines of unmoving traffic causing pollution, the impact to traders on deliveries and connections, the hospitality and tourist industry, cyclists forced to deal with signs littered across the cycling space. - in short the closure of this bridge has caused an increase to journey times and distances and further added to Bath's congestion issues and is having a detrimental impact on Bath.

On the 28th April 2022 B&NES Council released a press statement in which Cllr Manda Rigby stated that:

"In January contractors unearthed a complex engineering and safety critical issue which reports show does not have a straight forward solution. Engineers need to be 100 per cent certain any solution will not cause a structural failure on other sections of the bridge. This will take time to model and for this reason we are extending the temporary traffic regulation order for another six months. We had aimed to open the bridge to two-way car traffic during this period, but we have been informed by technical experts that this cannot be done safely."

As the previous Joint Cabinet Member for Transport who was central to these works commencing I would like to ask the Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel to investigate the reason why Cleveland Bridge is still in the process of renovation and why did it take so long for the works to begin?

In one of my first conversations with Officers on becoming a Cabinet member I was informed of the absolute necessity to fix Cleveland Bridge.

I was clearly told how Cleveland Bridge was a deteriorating heritage asset, listed Grade II* which sits on Bath's Primary Road Network (PRN).

And that B&NES Council is a Highway Authority, which is directed by the Department for Transport (DfT) to manage the Primary Road Network and has a statutory duty to keep its highways structures safe.

As the Highway Authority, B&NES operates a bridge assessment process to National Standards. The process can be broken into two parts: the Assessment of the bridge, and the Technical Approval of the assessment. Both functions require a high degree of competency as ultimately the Technical Reviewer is accountable for approving the bridge as safe or agreeing mitigations. The assessment and technical review are an evidence-based process that leads to a safety-critical decision being made regarding the safe use of the bridge. This process is based on technical evidence and is free from external influence.

However, on passing to Cabinet the critical need, from a technical report as to why Cleveland Bridge must be fixed, it became apparent to me that delays to the bridge renovations were a clear political priority for some. The Temporary Weight limit restrictions had stopped HGVs from crossing Cleveland Bridge and this was seen as politically convenient.

Over many months obstacles of various sorts were put in place to delay Cleveland Bridge from being fixed, resulting in Officers making the renovations an operational decision.

I am therefore concerned that the early political delay led to further structural corrosion on Cleveland bridge, which has forced the original 7 month closure to a point where the Council presently is unable to confirm when this bridge will be fixed or open again for two way traffic.

Please can I ask that the Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel looks into this matter?

Joanna Wright

Green Party Councillor for Lambridge