

# Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel

**Date: Monday, 29th March, 2021**

**Time: 4.00 pm**

**Venue: Virtual Meeting - Zoom - Public Access via  
YouTube**

**<https://www.youtube.com/bathnescouncil>**

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

**Panel members only – there will be a pre meeting at 3.30pm**



**Michaela Gay**

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## NOTES:

1. **Inspection of Papers:** Papers are available for inspection as follows:

Council's website: <https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1>

2. **Details of decisions taken at this meeting** can be found in the minutes which will be circulated with the agenda for the next meeting. In the meantime, details can be obtained by contacting as above.

3. **Recording at Meetings:-**

The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 now allows filming and recording by anyone attending a meeting. This is not within the Council's control.

Some of our meetings are webcast. At the start of the meeting, the Chair will confirm if all or part of the meeting is to be filmed. If you would prefer not to be filmed for the webcast, please make yourself known to the camera operators.

To comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, we require the consent of parents or guardians before filming children or young people. For more information, please speak to the camera operator.

The Council will broadcast the images and sound live via the internet [www.bathnes.gov.uk/webcast](http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/webcast) An archived recording of the proceedings will also be available for viewing after the meeting. The Council may also use the images/sound recordings on its social media site or share with other organisations, such as broadcasters.

4. **Public Speaking at Meetings**

The Council has a scheme to encourage the public to make their views known at meetings. They may make a statement relevant to what the meeting has power to do. They may also present a petition or a deputation on behalf of a group.

**Advance notice is required not less than two full working days before the meeting. This means that for meetings held on Thursdays notice must be received in Democratic Services by 5.00pm the previous Monday.**

Further details of the scheme can be found at:

<https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=12942>

5. **Supplementary information for meetings**

Additional information and Protocols and procedures relating to meetings

<https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13505>

## Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel - Monday, 29th March, 2021

at 4.00 pm in the Virtual Meeting - Zoom - Public Access via YouTube  
<https://www.youtube.com/bathnescouncil>

### A G E N D A

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS
2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS
3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

At this point in the meeting declarations of interest are received from Members in any of the agenda items under consideration at the meeting. Members are asked to indicate:

- (a) The agenda item number in which they have an interest to declare.
- (b) The nature of their interest.
- (c) Whether their interest is **a disclosable pecuniary interest** *or* an **other interest**,  
(as defined in Part 2, A and B of the Code of Conduct and Rules for Registration of Interests)

Any Member who needs to clarify any matters relating to the declaration of interests is recommended to seek advice from the Council's Monitoring Officer or a member of his staff before the meeting to expedite dealing with the item during the meeting.

4. TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN
5. ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE DEPUTATIONS, STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING

At the time of publication no notifications had been received.

6. MINUTES (Pages 5 - 12)
7. CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The Cabinet Member will update the Panel on any relevant issues. Panel members may ask questions on the update provided.

8. PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY (Pages 13 - 16)

A report on 'Parental Leave Policy' is attached.

9. INVEST IN BATH UPDATE (Pages 17 - 28)

An update report on 'Invest in Bath' is attached. There will also be a short presentation at the meeting.

10. UPDATE ON PARISH CHARTER

There will be a presentation on this item. There is no report attached.

11. PANEL WORKPLAN (Pages 29 - 32)

This report presents the latest workplan for the Panel. Any suggestions for further items or amendments to the current programme will be logged and scheduled in consultation with the Panel's Chair and supporting officers.

The Committee Administrator for this meeting is Michaela Gay who can be contacted on [michaela\\_gay@bathnes.gov.uk](mailto:michaela_gay@bathnes.gov.uk), 01225 394411.

**BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

**MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING**

Monday, 8th February, 2021

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

Also in attendance: Councillors Vic Pritchard (lead call-in Councillor) and Richard Samuel (Cabinet Member for Resources)

**65 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

He reminded the Panel that their remit today was to consider the following two bullet points of the call-in notice;

- *the decision to dispose of the asset at nearly half a million pounds below market value, and on a non-competitive basis, is contrary to the interests of Council Taxpayers in B&NES*
- *the case has not been made to justify the below market value disposal and so the asset should be listed on the open market, where it will fetch greater returns for the Council*

He explained that any other aspects of Council company governance were not within the scope of the meeting. The Chair further reminded the meeting that, whilst there were two decisions on the Council's Forward Plan relating to 117 Newbridge Hill, only the one made by the Cabinet Member, Cllr Samuel, is to be scrutinised today. The other decision taken by the Leader as Shareholder of a Council owned company, is outside the jurisdiction of this Panel. Michael Hewitt (Head of Legal & Democratic Services & Acting Monitoring Officer) confirmed this position.

**66 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

**67 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

There was none.

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

The following statements were made by members of the public and Councillors.

Councillor Colin Blackburn addressed the Panel. He made reference to the fact that, although this was a Conservative led call-in, it had support from across the groups. This challenge expressed a fear that residents were being short changed. He explained his concern that the valuation figure was too low and reported a much higher offer he was aware of from a local developer. At a time when finances were so constrained, he considered this was unfair to residents and better value could be obtained.

Councillor Andy Furse asked if the offer Councillor Blackburn had received had been in writing and including the conditions regarding HMOs and holiday lets, to which Councillor Blackburn responded that it had been.

Councillor Winston Duguid followed this up to check that the valuation had been on a 5-bedroom detached house rather than the market which might serve the RUH. Councillor Blackburn replied that it was to re-develop into 6 apartments with a restriction against HMO or AirBnB type properties.

Bob Goodman addressed the Panel describing the concern, in his view, of commercial property irregularity. He explained that Aequus has been set up to ensure empty properties went back into residential use, but now activity was going way beyond that. He ran through some financial details which called this decision into question and proposed that this was only proceeding in this way to keep a failing development company going, at the expense of residents. He asked this be referred to Council to look into his concerns, including the company arrangements, with independent advice to hand.

Councillor Karen Warrington asked Bob for his view on the return if sold for student and holiday lets, to which Bob responded that he had not addressed that in his statement. It may well be the case that that would bring a higher return, but he recognised the social need and so had not made reference to that aspect.

Councillor Winston Duguid asked Bob if he was calling into question the competence of Knight Frank. Bob responded that, if that was the valuation they had produced, then he did consider it should be independently reviewed.

Councillor Mark Elliott asked Bob if he believed Cabinet Members should follow advice given to them, such as from professional valuers. Bob replied that the Cabinet Member should look at all the information available and if the Cabinet Member believes any advice is wrong, he should seek further advice.

David Stubbs addressed the Panel. He explained his background as a retired Chartered Valuation surveyor. He posited that the rationale behind the decision was flawed, as being justified by the imposition of voluntary conditions. He explained that, in his experience, any developer would be prepared to pay at or close to the unconditional value reported by Knight Frank. This transaction is predicated on the hope for future return, which is not enough, due to the element of risk. He suggested this was taking place as ADL were unable to go ahead without the discount. He would like to see this go to the private sector with the same conditions for a higher return.

Councillor Mark Elliott asked if David could comment on why he considered Knight Frank had come up with a flawed valuation. David responded that, unless he was able to see the instructions given to them and their methodology, he would not like to comment, but he could not see how the undervalue was warranted based on the known information.

Councillor Eleanor Jackson addressed the Panel. A full copy of her statement can be read via the link from the minutes. Councillor Jackson questioned the assumptions about the planning process made in this proposal and outlined the considerations the Planning Committee would consider. She queried why 3 valuations had not been sought, as was necessary for Parish Council negotiations. She asked the Panel to request the Cabinet Member ask for 2 more valuations and to ask for the evidence to justify the need for this accommodation.

Councillor Paul May addressed the Panel. He asked for clarity on 2 issues; firstly relating to the need, as he had not seen evidence of this and secondly, about the value. On breaking down the numbers and seeking advice from the Section 151 officer, he was advised that ADL is TECKAL exempt. CIPFA advises that TECKAL is complex and subject to challenge and so Councillor May wanted the Scrutiny Panel to check if this exemption was valid in proving value for money for Council Tax payers.

The Chair thanked all the speakers for their statements.

## **69 CALL IN OF DECISION E3229 - ASSET DISPOSAL: 117 NEWBRIDGE HILL, BATH**

Councillor Vic Pritchard, as lead call-in Councillor, addressed the Panel. He explained his view that there was no justification for this property to be sold at half a million pounds below the market value and it was irresponsible to do so. His objection could be summarised in 3 areas;

- The Council is only a temporary custodian of this public money and this asset belongs to the people so better value should be sought;
- This was setting a dangerous precedent to forego the financial benefit now for the uncertainty of a gamble on future income;
- Administrative mismanagement of the Council's property company to justify this decision.

Councillor Pritchard concluded by asking the Panel to take this opportunity to reconsider this decision before it is too late.

Councillor Richard Samuel then addressed the Panel as decision maker and Cabinet Member for Resources. He explained the recent history of this property and the decisions made by the previous Administration of the Council leading to their decision for its disposal to ADL at reduced value and creating a dividend. On becoming involved as Cabinet Member, he sought a business case and the required independent valuation as the Council was seeking to impose voluntary conditions. As Cabinet Member, Councillor Samuel explained that he could not ignore the independent professional advice received. He added that this valuation process was as set out in the procedures established by the previous Administration. Councillor

Samuel concluded by rejecting the basis of the call-in and supported this decision which generated a dividend, rather than it being lost to the private sector.

Councillor Shaun Hughes made reference to the voluntary conditions and restrictive covenants and asked how watertight they were, with regard to future landlords and their ability to change them. Councillor Samuel replied that they will be completely watertight, as they will be built into the covenants of sale. He added, with regard to comments about the valuation, that he was not an expert and so must rely on qualified advice from experienced professionals, endorsed by statutory officers of the Council. We should not be selective about only taking on board parts of advice that we like and ignore those parts we do not.

Councillor Winston Duguid made reference to the actual return to the Council being more than just the sale and asked Councillor Samuel to comment on that. Councillor Samuel agreed that the figures in the round needed to be looked at including Council tax receipts over the next 20 years. He explained there was also provision that ADL can retain an element of the profit so it can function as a company with working capital. The total gains are in excess of the open market value of simple disposal as it is recycling funds into the Council's finances to benefit residents.

Councillor Paul Myers asked if Councillor Samuel considered he had a right to question a valuation. Councillor Samuel responded that he did query the figures on 2 occasions and, as a result of that query, more information was provided on how the valuation had been derived. With regard to the legislative position, Councillor Samuel read a section of the Government advice which stated that the Council must use a RICS accredited independent valuer and can't ignore this advice. We are bound within audit and sound decision-making rules in this regard. In response to a further query from Councillor Myers about Councillor Samuel's view about the valuation now, having queried the figure, Councillor Samuel responded that he was neither happy nor unhappy, but he had to recognise that this was the professional advice received. Councillor Myers asked if Councillor Samuel continued to query the figure. Councillor Samuel replied that the valuation report sets out in considerable detail how the valuation is reached and beyond his level of competence, so he defers to officers to confirm the valuation advice is appropriate and correct for the circumstances.

Councillor Myers referred to Councillor Samuel's statement that he was adhering to processes set up by the previous Administration and asked if different financial circumstances now could warrant a different approach. Councillor Samuel replied that the principle behind it – retaining profits from development within the Council's finances rather than handing them to the private sector – was sound and had not changed. Sites are still being developed and dividends still feeding into the Council's coffers. Some small amendments have been clarified regarding working arrangements between the two organisations, but this Administration remained committed to make this work.

Councillor Mark Elliott asked why it was not the practice to get separate valuations as had been referred to in Councillor Jackson's statement. Councillor Samuel responded that we were only required to get one valuation from a professionally qualified organisation.

Councillor Winston Duguid referred to the social and environmental criteria and asked whether those factors had been considered in the decision making. Councillor Samuel replied that they had wanted the sale price to not be beyond the reach of local people, and for the energy efficiency elements to be in line with the Council's climate emergency targets. The impact of these restrictions does have an impact on the value.

Councillor Shaun Hughes asked who produced the brief for the valuation and whether ADL had had any input into that. Councillor Samuel replied that ADL would not have had input as that would have been totally inappropriate. The Council commissions its own advice through its officers.

Councillor Paul Myers asked whether it would not have been possible to achieve a higher value still with the required benefits, as had been suggested by some of the speakers. Councillor Samuel replied that he did not consider it so as, once the property had been disposed of, they had no further control over how it was developed.

Councillor Paul Myers asked if it was not a risk to pursue this option, as opposed to receiving a higher level of funds, in this constrained financial environment and a potential property recession. Councillor Samuel responded that there was always a risk with any development, but he felt reasonably confident that the information set out in the documents does mitigate the risk. ADL are not un-tried as a development partner and have produced significant developments that produce return, so the model is sound. In producing a business case, we need to form a view to the level of risk before the decision is made. If the figures indicated a small margin, or a high risk, it is unlikely we would proceed on that particular development.

Councillor Richard Samuel, in his closing statement, stated that this decision had been taken as part of a well-established policy, created by the previous Administration, to achieve a pipeline of schemes to create a viable local authority company and to benefit Council tax payers by recycling money that would otherwise have gone into the private sector. He urged the Panel to dismiss the call-in as it was within policy, and compliant with legal and financial considerations.

Councillor Vic Pritchard, in his closing statement, highlighted the lay perspective of this decision. He proposed that the public would not understand the intricacies of how it works, and public perception is important. He raised the point made by Councillor Jackson about the practice of seeking 3 valuations for any Town or Parish Council project and posited it was surely more prudent to seek 3 quotes in the interests of public benefit. He queried whether the process could be improved.

The Panel then moved into their debate.

Councillor Shaun Hughes raised a few concerns about the level of the undervalue, and about the viability of restrictions from covenants in the future.

Councillor Winston Duguid commented, with regard to the question of 3 valuations that, if that was the requirement, why was that not written into the policy when it was set up. He commented that there seemed to be a lack of understanding of the element of future profitability. He asked the Panel to look at ADL's track record and

mentioned successful projects at Terrace Walk and Westgate Buildings. He reminded the Panel that Knight Frank were professionals and within the best in the field. He invited the Panel to consider this holistically and look at the social and environmental aspects too.

Councillor Mark Elliott commented that he did not feel the call-in justification had been proven and that Councillor Samuel had followed guidance.

Councillor Karen Warrington raised some concerns. She was not sure that the policy specified how many valuations and it was not unreasonable to seek 3 as takes place at local Council level. On balance, in a time of huge turmoil, she queried if it was not better to sell now rather than take a risk for the longer term with the prospect of a fall in the housing market.

Councillor Mark Elliott responded to the above point about valuations, saying that valuation reports were expensive, it is not the same as a house valuation, and that Councillor Samuel had followed process and professional advice. With regard to the risk in the current climate, by selling to ADL, if the market values drop, the company can hold it and rent it if that is the best option at the time.

Councillor Shaun Hughes explained that he was not questioning the valuation itself, but without knowing the brief they were given, it is difficult for the Panel to truly scrutinise this.

Councillor Hal McFie agreed with the comments made by Councillor Elliott. Another valuation would be expensive, and he did not consider it would be warranted. Agreed procedures have been followed.

Councillor Karen Warrington clarified that she had not been calling into question Knight Frank's valuation, but just making the point that professionals can differ in their opinions.

Councillor Paul Myers expressed his concern about the public perception of this. In an unprecedented budget crisis, the financial return is needed now, and the public would expect the Council to look at this within the current situation and use common sense. It appears that the property company needs business. We need to consider this very carefully.

Councillor Mark Elliott responded to the above point stating that Councillor Samuel needed to work within the professional framework and not by using his common sense.

Councillor Alastair Singleton commented that professional advice had been taken and not to do so would have been ultra-vires. This decision has greater long-term financial, social and environmental benefits.

Councillor Hal McFie then moved, seconded by Councillor Elliott, that the Panel should dismiss the call-in.

At a request from Councillor Karen Warrington, and with the agreement of the Panel, a named vote was taken;

|                       |   |         |
|-----------------------|---|---------|
| Councillor Duguid     | - | For     |
| Councillor Elliott    | - | For     |
| Councillor Furse      | - | For     |
| Councillor Hodge      | - | Abstain |
| Councillor Hughes     | - | Against |
| Councillor McFie      | - | For     |
| Councillor Singleton  | - | For     |
| Councillor Warrington | - | Against |
| Councillor Myers      | - | Against |

The resolution was carried with 5 in favour, 3 against and 1 abstention.

The Chair thanked all those involved.

The meeting ended at 5.56 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**

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| <b>Bath &amp; North East Somerset Council</b> |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| MEETING:                                      | <b>Corporate Policy Development &amp; Scrutiny Panel</b> |  |
| MEETING DATE:                                 | <b>29<sup>th</sup> March 2021</b>                        |  |
|   |  |  |
| TITLE:  | <b>Parental leave policy – handling casework</b>         |  |
| WARD:   | All  |  |
| <b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>                    |  |  |
| <b>List of attachments to this report:</b>    |  |  |
| None  |  |  |

## **1 THE ISSUE**

- 1.1 Council on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020 agreed to adopt a Parental Leave policy and asked the Corporate Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel to investigate options for handling casework during a period of parental leave.

## **2 RECOMMENDATION**

The Panel is asked to;

- 2.1 Propose to Council that the principles set out in section 3.9 are adopted to support the policy.

## **3 THE REPORT**

- 3.1 When Council adopted the [Parental Leave policy](#) in September 2020, they further agreed to request that the Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel consider the matter of how the role of casework could be undertaken while a councillor is on parental leave or absent for other reasons (e.g. long-term sickness), and to report back to Council by the next Annual Meeting with proposals, or reasons for not bringing proposals.

- 3.2 Although the status of Councillors (who are not employees of the Council) means that employee benefits do not apply to them, the Council clearly recognises a duty of care to Councillors. The Council must seek to support Councillors in those areas which it can manage and control.

- 3.3 This may involve making appropriate adjustments for Councillors attending meetings, staying in touch with key messages and information from the Council and alerting and signposting to sources of information.
- 3.4 A number of Councils (just under 40) were contacted to see how they handled this. None of those that responded reported formal arrangements being put in place to manage casework during a period of parental or other such absence. The majority stated that it was a matter for the member taking the leave of absence to decide which responsibilities (if any) they wished to continue e.g. meeting attendance, a degree of casework, special responsibilities etc. and to discuss and agree this with their Group Leader.
- 3.5 For those wards represented by two councillors, a councillor taking a leave of absence may naturally signpost to their ward colleague. For single member wards, if they chose not to call upon their ward colleague, another named councillor from their group should be identified for constituency casework. One Council stated an example of a councillor employing a caseworker to assist, as a private arrangement not organised or funded by the Council.
- 3.6 A key theme from consulting other Councils was that the arrangements political groups make to cover member's roles must go across party politics to ensure that there is no democratic deficit to constituents.
- 3.7 Council officers do not manage casework for councillors so this must remain a matter between the councillor and their political group, although the Council can help to facilitate such arrangements.
- 3.8 As B&NES has a Political Assistant or Group Support Officer for each political group, they are best placed to handle the necessary liaison between the Group Leader and absent councillor.
- 3.9 When a councillor indicates they intend to take a period of parental leave, the following steps are recommended;
- (1) Group Leader has a discussion with the councillor to establish;
    - a) Relevant dates for start and end of period of leave;
    - b) Whether the councillor would like to maintain any councillor responsibilities during this period and, if so, which ones;
    - c) How and how often the councillor would like to be contacted;
    - d) How they would like their webpage to be amended;
    - e) Record keeping arrangements during the period of leave;
    - f) A review and handover of open issues at the start of the period of parental leave;
    - g) Settling back in on return from parental leave (work handover, if further support needed)
    - h) Any other relevant considerations including undertaking a risk assessment for expectant/new mothers if appropriate.

3.10 The Group Leader or Political Assistant then communicates the above information to Democratic Services and they jointly agree what is needed. Understandably, each case will be individual, and so a flexible approach will be needed, and the arrangements may need to adapt with circumstances.

#### **4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1 This policy supports Councillors with caring responsibilities.

#### **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)**

5.1 There are no direct financial implications of the proposals.

#### **6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision-making risk management guidance.

#### **7 EQUALITIES**

7.1 The role of a councillor should be open to all, regardless of their background, and adopting a Parental Leave policy is a step towards encouraging a wider range of people to become councillors, and is also a step to encourage existing councillors who may want to start a family to remain as councillors.

#### **8 CLIMATE CHANGE**

8.1 There are no direct climate change implications of proposals.

#### **9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

9.1 None.

#### **10 CONSULTATION**

10.1 Political Group Leaders, Political Group Assistants, Director of Human Resources & Organisational Development, Head of Legal & Democratic Services, Chief Executive.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Contact person</b>  | <i>Jo Morrison, Democratic Services Manager</i>  |
| <b>Background papers</b>   | <i>Parental Leave policy;</i><br><a href="https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s62497/Appendix%20-%20Parental%20Leave%20Policy.pdf">https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s62497/Appendix%20-%20Parental%20Leave%20Policy.pdf</a> |
| <b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b> |  |

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| <b>Bath &amp; North East Somerset Council</b>   |  |               |
|---|--|---------------|
| MEETING/<br>DECISION<br>MAKER:  | <b>Corporate Policy Development &amp; Scrutiny Panel</b> |               |
| MEETING/<br>DECISION<br>DATE:   | <b>29 March 2021</b>                                     |               |
|   |  | <b>E 9999</b> |
| TITLE:  | <b>Invest in Bath Service Overview</b>                   |               |
| WARD:   | All  |               |
| <b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>  |  |               |
| <b>List of attachments to this report:</b>  |  |               |
| Appendix 1: List of key current business & skills initiatives being delivered or promoted by the Business & Skills Team |  |               |

## **1 THE ISSUE**

- 1.1 Panel members requested an update on the Invest in Bath service, which provides a single point of entry to a wide range of support for local businesses and residents. The service is operated through the Council's Business and Skills team forming part of the Cabinet Member for Housing Planning and Regeneration's portfolio. The report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the team to support local businesses and residents throughout Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES).
- 1.2 The Service is accessed through the Invest in Bath website - [www.investinbath.co.uk](http://www.investinbath.co.uk)

## **2 RECOMMENDATION**

**The Panel is asked to;**

- 2.1 Note the work of the Business & Skills Team in delivering the Invest in Bath brand that promotes inclusive economic growth throughout the district
- 2.2 Support the team's work in engaging both businesses and residents in your wards in order to increase take-up of the initiatives available

### 3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 Invest in Bath is a service delivered by the council's Business & Skills Team, whose core function is to deliver sustainable inclusive growth to the district's economy. We aim to enable both residents and business to meet their full economic potential, increasing productivity, incomes, business rates and improving health and wellbeing outcomes.
- 3.2 Invest in Bath is the team's business, innovation and inward investment service, whilst the team's other two main brands comprise Achieve B&NES (skills and employability support to businesses and residents) and Future Bright (an in-work progression project funded externally). The team also leads on a number of digital projects such as Connecting Devon & Somerset Broadband, targeted recruitment and training through planning obligations and the economic development input into planning policy development and development management functions.
- 3.3 The Invest in Bath brand itself was developed in parallel to Invest Bristol & Bath, the West of England Combined Authority (WECA)'s inward investment service. The brand is outward-looking and aims to harness Bath's global reach to promote Bath & North East Somerset as an outstanding location to do business in. Our services are primarily focussed on businesses and people of B&NES as a whole, regardless of their location within the district.

3.4 The principle functions supporting businesses have been;

#### (1) The COVID Grant schemes

In the past 12 months the team has:

- Delivered 14000 Government COVID grants to 3800 B&NES businesses, totalling over £65m
- Responded to over 5,000 individual enquiries and requests for support from local businesses and residents

#### (2) Universal Business support Service

- In the first 11 months, delivered 57 free webinars, 374 free one-to-one advice sessions and 3+ hours of dedicated support to 292 local SMEs or start-ups.
- Ran targeted sessions to help businesses adapt to COVID, including business resilience, sustainability, HR, remote working, growing online presence and financial modules
- Secured funding for a further two years of the service

#### (3) Employment and Skills advice and services

- Achieve B&NES delivers projects, initiatives and events focussed on improvement the employability and long-term employment outcomes for target resident groups

- The Employment and Skills Pod, a newly launched community service to support residents seeking work and training (based in Peasedown St John)
- Future Bright, a free service offering coaching and assisting to residents in receipt of in-work benefits to enable them to progress with their skills, income and career path. The service has worked helped 629 residents complete action plans, 222 undertake training courses, and 316 access client-responsive budgets. Future Bright widened its scope to support people affected by redundancy in light of COVID; most recently the team has been assisting employees of Williamson-Dickie based in Westfield.

#### **(4) Sites and Premises Assistance**

- Promoting the area as a location for inward investment in collaboration with Invest Bristol & Bath, offering tailored site searches, business support/finance, recruitment assistance and ongoing aftercare.
- Working with local commercial agents, developers and businesses to bring forward, market and fill new commercial workspace. An example of this recent filling the Chocolate Factory office redevelopment in Keynsham (circa 8,000 sqm) which helped establish a market for office space in that location and provided new HQ offices for Independent Vet Care and Pukka Herbs.
- Providing strategic input into planning in order to secure sufficient employment space to meet our growth needs in the district and protect our existing stock

#### **(5) Communications & Networks**

- The Business & Skills team has actively promoted and referred businesses to additional business support and finance initiatives through our ongoing business engagement programme.
- Our Invest in Bath newsletter is sent out monthly to subscribers across Bath & North East Somerset. Our subscriber base has grown by over 300% to more than 3,000 in the past year. The team's social media presence is growing, particularly on Twitter with 1,350 followers, and we work with the council's core communications Team to promote our activities via the corporate Facebook account
- We manage the [investinbath.co.uk](http://investinbath.co.uk) website which includes dedicated sections on our inward investment offer, sites & premises, business support and business news. It also includes dedicated sections for each of the key locations in our district, including Keynsham, Midsomer Norton, Radstock, the Chew Valley and City of Bath.
- In the last calendar year the Invest in Bath website has received 24,000 separate sessions from 17,000 unique users. Locational data for users is highly limited, however it is noted that the website's user base is broad, including local, regional, national and international visitors
- The team is active in engaging with stakeholders, such as the local chambers of commerce, sector and business networking groups, who assist us by disseminating news of our support initiative to their networks. Our team is active in attending business networking events and offers individual business meetings in order to help understand their current challenges and ambitions.

3.5 The Business & Skills Team is relatively small, comprising nine core-funded posts (one of which is currently vacant) and six externally funded posts (the Future Bright Team). Approximately 8,500 businesses are located in Bath & North East Somerset, hence the team will welcome support from our councillors in promoting the initiatives that are available to our business community. We would also gladly attend events in order to promote our services where deemed appropriate.

## **4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1 There are no statutory considerations associated with this report.

## **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)**

5.1 There are no resource implications associated with this report.

## **6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision-making risk management guidance.

## **7 EQUALITIES**

7.1 A full equalities impact assessment of the service has not been carried out with respect to this report. The team's ethos is to promote sustainable inclusive growth and improve the lives of residents and business owners that access our services. Our individual programmes have dedicated equalities targets and several of our key initiatives target equalities groups, such as lone parents, residents on in-work benefits. We ensure our services are accessible for all, for example by offering sign language assistance where needed on our Universal Business Support programme.

## **8 CLIMATE CHANGE**

8.1 There are key elements to the Business & Skills Team's work that goes towards addressing the climate emergency. Our Universal Business Support programme includes webinars dedicated to sustainable business practice, and we are actively supporting partners such as the University of Bath's Sustainable Technologies Business Acceleration Hub, and the WECA's Green Business Grants programme.

8.2 The most recent Invest in Bath newsletter was a dedicated 'green business' edition, and the team recently contributed to the council's Green Skills and Greening Your Business webinars. One of the key outputs of our work is to increase employment in the district, one outcome of which is likely to be lowering out-commuting and its associated environmental impacts.

## **9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

9.1 None

## 10 CONSULTATION

10.1 None

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Contact person</b>  | Rob Dawson, Enterprise Officer. 01225 394378  |
| <b>Background papers</b>   | An accompanying powerpoint presentation to be given during the report will be made available to panel members in advance of the meeting |
| <b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b> |   |

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# Corporate Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel

## Invest in Bath Service Overview

### Appendix 1 – Outline of Key Business & Skills Support Initiatives

#### Business Support and Grants

##### [COVID Grants and Financial Support](#)

Local Restrictions Support Grants and Additional Restrictions Grants are currently open for applications.

Restart grants expected to launch in April – we are currently awaiting guidance.

The council grants page linked above also details other relevant COVID assistance available for local businesses.

##### [Business Growth Grant Fund](#)

The Business Growth Grants are designed to support SMEs in the West of England with their plans to drive growth by implementing new business practices or adopting new ways of working.

The grants are open to businesses across all sectors, from sole traders to established SMEs.

##### [Green Business Grants](#)

West of England Green Business Grants support SMEs to improve their energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. A free energy audit is carried out first in order to identify interventions.

##### [Universal Business Support](#)

The universal business support programme provides training and expert advice for those who are (or are hoping to become) business owners, whether you're self-employed or leading an established small business. It can support businesses in any sector, from retail to removals.

The universal business support programme can help you:

- Understand regulations, requirements and best practice when setting up a new business
- Access free expert advice and guidance to get started with a new business

- Access training to develop your business
- Access a range of one to one support, workshops and resources to help with everything from digital marketing to accountancy

Universal business support is free, and open to all entrepreneurs, start-up businesses and established SMEs in bath & North East Somerset

### **West of England Growth Hub**

The West of England Combined Authority's Growth Hub is a free service full of tools and resources to help SMEs drive sustainable growth and profit. They offer one-to-one business support via their team of Enterprise Executives. They will help assess your needs and share a wide range of services, programmes and events you can use to achieve your objectives

### **Creative Scale Up**

Creative Scale Up is a two-year pilot programme funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport. It aims to help creative businesses in the West of England access finance through an intensive sustainable growth support programme.

### **Business Innovation Fund**

Businesses can get help to accelerate innovation and bring new products, processes and services to market through a new programme.

### **Accountancy Support Programme**

The Accountancy Support Programme is a West of England Combined Authority initiative, delivered in partnership with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW).

### **Trading Better Online**

Trading Better Online is a West of England Combined Authority initiative which provides free, expert business support to enhance your digital presence and increase online sales

### **Mentoring for Growth**

New Mentoring for Growth programme in partnership with Be the Business. It is designed to connect business leaders from large, multinational companies with key decision makers and owners from SMEs.

## Peer Networks

Peer Networks is a national peer-to-peer networking programme for SME leaders that want to grow and develop their organisation for future success.

## **Employment & Skills**

### Achieve in B&NES

Achieve B&NES provides a job and course search service for anybody wishing to enter the workplace or progress their career. There are several free and funded courses from local providers on offer.

Achieve in B&NES is a built network of local businesses as well as support services, who can confidently offer real jobs, opportunities in the routes to employment and support which meets the needs of the residents, both now and for a productive future. Their focus is to build an accessible network of support to help individuals reach their full potential and goals.

### Future Bright

Future Bright offers free career coaching, training and support to develop your skills and increase your pay. All conversations are confidential and focus on what you want to achieve; your coach will help you take your next step.

Future Bright is open to local residents who are: Aged 19 and over, Living in the West of England – that's Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire. Currently in paid work – this can be full-time, part time or anything in between f& Receiving benefits or tax credits – Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Job Seeker's Allowance, Income Support, Employment Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, or Means-Tested Council tax Reduction.

### Employment & Skills Pod

Working in partnership with other key organisations to provide training and upskilling opportunities for not only for people who have been made redundant due to Covid-19, but also those that are short or long term unemployed, require upskilling in order to keep their jobs, or are looking change careers.

The Employment and Skills Pod will also help individuals think about the type of jobs they could do, looking at wider options on returning to work and gain work experience. The employment and skills pod will offer individuals structure, direction and practical tools in order to progress forward into employment.

## Kickstart

Kickstart will provide high quality 6-month work placements aimed at those aged 16-24 who are on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. For each new job created, funding is available for 100% of the relevant National Minimum Wage for 25 hours per week, plus the associated National Insurance contributions and start-up costs.

Bath & North East Somerset Council will be acting as an intermediary for the Kickstart Scheme.

## Women Work Lab

The Women's Work Lab is launching their first Bath program in April in conjunction with B&NES Council. An initiative to help disadvantaged and unemployed women who have struggled to get a job after having children back into employment.

Our bespoke classroom training and work placements focus on building confidence, ambition and employability skills. They specialise in unlocking potential and laying the foundations for a brighter future.

Outcomes for participants include new careers, positive role modelling for their families and communities and the creation of a vital support network.

## Workforce for the Future

Workforce for the Future provides tailored, in-depth support to help your business plan and adapt for the future by identifying your current and future skills needs, implementing development plans to upskill or retrain employees, and supporting you to bring in apprenticeships or work placements to drive your business forwards.

## Thrive

A new support programme is offering West of England employers help to respond to mental health concerns in the workplace, particularly those arising from Covid-19. The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) is investing in the two-year Thrive at Work West of England programme, which aims to address the key mental health issues that businesses say are affecting their employees, and impacting productivity. The package of support, including training resources, is available through WECA's Growth Hub website. It includes mental health e-learning to equip managers with the confidence and skills to have supportive conversations with their staff about mental health and wellbeing, particularly in these challenging and changing times.

## **Disability Confident**

The Disability Confident scheme supports employers to make the most of the talents disabled people can bring to your workplace. Disability Confident is creating a movement of change, encouraging employers to think differently about disability and take action to improve how they recruit, retain and develop disabled people.

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## CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

This Forward Plan lists all the items coming to the Panel over the next few months.

Inevitably, some of the published information may change; Government guidance recognises that the plan is a best assessment, at the time of publication, of anticipated decision making. The online Forward Plan is updated regularly and can be seen on the Council's website at:

<http://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/mgPlansHome.aspx?bcr=1>

The Forward Plan demonstrates the Council's commitment to openness and participation in decision making. It assists the Panel in planning their input to policy formulation and development, and in reviewing the work of the Cabinet.

*Should you wish to make representations, please contact the report author or, Democratic Services (). A formal agenda will be issued 5 clear working days before the meeting.*

*Agenda papers can be inspected on the Council's website.*

| Ref Date               | Decision Maker/s                                | Title                                    | Report Author Contact                                   | Director Lead                             |
|------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| <b>29TH MARCH 2021</b> |   |  |   |   |
| 29 Mar 2021            | Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel | Parental Leave Policy (Casework options) | Jo Morrison<br>Tel: 01225 394358                        | Director Legal & Democratic               |
| 29 Mar 2021            | Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel | Update on Parish Charter                 | Dave Dixon  | Director Partnership & Corporate Services |
| 29 Mar 2021<br>Page 30 | Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel | Invest in Bath Update                    | David Trethewey<br>Tel: 01225 396353                    | Director Partnership & Corporate Services |
| <b>24TH MAY 2021</b>   |   |  |   |   |
| 24 May 2021            | Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel | Policy and Corporate Strategy            | Andy Thomas<br>Tel: 01225 394322                        | Director Partnership & Corporate Services |
| <b>5TH JULY 2021</b>   |   |  |   |   |
| 5 Jul 2021             | Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel | People Strategy Update Report            | Cherry Bennett,<br>Amanda George<br>Tel: 01225 47 7203, | Chief Operating Officer                   |

| Ref Date   | Decision Maker/s                                       | Title   | Report Author Contact                | Director Lead                             |
|--|--|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>27TH SEPTEMBER 2021</b>   |  |   |                                      |   |
| <b>29TH NOVEMBER 2021</b>  |  |   |                                      |   |
| <b>FUTURE ITEMS</b>  |  |   |                                      |   |
|  | <b>Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel</b> | <b>Climate Emergency Procurement Strategy</b>   | Richard Howroyd<br>Tel: 01225 477334 | Director Finance - Section 151 Officer    |
| Page 31  | <b>Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel</b> | <b>Contacting the Council (Background Briefing:- reporting an issue to the Council)</b> | Tracey Long                          | Director Partnership & Corporate Services |
| The Forward Plan is administered by <b>DEMOCRATIC SERVICES:</b> Democratic_Services@bathnes.gov.uk |  |   |                                      |   |

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