

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Monday, 24th October, 2022

Present:- **Councillors** Karen Walker, Joel Hirst, Shelley Bromley, Paul Crossley, Ruth Malloy, Lisa O'Brien and Dr Kumar

Apologies for absence: Councillors: Grant Johnson and Ryan Wills

36 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

37 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

38 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Grant Johnson gave his apologies.

Councillor Ryan Wills gave his apologies.

Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Tom Davis gave his apologies.

39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

40 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

There were none.

42 MINUTES

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

43 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Climate and Sustainable Travel, Councillor Sarah Warren reported that she had nothing to add to her update given at the meeting of the Panel held on 10th October 2022.

44 ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

Stuart Gardiner, Green Infrastructure & Nature Recovery (Green Transformation) and Councillor Sarah Warren, Cabinet Member for Climate and Sustainable Travel gave a presentation to the Panel which covered the following:

- Background
- Why does it matter? Impacts of Wildlife loss
- Opportunities
- The need for an Action Plan
- What will the Action Plan be?
- Vision and Priorities – Nature Positive by 2030
- Key Messages
- Proposed Structure
- Action Plan Examples
- Timeline
- Plans for Engagement

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

Councillor Bromley asked about the Action Plan regarding planning. The officer explained that these are preliminary discussions with indicative actions that may not be final.

Councillor Bromley asked if we work with water companies and what Wessex Water are doing to improve water quality. The officer explained that there are good lines of engagement with Wessex Water and that they are keen to improve water quality with a drive to invest in nature-based solutions.

Councillor Hirst stated that he is keen to see momentum on this piece of work and, regarding consultation, are we going to construct a map of key stakeholders with a gap analysis and grow the custodial role. The officer explained that yes partnership working will be set up, there is value in empowering communities. We also have some ideas for enabling Parish and Town Councils. The Cabinet Member added that we are working with both large organisations and small local groups. The officer stated that we are looking to facilitate support groups within the City of Bath.

Councillor Hirst asked if any improvements regarding ecologic environments in terms of our list of buildings can be documented and ensure the planning system takes this into account. The Cabinet Member stated that we are already doing this and will be bringing forward a list. The officer added that we are looking at sites the Council owns to see how they can better manage nature. There has been a lack of capacity in national monitoring.

Councillor Dr Kumar stated that nature is collapsing at an alarming rate and stated that there seemed to be hollow words from the administration when residents are forced to drive miles to a tip.

There was some discussion around decisions made by previous administrations.

Councillor Crossley stated that the Action Plan was a good start. He mentioned the importance of working with residents, adding 'gardens, residents and streets' to the plan. He mentioned that shrubs were given away at one point and asked how we could work with residents and their gardens. The Cabinet Member stated that this was a good idea and can be added to the action plan. The officer confirmed that utilizing gardens is in the current draft of the plan. Councillor Walker mentioned that 500 trees had been distributed in Peasedown St John. The Cabinet Member stated that the Council do run tree give aways.

Councillor Crossley mentioned his concern about 6ft timber fencing being put up regularly and the need for people to understand how gardens connect with others.

Councillor O'Brien asked if there was any monitoring of uncut verges some of which had become tinder dry in the summer and stated that it would be useful to distribute seeds early in the season to Parish and Town Council for spreading on the verges. Councillor Walker asked that it be checked that planting be done in the right places so as not to compromise road vision/safety. The officer referenced the BathScape project. The Cabinet Member added that she is working with Parish and Town Council's to monitor verges.

Councillor O'Brien stated that this was an opportunity to encourage people to provide holes for hedgehogs. She hoped that more beavers would benefit rivers. The Cabinet Member thanked Councillor O'Brien for the suggestions and comments and stated that these ideas can be picked up.

Councillor Malloy made the following points:

- Where possible we could develop community gardens and, in some instances, allotments could be used to grow shared food.
- It is a worrying trend that people are paving their front gardens which reduces green space. Councillor O'Brien added that there are some issues with current planning rules on this.
- There are examples of initiatives where people are encouraged to break up stones in front gardens and grow plants.

The Cabinet Member thanked Councillor Malloy for raising these points, some of which could be tackled through the Local Plan. The officer added that there is information on the Council website about sustainable urban drainage systems.

The Chair thanked the officers and Cabinet Member.

45 ANNUAL HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

Head of Housing - Graham Sabourn and Housing Strategy & Commissioning Manager – Ann Robbins introduced the report.

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

Councillor Hirst asked about supported housing which plays a valuable role for vulnerable people. He asked if there would be an opportunity to grow more of these arrangements. The officer stated that it is an expandable service and, for example, two schemes had developed through opportunities where buildings became surplus. He added that Government funding could expand the scheme.

Councillor Hirst asked about the challenges in supplying large family (3/4 bedrooms) units and if there is anything that can be done to unblock this. The officer explained that the challenge is about encouraging occupiers to move into smaller properties or flats where appropriate. He stated that providing large units is challenging and expensive.

Councillor Bromley asked if supply of private rental units is going down? The officer answered that yes this is the case, especially in the city centre.

Councillor O'Brien asked if same sex siblings could share rooms – the officer stated that yes they would share room until age 12/13 years.

Councillor O'Brien asked if there was any evidence that people were coming here for temporary accommodation from other areas. The officer explained that no, certain local criteria has to be met. He added that we compare favourably to the national average and neighbouring authorities regarding temporary accommodation.

Regarding the 'Rough Sleepers' part of the report, Councillor O'Brien congratulated the team. She stated that strides had been made in holistic access and a major catalyst was the Government saying 'Everybody In' during the Covid pandemic.

Councillor Crossley praised the excellent work of the team. He asked about the programme working in prisons. The officer replied that she could send some data to Panel members. She stated that it was early days regarding the crime justice post. There was agreement that local members should be shown around the extension to the Dartmouth Avenue provision.

Councillor Walker asked about younger people with drug and alcohol issues. The officer stated that she rarely sees anyone under 25.

Councillor Dr Kumar asked why the problem in St Mary's Church yard is not resolved. The officer explained that there is an impact on the environment and the team do work with cleansing teams and Bath BID. Issues can be reported via street link and the outreach team will be told. Some rough sleepers resist, and can be used to life on the street. Councillor Dr Kumar asked if there is extra allowance for owning a dog. The officer confirmed that this is not true.

The Chair thanked the officers for the update.

46 COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME

Head of Housing - Graham Sabourn introduced the report.

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

Councillor Hirst asked how the model of shared ownership can be grown. The officer stated that we have concentrated on the social rent side because that is the area of greatest need. Shared ownership will be considered in the larger pipeline.

Councillor Hirst congratulated the team on delivering and asked if there are ambitions beyond the 255 homes in the pipeline. The officer stated that this would be down to the political ambitions of the administration but that the Cabinet Member has publicly expressed wider ambitions.

Councillor Malloy asked if it is possible to design flats that could be combined to create a larger property – obviously this flexible housing would be mainly new builds. The officer stated that this could be considered in supported housing, there would be a number of challenges in permanent social housing.

Councillor Malloy asked if the end of the 6 month 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme had led to an uplift in the need for social housing. The officer responded that there had been an uplift and some placements had fallen through before the 6 month period.

Councillor Dr Kumar asked if a tweet about 26 new council houses was true. He asked why the council worked through ADL rather than in-house. The officer confirmed that the number of units is 26 (20 – Grosvenor Place; 4 – purchased on the open market and 2 new build). He further explained that officers do not set values – there is a red book valuation (external market value).

Councillor Dr Kumar asked if the Panel were aware of some instances of poor quality Curo housing. He asked if Curo were selling off social housing. Councillor Walker stated that she was unsure on the type of properties being surveyed by Curo. The officer stated that if residents are concerned, they can come to the Council as we have authority regarding poor housing conditions.

Councillor O'Brien stated that a substantial portion of social housing is underutilized yet there is a significant number on 'homesearch' – we should be realistic while not wishing to upset people. This could do a lot toward our housing issues. The officer agreed and stated that the national evidence also shows much under occupation. We have to address it.

The Chair thanked the officers.

47 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted the future workplan

The meeting ended at 6.12 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services