

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Tuesday, 19th September, 2023

Present:- **Councillors** Robin Moss, Lucy Hodge, Ian Halsall, Hal MacFie, Onkar Saini, Toby Simon, Malcolm Treby and Colin Blackburn

Apologies for absence: Councillors: Oli Henman

12 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

13 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Oli Henman sent his apologies.

15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Lucy Hodge stated that she was the Cabinet Project Lead for Highways Maintenance and would not take part in the debate on 'Fix My Street' item.

16 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

There were none

18 MINUTES

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

19 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The Panel noted that updates would be contained in the items on the agenda.

20 KEY PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Chair invited Steve Harman, Head of Corporate Governance and Business Insight, to introduce the item and give a presentation which covered the following:

- Corporate Strategy end of year review
- Some notable successes in 2022/23
- Principle 1: Preparing for the Future – Successes
- Principle 2: Delivering for local residents – Successes
- Principle 3: Focusing on Prevention – Successes
- Tackling the Climate & Ecological Emergency
- Core Policy – Giving people a bigger say
- Selected Achievements and Successes by directorate
- Strategic Performance Indicator set
- BANES Activity Report 2022/23
- Resident Satisfaction with the Local Area
- Health and Wellbeing – Support for Refugees
- New Corporate Strategy 2023/27
- Monitoring the Corporate Strategy 2023/27

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

Councillor Simon stated that there was much emphasis on positives in the presentation but the panel need to know about things that require improvement (red or amber areas that within the panel remit). He asked that the panel receive regular performance updates.

Councillor Treby agreed and stated that it would be useful if the panel could be involved in forming the KPI's.

Councillor MacFie asked if the information could be accessed on a timeframe, the officer explained that members can be supplied with time trends as requested.

Councillor MacFie asked if there was any modelling/projection regarding electric charging. The officer explained that the Climate Emergency agenda is relatively new so work is underway, with the Green Transformation Team, to develop a full suite of data for this area. This can be shared with the panel.

The officer agreed with Councillor Simon's request to bring the outcome of the resident's survey to the Panel. He explained that the survey is sent out in October/November and information should be available in February (this could come to the March meeting of the panel).

Councillor Saini asked about staff training. The officer explained that there was a comprehensive staff training and development programme. He explained the 'Clear Review' programme which provides objective setting and training details for staff.

Councillor Simon asked if there are any performance indicators for Human Resources (HR). The officer explained that HR have internal indicators which can be shared with the panel.

Councillor Hodge asked how amber/red indicators link in with corporate audit. The officer explained that areas of concern are reported to the Strategic Management team and a surgery is held to discuss and take a view on a way forward. The Chief Finance Officer explained that there are two key pieces of information for internal audit which are performance targets and budget position.

Councillor Moss stated that statistics can tell us nothing or everything and the key is to pick out those key indicators of value. Important indicators to look at are those that show red/amber and those which are having unexpected change in the direction of travel. Councillor Moss asked about political discussion around the relationship between performance indicators and financial performance. The Cabinet Member for Resources explained that the Cabinet see indicators quarterly or more frequently and will discuss mitigations and look at budget setting for the following year.

Councillor Moss asked about areas where there may not be a clear red flag but may be issues. The Cabinet Member reassured the panel that the Cabinet will not lose sight of the fact that there are many areas of pressure. He explained that they also look for opportunities for revenue.

Councillor Blackburn stated that the panel had seen the headlines but asked how the panel drill down to those indicators that require scrutiny. The Cabinet Member stated that he was support of the panel having access to the information they want and need, he stated that there was another set of eyes in the room.

Councillor Moss thanked the Cabinet Member for the update and stated that it was good to see the positives but will be useful to see the red/amber indicators in the future.

21 UPDATE ON COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The Chair invited Councillor Mark Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources to introduce the item.

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

Councillor Treby asked if the scheme could be smoothed around the boundaries as there can be anomalies. The officer explained that it is hard to avoid a 'cliff edge' where the scheme is banded. He stated that there would be help to mitigate where people lose out.

Councillor Simon stated that the officer and Cabinet Member had done a great job. He stated that it is not affordable to leave the bands where they are although it would be nice. He pointed out that other authorities are also having to make changes. He mentioned the difficulty of smoothing the boundaries due to having to combine rebates on an annual tax with monthly incomes that vary.

Councillor Blackburn asked about the 49% of those receiving 50% rebate who are in arrears and asked how they would fair under options 3 or 4. The Cabinet member pointed to the appendix which gives 6 examples. The officer explained that if people are earning, this can be accessed.

Councillor Halsall stated that the case studies are helpful and asked that a message go out to those potentially effected which points to help available. The officer explained that if public consultation comes back and it looks like option 3 or 4 will be chosen, all those effected will be contacted – this is believed to be around 68 households.

Councillor MacFie asked if anyone would benefit if option 4 was chosen. The Cabinet Member stated that the periodic adjustment would make the scheme fairer and that this is an appropriate time to review this. He explained that it is difficult to have targets as it depends on who claims.

Councillor Blackburn asked how many of the 68 household effected are home owners. The officer explained that he would have to assess this.

Councillor Moss as how people will claim and is it an automatic deduction from Council Tax. The officer explained that most of the cohort will claim automatically when they claim Universal Credit.

Councillor Moss asked if they would be a group of potential claimants that could be missed who would receive money towards a bill. The officer explained that no one would receive money, it is all deducted. He stated that he could not think anybody would not get the opportunity to claim.

Councillor Moss asked about arrears and whether they may increase or decrease and whether this could be more effected by the general cost of living. The Cabinet Member stated that there is no control experiment so it is hard to measure. In response to a query about the consultation period, the officer explained that the timetable is pretty tight, all effected will receive letters. This will be reported to November Council. Councillor Moss stated that groups such as Age UK can be contacted. Councillor Saini stated that the system must be clear and precise.

Councillor Treby asked what notice period people will get. The officer explained that once the decision is made on an option, letters will be sent out and public consultation on the website. This will be reported to Council in November and people will get Council Tax bills in March of next year. The Cabinet Member added that people will effectively get 6 months notice, the impact will come in the next financial year. The officer explained that there will be a page devoted to welfare support. He stated that publicity is key.

Councillor Moss noted that a brief update on this would be reported to the November meeting of the Panel and thanked the Cabinet member and officers.

22 UPDATE ON 'FIX MY STREET'

The Chair invited Councillor Manda Rigby, Cabinet Member for Highways to give a presentation on the item. The presentation covered the following:

FixMyStreet Process and Improvements

'Report a problem' page

FixMyStreet Reports (Highways): Jan 22 – Aug 23

FixMyStreet in action
Example of a report
Report reviewed
Issue Inspected (photo example)
Highways Web Content Redesign
Improved landing design
Using localised data
Map improved
Avoiding duplicate reports
Updated contact items
'Report has been logged' example page
New updates
Improved responses

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

Councillor Halsall stated that he had recommended this system to his residents. He mentioned a gulley complaint that was made but was not given any advice on a schedule. He asked if this system was more efficient than Council Connect. The Cabinet Member stated that some people are not comfortable online so can use Council Connect. She also asked panel members to report any issues/glitches to her or officers.

Councillor Simon stated that he uses it regularly, it works well and he likes the App.

Councillor Saini asked if the update will ease pressure on the system. The Cabinet Member explained that the update has happened and will enhance the existing system.

Councillor MacFie stated that the system had not worked particularly well regarding Keynsham High Street issue. The Cabinet Member explained that the emphasis has been on potholes and noted that Councillor MacFie had been communicating directly with the relevant officer.

Councillor Blackburn stated that he welcomed where FMS is now, it is working and accessible – more publicity is good.

The Cabinet Member thanked the officer and his team for their outstanding work.

Councillor Simon asked that the panel be given 6 month/annual data on reports cleared/dealt with etc so that they can monitor.

Councillor Moss stated that he had used the system in North Somerset with varying results – he asked if comparisons are done with neighbouring authorities and CUBA. The officer explained that the authority is a member of the National Highways and Transport Network who send out questionnaires. We are benchmarked with 104 authorities, and we are above average.

Councillor Moss asked that the response time data come to the Panel on a regular basis.

He thanked the Cabinet Member and officers.

23 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted the future workplan with the following:

November meeting likely items:

- Q2 Budget Monitoring Report
- Developing Economic Strategy
- Outcome of 'Council Tax Support Scheme' consultation

January 2024 likely item:

Aequus Business Plan

March 2024 likely item:

Outcome of Residents Survey

The meeting ended at 5.50 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services