

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Tuesday, 14th May, 2024

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

67 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

68 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

69 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

The Chair welcomed new Panel Member Councillor Duncan Hounsell.

There were no apologies.

70 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

71 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

There were none

73 MINUTES

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

74 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Dave Wood, Deputy Council Leader (non-statutory) and Cabinet Member for Council Priorities & Delivery gave an update which covered the following:

- Staff Recognition Event 27th June
- Shortlisted for LGC award – Most Improved Council

- Communications activity
- Annual performance update
- Development of new reporting indicators aligned to the 2023-27 Corporate Strategy
- Voicebox
- Debate not Hate
- Care experienced People

Councillor Simon commented on the article regarding the quality of Councils, he stated that this Council scored low regarding finance due to it's low spending power.

Councillor Mark Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources, gave an update which covered the following:

- 2023-2024 Budget outturn report
- 2024-2025 Budget monitoring report
- Preparation for the 2025/26 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy
- Procurement Act

Councillor Moss stated that it is good to hear the Cabinet Member is positive about the outcome of the last financial year and asked how Quarter 1 is looking. The Cabinet Member stated that he could not say for sure yet but that there was continued pressure in Children's Services.

Councillor Moss asked about the suspension of the safety valve funding by the Government. The Cabinet Member explained that the safety valve programme refers to a carried overspend due to the Government underfunding the direct Schools Grant. He explained that he is confident that the suspension is nothing to be concerned about, there are discussions with the DfE and a robust plan.

Councillor Halsall congratulated the Cabinet Member on the move to bring social care back in house.

Councillor Simon asked if the safety valve suspension impacted on the school or the general budget. The Cabinet Member explained that it depends on which line the DfE take. He stated that it was not a local issue – it is a result of the massive increase in EHCPs (Education Health and Care Plans) and an issue that was not made clear during the academization process on who picked up the preventative work.

75 DEBATE NOT HATE (UPDATE)

Councillor Dave Wood, Deputy Council Leader (non-statutory) and Cabinet Member for Council Priorities & Delivery, introduced the item (officer support Cherry Bennett, Director of People and Change)

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

Councillor Moss thanked the Cabinet Member and officer for including officers as well as Councillors. He asked if this item/work would be cascaded to Town and

Parish Councils. The Cabinet Member explained that yes, it was being taken to the Parish Liaison meeting on 26th June 2024.

Councillor Hounsell commented on the fact that the monitoring officer has indicated that he will be sympathetic to removing addresses from the register of interests but asked what 'sympathetic' means in practice and suggested that the default position be that addresses are not shown. The Cabinet Member stated that there has to be a compelling and specific reason within the current law and that he would prefer something more definitive.

Councillor Blackburn stated that previously Councillors have been able to give the party address but independents to not have that option. Councillor Moss explained that there are two matters – the address published as a contact on the website (which could be c/o Guildhall for example) and the declaration of an address on the register of interests which is public.

Councillor Simon (Co Chair of the Standards Committee) stated that the Monitoring Officer had been asked to consider a default position and he thinks that will be reasonable. He added that, in his last authority, the statement on the register of interests was 'address within the borough as declared to the Monitoring Officer'. The Cabinet Member stated that the Monitoring Officer had to work within the current law.

Councillor Hodge commented that the list of incidents/events is not as systematic for Councillors as it is for officers. She also asked about the nominated officer for member wellbeing. The officer stated that there is a system for Health and Safety incidents, and we will be rolling out the use of the system for Councillors. She explained that there is a virtual briefing on this for Councillors in June and the nominated officer will be promoted.

Councillor Blackburn asked what work is being done to root out anonymous troll accounts (internal and external). The Cabinet Member acknowledged this point and stated that it would be taken away to discuss.

Councillor Simon stated that there used to be a shared index of people who were cautionary contacts that was used by officers and Councillors, has this now been affected by Data Protection issues. The officer agreed that GDPR rules had had an affect on lists such as this.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers.

76 UPDATE ON PROCUREMENT

Councillor Mark Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources, gave a presentation which covered the following (Officer support Jeff Wring – Director of One West and APF and Cheryl Hansford, Head of Procurement):

- The Procurement Act and Provider Selection Regime
- The Procurement Act 2023 – Headlines
- Benefits and Opportunities
- Preparation
- The Provider Selection Regime

- Procurement Strategy – Refresh of Priorities
- Strategic Context & Purpose
- Procurement Strategy – Our Refreshed Themes
- Each Theme has an Ambition and set of Outcomes
- Delivering Best Value & Good Governance – Ambition
- Delivering best value & good governance – Example Outcomes
- Embedding Sustainability & Climate Action – Ambition
- Embedding Sustainability & Climate Action - Example Outcomes
- Providing Opportunity for Economic, Social and Environmental Wellbeing – Ambition
- Providing Opportunity for Economic, Social and Environmental Wellbeing – Example Outcomes
- Enhancing the Supply Market – Ambition
- Enhancing the Supply Market – Example Outcomes
- Improving Contract & Commercial Management – Ambition
- Improving Contract & Commercial Management - Example Outcomes
- Building Skills & Capability – Ambition
- Building Skills & Capability - Example Outcomes

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

Councillor Moss asked how we can advertise so that SMEs (Small and Medium size Enterprises) can access the information. He also asked about the risk in terms of unsuccessful companies taking action. The officer explained that the risk of challenge may be raised with more transparency but this will be mitigated by clearer processes.

Councillor Blackburn asked if there was any change in the new legislation with regard to scrutiny of cost overruns. The officer explained that the new Act does not change the process but the transparency element raises the profile. He stated that performance will be managed with increased monitoring through the Corporate Priorities.

Councillor Moss asked about the potential date of secondary legislation and would it involve constitutional changes. He also asked if contracts with arms length organisations such as Aequus would be impacted. The officer explained that the current set up continues, the new legislation would apply to Aequus as well.

Councillor Treby asked how conflict between the themes could be managed. The officer explained that it is about achieving the best outcome – there would need to be a robust conversation with a professional and safe decision.

Councillor MacFie asked about the use of AI in setting up contracts. The officer stated that AI was a subject in itself. He explained that suppliers using AI would be welcomed. Generally the process will not be radically different though, we are trying to improve on what we have.

Councillor Hodge asked how a Cabinet Member’s view on the themes would be weighted. The officer explained that the Government framework would be used. There are gateways and guides as to where the Cabinet Member might be involved.

The Cabinet Member stated that views on this are welcome.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers.

77 VOICEBOX - OUTCOMES OF RESIDENT SURVEY

Councillor Dave Wood, Deputy Council Leader (non-statutory) and Cabinet Member for Council Priorities & Delivery, introduced the item (officer support Jon Poole)

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

Councillor Hodge stated that it was good to be able to scrutinize this and asked what actions would arise from it. She stated that it was useful to see the sort of thing people are concerned about and asked if we are communicating our positive outcomes widely enough. She added that the majority of responses being on paper may indicate the demographic of most of the respondents.

Councillor Hounsell stated that there are some good messages, and it is hard to see why satisfaction levels are not as high as we would expect. He suggested that the social media put out by the Council have comments switched off as anyone with a positive message is pushed off by negative comments and hectoring.

Councillor Treby asked about next steps.

Councillor Blackburn noted that the majority of responses were on paper which is telling as most of our consultations now are online and would not allow for this facility. He asked if the drop in the belief in engagement (20% to 11%) could be linked to consultation processes. He noted that a lot of the responses on services are good but feedback on the general direction of the Council is not so positive.

Councillor MacFie asked if there were any major differences in responses between the Bath area and North East Somerset area. The Cabinet Member stated that this can be fed into future voicebox surveys.

Councillor Hodge stated the need to dig down further into the responses (for example on walking and cycling) before criticising. She added that she would like to see more of a breakdown and reasons in future voicebox surveys so that some working points can be pulled out. The officer responded that we know certain demographics respond differently and we use 'weighting'.

Councillor Hounsell stated that in quality control, if there is an extreme result, it is sensible to look at the cause but not make any change in the production line. It is better to look for trends.

Councillor Hodge stated that a lot of people did not know about Discovery Cards, maybe information could be put out with Council Tax Bills.

Councillor Moss commented that there would be different views in the Bath area and in North East Somerset especially with things such as walking to work (rural area

and city area). He suggested the possibility of incentivising responders. He stated that 72% have not responded so there needs to be caution. There is a section of society that are totally disengaged.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers.

78 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted their future workplan.

Councillor Blackburn suggested future items on procurement with regard to ADL and possible scrutiny regarding the bollards in the city centre.

The meeting ended at 5.47 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services