

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

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

Tuesday 17th March 2026

Present:- **Councillors** Robin Moss, Toby Simon, Malcolm Treby, Colin Blackburn, Duncan Hounsell, Jess David, Gavin Heathcote and Stuart Bridge

#### **197 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

*Note: Councillor Treby (Vice Chair) chaired the meeting.*

#### **198 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **199 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were none

#### **200 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

#### **201 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

There was none.

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

Councillor Joanna Wright made a statement on the following:

- Council Tax Support Scheme software – Councillor Wright asked that the Panel supports this request. Councillor Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources confirmed that the software could be purchased. Councillor Treby noted that an item on the scheme is scheduled for the July meeting of the Panel.
- ‘Debate not Hate’ – Councillor Wright asked the Panel to request a cross-party working group and take up the matter of what and when a review will be carried out.

The Panel agreed that this be added as a future agenda item on the Panel workplan

#### **203 MINUTES**

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

## **204 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Elliott, updated the Panel on the replacement of the Household Support Fund with the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) resulting in a funding reduction and a national rule change prohibiting blanket free (holiday) school meal vouchers after summer 2026. There will be transitional arrangements to avoid a “cliff edge”, using part of the new CRF for Easter, May half-term and summer 2026. There will be a detailed report to the Panel in May 2026.

Panel members asked the following questions:

Councillor Blackburn asked what percentage of the 1.9m budget was used for the meal scheme? The officer reported that this was just under 42%.”

Councillor Simon asked that the Citizens Advice Bureau be consulted, given that the HSF funds fuel vouchers. The Cabinet Member agreed.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member.

## **205 AI UPDATE (IN RESPONSE TO COUNCIL MOTION)**

Councillor Mark Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced the item.

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

Councillor Bridge asked if we are monitoring the cost of AI (licenses etc) and value for money. The officer explained that we track usage and efficiency, though not netted against staffing reductions.

Councillor Bridge asked if we keep a register of where AI is being used. The officer explained that we do, but we do not manually review every prompt.

Councillor Bridge asked if we are surveying staff about AI impacts on job satisfaction. The officer stated that yes—examples from social care show improved experience with Magic Notes. He added that staff are not forced to use AI.

Councillor Hounsell asked who would be responsible for checking and monitoring the ethical dimension. The officer explained that the Executive Director of Resources has responsibility and that there is an AI Ethics Committee—the membership is expanding and the terms of reference are in development. He added that transparency is intended—an external AI usage report will be published.

Councillor Blackburn raised concerns about the accuracy of multiple AI notetakers. The officer stated that accuracy varies by tool. Monitoring is done through Heads of Service and use of templates, configuration and training.

Councillor David stated that she would welcome further information on governance procedures and an annual AI Update. The officer stated that the policy review is due in June and an update can be reported to this Panel in July/August.

Councillor Blackburn raised issues regarding Councillor access to AI tools. The officer stated that online licences can be provided. The Cabinet Member stated that he supported Councillors being considered as a cohort.

In response to a query from Councillor Blackburn regarding usage, the officer explained that some outside tools are blocked as they have to meet our policy and standards.

Councillor David asked how environmental issues are taken into account. The officer explained that the AI review includes information on this including information on carbon neutral/negative companies.

Councillor Treby asked about Agent AI and whether the policy would be updated in this respect. The officer confirmed that this is not currently being used within the council.

Councillor Treby asked about the governance arrangements for the use of AI, in particular HR due to the potential impact of AI on our people. The officer confirmed that the usage is reviewed by the IT Steering Board that he chairs, and HR is represented.

The use of AI to analyse submissions was discussed, the officer explained that we must always be clear and transparent about this.

The Panel noted the update and agreed to include future reporting within the workplan.

## **206 QUARTER 3 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT**

Councillor Mark Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources introduced the item.

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

Councillor Hounsell asked about staffing pressures across waste, fleet, legal and project delivery and asked what this meant. The Cabinet Member explained that this meant the use of temporary staff where recruitment has been difficult.

Councillor David asked about nature of the £1m disputed invoices with the ICB. The Cabinet Member explained that it is not definite that they will all be written off. He explained that the invoices were raised via joint work with other Councils on packages of care. Not all invoices have been paid, and the balance is now in dispute with the ICB. He added that there are now more robust systems in place.

Councillor Blackburn asked what is meant by increased income from network and traffic management. The Cabinet Member stated that he would come back with the detail on this.

Councillor Blackburn asked about the regeneration shortfall and an update on Bath South Quays. The Cabinet Member stated that Councillor Roper could provide detail as the portfolio holder.

Councillor Blackburn asked for clarification on the significant drift from the £4.5m savings planned regarding the 'Being Our Best' Programme. The Officer (151) stated that he could provide a full reconciliation. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that the savings were lower than expected; that process prioritised fair job evaluation over savings and that 60% of the workforce received a pay rise.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers

## **207 CORPORATE STRATEGY PERFORMANCE**

Councillor Mark Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources introduced the item.

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

Councillor Blackburn asked about renewable energy installation and if we are on track for 2030? The Cabinet Member stated that an update will be provided.

Councillor David asked that where indicators are consistently on target, do the targets tighten automatically. The Cabinet Member stated that targets can be reviewed and adjusted and that this could be brought back to the Panel.

Councillor Treby asked about the impact of the Local Outcomes Framework. The Cabinet Member stated that significant changes are expected and that this will be brought back to the Panel.

Councillor Blackburn asked for an update on progress toward 'good jobs' commitments. The Cabinet Member stated that the portfolio holder (Economic Development) can provide an update.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member.

## **208 PANEL WORKPLAN**

The Panel noted the future workplan and the following suggestions:

- Annual AI Update.
- Follow-up on (Debate not Hate) Member Safety processes.
- Local Outcome Framework – new monitoring data
- Q4 Year End Budget Monitoring
- Replacement of the Household Support Fund with the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF).

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**