

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday, 30th September, 2013

Present:- Councillors John Bull (Chair), Roger Symonds (Vice-Chair), Paul Myers, Charles Gerrish, Barry Macrae and Nigel Roberts

26 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

27 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Barrett sent his apologies that he could not attend the meeting.

29 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

30 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

1. A member of the public, Pat Ryan (Bath against Cuts) made a statement to the Panel on the subject of 'Impact of Council Tax Support Scheme and Bedroom Tax' (A copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book and attached to these minutes).

In response to a question from Councillor Symonds, Ms Ryan explained that, at the Citizens Advice Bureau where she works, cases regarding benefits and debt advice were rising.

Councillor Bull asked Ms Ryan if she knew that a majority of Councillors had asked the Cabinet to consider alleviating the Council Tax Benefit cut.

The Strategic Director for Resources – Andrew Pate advised the Panel that they may like to consider the comments in the statement during Item 10 ‘Welfare Reform’ when the comments can be put into context.

Councillor Bellotti – Cabinet Member for Community Resources explained that Mrs Ryan had spoken at the Council meeting. He further explained that the Council had taken the decision not to increase council tax over the last two years. He explained that there is a social fund which provides food, clothing and help with gas and electric. He added that money had also been allocated to the connecting families’ agenda. Councillor Bull stated that he felt it would be better if people had the benefits that they need rather than relying on the social fund.

Councillor Cherry Beath explained that she is Vice-Chair of the Wellbeing Policy and Development Panel. She stated that she welcomed the statement by Pat Ryan and explained that the Wellbeing Panel would be monitoring how the changes regarding Welfare Reform will affect people.

The Chairman announced that the Panel noted the statement and would take the points into consideration, especially in the context of Item 10 on Welfare Reform. The Panel agreed to forward the following point to the Housing and Major Projects Panel:

“We call on the council to work in conjunction with housing associations in Bath&NES to establish a ‘no eviction’ policy for residents in arrears for either council tax or the bedroom tax and to identify ways of ameliorating the impact of this measure on the people affected by it...”

2. A member of the public, Anne Robbins registered to ask the Panel three questions on the subject of ‘Grand Parade and Undercroft’ (A copy of the questions can be found on the Panel’s Minute Book and attached to these minutes). Mrs Robbins was unable to attend the meeting. The Chair referred to the questions and asked the officers to provide an answer within 5 clear days of the meeting.

32 MINUTES - 15TH JULY 2013

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

33 WORKPLACES - OFFICE ACCOMMODATION BRIEFING

Dave Thompson Programme Director: Organisational Development gave a presentation to the Panel (a copy of the presentation is on the minute book for the Panel and also on the website). The presentation covered the following:

- ‘One Council’ Organisational Development Programme – three workstreams
- Workplaces: Changing how we work

- Five Buildings
- Three workstyles
- 1.500 staff: 1,000 desks
- Changing how we work
- One Council – What it feels like for Services, Teams and Staff
- One Council OD Programme.

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

Councillor Macrae asked about staff that did not work in offices such as drivers and also customers. The Programme Director explained that manual workers are outside the scope of this project. The Strategic Director for Resources added that there may be an opportunity to extend the programme, he stated that the point is taken regarding non office workers but that this programme tackles the fact that a lot of office staff will be changing their environment. In terms of customers, the Strategic Director explained that there is a programme for improving services to customers. William Harding, Head of Human Resources added that the '10 in 100' project was open to all staff, not just office staff and that there is a 'back to the shop floor' where the Chief Executive meets workers. Councillor Macrae stated that he was heartened in part but felt that an opportunity could be missed with the workers out on the road as they are often closest to the residents.

Councillor Myers asked if the staff survey results showed that people believed in 'One Council'. The Head of Human Resources explained that the staff survey results had been used to inform the presentation, he also explained that the results are 18 months old. Councillor Myers stated that it was worrying that the surveys are not annual. The officer explained that smaller service based surveys are also carried out. Ian Savigar – Divisional Director for Customer Services explained that he would be working across all services on issues such as phone manner etc. He also explained that small surveys are done with customers that come in and he pointed to the fact that the new customer feedback programme would be coming in soon.

Councillor Gerrish stated that a lot of work is going on that is not yet filtering through to the public. He stated that the effort is certainly paying off in terms of the One Stop Shop. He stated that sometimes it is hard to get across to the public that in some circumstances, the Council cannot act on something due to legislation.

Councillor Macrae stated that he was concerned over the priority given to training and working from home but the priority should be answering the phone and delivery of services. The Head of Human Resources stated that much of the training referred to here is behavioural such as phone answering. Councillor Pritchard stated that there is a danger of isolation in working at home. The Strategic Director explained that the ratio of 1000 desks: 1500 people is achievable without pushing home working.

Following a concern raised by Councillor Symonds, The Programme Director explained that office moves should be minimized as much as possible.

The Chair thanked the officers.

34 STAFF RESOURCES - ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND STAFF SUPPORT

William Harding – Head of Human Resources gave a presentation to the Panel (a copy of the presentation is on the minute book for the Panel and also on the website). The presentation covered the following:

- Supporting staff through change – Training through Corporate Training Programme
- On line/e learning resources
- Outplacement Services to those formally at risk
- Employee Assistance Programme

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

Councillor Macrae stated that he felt there was sensible and serious provision for those at risk, he stated that there should also be some focus on those staff that are staying. The Head of Human Resources stated that he would circulate a briefing note to Panel members on the work that is done on this. Councillor Nigel Roberts stated that the presentation shows members that the organisation is thinking and caring.

Councillor Myers asked about tracking people who are leaving. The officer explained that leavers are tracked and that a brutal measure is that there have been no tribunal cases in the last 12 months. He also explained that a 'leaver's survey' is being brought in. He reported that, in the main, the majority view is that the Council has behaved well in the circumstances.

Councillor Gerrish stated that he was interested to know the outcome of the work of 'Workshop Solutions' – The officer will circulate information to Panel members.

The Chair thanked the officers.

35 WELFARE REFORM

Ian Savigar – Divisional Director Customer Services introduced the report to the Panel. He pointed out that there had been an amendment to page 11 of the report.

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

Councillor Macrae stated that he was heartened to hear the work being done. He asked about the relationship with Curo and housing providers. The officer explained that it was difficult to answer for them but reported that they did have a welfare support team.

Councillor Gerrish asked about the availability of 1/2 bedroom houses. He stated that if people are willing to move (due to the 'bedroom tax') and 'down house' then appropriate houses should be available so they are not penalised. The officer reported that it did not take long to re house people so this was not an issue at the moment.

Councillor Gerrish asked if the government are listening to our feedback. The officer reported that the main area of learning is around digital access, there will be a rising demand for PC's and some people will need support to complete their claim online. He stated that this had been fed back to the government. Councillor Gerrish stated that there should be a strong message to the government that isolated communities in rural areas cannot always access PC's.

Councillor Symonds asked if there had been an increase in people going to CAB (Citizen's Advice Bureau) on the issues of benefits. The officer reported that 60% of the workload for CAB and SWAN (South West Advisory Network) was working with people on benefit claims. Pat Ryan (CAB) added that both benefits and debt advice is on the increase. She also reported that there are delays involved in the disability living allowance and people are approaching the CAB about this.

Councillor Macrae asked if there could be some feedback to the development control department about the need for more 1/2 bedroomed houses. The officer stated that he would feed this back.

It was agreed that an update on Welfare Reform be added to the future workplan for March 2014.

36 REVIEW OF COUNCIL LETTINGS FOR USE OF ROOMS

Stephen Bird – Head of Heritage Services introduced the report. He explained that a previous event had acted as a catalyst to tightening the terms and conditions. He explained that now, a simple assessment is carried out with every application and staff are more cautious. Councillor Bull explained that the Cabinet Member is the ultimate longstop but that the Cabinet member would be advised by Stephen Bird.

The Chair thanked the officer for the information.

37 PROPERTY - BUDGET SAVINGS REVIEW

Derek Quilter – Divisional Director Project Management introduced the report.

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

Councillor Gerrish raised a concern that the savings proposed in the budget are not coming through – he asked if the savings would be achieved in the timescale. Andrew Pate, Strategic Director for Resources explained that there were tough targets for the department and that only one dimension of this had been staffing. He explained that there had been a lot of restructuring and cutting out duplication. He stated that he was confident that the targets would be achieved but the question was the timescale. He assured members that it would not be a recurring problem.

Councillor Bellotti – Cabinet Member for Community Resources stated that the savings are not all made up from staff cuts. He made the following points: that the budget will have over and underspends but would come in roughly on target; there had been a substantial and unexpected increase in the income for the Roman Baths; a lot of duplication has been cut out in the Property department and there are now 10 academies so there is not such a call on Council services.

38 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor David Bellotti – Cabinet Member for Community Resources updated the Panel on the following:

- Procurement Fair on 15th October 2013 engaging with local businesses on ‘Think Local’;
- Four Budget Fairs in November to consult the community;
- Keynsham regeneration is on time and on budget;
- Workplaces – 200-250 posts will go over a 2-3 year timescale but the number of compulsory redundancies will be small.

39 PANEL WORKPLAN

With the following additions and amendments, the Panel noted the workplan:

- Impact on Customers of Budget Cuts/Savings (Councillor Macrae suggestion for November 2013). *To include the next customer satisfaction survey result.*
- Grand Parade and Undercroft to move to March 2014.
- Councillor Myers asked that the Panel look at customer satisfaction data and geographical differences in feedback.

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services