

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Wednesday, 25th November, 2015

Present:- Councillors Sarah Bevan (Chair), Bob Goodman (Vice-Chair), Jasper Becker, Colin Barrett, Chris Dando and Andrew Furse

24 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

25 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Christopher Pearce sent his apologies and was substituted by Councillor Michael Norton.

27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

28 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

Councillor Sarah Bevan read two statements on behalf of Councillor Karen Walker on the following issues:

- Capital Funding for a proposed roundabout in Peasedown St John (Bath Road A367)
- Capital Funding for a Car Park on Peasedown St John Recreation Ground.

(Copies of these statements are appended to these minutes and are available from Democratic Services)

It was agreed that the Panel note the statements.

Andrew Pate, Strategic Director for Resources stated that the relevant Panel for these issues would be the Communities, Transport and Environment PDS Panel.

Councillor Gerrish, Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources commented that the Council could not build a Car Park on the Recreation Ground unless the owners are sympathetic to this. On the first statement, he commented that this should be referred to Councillor Clarke, Cabinet Member for Transport.

30 MINUTES

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

Councillor Barrett noted the item on consultants on the future workplan and asked for an answer to be given to his question 'How much money in the last financial year 2014/15 was spent on agency staff and how much up to the current time'. The Strategic Director for Resources agreed that he would work with Councillor Gerrish (Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources) to find out this information and make it available to Councillor Barrett.

31 DIRECTORATE PLAN FOR RESOURCES

The Strategic Director for Resources, Andrew Pate introduced the Directorate Plan. He informed the Panel that representatives from the Resources Department are present at the meeting to answer questions and he highlighted the key documents in the plan. He explained that Appendix 4 contained the detail on any financial changes.

The Divisional Director for Finance, Tim Richens explained that the Government spending review had been announced today and he would be going through the details in the next few days. He explained that some assumptions had to be made in the papers and also that these documents contain a one year budget plan with a direction of travel for future years.

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

Councillor Barrett asked if there is a timescale to report back on each area so that members can monitor the targets. The Cabinet Member explained that a quarterly report on performance against the budget is produced and taken to the Cabinet. There was some discussion around the Panel viewing the budget monitoring reports, the officer explained that the reports are in the public domain and accessible to Panel members. The Strategic Director explained that the information could be shared with the Panel but it would be after it had been considered by the Cabinet, it could be left up to the Chair if it is put on the next available meeting for the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Becker, the Cabinet Member explained that a quarterly report is a snapshot at a certain date whereas a budget is an average over 12 months.

Councillor Becker asked if members will be briefed on any changes brought about by the changes in Local Government and funding from the Government. The Divisional Director stated that he would be in a position to brief members in the new year.

Councillor Andy Furse asked for further explanation on the following issues in Appendix 1:

- Page 21 'Continue to invest in sustainable energy initiatives...'
- Page 22 'Align school meals service with changing needs of schools ...'
- Page 23 'Explore further opportunities to collaborate better with other public sector partners'.

The Cabinet Member explained that the authority will continue to support sustainable energy initiatives where other projects come forward.

The Strategic Director explained that regarding school meals, the demand from schools changes which is adapted to. Regarding Community Meals, he explained the potential impact of 'Your Care Your Way'. He explained that VAT has now been levied on this service.

The Divisional Director for Strategy and Performance explained that there are many examples of collaboration with other authorities such as in adoption and fostering services. The Cabinet Member added that he has met with Wiltshire and will be meeting with North Somerset in January. He also mentioned that there is an example of collaboration on a large scale around Community Health and Social Care and the Pension Service is across the whole South West.

Appendix 4

Councillor Goodman asked if the amount shown for the Property Company (p33) is for planned conversions. The Strategic Director explained that all the details of the Property Company would be in a detailed report for the Cabinet next week.

Councillor Barrett asked if this company would work alongside Curo. The Cabinet Member explained that Curo is social housing and the proposed Property Company would be concerned with flats above shops in the commercial estate and there would be the potential for new housing developments on Council land where this is in line with planning policy. Councillor Barrett asked if the Property Company will be outsourced, the Cabinet Member replied that an outside agency will manage the day to day lettings and maintenance the Company.

Councillor Dando asked if he could view a template for business cases anywhere. The Divisional Director for Finance commented that there is a template and that the Property Company business case (discussed above) would be available in the papers for the Cabinet meeting next week.

Councillor Dando asked if risk mitigation is considered as part of completing the business case, the Divisional Director explained that yes it is, the Treasury Better Business Case Model has been adopted. He further explained that each business case would be held by the relevant project and can be requested as a background paper.

Councillor Furse commented that bringing properties back in to use is good but maybe some over the shop properties could be brought onto the market for key workers as full market rent may outprice service professionals. The Cabinet Member stated that the Council must assess the type of demand further down the line and this point can be taken into account then. The Strategic Director explained that if the Property Company built housing in the future, the normal affordable housing policy would apply.

Councillor Furse pointed to the 2nd bullet on page 35 regarding service recharges, he stated that it is implied that the current borrowing approach is wrong. The Divisional Director explained that 'service supported borrowing' was a policy in the past but times are different (eg. current low interest rates) and a different climate must be recognised.

In response to a query from Councillor Barrett, the Divisional Director for Customer Services, Ian Savigar explained that Universal Credit will replace housing benefit and there will be funding for the associated administration costs.

Councillor Becker asked if the current low interest rates benefit the Council. The Cabinet Member explained that where the Council seeks to borrow to invest – low rates are beneficial. There is a small return on large balances though so the Council has used its own money to fund some projects. If the rates rise, the Treasury Management Team to deal with buffering the effects of this. He added that a Treasury Management report would be coming to the Council meeting in December 2015.

32 BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL CORPORATE STRATEGY 2016-20

Strategy and Plan Manager, Helen Edelstyn introduced the report. She explained that this document would help to inform the financial plan. The Strategic Director further explained that this document has been approved by the Cabinet but is still a draft that will go to Council to set the context for the budget.

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

Councillor Furse explained his concern about the Council being a 'business' as this implies making a profit whereas he feels the Council should also be concerned with community need and there should be a priority to consider 'value' rather than 'profit'. The Strategic Director explained that not all businesses are designed to make a profit, the Council is concerned with being 'business like' and efficient and if there is a return then that can be used for community benefit – that is the objective.

Councillor Barrett asked if this Panel should look at all of the Business Cases. The Divisional Director for Strategy and Performance explained that the Panel can request more details on specific items to be brought to the January meeting but there are a lot of Business Cases so all of them could not come to the Panel.

33 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The Strategic Performance Manager, Steve Harman introduced the report. He explained that the statutory code recommends an annual report should be published (the report is available on the website and hard copies have been sent to members). He explained that it is intended that regular performance report be brought to the Cabinet and this Panel from next April.

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

Councillor Barrett asked that some comparisons to the national average be shown. The officer explained that there are some comparisons to national data and where possible this is shown.

Councillor Furse congratulated officers on the overall performance. He added a word of caution regarding overpopulation of the Roman Baths.

Councillor Becker asked where the statistics come from, the officer explained that some are gathered locally and some from the Office of National Statistics.

34 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources, Charles Gerrish updated members that he had been attending all PDS Panel meetings, attending budget fairs and meeting with officers to be briefed on the Directorate Plans.

35 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted the workplan items.

The meeting ended at 6.00 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services