

CABINET MEETING 10th Feb 2016

REGISTERED SPEAKERS

Where the intention is to speak about an item on the Agenda, the speaker will be offered the option to speak near the beginning of the meeting or just before the Agenda item.

Statements about issues NOT on the Agenda

- David Redgewell on the subject of public transport cuts and the effect on bus and rail services
- Cllr Alison Millar about Park and Ride

Statements about issues on the Agenda

- Cllr Sarah Bevan (Chair of Resources PDS Panel)
Re: Budget and Council Tax 2016/17 and Financial Outlook 2016/17 to 2019/20.
- Cllr Dine Romero
Re: Urban Gulls Strategy and Action Plan and also on Budget and Council Tax 2016/17 and Financial Outlook 2016/17 to 2019/20
- Cllr Neil Butters
Re: Metro West Phase 1 Update and also on Budget and Council Tax 2016/17 and Financial Outlook 2016/17 to 2019/20
- Cllr Rob Appleyard
Re: Heritage Services Business Plan: 2016-2021 update
- Cllr Andrew Furse
Re: Revenue & Capital Budget Monitoring, Cash Limits and Virements – April to December 2015, Treasury Management Monitoring Report to 31st December 2015, 2016/17 Treasury Management & Investment Strategy and Budget and Council Tax 2016/17 and Financial Outlook 2016/17 to 2019/20.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - COUNCILLORS

M 01	Question from:	Councillor Nigel Roberts
<p>The Wansdyke is a scheduled ancient monument in Odd Down. There has been a management plan scheduled for several years. Please could the Cabinet Member update on the progress of this plan?</p>		
Answer from:		Councillor Liz Richardson
<p><i>The West Wansdyke Conservation Management Plan for the whole length of the monument within Bath and North East Somerset Council has now been issued by Historic England can be viewed on the Council's website.</i></p>		

M 02	Question from:	Councillor Karen Walker
<p>Despite Council action in the past to reduce the number of people on the social housing waiting list, more still needs to be done to provide homes for people who need them the most.</p> <p>Is the Cabinet aware of the current number of empty residential properties in Bath and North East Somerset council?</p> <p>If so, could the Cabinet Member tell us the number, and what's being done to bring them back into use?</p>		
Answer from:		Councillor Liz Richardson
<p><i>Due to the numerous and often complex reasons a property may become empty (such as renovation, probate etc), as well as recent changes to the Council Tax system including the removal of the empty property discount, it is hard to accurately establish the number of empty properties within the district at any given time.</i></p> <p><i>The Council therefore focusses its efforts on those long-term empty properties that tend to have greater negative effects on local neighbourhoods. The standard definition of these long-term empty properties is one which has remained empty for two or more years. These properties are less likely to come back into use without intervention and are more likely to be reported, often by local residents. Our current estimate is that there are 145 of these properties.</i></p> <p><i>There are a number of ways in which the Council attempts to address this issue.</i></p>		

To disincentives property-owners from allowing these properties to remain empty, the Council charges 150% of normal Council Tax on these properties.

In addition, the Council employs an Empty Property Officer who provides the following services to encourage the recovery of empty and void properties:

- *Contacts all empty home owners to encourage the effective use of the property, inform them of their options and provide free advice if required, including visits and advice on making the property habitable;*
- *Bi-annual newsletter and dedicated website www.no-use-emptywest.co.uk run with our West of England partners allowing free advertising of empty homes for sale, reporting of empty homes, case studies and advice for empty home owners;*
- *Issuing VAT exemption letter which allows owners of 2yr old+ empty properties to claim VAT exemption on building materials/works to bring property up to standard;*
- *Prioritising all properties that have been empty for over 2 years into low, medium high priority;*
- *Owners of properties empty for 2 years or more are offered a £500 grant for essential work to help bring the home back into use or for sale;*
- *For high and medium priority empty homes, a conditional loan of up to £30,000 is available for work to bring the home back into use;*
- *The owners of high priority empty homes are contacted specifically and encouraged to take action to bring their homes back into use, including where appropriate consideration of formal legal action, such as compulsory purchase orders and other measures available to the Council.*

So far this financial year the Council has brought back into use 39 properties that had been long term empty, including two through the Compulsory Purchase Order process.

M 03	Question from:	Councillor Andrew Furse
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What was the value of penalty charges levied on Kier for not meeting their recycling collection requirements?

Answer from:	Councillor Martin Veal
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The Council has been working with Kier throughout to minimise the effect of non-collection of the waste. We have submitted our claim to Kier and we are having further discussions with them in relation to the final cost.

Supplementary Question:

I am concerned that we, as a Council, are not getting service from Kier in terms of recycling delivery. This, along with cuts in the budget for recycling centre would lead to more problems and potentially to more fly-tipping?

Answer from:	Councillor Martin Veal
<i>We are in constant negotiations with Kier and service value will be assessed over the period of time, in balance with what service we require from them. I can provide more information on this matter in near future.</i>	

M 04	Question from:	Councillor Andrew Furse
The draft capital programme for 2016/17 includes a provisional item of £3m for Energy Services Investment; could the Cabinet member explain what projects this will fund?		
Answer from:	Councillor Martin Veal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The purpose of this provisional capital programme is to invest in local energy generation or infrastructure projects that will support delivery of the Core Strategy Policy CP 3 (renewable heat and electricity) and deliver other community benefits, whilst generating a return on Council investment</i> • <i>Those community benefits include, for example, reduction of local carbon emissions, retention of local economic benefit, contribution to the Bath & West Community Energy Fund (for reinvestment in B&NES projects) and business rate income growth</i> • <i>Any investment made will only be approved following satisfactory completion of due diligence</i> • <i>The Council, working with its partners in the Environmental Sustainability Partnership, has a smart energy vision for B&NES that requires the development not only of local renewable energy resources, but also the development of smart energy infrastructure, including demand management, storage capacity and a local supply mechanism, that will enable the Council, local community groups and others to develop viable local energy projects in the medium to long-term</i> • <i>The energy market is changing fast with costs continuing to fall for solar PV, for example, and reducing fast for important infrastructure such as storage technology, which is vital to local energy independence. It's early days, but, for instance ,we are exploring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>a possible scheme combining solar with electric vehicle charging and smart storage that may provide a sound investment opportunity in the shorter term and</i> ○ <i>other potential schemes such as small-scale hydro, roof-mounted solar and combined heat and power</i> </i> • <i>Finally the Council is creating further opportunities by developing a local supply model which, combined with these market changes, should provide a mechanism for a better rate of return for local energy producers, whilst offering a better deal for local energy consumers within the next year.</i> 		
Supplementary Question:		
Do we have a budget for delivery of renewable energy resources and smart energy		

infrastructure which would enable Council, local community groups and others to develop viable local energy projects in the medium to long term?

Answer from:

Councillor Martin Veal

I will provide you with an answer within 5 working days.

M 05

Question from:

Councillor Cherry Beath

I have had a number of requests from residents for safety signage on Claverton Down Road, approaching the Zebra Crossing that was installed last year. This is a very fast, busy road, and the police confirm vehicles do tend to speed and there are no warning signs other than '30' written on the road, Can the Cabinet Member agree to signage here being installed this year?

Answer from:

Councillor Anthony Clarke

Enforcement of the speed limit is carried out by the Police. I have asked officers to consider the request for additional signage and report their findings and recommendations to myself and local Ward Members.

M 06

Question from:

Councillor Cherry Beath

Residents, and particularly Parents, are upset that the 'Lolly Pop' crossing on Church Road Combe Down has been axed. Can the Cabinet Member confirm that much needed 'Children Crossing' or other safety signage will be installed on Summer Lane on the approach to the newly installed crossing point, where traffic still seems to speed up to the junction?

Answer from:

Councillor Anthony Clarke

The School Crossing Patrol on Church Road has been disestablished as the site does not meet the National Criteria for a school crossing patrol. The Patrol was initially installed whilst the Combe Down Stone Mines works were operational. In accordance with Safety Audit procedures, the Road Safety Engineer is considering the installation of appropriate warning signs at Summer Lane and will liaise directly with local Ward Members on the outcome of the investigation.

M 07

Question from:

Councillor Cherry Beath

It is regretful that the decision on the Charter Agreement between the Council and Curo is being taken as a Single Member Decision. Can the Cabinet Member assure me that The "Charter" will go through a transparent process of consultation with the

Community?	
Answer from:	Councillor Liz Richardson
<p><i>Yes, we can confirm that the draft Foxhill Regeneration and Development Charter is to be consulted on fully with the community and local stakeholders. The single member decision being taken to approve the draft is to allow consultation to happen in a timely fashion which enables Curo to commence a significant community-focussed masterplanning exercise in the Spring.</i></p> <p><i>We can also confirm that ATLAS, the HCA's Advisory Team for Large sites, who developed the charter for Curo and the Council, have commissioned the specialist consultant Arup, to carry out the consultation work. Ward members will continue to be briefed on this process as details around consultation are firmed up.'</i></p>	

M 08	Question from:	Councillor Neil Butters
<p>When are repairs scheduled for the surface in Station Road and the access track to Station Road Car Park in Wellow? The surface is severely eroded and potholed, risking damage to vehicles and causing a trip hazard for pedestrians. In addition, the boundaries of the car park are overgrown with brambles, trees and bushes that seriously encroach upon the usable space within the car park. When will these boundaries be cut back and can the Cabinet member commit to ensuring they are maintained in the future? These queries were raised with Council Connect by a local resident in November, but as yet he has not received a reply.</p>		
Answer from:		Councillor Anthony Clarke
<p><i>Station Road, the access road and the car park are all privately owned and not maintained by the Highway Authority. Therefore, the landowner should be addressing the issues reported. The Council's records showing the extent of the public highway are available on line, to all Members.</i></p>		
Supplementary Question:		
<p>Does the Cabinet Member accept the fact that it may be a possible error in Council's records, and this is in fact within Council's ownership?</p>		
Answer from:		Councillor Anthony Clarke
<p><i>I will provide you with an answer within 5 working days.</i></p>		

M 09	Question from:	Councillor Neil Butters
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What reduction was there in traffic - by type - on the London Road whilst the A36 was shut?

Answer from:	Councillor Anthony Clarke
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The table below shows the traffic count across a 24 hour period, during and after the closure

	<i>24 Hour Average Total Vehicles by Class</i>				
<i>Period</i>	<i>Car and Light Vans</i>	<i>Heavy Vans and mini bus</i>	<i>Rigid lorries</i>	<i>Rigid Lorries and Trailer and Articulated HGVs</i>	<i>Bus and Coach</i>
<i>Prior to Closure (1st Jan - 2nd March)</i>	18841	2373	752	623	384
<i>During Closure (3rd March - 20th June)</i>	19555	2473	671	400	472
<i>After Closure (20th June - 7th Dec)</i>	20197	2667	761	669	467

M 10	Question from:	Councillor Neil Butters
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Please could the Cabinet member confirm whether the Parish Charter still exists? If it does not, can he explain when was it discontinued and how parish councils were notified? If it does still exist, why were Freshford and Monkton Combe Parish Councils - and Wiltshire - not consulted well before the recent closure of the B3108 at Limpley Stoke/Monkton Combe Viaduct in order to minimise disruption to local traffic?

Answer from:	Councillor Anthony Clarke
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The Parish Charter recognises Local Councils alongside Bath & North East Somerset Ward Councillors as the grass roots level of local democracy and community leadership in our area. Initially put in place in 1999, and reviewed in 2006, it remains in operation and contains a framework for developing arrangements for local co-operation, consultation and partnership with parish and town councils.

In relation to consultation, there is a commitment in the Charter to “consult an individual Local Council when a planned decision or action will have a direct and significant impact on that Local Council or its area or inhabitants”. The Charter does however recognise that issues may arise which might prevent or curtail the usual consultation processes.

We believe that overall the Council has a good track record of working with parishes in

relation to local highways projects and we recognises that much local knowledge can be gained from this to improve the design of such schemes. Recent improvements have included circulating to parishes on a regular basis a constantly-updated weblink giving information on street works.

In respect of the closure of the B3108 at Limpley Stoke/Monkton Combe the Council agreed the timing of the works with Highways England and Wilshire Councils, advertised the works in advance via road side signs, traffic regulation order notices and on Elgin.

The Ward Councillor was informed back in October that the works were being planned for January/February. As a direct result of local feedback modifications to the works were made, which completed a week and half ahead of schedule.

The Parish Charter is now ten years old and although its principles are robust some of its specific provisions may require updating in the light of changes in local arrangements and particularly in methods of communication. In recent months a working party of Parish Council clerks have been developing detailed proposals to further improve communications, consultation and liaison. A survey of all parish clerks in the area has been undertaken which has yielded useful feedback on how joint working can be improved.

The Parish Charter is proposed to be an agenda item at the next Parishes Liaison meeting.

M 11	Question from:	Councillor Neil Butters
<p>With regard to the planned resurfacing of Wellow Lane (Wellow-Peasedown St John):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What will be the timescale for Phase 1? The section through Double Hill - frequently patched - is in a particularly bad state, yet Phase 1 will stop just short of that. Surely that at least should be included? What is the schedule for further phases and what will they include? We were previously told that the entire road - Peasedown to Wellow, past Shoscombe - would be surface dressed, and in the 2015/16 financial year, yet now we learn that even by doubling the budget (£170K v £88K for which we are most grateful) still only a small length can be tackled. It is understood that there was a major gap between the estimate of the Council and the price actually sought by the contractor. Is the Cabinet Member satisfied that there is a sufficient understanding between the Council and its highways contractors over likely costs? 		
Answer from:		Councillor Anthony Clarke
<p>a) <i>Trial digs will be undertaken in the next couple of weeks throughout Wellow Lane to allow the design to be concluded by a specialist sub-contractor. Following consultation with the Recycling centre over access arrangements during the works, a start on site in April is planned</i></p>		

- b) *Phase 1 of the works require all the currently available funding and targets the area of highest priority. Officers will prioritise further phases of the work with consideration to the condition of other roads across the district ensuring that the roads most in need of repair are dealt with first.*
- c) *Lengths of treatment in future phases will be dependent on planning the works in way that minimise disruption to the public and ensuring the most economical phasing. The Ward Councillor will be consulted on future options as they emerge.*
- d) *During the detailed investigation phase of the work it became apparent that the road's condition and traffic flows meant that surface dressing was not the best option and a very different solution was needed, which comes at a different cost. There is very good understanding between officers and the highways contractor who jointly develop and agree the most appropriate surfacing technique.*

M 12

Question from:

Councillor Rob Appleyard

Please could the Cabinet Member explain the rationale behind the replacement of the Stall Street carousel at the Christmas Market in 2015 with a beer shed? Given that part of objective of market is to attract families, it caused concern that one of the few attractions for children was removed.

Answer from:

Councillor Martin Veal

Bath Tourism Plus (BTP), organisers of the annual Bath Christmas Market each year conduct a thorough review of the event taking into account; site layout, event content and feedback from stallholders and visitors. This survey specifically asks people to make recommendations on areas they feel should be improved at the event and to offer feedback on content they feel is missing or could be added to the event.

Between 2012 and 2014, there were a large number of responses which cited that the event was lacking in areas for people to sit down and have something to eat or drink whilst still being on the Market footprint and offering the atmospheric feel that is present throughout the rest of the event. This feedback was taken into account and for 2015, a partnership arrangement was put in place with Bath Tourism Plus and Bath Ales to create and manage this new indoor venue for the duration of the event. The emphasis of The Lodge at all times during consultation, planning and licensing was that it was aimed to provide an indoor area for shoppers looking for some respite during their visit while enjoying local food and drink and was not to provide a "Beer Shed" or temporary bar which would encourage anti-social drinking or behaviour.

A number of changes to the site layout were made for the 2015 Bath Christmas Market, with one of the key aims to improve pedestrian flow across the event. The location of the carousel was one particular area of concern as the attractions footprint is significantly large, and has restricted pedestrian flow for a number of years. Bath Tourism Plus spent considerable time looking for suitable alternative locations for the

ride but these were either not suitable to accommodate the size or were unable to take the weight of the ride.

As the Destination Marketing company for Bath, Bath Tourism Plus work across the City with a number of partners to actively promote other activities and events. Key to the Christmas offer are both the Santa's Grotto and the Ice Rink, both of which are attractions for children. The Bath Christmas Market is predominately a shopping experience for adults, results from the 2015 visitor survey concluded that 86% of visitors were in adult only groups, which further supports our decision to provide a seated food and drink venue over the carousel. In addition to this, currently it is not one of the Market objectives to specifically attract families, the objectives are as follows: .

- To continue to be a market leader in the management and execution of a British Christmas Market and to maintain the benchmark for which others aim to aspire to.*
- To engage with local makers and businesses and to offer growth and exposure opportunities within an award winning visitor event in the South West.*
- To continue to provide an economic boost to Bath, by attracting visitors both repeat and new by offering a visitor experience to cherish whilst maintaining the classic quality brand that is Bath.*
- To provide a reliable income to Bath Tourism Plus to contribute to the development of the City's destination marketing plans and to support other city wide campaigns.*

Notwithstanding the above, Bath Tourism Plus are aware that the absence of the carousel resulted in some disappointment. To this end Bath Tourism Plus and officers from BaNES economy & culture and parks & leisure are exploring options for the use of additional space in the city centre which could form the basis of an enhanced family offer.

M 13

Question from:

Councillor Rob Appleyard

Can the Cabinet Member give a progress update on the remodelling of the Alice Park charity trust membership to include a wider representation of the community? Where we are with the process, what is the intended membership make up, what is the timeframe to achieve its objective and how is the consultation process to be conducted?

Answer from:

Councillor Martin Veal

*This matter has yet to be determined by full council. Full council is the sole corporate trustee for the Alice Park Trust and only it can decide this matter.
A report is to go to Council on the 23 March 2016.*

Supplementary Question:

Could you give us an indication when this will be determined?

Answer from:	Councillor Martin Veal	
<i>A report will come to the Full Council on 23 March 2016.</i>		
M 14	Question from:	Councillor Rob Appleyard
As the government has now announced the withdrawal of business rate support from small businesses, and this administrations has declared continuing support for small businesses what support will be put in place to support our small business sector with business rate relief when this council has control of the business rates generated in our area?		
Answer from:	Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones	
<i>The details relating to how future National Non Domestic Rates will actually work on a local level are still to be determined and any issues relating to discretionary powers will be reviewed and considered as and when the details are made available.</i>		
M 15	Question from:	Councillor Rob Appleyard
What has become of the funding set aside by the previous administration to provide skate facilities in Alice Park for residents in the East of Bath.		
Answer from:	Councillor Charles Gerrish	
<i>Funding remains earmarked for the skatepark within the capital programme.</i>		
M 16	Question from:	Councillor Alison Millar
<p>Last Monday (1 February) a presentation was given to four cabinet members and senior officers on the proposal for a park and ride to the East of Bath. Data analysis on local park and ride usage was put forward by a local resident.</p> <p>The data was taken from BANES associated Bath Hacked site and showed that, although there are predictable and seasonal peaks in demand, that the existing three park and rides around Bath on average have extensive capacity across the day. That they are also quieter at around 8-9 with an average of 25% utilisation, get busy by midday and empty by about 4pm. Where capacity levels do reach 100% these are limited in number (approximately 20-25 days) and are caused by predictable events such as the Christmas market. Given the under utilisation of the current Park and Rides and the ability to mitigate high demand at predictable points in the year, this is of great concern. It is entirely relevant as to whether, in reality, an additional park and ride around Bath is indeed necessary.</p>		

Bath Hacked states on their website that it is an "award-winning, joint council/community initiative that puts open data and smart thinking at the heart of our city." Their website goes on to say that their "primary mission is to bring bright people and quality data together to do useful things for the community of Bath & North East Somerset". Jon Poole, BANES' own research manager, is on Bath Hacked's committee.

We know that the Council has some reservations about this data so would the Cabinet Member explain in detail what the specific concerns are around it and the basis for these concerns please?

Answer from:

Councillor Anthony Clarke

The Council only recently finished expanding our existing P&R sites by some 870 new spaces through the Bath Transport Package, a 40% increase in numbers. Without this timely investment our P&Rs would now be full and people would not be able to visit the city. Patronage continues to grow at our existing P&R sites and we need to plan for future growth in their use. This growth was identified in the Getting around Bath Transport Strategy adopted by full Council in 2014. We are planning for a growing economy and we know that timely investment now will provide the capacity for this future jobs and visitor numbers, including peak times in the day and peak periods of the year .

Supplementary Question:

I wonder if any analyses have been done on the new capacity from newly expanded Park and Rides at Lansdown and Newbridge? If yes, would it be possible to see statistics in relation to those two sites?

Answer from:

Councillor Anthony Clarke

The work is in progress and we are gathering the data. I will share that information as and when it becomes available. We are working on projections on growing population in B&NES and Wiltshire. It is a matter of balance between historical data and projection. A lot of this work is predicated that we are committed to economic expansion within this authority.

M 17

Question from:

Councillor Lisa Brett

Can the Cabinet member give an update on the plans for the Riverside centre?

Answer from:

Councillor Michael Evans

The current position in regard to the Riverside Youth Hub is that we are working with colleagues in Property Services to develop a refurbishment plan for the building.

Subject to full Council approval of the capital investment, the overall aim will be to modernise the facilities so that it can be a more effective venue for both youth activity and wider community activities for local residents. We aim to start the work towards the end of the summer. Richard Baldwin, Divisional Director, Sally Churchyard Service Manager and I would be happy to meet with Councillor Brett and Councillor Darey at the Youth Hub to share with them the plans that we are developing and to ensure that they are kept abreast of developments.

Supplementary Question:

I understand that the funding to improve youth and community facilities in east of Bath has been cut from £1m to £200k. Is that correct?

Answer from:

Councillor

Yes. The £1m funding was predicated on the Lottery funding, which didn't come.

M 18

Question from:

Councillor Tim Ball

Parking on pavements and grass verges in Twerton is becoming a nightmare for pedestrians. This affects the disabled and partiality signed residents the most and can have devastating effects on their lives. Will the cabinet ensure that its officers work with Curo the Police and the community of Twerton in order to resolve this ever growing problem? Will the cabinet look at what other powers they are able to bring down from government to tackle this problem? Will the cabinet investigate what financial resources may be needed in order to resolve some of the problems uncovered?

Answer from:

Councillor Anthony Clarke

Unlike Greater London, there is currently no national legislation banning the parking of all vehicles on the pavement, due to the wide range of circumstances and locations where pavement parking occurs. For example in some narrow residential roads with a lack of off-street parking provision, drivers have little option but to park on the pavement to avoid causing traffic congestion.

Parking Services can enforce against vehicles where other restrictions such as Double Yellow Lines are in place upon the highway under the Traffic Management Act 2004. Where there are no restrictions we do not have powers to enforce via the issue Penalty Charge Notices. Furthermore, the Police have powers under section 137 of the Highways Act 1980, which makes it an offence "to wilfully obstruct the free passage of the highway". However, this is difficult to prove and resource intensive so rarely gets used.

We do have the power under the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984 to make Traffic Regulation Orders, allowing for specific parking regulations to be implemented in specific areas, according to the demands of local circumstances. We can for example

introduce a Traffic Regulation Order in a single road banning the parking of vehicles on any part of the pavement. However, the order would need to be signed appropriately and the restriction would apply to all vehicles which can be contentious and lead to many objections. Currently no budget has been allocated to investigating this issue specifically in Twerton but if specific areas of concern are raised they can be added to the forward plan of work for when budget is available. In the meantime, Parking Services will liaise with Curo and the Police Neighbourhood Teams to raise awareness of the issues being caused by pavement parking and request that residents show consideration for others by not parking on the pavement.

On the 4 December 2015 the government committed to undertake a policy review and to convene a round table next year to examine the implications of any legislative change in response to a private members bill which was subsequently withdrawn. Transport minister Robert Goodwill MP stated that improving access for all pedestrians remained a priority for the government. As an Authority we will be feeding into any consultation raising the issues faced within Bath and North East Somerset for both pedestrians and motorists alike .

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - PUBLIC

P 01	Question from:	Nathan Hartley
<p>For over a decade, the Hindu community in Bath and North East Somerset have been looking for a building in the local authority to move into and use for worship.</p> <p>The search for a temple has explored many options and with the local Hindu community now exceeding 400 people*, it has become even more essential that a building is found.</p> <p>Would the Cabinet be willing to work with myself and the Hindu Community to find a building to open Bath's first ever Hindu temple? The Council currently has a large number of empty properties (commercial, corporate and residential) that could easily be adapted.</p> <p>Such a building, as well as being a temple, would also act as a cultural centre for residents, students, and tourists to learn about Indian culture, food, and languages.</p> <p>*This figure doesn't include any of Bath's 20,000 students - a large proportion being from a Hindu or Indian background.</p>		
Answer from:		Councillor Tim Warren
<p><i>Through the Council's Economic Development and Property departments the Council is willing to provide assistance to the Hindu community in its search to identify appropriate</i></p>		

accommodation. Property Services has already provided links to a number of potentially suitable buildings in private ownership that are currently available and on the market.

The Council property portfolio does not contain many buildings that would be potentially suitable for this use and does not at present have any buildings that could be considered as appropriate which are either vacant or presently on the market.

P 02

Question from:

Laura Morris

Why have Bath and North East Somerset decided to demolish the empty property council tax exemption completely? This appears to directly undermine the Empty Property policy which aims to get empty properties back into use, yet full abolishment of the exemption discourages this by charging owners up to 150% council tax on these homes. Whilst I understand the rationale if owners are not utilising the properties they own, it is penalising those who have bought to renovate (for the wider local benefit)- under these circumstances, should a short term exemption (ie. 6 or 12 months) not be granted?

We purchased our property in December 2014 to renovate into our family home, which had been empty in excess of 2 years at this point. It was in a very poor state of repair as it had been neglected for over 20 years, which I understand had raised a large number of complaints within the community. Therefore, under the Empty Property Policy I believe it would be identified as a high priority property and as such, support should have been provided to bring it back into use. Instead, however, we were charged 150% council tax on top of the council tax charged at the property we were actually residing (also within BANES). I explained the condition of the property- which initially didn't have running water, heating or even cooking facilities and as such was not a habitable abode, especially with young children- however, I was advised that there was no exemption applicable in our situation. Nor did we receive any level of financial support in carrying out the works, although I understand the council will have received a grant for the home now becoming occupied (at our great expense).

Having spoken to my local councillor, I understand the decision to abolish the empty property council tax exemption was made using a voting system amongst local councillors, although my councillor eluded to the fact that herself (and potentially many others) hadn't considered the impact on individuals such as ourselves and I feel was probably ill advised on this basis. Therefore, I would like to make a plea for the exemption to be re-introduced on a temporary basis in support of individuals such as myself rather than being penalised for helping to improve the local community.

Answer from:

Councillor Charles Gerrish

The decision not to replace the exemptions formerly known as class A and C exemptions was not taken lightly. The minutes of the council meeting held on 08.11.2012, and the associated reports and documentation can be found here;

<https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=272&MId=3215&Ver=4>

As this is a personal issue the Cabinet Member will arrange for an individual written response to the issues raised.