

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Wednesday, 25th May, 2016

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

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Dando sent his apologies and was substituted by Councillor Joe Rayment.

Councillor Pearce sent his apologies.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Panel noted that Councillors Barrett and Goodman are Avon Pension Fund members but that this would not prevent them from participating in discussion on item 8 'Pensions Board'.

5 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

There was none.

7 MINUTES

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

8 PENSIONS BOARD

Jeff Wring – Head of Audit West gave a presentation to the Panel which covered the following points:

- The Local Government Pension Scheme;
- Membership;
- Value of the Fund;
- Assets and liabilities;
- Investment portfolio;
- LGPS national governance structure;
- National governance framework;
- Local Pension Board;
- Terms of Reference – Structure of Board;
- Focus of the Board – Code of Practice 14;
- Pension Board – Year 1 Summary;
- Pension Board – Year 2 Work Plan

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

In response to a question from Councillor Furse regarding membership of the board, the officer explained that there is an open recruitment process with job description and criteria.

Councillor Furse asked about breeches and fraud – the officer explained that a breach would have to be significant to be reportable and this had never occurred to date.

Councillor Barrett asked if the Government can access the pension fund and also if outsourced services employees can join (eg. academy staff). The Strategic Director responded that the Government cannot access the Pension Fund but would like to influence the way funds are invested. He also explained that academy non-teaching staff regularly join the Pension Fund.

Councillor Goodman asked if 78% funded is a good level and what level would be a worry. The Strategic Director explained that this level is acceptable and that the key is a sustainable recovery plan which is in place.

Councillor Becker noted the elaborate system of controls and stated that BHS had a Pensions Board and is this structure similar. The officer explained that there is a difference between private and public pension schemes. He assured the Panel that the Avon Pension Fund is one of the best Local Government Schemes. The Strategic Director confirmed that the Local Government scheme is a national scheme, underpinned by secure funding streams and unlike many public sector schemes its liabilities are mainly funded by investments.

Project Brunel Update – the Strategic Director gave a short introduction to this project, he explained that this Government directed initiative is at a crucial stage. The Project concerns the pooling of funds and the business case is being worked on by PWC. He informed the Panel that there will be a report to Council probably in September to further update members.

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

Following a query from Councillor Furse, the Strategic Director explained that the pension funds stay separate, it is the investments that are pooled.

The Chair thanked the officers.

9 DIGITAL STRATEGY

Angela Parratt – Head of IT gave a presentation to the Panel which covered the following points:

- The Developing Digital Programme;
- Programme Vision;
- Our Digital Design Principles;
- Business Needs – why Digital? (An Efficient Business; Customer and Community; Prevention; Economic Growth)
- What we have achieved already (Digital communications; social media; Intranet; PCC Website; External Website)
- One Council Review Programme;
- Achievements to date (eg Tell Us Once policy);
- The Digital Programme – what does it look like, what will it do

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

Councillor Barrett referred to some feedback issues he has had with Council Connect and asked how the new digital approach will be better. The officer explained that a core design piece of the system will be the user experience. Councillor Barrett cautioned that the approach will only be good if it is well maintained and it must be user friendly. The Strategic Director for Resources Andrew Pate explained that simplicity and ease of use would be the key.

Councillor Rayment asked if Apps are sustainable in the future as people may have storage issues. The officer explained that a solutions architect is being consulted and a choice of channels will be available.

Regarding staff use of their own devices, The Strategic Director explained that where employees need a device for their job, the Council will provide but where a member of staff wants to use their own phone for convenience then they would be able to do so but would not be reimbursed for data.

Councillor Furse stated the importance of accuracy of the system and keeping it updated. The officer noted the comment and explained that hundreds of applications are used and with the new system a 'golden record' can be produced and used in all of the service areas. The Strategic Director explained that this is an opportunity to further join things up and cut down the systems used.

Councillor Barrett asked how much the setting up and maintenance costs of the digital approach would be. The Strategic Director explained that this is a draft programme at present so the budget is not yet confirmed but it would be in the next 3 months when it becomes a strategy. The aim is to help the Council save significantly.

Councillor Barrett asked how secure the system will be. The officer explained that the Council achieves high public sector security standards.

Councillor Barrett asked how Bath Hacked get their information. The officer explained that the Council have an open data policy on some aspects of data and would share it with such organisations. Bath Hacked uses publically available data.

The Panel **agreed** to note the report. The Chair will consult Panel members on what they think might be missing from the programme and whether they would like annual updates on progress.

10 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources, Councillor Charles Gerrish updated the Panel on what he and his senior officers are currently working on:

- The HR Review – many positives and some learning aspects;
- Property officers are currently looking at investments;
- Proposals are being developed to make the Council Tax Benefit scheme more efficient;
- Adult Care Review – due to be briefed in June and will report back to the Panel;
- The Council has appointed Ernst & Young (EY) as its financial advisor and partner;
- The Property Company is now formally established.

The Panel noted the update.

11 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted the future workplan with the following suggested additions:

- Council Tax Benefit Review (July or September)

The meeting ended at 6.35 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services