



**Note of the meeting of the Bath City Forum
held on Thursday, 2nd February, 2017
in Banqueting Room - Guildhall, Bath**

Meeting Attendance

In Attendance
Councillor Rob Appleyard
Ashley Ayre
Councillor Colin Blackburn
Jeremy Boss
Dave Dixon
Councillor Andrew Furse
Councillor Bob Goodman
Sally Harris
Mark Hayward
Michael Hill
Ben Howlett
Matt Humberstone
Robin Kerr
Penny McKissock
Councillor Lin Patterson
Councillor Christopher Pearce
Rosie Phillips
Councillor Joe Rayment
Les Redwood
Dr Christopher Roche
Councillor Dine Romero
George Samios
Ian Savigar
Councillor Shaun Andrew Stephenson-McGall
Kevin Thatcher
Andy Thomas
Councillor Peter Turner
Councillor Martin Veal

Additionally seven members of the public were present

Apologies Received from
Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones
Councillor Fiona Darey

1. Welcome and Introductions

Councillor Bob Goodman (Chair) opened the meeting and welcomed everybody in attendance.

2. Policing issues in Bath

Chief Inspector Kevin Thatcher provided an update on Policing matters in Bath.

The major drug operation in Bath 'Operation Hydra saw 29 arrests made with a further 10 arrests following the raids. Some of those have been through the court and have seen sentencing of between two and three years. Additionally many have been handed out Criminal Behaviour Orders so when they do come out of prison they will be controlled.

The Police are working with organisations like Curo and Julian House to help rehabilitate offenders when they are released from prison.

The Police are holding fortnightly meetings that look at intervention with individual street drinkers who are persistent offenders. This method looks at the needs through conducting interviews and prioritising the actions.

I was explained that to hassle and move offenders simply moves on the problem. This is something we have to deal with at the route of the problem rather than push it somewhere else.

Questions

1 Rosie Phillips – What has been the impact on drug supply to the City following the recent action in Bath?

Response – The impact has not been as great as it was hoped but there has been some disruption to the supplies coming into the City.

Follow Up – has there been a ripple effect to outlying areas?

Response – It is understood how displacement of the problem exists and when Wiltshire were taking action Bath saw an increase in supply. The Police are determined to keep taking action and where possible join up with neighbouring authorities.

2. Councillor Dine Romero – What action can the Police take against private residents who are involved in crime?

Response – Criminal behaviour orders are used to disrupt the activities.

3. Councillor Dine Romero – What is being done to deal with the problem of rough sleepers with mental health issues?

Response – The Police work with individuals and build plans to deal with each case.

4. Councillor Dine Romero – What more can be done to deal with aggressive begging in the City?

Response - We need to improve specific actions around beggars, this can be quite difficult to deal with.

5. Councillor Chris Pearce – A lot of residents are concerned about car break-ins on the Weston Road, could CCTV be used to look into this?

Response – There have been a small spate of vehicle crimes. In relation to what the Police are doing, extra patrols in that area. We may now go another four five or six months without further offences reassurance can be given that things have been put in place to sort this out. Cameras are possible but difficult; there is also the cost element to it. If people are really worried then please put them in contact with me.

Comment from Councillor Martin Veal – The suggestion was made that the B&NES CCTV manager could liaise more closely with Avon and Somerset police in Bath.

6. Councillor Shaun McCall – Can you provide an update be given on hate crime in the area?

Response - Generally we get very few hate crimes in Bath. The last one we had was a taxi driver who got abused for not taking somebody to the right place. There are updated numbers but I do not have these with me tonight.

7. Councillor Shaun McCall – The PSCO in Westmorland Ward has left can you reassure us that a replacement will be found?

Response – There are no plans to reduce any front line staff in Bath, the restructure has taken place and vacant posts will be filled.

3. Questions for MP for Bath, Ben Howlett

1 Councillor Joe Rayment – Councillor Tim Warren admitted the speed and scale of local government cuts are endangering social care in B&NES. Why did you consistently vote to deal the council that card ... causing a humanitarian crisis to the NHS?

Response - Social care clearly has a huge amount of pressures attached to it at the moment, B&NES is being used as an example of best practice. The government is currently looking at considering whether we should be front loading with care, It is not a rosy picture out there in terms of the economy. Yes there are financial pressures but B&NES have put down very good budget proposal.

2. Councillor Bob Goodman asked an e-mailed question on behalf of Emma Adams - Do you still believe that a new Park and Ride on Bathampton Meadows will significantly reduce congestion and pollution on the London Road as you did when you campaigned in the election?

Response – Both the park and ride and the A36/46 link road are progressing very nicely at the moment. It was a cross party agreement.

Over the last few months there has been an awful lot of concern and forgetfulness about why Park and Ride has been put into place in the first place. The Council decided after going through dozens of different sites to decide on site B. I think the Council have made the right decision in selecting site B.

Additionally the location would benefit the call for additional rail services from Batheaston Station if is reinstated in the future.

3. Councillor Peter Turner – Has protesting become dysfunctional with the volume has increased.

Response – Debate and opposition is a good thing and protest when not violent form part of this.

4. Rosie Phillips – Should the lack of affordable housing in Bath lead to a separate level for housing allowances being set for the City?

Response - I have a huge amount of frustration about developers trying to get out of providing affordable housing. I think across the whole of Bath we are facing a number of challenges across these areas. To most people in Bath, a two bedroom flat costing £350,000 is absolutely not affordable.

Access to starter home funding has not been available to the City.

5. Councillor Andy Furse - What is Ben is doing to ensure Chris Grayling understands we do need electrification?

Response – It was clarified that there isn't any cancellation over electrification, there is however a delay due to a funding issue.

The funding issue is around the numbers for 2019-2024. In the mean time we need to see how much skilled labour is available to put the lines in above the tracks. Network Rail had promised they will be able to deliver a scheme without realising they didn't have enough staff.

When the West of England Mayor is in post from May 2017 there will be powers to tackle regional issues, such as the hold ups that occur at the Bristol East Junction.

6. Robin Kerr – What is happening regarding the changes to licencing for HMO's and Student Accommodation?

Response - There has been no kicking to the long grass in relation to local planning and HMOs - it's still under review.

Bath University was given additional space on campus to get them to cater for second and third year students on campus.

Both universities are two of the most popular universities in the country - all credit to them. They are fantastic.

Councillor Bob Goodman is working on the consultation on HMO's in Bath.

7. Sally Harris – Following the recent community take-over at Bath City FC the film I Daniel Blake was shown. Would Ben agree to attend the showing of the film and take part in a debate around foodbanks?

Response - Ben Howlett congratulated everyone for their successful takeover of Bath City FC. There is a whole range of reasons why people need to use food banks. Food banks are a really good thing to have. We have to understand what sort of programmes are going to actually help these people get out of food banks.

We want to help people get a better, more sustainable outcome for their lives.

Where people are having issues with universal credit, please advise them to contact me through my surgery.

Let me know the date for the film showing and if I am available I will be happy to attend.

8. George Samios - The (new) National Funding Formula for schools will impact adversely on 8 out of 53 schools in BANES. Three of the schools that are losing out are in areas of the highest deprivation in BANES, in the wards of Twerton and Southdown. Twerton Infant School, Roundhill Primary and St Michael's Junior School will see a reduction of 2.5% to their funding. Whilst many schools in affluent parts of Bath will benefit from significant increases; including Weston All Saints Primary School (+11.9%) and Saltford Primary (+11.2%). What assurances can Ben Howlett MP give to the Forum that he will campaign against the National Funding Formula and protect the rights of the most vulnerable children in Bath."

Response – Ben explained national funding for schools and what assurances he can give to campaign for vulnerable children in Bath. This formula has been on the cards for a very long card, this in consultation at the moment. I think there is a fundamental problem on how this affects areas of deprivation.

9. Councillor Rob Appleyard - Affordable Housing - The focus should be on understanding the loose and abusive viability process that developers use to approach the Council.

Response - There are a huge number of issues there which have been raised. The pre-planning process will address some of the viability issues. The wider problem in relation to housing is where do you put it? This is because of the green belt mainly. We are looking at developing housing to the South of Bristol. There is a good prospect of seeing more homes being developed when there is a new Mayor.

10. Chris Roche - Do you condemn the Vice Chancellor of Bath University receiving a pay rise of 11%?

Response - We need to have much greater transparency on pay - particular in Universities.

11. Chris Roche - Bath University is focusing on recruitment of international students and post graduate students what do they need to do to stop locals being penalised.

Response - They need to start developing accommodation on the green belt land on campus for year 2/3 students. This will reduce pressures on certain areas of the city like Oldfield Park and Twerton.

12. Councillor Lin Patterson – Are you aware of the cuts to the North East Bath bus route and what is your position on the National Bus Services Bill?

Response – The 6/7 bus route numbers on usage are disputed. To make a route sustainable user need to encourage usage on the route.

The National Bus Services Bill was put back this week in Parliament. There are are points in the bill that would see the opportunity for wider franchise options, longer periods that will generate an economy of scale and the unlocking of smartcard ticketing for the West of England.

13. Virginia Williamson - Given that 68% per cent of Bathonians voted remain, would you be prepared to demand access to progress on Article 50? Given that 68% per cent of Bathonians voted remain, will you be prepared to demand access to progress on Article 50?

Response – As an MP if you ever want to believe that parliament has a real value in society going forwards, you must uphold democracy. I voted for a referendum because I thought we should give the people a say.

We made that decision and we need to uphold that decision. It's a horrible position to be in, I never wanted that bill, I never wanted to make that speech.

I'm not thinking about joining Ukip or anything like that. I have asked for a series of concessions from the government.

The Prime Minister already provides a quarterly report; this would be a good place for this to sit.

14. Adam Reynolds - Given, that by 2030 the Netherlands will have an obesity rate of 8.5% down from 10%, compared to a UK rate of 35%, up from 26% and given that the Netherlands is considered the best place to drive a car, with car ownership at similar levels to the UK. What in his opinion are they doing right that the UK is failing to do and does he think the intention by the council to spend £200k to remove the off street cycle path on London Road and replace it with parking demonstrates precisely why the UK has an obesity crisis?

Response – Walking and cycling initiatives do help with the obesity levels, it is the Councils place to decide on how to implement this.

15. A lot of people are panicking about the Bath City library plans - would you encourage them to reassure us we are going to get the services we have at the moment?

Response – This is a local Council matter. It is a pretty out of date library that needs more than a lick of paint. I am fully supportive of what the council is doing in integrating with the one stop shops' would definitely send in your feedback to the council so that your views can be heard. Children's library services are absolutely integral to all libraries across the country and I will be talking to Martin Veal about that tomorrow.

4. Bath Libraries

Cabinet Member for Community Services, Councillor Martin Veal provided the meeting with an update in Bath Library Services

There has been much debate given from across many directorate portfolios to provide suggestions, a lot of time and effort has gone into putting together the proposals. The proposals in part are due to Lewis House being owned by The Council and The Podium is a leased space.

The proposals have taken into account the success that Keynsham has indicated to us with the One Stop Shop. Statistics show us that there was a fall of 11% of active users in Bath while there was a corresponding 12% increase in Keynsham because of the way that facilities are provided. There are examples of what the new modern space could look like on our website and in the room tonight.

This is not a closure and it is recognised that this going to be a 'one size fits all' solution. What is proposed will ensure residents can access a modern library service and have access to a One Stop Shop in one place. We need to co-locate libraries with community service to ensure we can continue to provide a modern library service. All existing services will still be available in the new modern library. We welcome all constructive and challenging points.

The three million books will still be accessible just as they are now, events will continue to be hosted and there will be modern computers and fast Wi-Fi available. A more modern location will mean more modern and contained facilities for small children. All this information and more details are available on our website which went live yesterday.

Modernising the library service will contribute £800,000 per year as we move forward. £200,000 per year will be saved by relocating from the Podium Space.

The Podium location was not purpose built and originally it was intended for use as law courts, the public rejected that idea when it was proposed. There's a lot of misinformation out there, we welcome as much input as you can give us to help us achieve what the community wants.

Divisional Director for Customer Services, Ian Savigar provided further detail

In September/October 2016 all five Connecting Community Forums received a presentation on the challenges facing the Library Service. The review has been looking at other library services in and outside of Bath.

The Keynsham development gave us the opportunity to look at what other authorities have been doing, good practice and carried out lots of research.

Children and families are biggest users of the library service; the designs are open to creating bigger family and children spaces to cater for this.

In creating an integrated space we want to make sure that we are providing for the right skills and those applicants applying for jobs in B&NES. The PC usage in libraries at present is full at most times.

We are at the early stage of the changes that we need to make, this is year one of three. The early consultation was criticised, it is important to us that we get this stage of consultation right. We have launched the consultation on the website and will be making paper questionnaires available next week.

Questions

1. Councillor Dine Romero suggests the council just talks at people rather than seeks views
Response – We welcome all constructive comments and challenges, you have every opportunity to feed into this process and your suggestions, if they work, will be used. We will adapt and certainly get impact from the community; we will look at how we can accommodate people.
2. Councillor Joe Rayment asked if there will be fewer books on shelves. I don't think people want an Argos library where you browse books on a library.
You say staff will be expected to do two jobs, will this be trained librarians?
There is no option for the other branch libraries in Bath to be run democratically by the people as there are no Parish Councils in Bath.
Response – The actual books on site will be decided by the results of the consultation, the full range will still be available through order and reserve.
The roles of staff are changing and we have a good track record in dealing with the public across all existing areas.
3. Councillor Andrew Furse asked how the balancing between The Podium and Lewis House works.
Response – Staff will be displaced from Lewis House, we have a workplaces programme that looks to relocate. The move will produce some additional lettable space that income can be generated from. This is a £5.8 million capital programme and proper process must be followed.
4. Rosie Phillips asked if the annual savings amount to £800K.
Response – Yes
5. Chris Roche asked has the Council made any agreement with any 3rd parties about the Podium and is there a break down on the costs for The Podium and Lewis House?
Response – Nothing has been signed.
Raw figures do exist on the broken down costs, these have been presented to Cabinet.
6. Councillor Shaun Andrew Stephenson-McGall asked how consultation is to be carried out on the local branch libraries in Weston and Moorland Road.

Response – The timescales are different, an example from Paulton is that the Parish Council is taking on the library and funding will be through the parish precept.

7. Councillor Dine Romero explained that when doing a consultation on local branches the adjoining ward areas that use the facilities need to be included.

What alternatives were considered for Bath Central Library?

Response – Alternatives were considered, a full response to this question is to be issued at a later date.

8. Michael Norton commented that nobody is losing a library here; the Council never once said there was never going to be a library. Some of response has been unfairly misinterpreted. Why has there been so much animosity? Is it that people simply don't like change?

Response - Martin Veal explained that we are offering a "creative way forward", we are right at the very beginning of this process.

Comments can be made on the website, this is part of an ongoing process - it is forward thinking, we have considered it for a long time. You cannot have strong governments without decent opposition and at least we have decent opposition that are challenging us on this and quite rightly to.

9. Adam Reynolds welcomed that the library will be situated closer to the transport hub. Would the overall floor space be a net loss or gain?

Response – The public space will be arranged differently, the like for like space is likely to be almost the same when all considerations are taken into account. The car park on Manver's Street provides an opportunity to improve disabled access.

10. Ben Howlett welcomed the assurances that have been given; this proposal has been well challenged. It would be good to see that alternatives for the movement of B&NES Officers to the Podium are being considered as this is a difficult sell.

Response - This is a viable business plan and the full response will be provided. We need to also consider other public agencies that work with the Council and require partner working space

5. Minutes from the previous meeting and matters arising

Bob Goodman asked for any comments on the minutes of the last meeting – no responses were made.

Matters arising from the last meeting –

- Councillor Dine Romero asked what real difference the comments on the budget made. Bob Goodman's Response – Areas such as Hotel Room Tax have been taken forward. The Director for resources has agreed to attend the March meeting. Ben Howlett Response – Councillor Time Warren has met with the minister for tourism to discuss a hotel tax.
- Chris Roche asked what exactly are the Council doing to lobby government around the budget?

Ashley Ayres Response – The Leader of the Council had responded to this question at last night's cabinet meeting. There is work that the West of England will be addressing in some areas where there are funding gaps.

- Councillor Joe Rayment felt that a Conservative Council lobbying a Conservative MP does not work because the MP will not vote against his own parties' budget plans. Ben Hewlett's Response – Local Councils carry out their negotiations directly. B&NES Council always make submissions to their MP. The Local Government Association (LGA) do work together on these issues.
- Sally Harris asked for a motion to be put to Ben Howlett asking: "Bath City Forum requests that our MP Ben Howlett votes against the budget that will have a detrimental effect on B&NES Council"

Councillor Dine Romero seconded the motion.

Ben Howlett explained that he would not be voting against a Conservative Budget.

Jeremy Boss raised a concern that this discussion was turning into political gesturing that is not helpful.

Councillor Martin Veal commented - At times we have our own moral code we must stick to - we have to look at ourselves in the mirror. If we could shackle someone to a particular doctrine then it would be total chaos."

Ben Howlett responded to the discussion - I fear that you are undermining your own cause. You could end up having the lead council governing party packing the Forum with people that will only agree with thier view. I think you are undermining the cause which a lot of people have fought for for a long period of time - that is to make the voices of Bath people heard. "I'm worried about the future of this organisation."

Councillor Lin Patterson called the whole meeting a "sham" after Councillor Bob Goodman closed the discussion about how Ben Howlett votes on the government budget and does not agree to take the motion from Sally Harris forward.

6. Responses to the working group reports

Rosie Phillips explained that the group on housing had produced notes from the workshop session and will be meeting with Ben Howlett to discuss the issues further.

Jeremy Boss explained that notes had been produced from a well-attended Economic Development group. Working with Visit Bath / Destination Bath is one direction to move things forward. A fuller feedback discussion will be welcomed at the next forum meeting.

Robin Kerr explained that he had produced notes from the session that a small group had taken part in. A good conversation took place on air pollution and waste issues, more work will be needed in negotiating around the changes on waste collections.

7. B&NES Council Budget - Discussion on the impact on Bath

Councillor Joe Rayment explained that it is unlikely that any consensus would be reached at this meeting on the budget. It was felt that without the cabinet member or director present the discussion would be wrongly timed.

Councillor Andrew Furse felt that that the impacts of the budget on communities had not been presented, instead there were just statements and big item headlines. The forum needs a presentation that shows what the budget means to service users.

Councillor Bob Goodman explained that the feedback from the forums had been fed into cabinet and that Andrew Pate has agreed to attend our next meeting in March.

Councillor Dine Romero wants to know what impact the cuts will have. The equalities team said the detail on the impact wasn't there because unintended consequences could occur.

Rosie Phillips explained that the third sector group had fed back on the proposals and these were recorded in the minutes of their meeting.

Councillor Joe Rayment put forward a motion to the forum - 'The timing of next year's budget presentation to the forum meetings from the Resource's Director and Cabinet Member for Resources need to be timed so that the Directorate Plans have been published for comment'.

Jeremy Boss seconded the motion

There were 15 votes in favour and nobody voted against the motion.

8. Any Other Business

Chris Roche – it is now unclear about what the Forum is for and what is and is not in order for the Forum to discuss. Can we have clarity on what the Forum can and can't have views on?

Chair of the Bath City Forum Bob Goodman explains they didn't have the time to debate the proposal about the Ben Howlett vote against the parliamentary budget.

- The Council budget will come back to the next meeting for a fuller discussion.
- This Forum is developing and will have a say in how CIL money is spent across the City
- Bath's MP attending provides an opportunity for the Forum to lobby on City issues.
- The opinions from Bath City Forum are fed into the B&NES governing powers.

Robin Kerr added that there are substantial issues that the Forum can make a difference on as long as we are being listened to.

Virginia Williamson offered to promote the Forum more widely through the Bath Seeds Project and would be happy to come and discuss any ideas. The forum is not well attended by the public and not enough is done to publicise its existence.