

## PARISH LIAISON MEETING

### Minutes of the Meeting held

Wednesday, 28th February, 2018, 6.30 pm

**Councillors:** Councillor Cherry Beath (Chairman), Councillor Karen Walker (Vice-Chair), Councillor Charles Gerrish (Cabinet Member), Councillor Bob Goodman (Cabinet Member), Councillor Paul Myers (Cabinet Member), Councillor Vic Pritchard (Cabinet Member) and Councillor Karen Warrington (Cabinet Member)

**Parish Representatives:** Rosemary Naish (Chair, B&NES ALCA) and Clive Fricker (Vice-Chair, B&NES ALCA), Bathampton PC, Batheaston PC, Cameley PC, Camerton PC, Chew Magna PC, Clutton PC, Combe Hay PC, Compton Dando PC, Corston PC, Dunkerton and Tunley PC, Englishcombe PC, Farmborough PC, Freshford PC, High Littleton PC, Keynsham TC, Monkton Combe PC, Peasedown St John PC, Publow with Pensford PC, Shoscombe PC, South Stoke PC, Stanton Drew PC, Stowey Sutton PC, Timsbury PC, Ubley PC, Wellow PC and Whitchurch PC

**Also in attendance:** Andrew Pate (Strategic Director, Resources), Simon De Beer (Policy & Environment Manager), Andy Thomas (Strategic Manager - Communities) and Sara Dixon (Locality Manager)

#### 99 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### 100 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Democratic Services Officer advised the meeting of the procedure.

#### 101 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Tim Warren, Councillor Paul May, Councillor Mark Shelford, Ashley Ayre and Corston PC.

#### 102 URGENT BUSINESS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

There was none.

#### 103 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING: 26 OCTOBER 2017

These were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### 104 UPDATE FROM THE LEADER OF BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL

Councillor Charles Gerrish, Cabinet Member for Finance and Efficiency, gave the update on behalf of Councillor Tim Warren, Leader of the Council, who was unable to attend.

Councillor Gerrish began by informing the meeting of a weather warning issued by the Council at 16.30 that day. It was likely that snow showers during the morning of Thursday, 1<sup>st</sup> March would turn to heavier snow showers in the afternoon, which would affect the evening rush hour. Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> March was likely to be very difficult, with significant disruption.

He reported that the Joint Local Transport Plan was now being translated into the Joint Transport Strategy Policy, which would be associated with the strategic development sites within the Joint Spatial Plan, and would be included in a further round of consultations. The JSP had reached Regulation 19 stage; all comments received during the recent consultation would be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate at the same time as the JSP was formally submitted, which was anticipated to be at the end of March. It would then be subject to examination in public.

The budget had been approved by Council on 13<sup>th</sup> February; he would give details under the next agenda item.

He gave a presentation on the West of England Combined Authority. A copy of the PowerPoint slides is attached as Appendix 1 to these minutes.

#### **105 UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY, COUNCILLOR CHARLES GERRISH**

Councillor Charles Gerrish, Cabinet Member for Finance and Efficiency, updated the meeting on the Council budget 2018/19.

He said that 2017/18 had been a difficult year. The pressures on Adult Care and Children's Services had been even greater than anticipated; 80% of the overall revenue budget was now spent on these two services. The budget for 2018/19 therefore responds to that challenge, and identifies solutions to several long-standing issues that we have identified.

Essential for this has been a major rebasing review which recognises some of the pressures we have had across all Council services. Additional resources have been provided for Adult Care and Children's services totalling an extra £7m, representing one of the biggest uplifts in cash terms for these services in many years. These increases will ensure that we can continue to provide high-quality services to the most vulnerable of our residents, while recognising the pressures the services encounter. At the same time we continue to work to identify further savings, to increase efficiency and generate new income opportunities.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy agreed by the Council in the autumn has outlined actions to ensure that we reduce the revenue budget, which, as we all know, has to be balanced. It provides a proper budget for the next twelve months, indicative information for the following year, and basic indications for the three years thereafter.

The Efficiency Strategy approved in November will enable one-off costs of structural change to be funded from capital receipts. However, it should be noted that much of those receipts will be achieved through working with our property company, thereby ensuring that assets ultimately remain within the Council's control. The vast majority of savings continue to come from increased innovation, efficiency and new sources of income.

However, given the scale of the challenges the Council faces, we recognise that it is no longer possible to avoid some impact on staffing. Councillors and unions have already been briefed on the process, and changes will be handled properly and carefully, with opportunities for voluntary redundancy considered first and foremost. Overall, it seems likely to us that there will be a 15% reduction in our total staffing, with the most significant savings resulting from a review of management structures. Such changes are relatively common within local government, and this has allowed us to learn from experience of other authorities who may have encountered that pressures that we have now slightly earlier. Whilst the process won't be easy, and we don't approach it lightly, it is necessary to ensure that the Council becomes sustainable for the future, and it is only by taking these decisions that we can protect the most vulnerable and continue to invest in frontline services.

We are providing £3.9m extra for Adult Care Services, together with an extra £460,000 that Government have given us to deal with the pressures we face. The Children's Care budget has been uplifted by £3.1m, which includes additional support for those with special educational needs.

The Schools' budget, which is determined by a national funding formula and goes directly to schools, has increased by approximately £3.7m this year.

Council has agreed to exempt care leavers up to the age of 25 from Council Tax, and we are implementing a new discretionary 25% Council Tax discount for foster carers.

An additional £20,000 has been put into the base budget to continue to counter the problems we are experiencing with gulls, and we have ensured that support for the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is now built into the base budget for the first time. Children's Centre services are being protected, and we are working with local schools and communities to expand the use of the premises. We continue to provide £1m a year to support buses and look forward to the outcome of the Western England Transport Review due later this year.

As far as the capital programme is concerned, there is significant national and regional investment in the Bath and Somer Valley enterprise zones. Some £19m is due to go on road and transport projects over the next two years, including an extra £3.1m this year for highway maintenance. We are continuing with the modernisation of the Bath and Keynsham leisure centres, Keynsham receiving some additional fill funding in response to feedback from residents.

There will be £3m a year to support affordable housing projects; we expect that £4.2m will have been provided for affordable housing by the end of this year. Further funding will be provided for superfast broadband across the district, and capital to support the public realm and Town Park in Midsomer Norton. The transfer of Midsomer Norton Town Hall to the Town Council and its associated charities is being

finalised. £18m will be provided for school buildings, £3m to support the Modern Libraries programme and further funding for the refurbishment of Lewis House. As staff levels are reduced, space in Lewis House will be let out to generate income. In excess of £1m had been received from the West of England Combined Authority. By taking the decisions that are necessary, the Council can continue to invest in the things that are important to residents.

£1.5m has been allocated to revenue budget contingency against any unanticipated pressures during the year. He said that he would rather reform services and seek new sources of income than make deeper cuts. Capital funding would be provided for the Council's housing company and funding to enable new commercial property acquisition. He believed this would be prudent, because it enabled the Council to diversify its portfolio to generate new revenue in line with Government guidelines, which can be used to support frontline services. Though investment clearly has an impact on the Council's borrowing, the Council will only borrow when the rate of return outweighs the cost of borrowing. This is prudent and will benefit future generations and help the Council to become self-sufficient in future years, which is its long-term objective. The Council will continue to fight to secure its fair share of national investment as we work towards making B&NES financially self-sufficient. That way we can have greater local flexibility to invest in our own priorities. We have made some progress in this regard, through a combination of additional commercial income, our heritage estate, new property investment, the housing company and changes to business rates. However, we want to go further, so he and the Leader of the Council had met the Local Government Minister to outline our request for action to help us address the current Government financial constraints. We suggested a Use Class Order that would make the owners of large-scale, dedicated student accommodation subject to a level of business rates in place of their current exemption, and the power for the Council to impose a local tourism levy. If the power to introduce a tourism levy were granted to the Council, there would be a consultation with guesthouses and hotels about the most efficient way of doing this. It is estimated that such a levy would generate in excess of £1m per annum. We also suggested full cost recovery of planning fees and the removal of Non-Domestic Rate exemption for empty listed buildings. It is not right that if you own a business and have an empty building outside the City, you pay a business rate, but if you are in the City and have a listed building, you do not and we have suggested a change in legislation. We have been invited to submit these proposals to the Government fair funding review.

We have decided on a level of Council Tax that is needed for a balanced budget, while protecting the majority of frontline services and putting in additional investment for the most vulnerable. At the same time, we are mindful of the fact that inflation over the past year has continued to outstrip average wages, and that any additional Council Tax adds to the pressure faced by all residents, particularly those on the lowest pay. That is why we chose not to seek the highest possible level of increase that we were empowered to do. We therefore chose a Council Tax rise of only 1.95%, in addition to the 3% precept for Adult Social Care, whereas we could have gone as high as 3%. We believe that represents a balanced approach

Councillor Gerrish invited questions from delegates.

A delegate asked about the decision not to reimburse parishes for the costs of parish elections. Councillor Gerrish explained that this only applied to parish by-elections,

and not to the 4-yearly whole parish council elections, and that there were some exemptions for parish by-elections. Andrew Orme, Chair of Freshford PC, asked whether parishes could be advised of the cost of a by-election for budgeting purposes. Councillor Gerrish replied that the cost could vary considerably, because the number of polling stations in parishes varied. The largest element of the cost was the staffing of polling stations. In addition there was the cost of sending polling information to every household. He knew that in his own parish a single-ward by-election cost about £3,000. Councillor Myers said that he thought it should be possible to calculate an indicative cost. He would have enquiries made about this.

A delegate asked whether the West of England transport review would consider powers for councils to franchise buses. Councillor Gerrish said that was one of the options being considered.

The Chair thanked Councillor Gerrish for the update.

## **106 UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY REGENERATION, COUNCILLOR PAUL MYERS**

Councillor Paul Myers, Cabinet Member for Economic and Community Regeneration, updated the meeting.

### Planning Briefing

Lisa Bartlett, Divisional Director – Development, and Mark Reynolds, Group Manager – Development Management, gave a presentation on “planning applications: discussions with the Planning case officer”. A copy of their PowerPoint slides is attached as Appendix 2 to these minutes.

Geoff Davis, Clerk to South Stoke Parish Council, asked what the criteria were for deciding whether a planning application was referred to the Development Management Committee. Councillor Sally Davis, Chair of the Development Management Committee, explained that if a ward councillor requested that an application went to the Committee, she reviewed the application with advice from officers and made a decision. Very often it was policy that was the determining factor in whether it went to Committee or not, but assured the meeting that she did read all the comments from the ward councillor and the parishes. She pointed out that she was also a parish councillor, so did understand the point of view of the parishes.

Geoff Davis said he had recently received an email notification about a planning application and had emailed a comment about it. He had received an immediate reply informing him that his email had been quarantined. Despite following the instructions in the email about actions he should take, he had received no further reply. He then received a notification about another application, and this time used the email reply facility to submit his comment, and it was received by Planning without any problem. He suggested that IT and Planning needed to liaise to facilitate the smooth operation of the electronic communications that parishes were being encouraged to use. Councillor Myers said that this issue would be followed up. If parishes had particular problems with communications they should get in touch with

him. Andrew Pate, Strategic Director of Resources, said the Council had to take cybersecurity very seriously and did have spam filters in place. It was necessary for the Council to be increasingly vigilant. Perhaps a way forward would be the sending of automatic email receipts to let people know that their email had been received and was awaiting attention.

### Parish Sweeper Scheme

Councillor Myers reminded delegates that there had been a discussion about this at the last Parish Liaison Meeting and in a session held after the meeting. A working group of parish representatives, representing parishes using the scheme and those not, would meet on 5 March to discuss what would happen to the scheme after 2019/20. Councillor Gerrish said that the budget approved in June had allocated funding for 2018/19 and an indicative figure for 2019/20. The 2019/20 budget would not be approved until Feb 2019, so any final decision about the scheme would not be taken till then. Councillor Myers pointed out that the meeting of 5 March would take place before the end of this financial year. There should be ample time for discussion and comments to be submitted before any final decision was taken.

Delegates said that parishes could no longer afford the number of hours of parish sweeper work they had originally planned, because hourly rates of pay had increased by as much as 100%. This had a severe impact on the parish sweepers, who were generally on the minimum wage, and on the parishes. For some parishes the money received under the Parish Sweeper Scheme represented 50% of their entire budget, so deciding to continue the same number of hours had a huge impact on them. Councillor Myers acknowledged this and said that he was also concerned that there were only 14 parishes in the scheme and there was no budget to allow others to join. It was time to put the scheme on a fair and proper footing, one way or another. He did not want decisions about the scheme to be taken unilaterally by the Council, but wanted them to be the outcome of discussions between the Council and the parishes. Councillor Gerrish said that the LGA had offered an increase of 15.65% over the next two years for Council staff at the bottom of the payscale, and that negotiations were ongoing with unions about whether they would accept this offer. It should be remembered that it was Council Tax payers would be paying these increases, and if there was a settlement above the LGA offer, there was no budget for the excess, so inevitably more jobs would have to go.

A delegate expressed concern about the amount of litter, including items like beds, being dumped throughout the district. Councillor Bob Goodman, Cabinet Member for Development and Neighbourhoods, responded that he was monitoring the situation very closely.

A delegate said that he had driven around his parish with Councillor Tim Warren, who had been amazed by the number of miles of footpaths in the parish. Parish sweepers were not only cleaning, but also ensuring that the footpaths were not obstructed with brambles.

### Community Empowerment Fund

Councillor Myers said that over 54 projects had been funded. £83, 704.50 had been allocated. It is anticipated that this will bring in over £300, 000 of funding. He believed that many of these projects would not have gone ahead without the Fund. It

had encouraged people to do things, and there had been a total of 4,500 volunteer hours. £44,000 had been allocated to 13 projects. He thought there had been a really good range of initiatives and projects. 39 towns and parishes had applied for funds. 12 towns and parishes did not apply. £6,195.50 was unallocated.

### Fix My Street

The go-live date, originally scheduled for 7<sup>th</sup> March, had been delayed, to allow for further consultations with users and to review the experience of other councils. Parish Clerks had been invited to take part in a user group. There would be a meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> March in Keynsham where volunteers would be able to sit down with IT people to test the functionality of the system in detail before it goes live. Getting the system right before the launch should save time in the long run. In reply to a delegate, he said that it is commercial software, which is being marketed to Councils and which is linked to a website on which members of the public can log problems, such as broken paving stones, and can integrate with council IT systems. Further information can be found at: <https://www.fixmystreet.com/pro/>

### Conference to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Parish Liaison

Councillor Myers said that a number of options were being considered for a conference in the autumn. Parishes would be consulted in due course.

The Chair thanked Councillor Myers for his update.

## **107 UPDATE ON PARISH CHARTER**

Councillor Myers and Rosemary Naish, Chair of B&NES ALCA gave a joint presentation. A copy of their PowerPoint slides is attached as Appendix 3.

The Chair thanked them for their presentation.

## **108 UPDATE ON MODERN LIBRARIES PROGRAMME**

Councillor Karen Warrington, Cabinet Member for Transformation and Customer Services, updated the meeting.

She presented apologies on behalf of Ian Savigar, Divisional Director – Customer Services, who had a prior engagement.

She reported that the one-stop shop had been temporarily closed while it was being integrated with the library. The plans for the new facility are available on the Council website. It would be a modern, vibrant space, mainly open plan, but with some meeting rooms. Customer service advisers would not be behind desks, but located in the open plan area. This arrangement had worked well in Midsomer Norton. The new

facility will be opened sometime in June. One-stop shop services would be provided in the library for the time being. The first round of engagement had taken place and there had been 5 or 6 sessions with local residents and interested parties, and a couple of meetings with the Council's partners, such as the Citizens' Advice Bureaux, who used the one-stop shop. It is anticipated that there will be two more rounds of engagement, one at the draft stage and one at the final stage.

With regard to the branch libraries, she had signed papers that day in respect of Saltford library, which is being taken over by Saltford Community Association. They will take over the running of the library, and will put a Post Office into the library, following the loss of the village Post Office. She had had a very successful meeting at Weston and she was hopeful that there would be good news about this soon; there was a community group that was very interested in taking over the library. A meeting about Moorland Road library had been held the previous day. There is willingness in the community to take on the running of the library, but the Council would have to provide support. In Paulton, the Parish Council is consulting with residents and is looking to take on the running of the library. The new Health Centre in Radstock had made a provision for a library on their premises. This made sense, as it was likely that the young and the elderly would use the Health Centre the most. As a result of community engagement, there is also the possibility of community libraries at Timsbury, Stowey Sutton, Chew Valley School and Peasedown St John.

She acknowledged that there were shortcomings in the present provision of mobile library services. At many places the mobile library only stops for fifteen minutes, the vehicle is rather old and there is only one driver, because it is a large vehicle and the driver has to have a special driving licence. If the community library projects come to fruition, the mobile library could stop at fewer places for a longer time.

The Chair thanked Councillor Warrington for the update.

## **109 PLANNING CIL ALLOCATION AND PROCESSES**

Simon de Beer, Group Manager – Policy and Environment, gave a presentation. A copy of his PowerPoint slides is attached as Appendix 4 to these minutes.

The Chair thanked Simon for his presentation.

## **110 DEREGULATION ACT 2015 - DEFINITIVE MAP AND STATEMENT 2026 - PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY**

The briefing note from Graeme Stark - Principal Officer Public Rights of Way, was noted.

## **111 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was agreed that the dates for future meetings would be:

30<sup>th</sup> May 2018

24<sup>th</sup> October 2018 (or a Saturday close to this date) for Parish Conference

20<sup>th</sup> February 2019

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**