

Joint Budget presentation 3SG, Bath City Forum, Cam Valley and Bathavon Forums

**Monday 10th December 2018
Brunswick Room, Guildhall, Bath**

Attendees: Rosie Philips, DHI (Vice Chair of Bath City Forum), Cllr Charles Gerrish (Cabinet Member for Finance and Efficiency), Ashley Ayre (Chief Executive B&NES), Stephen Dale (Dorothy House & Chair of 3SG), Cllr Shaun Stephenson-McGall (B&NES), Robin Kerr (FOBRA), Cllr Rob Appleyard (B&NES), Roger Driver (St Michaels without), Caroline Haworth (Bath Area Play Project), Kate Morton (Bath Mind), Paul Roles (Bath Forum), Roanne Wotton (Julian House), Cllr Dine Romero (B&NES), Nigel Pollard (resident), Cllr Sue Greig (B&NES), Winston Duguid (resident), Stephen Simner (Bath Chronicle), Barbara Gordon (resident), Betty Suchar (BRLSI), James Carlin (3SG), Cllr Alison Millar (B&NES), Michelle O'Doherty (B&NES), Sarah Williams (SWAN Transport), Cllr Jasper Becker (B&NES), Jennifer Pack (B&NES Officer), Cllr Paul May (B&NES), Les Redwood, (Bath Tourism Plus), Cllr Tim Warren, (Leader, B&NES), Cllr Joe Raymond (B&NES), Cllr Vic Pritchard (B&NES), Cllr Will Sandry (B&NES), Cllr Neil Butters (B&NES), Sian James (resident), Diana White (resident), Adam Reynolds (Cycle Bath), Penny Coatsworth (PC Productions), Nicola Boater (Bath City Forum), Cllr Karen Warrington (B&NES), Donna Parham (B&NES Director of Finance), Dave Dixon (B&NES Community Engagement Manager), Sara Dixon (B&NES Locality Manager)

1. Introductions and Welcome

1.1 Rosie Philips, Vice Chair of the Bath City Forum welcomed everyone to the meeting. She welcomed Cllr Gerrish, Cabinet member for Finance and Efficiency and Ashley Ayre, Chief Executive of the Council.

2. Working Together on our budget, our plans and our communities

2.1 Ashley Ayre thanked those who were in attendance and commented that the presentation was building on information shared last year. He handed over to Cllr Gerrish who gave the presentation. A copy of the presentation can be found [here](#).

2.2 Following the presentation, a question and answer session was held.

Question 1:	When Ben Howlett was MP the estimated no of jobs created from Bath Quay's site was 5,000 jobs and now you state that there will be 9,000 jobs created. How can you achieve those numbers?
Answer 1:	It is important that we create jobs locally particularly highly skilled jobs. There are a vast amount of people who travel out of the area for work and those travelling in. This will help reduce in and out commuting.
Question 2:	There are 43 empty shops in Bath what type of employment space will be created.
Answer 2:	We are looking at creating more office accommodation to attract new businesses into the area.
Question 3:	You talked about building affordable homes, can you confirm that there will be an increase and not a net decrease?
Answer 3:	I am unable to give the exact figures regarding housing growth numbers but it's important that we identified sites and current constraints such as lobby government about Air BnB and HMOs. Although it's not that straight forward,

	as HMOs are not always taken up as student houses, they are also used by young professionals.
Question 4:	Explain the thinking behind the housing company.
Answer 4:	The Council used to provide social housing. In early 2000, the Council took a decision to pass its housing stock to the social housing provider, which was Somer Housing, now known as Curo. From that point the Council ceased to have a housing revenue account. The property company is at arms length, although the Council is the sole shareholder. The company is converting a number of empty premises above the shops. These have remained empty for a number of years. This is an opportunity to convert them into residential uses. We are also converting our former Council offices in Keynsham into 95 new homes, some will be available for sale and some rented. The income will come back to the Council.
Question 5:	I understand the principle, but why can't the Council just deliver them?
Answer 5:	We cannot compete with the social housing provider. The property company can bring forward sites that wouldn't have happened otherwise. There is a site in lower Weston that we are working with the Duchy. It's a unique site and we are looking at developing sustainable properties.
Question 6:	Clearly there is a growing expectation for volunteers to step forward, is there evidence that there are enough volunteers to take up the slack
Answer 6:	There are never enough volunteers. Good neighbours and being neighbourly is different from volunteering.
Question 7:	There is advice that 15% of the transport budget should be allocated to cycling and walking, will you ensure that the transport budget is adequately split to fund cycling and walking initiatives?
Answer 7:	I suggest we take this away and find out more.
Question 8:	There is a shortfall in the budget of £6million before Council tax increases. What would 1% Council tax rise be?
Answer 8:	1% raises about £800k. Council tax rises are capped.
Comment 6:	There is often confusion between volunteering and the voluntary sector. Many voluntary organisations are quite sizeable and have paid professionals. It is very different.
Comment:7	There are many young professional and young vulnerable people who need housing to rent particularly those under 25.
Response: 7	We are working with the YMCA on a housing project.
Question 9:	In terms of working together, placed based commissions, health and education, what are you doing to help those young people who are excluded from school.
Answer 9:	The majority of schools in B&NES are now Academies. We commission alternative provision working with and involving schools and other partners. The education service is shrinking. We do monitor exclusions and challenge them.
Question 10:	Within the presentation you highlight the negative impact of the Universities on the Council tax and the loss of HMOs, what are you doing to ensure they pay their way?

Answer 10:	We are having conversations with both universities. There is a degree of engagement and we hope to reach a degree of understanding.
Question 11:	The average salary is £27.5k, how many properties in the Keynsham development will be within their price range?
Answer 11:	We are developing 95 new homes, some will be under £150k and will be available for local people. We will go back to the Board and ask for more information.
Question 12:	One good thing that has happened is the waste collection which must have saved money and is also good for the environment. Have you got other ideas to make improvements, such as encouraging businesses to recycle?
Answer 12:	This is a very good point. Our enforcement teams are very proactive and take action against businesses.
Question 13:	How do you guarantee that affordable housing doesn't get taken over by investment?
Answer 13:	This is a decision for the Company Board and it is an issue that we will be addressing with them.
Question 14:	In your presentation you refer to the Wigan Deal. They ask citizens to commit to doing their bit. Are you planning to roll out something similar? How can we help you with developing ideas and work with you?
Answer 14:	We are using the basis of the Wigan Deal. A meeting last month of the voluntary sector focussed on how we can work together and promote the services that are available locally. An example given was the Frome Model, there is an opportunity to create something similar in Banes. We are keen to hear new ideas.
Question 15:	In relation to your acquisitions for commercial property with another local authority are you also looking at property for housing and what is the % debt to the value of the property?
Answer 15:	The Council owns a number of commercial properties throughout the city, most of which are within retail. The retail sector is not very buoyant and therefore it's important to diversify our holdings. Rather than dispose of property we are acquiring additional property. The level of debt is lower than the private sector. The previous administration agreed to purchase an old bank building on Milson Street. The overall proportion of debt is 30% of the property value.
Question 16:	Does the Council subsidise refugees and can we accept further refugees? There is a family who is in unsuitable housing.
Answer 16:	The families accepted under the Government's scheme come with a funding package. Some of the grant is to help set up their accommodation. With regard to additional families this will be subject to suitable accommodation. We currently have 18 unaccompanied children in the resettlement scheme. With regard to the specific case you mention we should talk after the meeting about this.
Question 17:	There are more cuts that need to be found, at what point will we no longer be able to achieve the cuts?

Answer 17:	The Fair Funding review will be announced in the Spring. This may give us some answers. The model is currently unsustainable. We have first class special schools and therefore we do attract people from outside the area to relocate. The additional pressure to fund SEN up to the age of 25 have added further pressure on local authority budgets as there was no additional funding available.
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3. Consultation on Consultation

3.1 Cllr Paul Myers referred to discussions that have taken place at all Forum meetings about the effectiveness of consultation. He told the group that he was setting up a working group to look individuals and groups experiences and set out some principles of best practice. He asked the group for some initial feedback.

3.2 The following comments were made:-

- Challenging how you engage with the most vulnerable. The support services can play a role in helping with this. It is often the most vocal that are often heard. Vulnerable people don't engage.
- We need some advice for local people that wish to submit petitions to the Council.
- The 3SG doesn't represent small campaign groups who are often not constituted. How can we get these groups to work with larger groups and sustain them.
- The 3SG group has over 170 organisations. We would be happy to seek the views of members and nominate a number of reps to join the working group.
- North Somerset Council planning officers have used Facebook to engage local residents and groups. Social media is a good way to engage people.
- There is a lot of social media posts on the Keynsham page which encourages people to take part in consultation.
- In Larkhall there are a number of noticeboards. Councillors could put up posts advertising the open consultations

3.3 Rose Philips thanked everyone for attending the meeting and contributing to the discussion.