

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday, 3rd February, 2020

Present:- Councillors Paul Myers (Chair), Winston Duguid (Vice-Chair), Mark Elliott, Andrew Furse, Matt McCabe, Alastair Singleton, Shaun Hughes, Karen Warrington and Lucy Hodge

Cabinet Member for Resources: Councillor Richard Samuel

Also in attendance: Donna Parham (Interim Director - Finance), David Trethewey (Director of Partnerships and Corporate Services), Andy Rothery (Head of Management Accounts), Mike Bowden (Corporate Director) and Martin Shields (Corporate Director)

38 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

39 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Matt McCabe was present for the duration of the meeting as a substitute for Councillor Hal MacFie.

41 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman announced that although the Draft Budget contains a range of issues that members may have associated interests in, the Panel is not a decision-making body and therefore no declarations are required, unlike when the matter will be discussed at Council later in the month.

42 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

Nicolette Boater had sent two questions to the Panel, the text of which and the subsequent responses have been circulated to the Panel and are attached to these minutes. She had also requested to make a statement under agenda item 9 (Draft Budget) and would do so when the item was reached.

44 MINUTES - 13TH JANUARY 2020

Councillor Alastair Singleton said that he had contacted the Democratic Services Officer regarding an amendment in relation to the Draft Corporate Strategy minute. The amendment reads as follows 'Councillor Alastair Singleton expressed concern that the well accepted term 'Climate Emergency' had been changed to 'Climate and Nature Emergency'. He feared the change risked causing confusion and dilution of the impact of a widely recognised concept.'

With that amendment in mind the Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chairman.

45 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Richard Samuel, Cabinet Member for Resources addressed the Panel. He said that since the last meeting the majority of his time had been spent working on the budget and that he had published a decision following the Call-in of decision E3181: 23 Grosvenor Place.

46 DRAFT BUDGET

Nicolette Boater made a statement to the Panel, a copy of which can be found on the Panel's Minute Book and a summary is set out below.

I welcome this administration's Corporate Strategy. Indeed, it communicates the Council's core purpose, activities and associated budgetary priorities more clearly, concisely and effectively than many I've seen in the past. However, my purpose today is not to flatter, but to enhance and ensure the Strategy delivers.

My first suggestion is that, rather than just two core policies (responding to last year's Climate Emergency declaration and election promises), you have more and broader well-being policies thereby enabling you to strengthen the links between policy goals, activities and budgetary priorities.

Doing so might, for example, help prioritise actions to address the worrying unsustainability of the 83.5% of the net budget going on Social Care and the impact this might have on residents' lives and community resilience.

Secondly, I hope that the holistic approach implicit in the three interlocking principles carries through to the appraisal of investments and outcomes, and especially in relation to those straddling service areas and/or impacting on multiple communities and organizations.

Thirdly, to demonstrate progress, it seems that much more needs to be done to align strategies, identify critical paths, and to develop a range of appropriate performance indicators and metrics. In this, focusing on what matters and being mindful of what can't be measured will be key.

Finally, in communicating the Strategy, as one who has long recognized that a good picture speaks louder than pages of words, I would love to see the outer circle of the diagram highlighting more policy goals.

Councillor Richard Samuel explained to the Panel that the setting of a budget is not a static process and that with a change in administration comes new priorities. He said that the process around Government funding is changing around us and we are still waiting for them to adequately fund Adult Social Care.

He stated that existing pressures are recognised within the budget and that the new Corporate Strategy underpins this process.

The Director of Finance added that the report seeks to outline the major aspects of the budget and show how they are aligned with the Corporate Strategy.

She informed the Panel that the Equalities Impact Assessments were set out on page 22 of the agenda.

She stated that a Council Tax increase of 1.99% is being recommended as part of the budget as well as an increase to the Adult Social Care precept of 1.99% for 2019/20 to continue to protect front-line services. The Adult Social Care precept will be specifically targeted to increases in expenditure within the ASC service. This equates to an increase of £55.76 per annum (£1.07 per week) overall on a Band D property.

She informed the Panel that the budget gap for 2021/22 is estimated to be £9.1m and there are currently savings plans totalling £2.4m to address this gap. Plans will be formulated early in the new financial year to address the remaining gap of £6.73m.

Councillor Winston Duguid commented that he would have like to have seen some comparative figures from previous years to provide context.

Councillor Samuel said that Local Government needs a stable financial environment, but that has not been possible due to an unstable Central Government and the introduction of a new Chancellor. He added that if you take a view over the last 10 years, funding to Local Government has been reduced.

Councillor Matt McCabe asked if funding information relating to the Student Community Partnership were available.

Councillor Samuel replied that he had received a briefing that stated that £15,000 would be approved for the Student Community Partnership through the next round of CIL funding.

Councillor Lucy Hodge said that she was concerned as to how the proposed £20,000 savings from the Music Service would affect low income families and those in receipt of benefits.

Councillor Samuel replied that this was a cut that had been proposed in 2018 and that he did not expect this proposal to go through in its current form. He added that

the Arts Council are changing the way they work and that it is likely that a joint service will be provided with Wiltshire. He said that he believed there are huge benefits of this service to our young people and that he had now wish to see any cuts introduced.

Councillor Alastair Singleton commented that he could not see within the papers any reference to the new Two Rivers Primary School that is set to built in Keynsham.

Councillor Samuel replied that the development will be recognised in the emerging Capital Programme. He added that this was potentially good news for the Council as the Academy is due to be built by the Dept. for Education. He said that discussions are ongoing to have the building built to the highest possible environmental and sustainable standards. He explained that a small pilot programme exists and that the Council may need to top up some of the funding in order to achieve the desired standards.

Councillor Karen Warrington asked if enough funds were in place with regard to Transport Services, in particular Highways, to deal with issues such as localised flooding. She also asked if funding would B&NES wide and not solely spent within the city.

Councillor Samuel replied that there almost certainly were not enough funds to fix all of the roads throughout B&NES, but that any issues would be assessed across the whole of the Council.

The Director of Finance added that a Highways programme will be submitted later in the week as part of the report due to be published for the Cabinet meeting on February 13th.

The Chairman urged officers to bear in mind the comments from the Panel and for the report next year to contain additional financial information.

Councillor Samuel thanked the Chairman for his guidance and said that the process this year had been disrupted by purdah and that the intention is to bring the whole process forward in future years.

Councillor Warrington asked if specific roads had been identified for resurfacing and said that she was aware of drains that should be cleared in rural areas in order to prevent localised flooding.

Councillor Samuel replied that £160,000 has been allocated in terms of drainage across five specific sites.

Councillor McCabe asked if the review of Empty Homes and HMO policy would be met through existing budgets.

The Corporate Director (Place) replied he believed they would be. He added that despite the withdrawal from the JSP a lot of good work had been carried out that will go on to form our Local Plan and as we work more in the future with our WECA partners.

Councillor Robin Moss addressed the Panel. He said that the budget outlined was an interesting one and that he welcomed the direction of travel and supported the references to Climate Emergency and Prevention.

He said that the Council will need to be mindful that the introduction of these proposals will require flexibility and that he recognised the difficulty in forming the budget due to late notifications from the Government.

Councillor Eleanor Jackson addressed the Panel. She said that she felt that the budget showed that the Council were heading in the right direction. She added that she hoped that within it there was an element of financial prudence to counter adverse impact such as that of the Coronavirus and the impact that that may have on tourism and visiting students.

She stated that she welcomed the move to bring certain services back in house and was pleased to see that work will continue with regard to Empty Homes.

She requested that the sum of £8,000 be put back into the budget to support the work of a long standing local Select Advisory Committee on Religious Education.

Councillor Liz Hardman addressed the Panel. She said that she echoed the previous positive comments that had been made. She added that she noted the planned £1.7m efficiency savings within Adult Services and hoped that this would not adversely affect residents.

She questioned whether bringing Residential Care Homes in house was achievable.

She welcomed the proposed investment to the Domestic Violence and Abuse Service and the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone in Paulton.

Councillor Vic Pritchard addressed the Panel. He said he supported the preventative agenda and would welcome any action that would provide additional resources to Mental Health services, particularly for children and young people.

Councillor Shaun Hughes commented that as a relatively new member of the Council he felt it was difficult to scrutinise the budget without knowing the history of what had been spent on certain services in previous years and would appreciate this information in the years to come.

Councillor Samuel replied that the primary purpose of this report when it reaches Council is to set the Council Tax. He accepted that there was a place for historic trends to be noted.

Councillor Lucy Hodge agreed with the comments made by Councillor Hughes and said that a certain level of detail should be provided to the Panel.

Councillor Winston Duguid said that he would be happy to work on a future template with the officers.

The Head of Management Accounts said that he has noted the comments made by the Panel regarding future reports.

Councillor Samuel said that he will try to formulate a process that is helpful for the future.

The Chairman said that the Panel could look to add this to their role within Policy Development.

Councillor Mark Elliott suggested that the figures presented would be benefitted by an additional column that shows the difference from year to year with a + / - % figure.

Councillor Andrew Furse asked if further information could be provided in relation to Income and Debt management referred to in Annex 1.

The Director of Finance replied that this did not relate to Council Tax, but to matters such as car parking fines and issues relating to property. She added that it is the intention to collect these debts in a more effective way.

She added that the debt collection agencies used by the Council were being reviewed and that the vulnerability of individuals from whom the debt was to be collected would be assessed so as not to use excessive measures while carrying out this role.

Councillor Duguid asked with regard to the matter of Electric Car Charging Points whether the sum of £50,000 was sufficient.

Councillor Samuel replied that it was becoming increasingly clear that the motor industry is promoting E-Cars. He added that this is a complex issue in terms of siting such points, especially in the city and that he was awaiting a policy decision to be made.

The Chairman thanked everyone present for their contributions to the debate and said that he would collate the points made in his address to Cabinet / Council.

47 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Chairman introduced this item. He asked that the future budget report be allocated as a policy development item for the Panel.

Councillor Andrew Furse asked for the relevant Outturn and Budget Monitoring Reports to be shared with the Panel to allow for a more informal discussion.

The Chairman proposed that the Panel looks at Regeneration in terms of officer time and the costs associated with that on particular projects. He said that he would welcome working with the Cabinet member for Resources on this matter.

Councillor Samuel replied that he would be willing to discuss the matter further with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Panel.

The meeting ended at 5.45 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services