

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Monday, 28th September, 2020

Present:- **Councillors** Paul Myers, Winston Duguid, Mark Elliott, Andrew Furse, Hal MacFie, Alastair Singleton, Shaun Hughes, Karen Warrington and Lucy Hodge

21 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed Panel members and officers who were attending the meeting via Zoom and members of the public viewing on YouTube.

22 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

There was none

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were none.

24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

25 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

David Redgewell, South West Transport Network, made a statement to the Panel regarding transport matters. He spoke about the progress in the resumption of bus network routes. He also mentioned the need for ongoing cleaning at bus and rail station and the need for consideration of a Tourist and Bus Information point in Bath.

27 MINUTES

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record.

28 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Richard Samuel, Cabinet Member for Resources updated the Panel on the following:

- The Quarter 2 report to Cabinet in November will provide an update on the Council's position regarding funding from central government. It is expected that this position will have improved since Quarter 1. The report will also provide an update on the income compensation scheme.
- Regarding the Commercial Estate (Property), the Council is about to employ external advisors to look at how the commercial estate operates.
- In the next few weeks, the Chief Executive will bring forward proposals for senior management changes across the Council including in the property service.
- An update on the cricket club Call in – I have signed off responses in relation to the Panel recommendations although a couple of things cannot be signed off until nearer the time.
- The Chancellor's announcement last week regarding support for businesses was disappointing, there does not seem to be any specific support for hospitality.

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

Councillor Furse asked the Cabinet Member what the Council is doing as a landlord for tenants under stress. Other landlords are giving rent relief. The Cabinet Member explained that all tenants had been invited to open dialogue with the Council on their rental agreement. The Council cannot give rent free periods as income is already stretched. The Cabinet Member explained that he will be meeting with some landlords to discuss the reinvigoration of the city. He further explained that new tenants are not likely to take on rents at the previous levels, a substantial market correction is taking place. The Cabinet Member explained that, with Governments schemes effectively ending, we are anxious to do what we can but we are limited. In response to a query from Councillor Hughes, the Cabinet Member confirmed that these interventions apply across the whole of BANES.

Councillor Myers asked how the external review of the Property Service would cross over with the senior officer's review. The Cabinet Member explained that a senior officer had been asked by the Chief Executive to look at how maintenance and management operates in Property Services. The external review will look at what is best in terms of Commercial Practice. The two pieces of work will come together.

The Cabinet Member for Resources and the Director of Finance gave a presentation to the Panel on the Medium Term Financial Plan which covered the following: *(A copy of the slides are appended to the minutes)*

- Where are we now?
- 5 year Budget Profile
- MHCLG and Provisional settlement
- Budget Planning Assumptions
- New 2021/22 Budget Pressures
- How to manage the MTFS?
- Strategic Financial Planning Themes
(Stabilise – short term/Transition – Medium Term/Change – Long Term)
- Financial Planning Assumptions

- Budget Growth vs. Funding Graph

The Cabinet Member explained the information – the substantial impact of Covid is shown in 2021/22 but the effect is shown as lessening over the 5-year period. The Council needs to radically change its structure over the next few years.

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

Councillor Myers stated that he would like to have some notice in future of such large items being presented which were not on the workplan.

Councillor MacFie asked if the increase in returns in Property shown were due to converting to residential. The Cabinet Member explained that most of the stock is in Bath and some is under utilized or not utilized at all. The aim is to produce the highest net return through several approaches. Councillor MacFie stated that it is important from a planning point of view to know how many residences were coming on stream. The Cabinet Member explained that it is complex – some prime retail shop frontages are impossible to convert to residential.

Councillor Hodge stated that there seemed to be profound changes to the way we all work, she stated the need for step by step consultation on this. She stated that she found out about the plans for Lewis House in the press. The Cabinet Member explained that staff had been surveyed 6 weeks ago on working during lockdown and the majority have embraced home working. Those who have not we will work with.

29 COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION FUND

The Head of Corporate Finance, Gary Adams introduced the report and gave a presentation to the Panel on the following:

- Introduction
- Background Information – Westminster Council Model
- Comparison of Number of Dwellings by C Tax Band
- Council Tax Band and Charges Comparison
- PDS Discussion Points –
 - 1) Scope
 - 2) Management
 - 3) Utilisation
 - 4) Engagement
- Next Steps and Reporting back to Council

The officer explained that following a discussion at Council of a motion from the Labour Group on Community Contribution Funds it was decided: To agree in principle to introduce a Community Contribution Fund from 2021/22, but to ask the Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel to consider and report back to Council with recommendations on how it might work in practice including: a. Whether to adopt an inclusive approach inviting all Council Taxpayers to contribute or whether it should be limited to those in Band H; b. The vehicle for managing any new

Community Contribution Fund; c. The mechanism for identifying local priorities for support; and d. The means of consulting with residents on the introduction of any such Fund.

Panel members discussed the points in the Council motion:

There was some discussion around the example CCF's in Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea.

Panel members discussed how the CCF could be managed, some felt that the scheme could be run as part of the Council Tax process while others felt that an independent charity could be set up to administer the scheme.

Panel members were keen to avoid ward based projects (concentrated in wealthier areas) and agreed that projects should be generic. There was some concern around how contributions to a CCF might affect support for other charities.

Panel members stated that the scheme must have safeguards for vulnerable people – it must be very clear that it is voluntary.

There was some discussion around whether projects should cover services that had been provided by the Council previously, but had been reduced.

Panel members discussed the possible 'Criteria Panel' and agreed that it should consist of a political and geographical spread of members where possible and also a representation of urban and rural wards.

There was some discussion around consultation – it was felt that for a one-year trial of a voluntary scheme, effective promotion was needed and the consultation would come after the trial.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to report back to Council with the following recommendations on how a Community Contribution Fund might work in practice:

Scope

- Panel members agree in principle to the setting up of a CCF. They felt that an inclusive approach should be adopted (rather than limiting to band B and H) so the scheme would be open to all residents/businesses/organisations whilst being very clear that it was a voluntary scheme.

Management

- Panel members recommended a trial period of one year where the CCF would be administered within the existing Council Tax system (after which there is the option to carry on using the council or establish a charity).
- Users would have the option to tick a box to make a contribution. Three 'Criteria Areas' (theme area projects) would be set out on the form so that people know what they would be contributing to (similar to a Supermarket

green token scheme). The 'Criteria Areas' would be reviewed at the end of the first year's trial.

- Group Leaders to discuss and propose to Council the creation and composition of a CCF body (CCF Panel) which will set the Criteria Areas and decide on the use of funds based on funding applications. Panel membership to include a political and geographical spread where possible as well as drawing on skills and experience relating to the Criteria Areas.

Utilisation

- The CCF Panel to select and agree the three Criteria Areas that the CCF could contribute to.
- The following areas were discussed – Youth Services, Libraries, Assisting Lonely People, Rough Sleepers and Parks. Panel members had concerns about whether reduced Council services should be funded through the CCF. It but it was agreed that these should not be ward based but generic projects.

Engagement

- As the scheme would initially be for a trial period (and also voluntary), consultation could be done at the end of the one year trial to take on board the results and also endeavour to engage with Parish and Town Councils and the Bath Forum.
- The Corporate Panel agreed that the scheme should be well promoted by good communications.

30 PROCUREMENT STRATEGY - UPDATE

This item was postponed to a future meeting of the Panel.

31 TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT - COMMERCIAL MARKETS

Councillor Paul Myers introduced the report and asked members of the Task and Finish Group to outline the findings within each area. It was agreed that further discussion and 'next steps' on the Task and Finish Group's findings would be postponed for a future meeting.

Heritage – Councillors Warrington and Myers

- Covid has accelerated future trends within this area. Millennials may not want the same experience regarding Heritage as is on offer now.
- Attractions outside Bath were discussed.
- For future trends in Heritage in Tourism we can look at cities such as York.

Parking – Councillors Duguid and Elliot

- In the long term, we cannot rely on parking income. Parking in the centre should move to be a service for residents rather than an income generator.

- There are some pressures with residents parking. We should move forwards with Residents Parking Zones.

Commercial Estate – Councillor Hodge and Hughes

- Again, Covid has accelerated trends, footfall in retail is down. We need to fully understand the reason for the shift in behaviour.
- There needs to be a 'retail experience' and the retail estate should be built around delivering that experience. An example is 'Instagram-able windows'.
- The city centre nighttime economy must be attractive to a wider range of groups (not just students).
- We have 1200 properties, we need more detailed information on how this has evolved.
- We have sought clarification on any incentives being offered.
- We need to protect income from Property while reducing access to vehicles.
- We need to support our tenants for the duration of the Covid crisis.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the above updates and to postpone discussion on the next steps to a future meeting of the Panel.

32 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted their future workplan.

The meeting ended at 6.35 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services