

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Monday, 11th January, 2021

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

44 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

45 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were none

46 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Singleton declared a non-pecuniary (other) interest in Item 10 (as a Director of Keynsham Community Energy which has dealings with ADL)

47 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

There were none.

49 MINUTES

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

50 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

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

Budget Update – The Council has been advised of most of its grant funding from Government. We are still waiting for the figure regarding a further Covid grant. The Assumptions have not changed much. The third lockdown does have potential implications such as the Roman Baths being closed and income lost. The expectation is that the budget will still balance.

Property Update – The work on reviews is continuing. The external report is due later this month. We will share this work with the Panel when it is available.

51 PEOPLE STRATEGY

Cherry Bennet, Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager and Amanda George, HR and OD, gave a presentation to the Panel which covered the following:

- Background
- Key challenges and risks
- Attraction, retention and workforce planning
- Talent and Development
- Staff engagement and performance
- Preparing for the Future Programme
- Health, Safety and Wellbeing

Panel members asked the following questions and raised the following points:
(Officer responses are shown in italics)

Councillor Furse asked the following questions:

- How do we embed the new apprentices into the Corporate Environment when they are working from home. *The officer explained that some apprentices are working on the front line so they are in workplaces. There has been less request for apprenticeships for roles that are totally based on home working. If they are based at home, we create planned opportunities for chats and structured time with colleagues from the team. We can manage new starters, our managers are very supportive.*
- Regarding the new blended working and working from home – what is the situation with more outward facing roles such as licensing officers, the public realm and planning teams. *During the Covid period, officers have been doing a mix of homeworking, working from Lewis House and the Guildhall. They can still have a base in Bath but are encouraged to mainly work at home. The Licensing team have been needed in the centre for enforcement, so they are using Floor 4 of Lewis House. In the future Keynsham Civic Centre will be used for team meetings and collaboration sessions. There will be desks available to book in the Guildhall and other venues.*

Councillor Warrington asked the following questions:

- Have you looked at succession planning, especially as we have lost some senior staff. *We will pick this up when the worst of the Covid situation is over.*
- Surveys – are there summaries? *Yes they are available, I will send these out and they are also available on the intranet for members.*
- What are the tactics considered for the recruitment challenge around social care? *This is very pertinent, We need help to cope with the situation as there are staff isolating and off sick and our services are under significant pressure at present. We will be undertaking some local campaigns and considering our*

position in the market. We are working with BANES/Swindon/Wiltshire CCG and local authorities jointly to explore some of the challenges together.

- *There is a perception that there is a lack of staff in the Council, can we do a gap analysis? We will pick this up in the summer when the worst of the Covid situation is hopefully over. There is no significant restructuring or redundancy planned for this or next year. Amanda George added that there is a meeting every Monday to discuss Business Continuity and Capacity Planning. Discussions have been around reallocating staff from services that are closed such as the Roman Baths to other services such as helping with the Business Grants service. We are very much reactive at the present time.*

Councillor Hodge asked the following questions:

- *What proportion, on average, of a working week will Council officers be expected to work from home. The officer explained that this will be different for every individual situation. Our last staff survey showed that 85% wanted to continue working from home. Only 6% said they did not. There is a real desire for choice in where we work, at the moment there is no choice. In general, in the future if you want to meet with your team you will be able to do that in Keynsham. There will also be the facility to work from hot desks elsewhere. I think on average staff may work 2/3 days a week from an office venue.*
- *Has experience of the last year prompted anyone to look again at that strategy? We have taken the experience into account. It very much depends on job roles. It is about managing by outcomes rather than presenteeism.*
- *Has anyone costed the added wellbeing support? This has not been costed but these are all things we wanted to do anyway.*
- *What are the implications of more staff travelling to Keynsham? We will do a piece of work on travel arrangements. I believe the result will show a lower carbon footprint. The £150k travel staff travel savings in the budget will be met.*
- *Will CCG staff also be able to work from Keynsham Civic Centre? (staff were working together at St Martin's). I have had many conversations with the CCG, they will be able to use Keynsham.*

Councillor Singleton asked the following questions:

- *Are we finding that recruitment (outside of social care) is easier? The officer explained that yes, there are more applicants, for example a part time job in Human Resources got 64 applications which is unusually high.*
- *What are the details of the staff recognition and thankyou scheme? We note your comments, we want to keep the scheme quite simple. We are thinking of a monthly recognition scheme.*

Councillor Elliot asked the following questions:

- *Regarding the nine MBA apprentices – will we get value out of that. There are 3 cohorts at Bath Spa University and 2 individuals studying at UWE. Their final projects are employer sponsored. We are also in the process of ensuring that their module research and assignment work is presented back to relevant leaders and managers across the council.*

- Regarding flexible/blended learning – it sometimes difficult to manage a mix/hybrid meetings. *We are working with IT regarding hybrid meetings, there is a lot going on in this area at the moment.*

Councillor Duguid asked the following questions:

- 85% of staff wanting to work from home is great but some people cannot for various reasons. This means some will struggle. *The officer responded that it will be for managers to work with their staff on this as they will know their specific circumstances and needs. We will be creating a number of working opportunities in the centre of Bath.*

Councillor Hughes asked the following questions:

- We seem to be making a lot of changes, we are yet to make Keynsham Civic Centre fit for purpose and maybe closing Lewis House was premature. We do not want personal circumstances to be career limiting. Can you confirm that people can have a permanent office position if they want one. *The officer responded that there will be a variety of scenarios, we do understand that some people cannot work from home and there will be options (for example – the Guildhall, Libraries and Keynsham Civic Centre) – there will be some flexibility required.*

Panel discussion and recommendation:

Councillor Warrington stated that she is pleased that this is being looked at holistically and that there are opportunities here.

Councillor Hughes stated that he would like to see timescales with particular regard to IT and Keynsham Civic Centre. Keynsham seems to be key to future plans but there is not a lot of adaption yet.

Councillor Hodge stated that there needs to be more discussion on the costs of refurbishment in Keynsham Civic Centre. Also some concerns on the 85% figure regarding staff being happy to work at home. The language seems to be ‘if you absolutely cannot work from home then we will find something for you’ – I have concerns about younger people or other groups who want to return to the office. Working from home may mean lower prospects of advancements.

Councillor Duguid stated that he was pleased that officers are looking at all aspects. Concern about the Council working in silos which might increase, staff may now start to work in personal silos. Working from home puts a premium on excellent management. We should be careful of the line ‘work is what you do, not where you go’ – work is a lot more than what we do, it is a social and psychological experience.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and ask the officers to consider the 4 factors set out below in their work and that the item be brought back to the Panel for review in 6 months.

- Details and timescales
- Costs

- Working from home – the impact on some areas of society
- Dangers of silo working

52 OUTSOURCING OUR SERVICES

Mandy Bishop, Chief Operating Officer introduced the report.

Panel members asked the following questions and raised the following points:
(Officer responses shown in italics)

Councillor Hughes how we are supporting company's that we have outsourced to during this pandemic. *The officer explained that it depends on the type of company – some do not need much support such as highways and transport providers. Leisure providers need more support. We have talked to various Leisure providers about accessing support, we have not been able to offer direct Council support to all as they are not direct providers to the council.*

53 COUNCIL COMPANY ACCOUNTS

Councillor Richard Samuel, Cabinet Member for Resources reminded Panel members that the report looks at the closure of accounts 2019/2020 and that the situation is different now. Andy Rothery, Director of Finance (S151 Officer), introduced the report and stated that it was encouraging to see the improvement in performance.

Tim Richens (ADL Director) reminded the Panel that ADL is a BANES company that looks after rental properties and ACL is a BANES company that looks after housing development.

Panel members asked the following questions and raised the following points:
Officer responses are shown in italics.

Councillor Duguid asked the following questions:

- What is the role of PDS as opposed to the Audit Committee? *The officer explained that the Audit Committee is concerned with the quality of the accounts and PDS looks at the business side of things.*
- If ADL is 100% owned by the council, why don't we use the council auditors (Grant Thornton) to audit ADL rather than Monahan's?.
Tim Richens explained that different auditors are needed.
- Do we need 6 Directors? *Tim Richens explained that there are only 2 executive directors.*
- Bonuses have been paid this year – this is not usual practice in the Council.
Tim Richens explained that bonuses are paid in line with the scheme approved by the Council.
- There is little investment compared to 2018/19. *Tim Richens agreed that there was more flow in 2018/19 but pointed out that there were 4 properties after the deadline for 2019/20.*

Councillor Hodge asked about staffing costs in relation to the accounts. *Tim Richens explained that things will look less confusing in the coming year, staff are employed by ADL.*

Councillor MacFie asked if there was any collaboration with WECA regarding the flow of new properties. *Tim Richens explained that the Government fund has certain conditions and that there must be a degree of separation.*

In response to a query from Councillor Myers, the officer explained that salaries had been through an independent process.

Councillor Myers asked if the accounts meet the objectives for the period they relate to, are they on track and are bonuses justified? *The officer explained that yes, the accounts show a positive achievement of sales and are on target in that year.*

Councillor Singleton asked about pension benefits? *Tim Richens explained that TUPE staff would be in the Avon Pension Fund and new staff the NEST scheme.*

Councillor Hughes asked the following questions:

- What are the targets of the Company and can we see the business plan. *Tim Richens explained that the shareholders set the objectives. There is a 3-year rolling business plan which is approved by the shareholders. The officer explained that another item for the Panel can be arranged when the business plan has been agreed. We can provide the prior year's business plan.*

Councillor Myers asked what the role of the Panel is today. *The officer responded that this is a relatively new role to check that things are looking like they are going in the right direction.*

Panel discussion and recommendation

Councillor Hughes stated that the relationship of ADL and ACL to Property Services and also the remit of the organisations is not clear. Also not clear on the role/relationship and remit of scrutiny.

Councillor Myers concluded that, from the outside, the governance is not easy to understand.

Councillor MacFie stated that it makes sense to have a Company rather than external developers, but it would help to see the objectives set for the Company so that we can make sure they are being achieved.

Councillor Samuel, Cabinet Member for Resources, explained that there two issues - firstly, the technical/final accounts and secondly, the objectives set by the company which is a Cabinet matter that can be shared with the Panel. The Governance procedures are set by Council. I would be willing to be part of a discussion to simplify this area so that it is more transparent.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and asked for a future agenda item setting out the following:

- A simple explanation of the governance/structure of ADL and ACL in relation to the Council.
- Sight of the appropriate Business Plan/Objectives to aid the Panel in scrutinizing Company Accounts in the future.

54 PANEL WORKPLAN

Councillor Myers explained that the potential future items below will be discussed at the agenda setting meetings with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Panel.

- Contacting the Council (also to include IT strategy)
- Parental Leave
- Property Services
- Policy and Corporate Strategy
- People’s Strategy *to come back for review – summer 2021*
- ADL/ACL – *Governance arrangements*
- ‘Invest in Bath’
- Items from Councillor Duguid to be advised at the agenda planning meeting.

The meeting ended at 6.15 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services