

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Monday, 5th July, 2021

Present:- **Councillors** Karen Warrington (Chair), Mark Elliott, Lucy Hodge, Shaun Hughes, Hal MacFie, Alastair Singleton, Sally Davis and Matt McCabe (in place of Winston Duguid)

20 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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21 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr Winston Duguid – substitute Cllr Matt McCabe
Cllr Andy Furse

23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

24 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was no urgent business.

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

There were no items from the public or councillors.

26 MINUTES - 14TH JUNE 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2021 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

27 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

As the previous meeting was only held a week ago there was no further update from the Cabinet Member.

28 PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The Panel considered a report which gave an update on the Preparing for the Future programme. Amanda George, Director of Business Change and Customer Services, gave a presentation regarding the programme. The presentation covered the following issues:

- Preparing for the future programme overview
- Keynsham Civic Centre redesign
- Communication and engagement
- Risk assessments and meeting spaces
- Technology update
- Key messages

It will be important to embrace the digital way of working which will provide increased flexibility for staff. The Keynsham Civic Centre is currently in the design phase. There will be an increase in the amount of team space including informal meeting areas. In some areas pods will be installed to provide quiet working spaces. Up to 650 staff at any one time will be able to work in the Civic Centre. Around 50 hot desking spaces will also be provided in the Guildhall.

Some staff are currently able to come into the offices to work following a risk assessment by managers.

The first phase of laptops has been delivered to staff and hybrid meetings are currently being trialled which will allow some staff to join meetings remotely.

A copy of the presentation slides is attached as Appendix 1 to these minutes.

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

Cllr McCabe asked about the number of additional journeys that would be made from Bath to get to Keynsham and measures being taken to encourage people out of their cars. He felt that there should be signage at the railway station to guide people to the Guildhall. He asked about the use of Citrix to access Zoom. He queried whether a modular approach to office redesign would be taken in case any changes needed to be made in the future.

The officer explained that there will be a modular approach to the office redesign and that use of the offices will be monitored (e.g. number of desk bookings). If certain spaces are not being used, then changes will be made.

There will be less travel by staff because they will not be going into the office 5 days a week. There will also be hot desks available in the Guildhall for people who live in

Bath and do not wish to, or need to, travel to Keynsham. The suggestion regarding signposting will be taken on board.

When staff have Council laptops, they will not have to use Citrix to access Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

Cllr Hodge asked some questions about homeworking, risk assessments and whether there will really be a choice for staff. She felt that figures are needed in advance of planning the design of the Civic Centre (such as the percentage of the overall role that is desk based and how much is collaborative). She asked about feedback from employees regarding the new arrangements, for example from young staff who may live in shared accommodation. She asked for more details regarding the equality assessments and the use of hotdesks by external clients. She also stated that it would be helpful to see a copy of the transport assessment and the cost of the branding exercise.

The officer explained that there will be some choice for staff. All teams will have an allocated team space and if there is an individual who cannot or does not wish to work from home then this can be managed. The risk assessment process has worked well, and some people are already back working at the Civic Centre. Nobody who has requested to return to the office following a risk assessment has been turned down.

Collaborative working will take place in the team spaces. There will still be a significant number of desk spaces available for use. There will be a booking system provided by Condecco for hot desks and this will allow staff to see who else has booked hot desks in a certain area so that they can co-ordinate their bookings with others and book a group of desks if necessary.

Details of the equalities impact assessments, staff feedback, costings and transport can be provided to Panel members.

Cllr Hughes expressed concern about car parking. He also asked about the opportunities for creativity as home working does not encourage this. He felt that the new ways of working will not suit everybody. He asked about the ergonomics of the new plans including furniture and seating.

The officer explained that there will be confidential booths and screening to enable people to work quietly if they need to. The seating will be of an appropriate design and this will be trialled. The diagrams provided in the presentation are currently at the concept stage.

There is currently capacity for 550 staff to work in the Civic Centre and this will be increased to 650. There will be collaborative space to enable creative and innovative work.

Cllr Elliott stated that success depends on genuine flexibility and consultation with employees. He asked whether an employee wishing to work in an office 5 days a week would be able to do so.

The officer explained that staff can come into the offices if they wish and that it would be up to managers as to how they schedule the working week for their team. However, they may not be in the same office each day of the week.

Cllr MacFie asked about car parking for the Civic Centre as public car parks currently get very full. He also queried whether the reception area would be able to be used for meetings with external people.

The officer explained that the current reception area in the Civic Centre is quite large but is not used effectively. There should be opportunities to meet in reception to avoid going through the to the secure area.

It will be important to promote sustainable transport options, such as use of public transport, cycling and walking.

Cllr Warrington asked about the costs and return on investment as there is still a shortfall of around £700k over 2 years.

The details of the costs and potential savings/income are contained within the report, but further information can be provided at a future meeting.

Cllr Hodge asked some further questions regarding design and the use of meeting tables. She also expressed concern about the effect of the new ways of working on recruitment and retention and felt that it would be helpful to see whether there is a trend. She also asked about mileage claims and training days.

The officer explained that there will be a balance regarding training with more blended learning and a mixture of online and in person courses. The use of the meeting tables will be based on feedback received. Staff have been positive and constructive about the proposed changes. The ability for some staff to work from home is very helpful. Officers are not aware of any changes to the staff retention figures but would keep this under review. All local authorities in the area are changing their working practices in the same way as B&NES.

There are tax implications on mileage claims and, if staff are based at the Civic Centre, then this is the base that they should be claiming travel from.

Cllr Hughes explained that there is a building in Midsomer Norton providing shared office space which is owned by the Council. This is currently not fully utilised, and he queried whether it could be used as office space for the Council.

This will be taken into consideration as several options are being considered, including whether to create locality hubs.

Cllr Warrington stated that capital costs at Lewis House, Bath should also be included when further financial information is provided.

The Chair thanked the officer for her presentation and the Panel **RESOLVED:**

(1) To note the report.

- (2) To request officers to provide further information to panel members regarding equality impact assessments, staff feedback and transport assessments.
- (3) To note that officers will investigate the available office accommodation at Midsomer Norton raised by Cllr Hughes.
- (4) To ask that further details of the costs and potential income/savings of the preparing for the future programme be brought to a future meeting.

29 COSTS OF DELIVERING HIGHWAYS SAFETY INFRASTRUCTURE

The Panel considered a report regarding the costs of delivering highway safety infrastructure. Gary Peacock, Deputy Group Manager, gave a presentation which covered the following issues:

- Details of the traffic and highways service
- Service dimensions
- The process followed once a highway safety issues is identified
- The transport improvement programme project delivery process
- Project delivery safety schemes
- Example of a scheme that has been implemented, including costings

A copy of the presentation slides is attached as Appendix 2 to these minutes.

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

Cllr Warrington asked how the staff costs were calculated for each project. *The officer explained that the cost of a scheme incorporates staffing costs based on hourly rates and that any work on a capital project is charged to that specific project. There is also an uplift charge to include overheads such as management and office costs.*

Cllr Hughes asked questions regarding the typical percentage of staffing costs, condition of pavements and the rights of utility companies to dig up roads and footways and their requirement to reinstate. *The officer confirmed that staffing costs on a scheme such as the Radstock scheme used as an example was likely to be about 16-17%. This percentage would be reduced for larger capital schemes where staffing costs could reduce to around 8%. Footways are the responsibility of the Highways Team, however, as safety critical schemes are given priority footways have not always received the attention they deserve. Utilities Companies have the right to install apparatus and dig up roads and footways as necessary. The Council can then ask them to reinstate the road/pavement to the national standard but cannot ask them to resurface the whole footway.*

Cllr MacFie asked about the competitive bid process. *The officer explained that the competitive part of the bid is at the time of tender when tenders are compared commercially against each other.*

Cllr Macfie also asked about contract lengths and about the metrics used when looking at contracts. *The officer explained that both the Volker and Dinneq contracts are for 5 years with an opportunity to extend. The contract process operates on a regional basis throughout the West of England and this gives the ability to check rates against other authorities.*

Cllr Hodge asked what percentage is charged on the staffing cost uplift and the process for making decisions on whether to install a zebra crossing or signal controlled crossing. *The officer stated that the uplift is 30+%. This includes all overhead costs. He stated that officers could look at the cost of providing pedestrian crossings in other local authority areas. Several different metrics are used when making decisions on schemes including the police accident statistics and location (e.g. whether there is a school nearby), traffic speed and number of vehicles. Decisions are based on safety and need rather than wholly on cost. There is also a revenue cost implication when new pedestrian crossings are installed due to maintenance. Signal controlled crossings have higher maintenance cost than zebra crossings.*

Cllr Singleton asked how the budgeting process works and whether there is a budget for new schemes as some areas have now been identified for the liveable neighbourhoods project. *The officer explained that the scheme for Whitchurch was funded by Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds which were specifically ring fenced for that location.*

Cllr Davis asked how Parish Council expectations can be managed as certain areas may be seen as having a safety issue, but these don't necessarily have a high priority under the B&NES Council schemes. In rural areas they often simply need small changes such as white lines on the roads and safety is an issue when there are no pavements. *The officer stated that this is a challenge and that social media can generate higher demand and expectation. It is important to improve communications and to provide timely responses. He also explained that officers are considering whether localised contacts would be helpful.*

Cllr McCabe asked what proportion of projects are successful and which fail, also what happens to those projects which do not get accepted for the list. *The officer explained that the available funding does fluctuate. The Department for Transport funding has remained fairly static over the last 5 years, however there is also CIL and Section 106 funding. There are currently only 25-30 schemes on the list, but it is important to keep this to a manageable level and to be clear that only the top 8 or 9 schemes are likely to be funded.*

Cllr Warrington asked about gully clearing and whether flood risk areas would be given a higher priority. *The officer confirmed that areas prone to flooding would have a higher priority and would be on the risk list. He confirmed that the Council does want to increase the amount of gully emptying.*

Cllr Warrington also asked about speed limits on narrow rural roads, as a lot of these have the national speed limit and there are often accidents and near misses. *The officer stated that there is an element of the programme looking at speed limits and that national criteria must be applied. He acknowledged that there is high demand this year for the reduction of speed limits on these roads and that there are currently*

8 or 9 areas which are on the list for consideration. He agreed to send a copy of this list to members of the Panel.

The Chair thanked Gary Peacock for his presentation and the Panel NOTED the report.

30 PLANNING GAIN

It was noted that this item has been deferred until the next meeting due to officer sickness. The Panel sent their best wishes to the officer concerned.

31 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel workplan will be considered at the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 5.30 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services