

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Monday, 14th November, 2022

Present:- **Councillors** Karen Walker, Joel Hirst, Shelley Bromley, Paul Crossley, Grant Johnson, Ruth Malloy, Lisa O'Brien, Dr Kumar and Shaun Stephenson-McGall (in place of Ryan Wills)

48 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

49 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

50 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Wills sent his apologies and was substituted by Councillor Stephenson-McGall.

51 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

52 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

Councillor Hirst made a statement on public transport/buses. *A copy of the statement is attached to the minutes.*

Councillor Warren, Cabinet Member for Climate and Sustainable Travel, made a statement. She explained that she had recently met with mayor Norris and there was a plan to use the WECA Planning Board more proactively going forwards, rather than as a rubber stamp. She thanked the mayor for these effective discussions.

54 MINUTES

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chairman.

55 WECA SCRUTINY - PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The Chair introduced the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) Mayor Dan Norris.

Mayor Norris thanked the Panel. He explained that there are some fundamental challenges regarding bus services - a major issue being the shortage of drivers which was made worse when the Government invited bus drivers to become HGV drivers during the pandemic. There is a need to identify, recruit, train and retain 200-300 drivers. The mayor stated that we need to think differently to find a solution such as changing shift patterns so that more women (who can often have more child and elder care responsibilities) could become drivers. He invited BANES to join in the recruitment drive and help to come up with initiatives and ideas. He stated that the other pressing issue is inflation which effects transport etc. cost of fuel. He explained that the most pressing issue at the moment is the lack of drivers. He stated that the number 12 service would continue until April 2023 and that he was constantly trying to patch up the system and do the best he can. He stated that people describe the problems well but what is needed is solutions. He went on to speak about bus stops – he stated the funds had been identified to improve bus stops and appealed for Councillors to urge their officers to remove any impediments to these improvements so that the money can be used. He stated that there is an option for him to take control of the bus stops so that they can all be brought up to a standard. He added that Bristol City Council had done this.

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

Councillor Crossley stated that he was glad the number 12 service had been extended to April 2023. He asked about flexibility in the bus service, for example a bus goes to the station and then changes number/service and goes back out – he asked if the mayor was looking at merging fragile routes. Mayor Norris stated that flexibility is exactly what is needed.

Councillor Crossley asked why we can't work in partnership regarding bus stops rather than handing responsibility to WECA. The mayor stated that if WECA controlled the bus stops, there could be economies of scale.

Councillor O'Brien asked if Town Councils can approach the mayor's office direct regarding bus stops. The mayor agreed and stated that they would need to know if there are any issue such as planning/wiring/lighting.

Councillor O'Brien stated that some local Parish Council's run a Dial and Ride service, they do not get funding from BANES – can they approach the mayor's office direct regarding funding for vehicles. The mayor explained that a 'Community Innovation Fund Prospectus' will be coming in – the WECA office would need to see the plan/case for funding requests.

In response to a query on Parish and Town Council precepts from Councillor Walker, the mayor responded that if there is money, it must be used and monitored. He stated that he would look at proposals on merit and he had no prejudgement.

Councillor Hirst asked what could be done to improve the situation for RUH workers. He suggested working closely with the RUH, a conversation with First Bus and also maybe buses coming from the south could divert to the RUH. The mayor stated that many employers used to provide transport for workers and that can be revisited as part of finding solutions. Councillors know their wards and their areas best. We need to address the issue of driver shortages, especially with regard to particular areas, solutions could include looking at Taxi drivers, students etc.

Councillor Hirst asked about the growth in passenger numbers in Bristol and South Gloucestershire but a fall in BANES along with a reduction in passenger satisfaction. The mayor explained that Bristol had been hit harder by challenges – they were unable to offer 5% of their services whereas in BANES it was only 2.5%. He stated that lower passenger satisfaction is to be expected but it will turn around in time. He stated that sometimes lower passenger numbers was the result of people working remotely which is good for the environment.

Councillor Johnson thanked the mayor for his support with bus services in Paulton, especially with the school bus service. He stated that it made sense to hand over bus stops and asked about sustainable bus stops. The mayor stated that he wanted to look at best practice.

Councillor Johnson stated that the Unite Union is calling for employers to have more responsibility for late night workers. He asked what WECA is doing to help this situation. The mayor stated that this was important and explained that one aspect was to have agreement to always honour the last bus service of the evening, even if earlier services have to be cancelled.

Councillor MacFie asked if there would be a qualitative investigation regarding the 178 service. The mayor stated that it was important to make logical decisions. He stated that data can be used to see where routes are working and smarter decisions can be made based on that data. He added that quality data also helps commercial operators.

Councillor Duguid stated that BANES contributes £26 per head while for others it is around £16. He asked that, if a franchising route was pursued – would there be increased costs for community transport and supported bus services. The mayor stated that he did not know the details at that level but the general answer is yes although we could get money in too as we should not rely on one source.

Councillor Stephenson-McGall stated that, in visiting Parish and Town Council's he had noticed a common theme is about changes to bus timetables enforced by First Bus. He acknowledged the issue about a shortage in drivers. He explained that some communities in the centre of North East Somerset are in a difficult position and feel left behind in terms of the public transport network. He asked how WECA could work with these communities. He also stated that the new timetables are not accessible (many signs and symbols). The mayor stated that he knew the

communities well and understands the issues. He stated that he wants to find new ways of working on the challenges, he explained that he is hoping to use to fund for local community groups to liberate people to come up with good ideas. He acknowledged that the bus information is not good. He added that, on meeting some groups of people, he found that some people are not aware of all bus routes. He stated that it is a challenging time but he is optimistic and thinks it will be 12 months before the situation is significantly better.

Councillor Stephenson-McGall stated that one third of bus drivers in the city are providing a near 24 hour service to students yet other residents/villages get no service at all. Could university's run their own bus service – what is WECA doing about this? The mayor explained that the quality of services to University's is a commercial decision. He stated that he would like to see a contribution from university's as they are big businesses and have a responsibility to the wider society. He explained that he had asked for a meeting with the Vice Chancellors and Student Union leaders.

Councillor Bromley asked if drivers could be included in any allowances for workers from Europe and if WECA has or could approach Government ministers on this. The mayor stated that the M10 (Metro mayors) have agreed to approach ministers which has been difficult as there have been so many changes in Government recently. There is a widespread skills shortage and drivers did not always feel welcome post Brexit. He stated that the Metro mayors can work collectively on this.

Councillor Bromley stated that Wessex Water provide transport for their staff and asked if this system could be expanded. The mayor stated that he would talk to the Chair of Wessex Water about it.

Councillor Malloy asked about a possible incentive scheme – people could be helped to learn to drive if they agree to work as a bus driver for a certain time. The mayor stated that it is difficult to restrict drivers once they have been trained – this would need clarity at Government level.

Councillor Walker asked the Cabinet Member, Councillor Sarah Warren, her view on bus stops being moved to WECA responsibility. Councillor Warren stated that she would consult officers on this.

The Chair thanked mayor Norris for attending the meeting and answering questions. She encouraged Councillors to send any ideas for initiatives to the WECA office.

56 PLANNING PERFORMANCE

Simon De Beer, Head of Planning, introduced the item.

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

Councillor Walker asked how the costs were made up with regard to planning appeals. The officer explained that he could provide more detail for the panel but explained that costs would generally be made up of legal advice and external expert advice.

Councillor Hirst asked if the SPD in January 2021 had been effective with regard to having a balance between homes for families and HMO's. The officer explained that the SPD introduced new criteria with regard to family properties being sandwiched by HMO's. He stated that there had been some success in this area. He stated that there were also other requirements in the policy regarding energy performance and room size and that this was having an effect too.

In response to a query from Councillor Hirst regarding the way the data is presented, the officer stated he would take this back.

Councillor Johnson asked if there is a register regarding 106 agreements in terms of completion and fulfilment. He asked about information regarding an access point to housing in Paulton. The officer stated that an officer monitors 106 agreements, she explained that developers are bound by the agreements, and they can be followed up. She further explained that there are different types of 106 agreement. She agreed to check to see if this information would be available for Councillors. She stated that if there is a case of concern that is brought to officers' attention it can be followed up.

Councillor Walker asked if 106 agreements are amended/reduced with a new planning application on the same site for reduced properties. The officer confirmed that the 106 agreement is renegotiated.

Councillor Bromley stated that she acknowledged the staffing issues and high case load for the team and congratulated them on their work.

Councillor O'Brien asked about an application in Keynsham which had not been approved but after an appeal had been given a year to complete the enforcement. The officer explained that the system builds in steps in order to complete the process – it would not be expedient to take enforcement action while an appeal is in process.

Councillor Crossley referenced the successful move, in 2007, from 4 planning committees to one. He asked about the planning appeal statistics for 2021. The officer explained that generally appeal statistics are good but they are expressed as a percentage so if there is a low number, this can make the results seem negative.

Councillor Malloy asked if it was in local or Government control to set fees for listed building applications and that for trees. The officer explained that fees for statutory services are set nationally. The Council has control over discretionary fees such as pre application advice.

The Chair thanked the officers.

57 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

There was no Cabinet Member update.

58 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted the future workplan

The meeting ended at 5.54 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services