

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Monday, 28th November, 2022

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

23 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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24 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Furse sent his apologies and was substituted by Councillor Hounsell.

26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

27 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

Councillor Walker made a statement about the 2023/24 Budget regarding Peasedown St John. A copy of the statement is attached to the minutes.

29 MINUTES

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meetings (26th September 2022 and 11th July 2022) as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chair.

30 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Richard Samuel stated that he would give an update as part of the item on the agenda '2023/24 Medium Term Financial Strategy'.

31 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Simon Martin, Director of Regeneration and Housing, Claire Lynch, Business Growth, and Richard Holden, Operations Manager Bath Enterprise Zone, gave a presentation to the Panel which covered the following:

- Regeneration and Housing
- Sustainable Communities Structure diagram
- Business Skills Team
- Meet the Employment and Skills Team
- Business and Skills Team Functions
- Business and Skills Support Projects
- Key Current Achievements
- Employment and Skills
- Meet the Regeneration Team
- Regeneration
- Our Future Ambition
- Enterprise Zone Team
- Meet the Enterprise Zone Team
- Enterprise Zone
- Bath Quays 2019
- Bath Quays 2022
- Somer Valley Enterprise Zone
- Service Plan key project activities

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

Councillor Hughes stated that he is feeling reassured about the plans for the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone in Midsomer Norton. He explained that he had met with the officer regarding issues in Midsomer Norton High Street. He explained that there was some local concern that the Town Hall regeneration was absorbing funds from other projects and that investment was needed in the rest of the High Street. He thanked the team for their work. The officer acknowledged that there was more work to do in the High Street and that the team would continue work on the business case for intervention.

Councillor Duguid asked about Bath Quays development and if office space is still relevant post Covid. The officer explained that the pandemic had actually reinforced the move towards higher quality and flexible office space.

Councillor Duguid asked how much of Bath Quays will be occupied by migration from offices in the city centre. The officer explained that the majority of enquiries are predominantly from Bath based businesses looking for more modern space. He stated that he expected one third of the Quays as a whole would meet local need.

Councillor Duguid stated that he was pleased that 'Invest in Bath' was now 'Invest in BANES'. He stated that he was pleased that BANES and i-Start was seen as a beacon local authority initiative. He asked for an update. The officer explained that there is now a strong relationship between the universities and the college and the development of a modular curriculum that builds skill and bespoke training. This is unique and seen as a regional offer.

Councillor Hounsell thanked the employment and skills team and asked about Keynsham High Street since the refurbishment. He asked about the transport consultancy outcome, movement strategy and high street/local business directory. The officer explained that the evaluation report would be made public in due course. It seems that footfall is up at weekends but lower mid-week – patterns had changed. He stated that the mid-week changes could be the result of more civic centre staff hybrid working now and that it was difficult to compare with pre Covid footfall. He stated that he would find out about the business directory.

Councillor Hounsell asked if there was data on business and employment available to ward Councillors. The officer will check this.

Councillor Singleton asked about the Government Investment Zone Scheme concerns. The officer explained that 2 sites had been submitted but these are no longer proceeding post Government Autumn statement. He stated that the focus was on growth clusters – university research and new businesses.

Councillor Hodge asked if there was potential for laboratory space in North Quays. The officer stated that this was a live conversation and that there is an evidenced need in the South West for dry lab space. There is potential at the old Debenhams site for some lab space.

Councillor MacFie commended the work done on a Heritage Trail in Keynsham. He asked about falls/accidents in Keynsham – he asked if there was a co-ordinated method of recording. Councillor Davis also asked how falls are recorded. The officer explained that however a fall is reported to the Council it will go through the 'Fix My Street' system as it is a public highway. This means there is a single reference point. He stated that there is a meeting planned in January 2023 with ward Councillors regarding insurance claims.

Councillor Duguid asked if there was any update on footfall in Bath centre and about the busy weekend coming up (10th December) with Bath Rugby and Christmas Market traffic. The officer stated that they are awaiting Bath BID footfall figures. He stated that there is no train strike on 10th December and an extra area in Avon Street Car Park opened.

Councillor Warrington asked if the fit out on number 1 Bath Quays had been done. The officer explained that this was completed last year and it is now partially occupied. Regarding business rates on empty properties (not yet developed/fitted out) the officer explained that floors that are not fully fitted out are not rateable.

The Chair thanked the officers.

32 2023/24 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Councillor Richard Samuel, Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced the report by explaining that the economic climate is severe and this is the hardest budget yet. He explained that the Medium Term Financial Strategy highlights the environment that the Council will be operating in and stated that the Council will have to do something different over the next few years. Andy Rothery, Chief Finance Officer talked through the main points of the report.

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

Councillor Hodge asked for information regarding the funding gap; budget re basing; contract inflation; demographic growth and proposed savings. The officer explained that there was some one-off monies last year, Covid funding, which has dropped now. He stated that there was contract inflation – key services exposed due to higher fuel costs etc. He added that proposed savings are currently being reviewed.

Councillor Hounsell commented on the tough situation next year. He asked that if schemes had not spent all of their money this year, would that money be safe. The Cabinet Member stated that this was difficult to answer at this stage. He explained that, looking ahead over the next 5 years, there were a lot of major projects such as Bath Quays and Fashion Museum and capital demand must be calculated. He said that ultimately it was a decision for full Council but it was hard to see how everything could be sustained. He further explained that all Council's have been affected by the shrinkage in local government funding.

Councillor Hughes asked about the strategy regarding the move away from retail. He asked if hospitality and tourism were potential areas of growth. The officer stated that the centre is reliant on tourist income and there are plans to diversify. He stated that there were also developments outside the centre. The seeds are being planted.

Councillor Hughes asked about the strategy regarding car parking in the centre as there is income from parking but the Council are encouraging Park and Ride and cycling etc. The Cabinet Member stated that there is an incoherence between parking income and measures to reduce carbon production. He stated that, in a perfect world the Council would not have to rely on parking income. He stated that the strategy is to reduce vehicles coming into the city for health and climate reasons.

Councillor Duguid asked about reserves and how they are used. The officer explained that reserves are linked to various things such as insurance reserve and social care. The overall level is £54million. He explained that temporary use of reserves is appropriate if they can be replenished. Reserves must span a range of financial years.

Councillor Duguid asked if BANES is prudent with its reserves. The Cabinet Member explained that if reserve levels are low, the Council has low resilience. He explained that his approach had been to rebuild reserves and this Council was in a stronger position than some others. He further explained his view is that reserves should be spent if something is unavoidable or towards an investment. He confirmed that this administration has built the overall level of reserves to £54million.

Councillor Hodge asked about business rates retention. The officer stated that they are hopeful but have to wait for the settlement.

The Chair thanked the officer and Cabinet Member.

33 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted the future workplan.

The meeting ended at 5.45 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services