

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

CABINET

These minutes are draft until confirmed as a correct record at the next meeting.

Thursday, 9th March, 2023

Present:

Councillor Kevin Guy (Ch)	Leader of the Council, Liberal Democrat Group Leader
Councillor Alison Born	Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Council House Building
Councillor Tom Davies	Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Council House Building
Councillor Manda Rigby	Cabinet Member for Transport
Councillor Dine Romero	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Communities
Councillor Mark Roper	Cabinet member for Economic Development, Regeneration & Growth
Councillor Richard Samuel	Deputy Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources
Councillor Sarah Warren	Deputy Council Leader (statutory) and Cabinet Member for Climate and Sustainable Travel
Councillor David Wood	Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services

67 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

68 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Senior Democratic Services Officer read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

69 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Tim Ball.

70 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr David Wood declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item no. 13 – Climate Annual Report and Ecological Emergency Action Plan. Cllr Wood is a Director of the Charity Avon Needs Trees which is referred to as a partner organisation in the Ecological Emergency Action Plan.

71 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

There was no urgent business.

72 QUESTIONS FROM PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

There were 4 questions from Councillors and 10 questions from members of the public.

[Copies of the questions and responses, including supplementary questions and responses if any, have been placed on the Minute book as Appendix 1 and are available on the Council's website.]

73 STATEMENTS OR PETITIONS FROM PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS

Members of the public and Councillors made statements as follows:

- Malcolm Baldwin – Liveable Neighbourhoods – Sometimes less can often mean more! *(A copy of which is attached as appendix 2 to these minutes)*
- Jackie Head – Sustainable Transport *(A copy of which is attached as appendix 3 to these minutes)*
- David Redgewell – Bus Franchising and Public Transport Network *(A copy of which is attached as appendix 4 to these minutes)*
- Jevon Smith – Bus Franchising and Public Transport Network. Mr Smith stressed the importance of public transport to elderly and disabled people and the need for joined up services in the region.
- Luke Emmett – New use for the old King Edwards School, using spaces in the Post Office and other empty shops in Bath *(A copy of which is attached as appendix 5 to these minutes)*
- Bob Goodman – The Real Climate Emergency *(A copy of which is attached as appendix 6 to these minutes)*
- Nicolette Boater – Climate Annual Report & Ecological Emergency Action Plan *(A copy of which is attached as appendix 7 to these minutes)*
- Cllr Lucy Hodge – Building back the B&NES Music Service after COVID *(A copy of which is attached as appendix 8 to these minutes)*

Cabinet members asked some factual questions of the speakers in order to clarify details mentioned in their statements.

74 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS CABINET MEETING - 9TH FEBRUARY 2023

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 9th February 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

75 CONSIDERATION OF SINGLE MEMBER ITEMS REQUISITIONED TO CABINET

No single member items were requisitioned to Cabinet.

76 MATTERS REFERRED BY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY BODIES

No matters were referred by Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels. Cllr Vic Pritchard informed Cabinet that the six-month pilot system separating the Adult and Children's Services Scrutiny work across alternate meetings has now been completed. This has worked well and there is now a strong argument to operate with two separate panels in the future. This would provide capacity to effectively

scrutinise the transformation programme as a number of community services are brought back in-house.

77 SINGLE MEMBER CABINET DECISIONS TAKEN SINCE PREVIOUS CABINET MEETING

The Cabinet agreed to note the report.

78 OPTIONS FOR BUS FRANCHISING IN THE WEST OF ENGLAND

Cllr Sarah Warren introduced the report, moved the officer recommendation and made the following statement:

“Our bus industry in England is broken almost beyond repair. Along with other parts of the public sector: the NHS, schools and local government - this industry forms part of the very fabric of society that this government is dismantling with alarming and accelerating speed. Yet thousands of people across Bath and North East Somerset rely on buses to get about every day. For many, buses are the vital lifeline connecting them to schools, work, hospitals, shops, to new opportunities, and to each other.

For far too long, residents have been forced to contend with a bus service that’s too confusing, unstable, unreliable, and expensive. This cannot continue and we can no longer afford to accept a public transport service that leaves behind the very people who need it most.

Bus services were deregulated by the Thatcher government in the 1980s, leaving services organised on a commercial, free market basis, and operators (more-or-less uniquely in the developed world) in full control of which services they will run, the fares they will charge, and the vehicles they will use. This has resulted in an uncoordinated network with a confusing array of ticketing options. Councils watch, impotent, as profitable routes are flooded with buses, leaving other areas at risk of becoming public transport “deserts,” with no alternative to the private car.

For public transport to be a viable option for our communities it needs to be frequent, reliable, fast, affordable, accessible, safe, comfortable, and go where people want to go. However, widespread market failure across the industry has led to rapidly increasing subsidy by local authorities of unprofitable but “socially necessary” services (which are no longer permitted cross subsidy from profitable routes). And this at a time when council income is falling. Following covid, we have seen this culminate in a near total collapse in the most socially important bus services across much of the country, including here the West of England.

With transport currently accounting for 29 per cent of carbon emissions in the Bath and North East Somerset area, and buses a vital lifeline for communities, we are committed to enabling more people to travel by bus. Using the powers that devolution has given us, we want to build an integrated transport system that’s faster, cheaper, cleaner, and more reliable.

This starts by taking back control of our buses to give us (rather than the private operators) greater control over fares, routes, vehicle specification and timetables.

That way, we can ensure buses integrate better with other modes of transport and offer simpler and more convenient ticketing.

In the Bus Back Better Strategy of 2021, the Government set out its support for Local Transport Authorities to access franchising powers as a way of rapidly delivering improvements for passengers. A franchise system would effectively mean that every bus service is paid for by the combined authority, who would in turn receive the income from fares, and they would contract with private bus companies like First or Stagecoach, to operate the services.

The model has been used in London for decades and is being introduced in Greater Manchester, whilst – in contrast - the West of England is the only combined authority nationally NOT to be investigating franchising. B&NES council backed franchising when bus services were discussed last October, and we are today joining other councils across the West of England in calling for the Metro Mayor to commission an independent review of options for the franchising of bus operations.

It is true that other Mayoral Combined Authorities have precepting powers, meaning they can raise a precept on Council Tax to fund mayoral responsibilities, including public transport, as part of their budget. That is why we are proposing that Mayor Norris should also explore this option to provide additional vital funding to support the bus network locally.

Franchising will be the most significant change in how buses are operated in the region since they were deregulated in the mid-1980s. We want to put the ‘public’ back into public transport by putting us in control of our bus services, and make these services work for us, rather than as a cash cow for private shareholders.

I say to Mayor Norris, bus franchising was a central plank of your manifesto, and you told us the possibility was “on the table,” but we learnt only this week that no formal analysis has been done on bringing buses back under public control. The power to do this lies with you, and with you alone. It’s time for new thinking that both contributes to our net zero targets and puts the needs of passengers first. Now let’s see you put your money where your mouth is, and commission a review of options, as step 1 on the long road to franchising. I move.”

Cllr Kevin Guy seconded the motion and made the following statement:

“Thank you Cllr Warren for an extremely clear explanation of the issues facing bus services in the West of England and indeed across the country as a whole. Councils are rather stuck in the middle when it comes to services. We have an uninterested government, a near monopoly company running most commercial services and the West of England Combined Authority, which is supposed to be in charge of buses, but which isn’t willing to grasp the bull by the horns.

And as usual it’s residents – particularly the most vulnerable and isolated – who are stuck in the middle. We desperately need better communication from the West of England Combined Authority with information being shared transparently and promptly, rather than being drip fed.

We have written several times to the West of England Mayor asking for engagement and public information around his new minibuses on demand scheme (or DRT) – a scheme we now hear will not be up and running this Spring, but instead will be

implemented in stages. We have also asked him to confirm which new 'spinal' services will be funded. When will North East Somerset residents know what options are available to them so they can plan ahead? (It's a particular problem for children who need public transport to get to school.) We don't know (we do know that the Mayor offered nothing for Bath residents). We want the DRT to work, but it's a big gamble.

Franchising seems to be one tool available to the Combined Authority to help deliver better services in B&NES. So far, the Mayor has been reticent about when – and indeed if – he will get started on franchising. It's a challenging and expensive process, which could take a long time. The Mayor is in charge of the buses and he needs to get on with it as soon as possible.”

Cllr Richard Samuel stated that WECA has let the region down and must now consider franchising along with precepting powers. The current transport levy is insufficient to run a franchising system. Certain routes will require funding through a precept.

Cllr Manda Rigby stated that the decisions and communication from WECA regarding bus franchising have been poor. She pointed out that the investigation of franchising was set out in the Mayor's manifesto prior to his election.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

To request the Council's Leader to write formally to the WECA Mayor requesting that the Mayor:

- (a) Commissions an independent review of options for the franchising of bus operations with the West of England, including considering the adoption of precepting powers; and provides a fully costed business case for the recommended changes engaging fully with each of the WECA constituent authorities at all stages of the review.
- (b) Provides regular updates to the Planning, Transport and Housing Board on the progress of the review.

79 CLIMATE ANNUAL REPORT AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

Cllr Sarah Warren introduced the report, moved the officer recommendations and made the following statement:

“Exactly four years ago in March 2019, Bath and North East Somerset Council declared a climate emergency, pledging to provide the leadership for the district to reach net zero by 2030. Since that evening, we have seen an increase in global atmospheric carbon dioxide by around 8ppm from 412 to 420, bearing in mind that scientists consider the safe level for human civilisation to be 350.

And local weather events over the last year, like last summer's record-breaking heatwave which saw UK temperatures above 40°C for the first time ever, have re-emphasised the importance of this declaration. We can now all see the damage being done with our own eyes, telling us we must maintain our urgency for greater and faster action.

B&NES also declared an ecological emergency in 2020, with the objective of being “nature positive” by 2030. Scientists estimate that the world's biodiversity is now just 75% intact, significantly below the 90% threshold [scientists consider safe](#), with the UK languishing in the bottom 10% of countries for biodiversity.

Firstly, Cabinet, we are being asked this evening to note progress against our climate strategy over the last year. We are also asked to note the Climate Action Plan and route map, our updated Climate Strategy. Over that period, the pace of delivery has stepped up substantially with the creation of the Green Transformation Team and filling of a number of new posts.

Of all our many achievements, the one of which we should probably be most proud, is the adoption of our local plan partial update last month, making us the first Council in the UK to require net zero carbon in new build housing. We are also at the leading edge of councils in requiring 10% biodiversity net gain for developments – a year before this becomes mandated nationally.

Installed solar PV in B&NES has doubled in the last four years, assisted by the council's participation in the West of England Combined Authority's Solar Together scheme; we've installed solar PV on council buildings; and we're working with the West of England Combined Authority on their retrofit accelerator to support householders in making their existing homes more energy efficient.

On transport, we've published our Journey to Net Zero strategy; established our new Journey to Net Zero transport stakeholder forum to hear from transport campaigners; built new safe walking / wheeling / cycle routes and published plans for more; we are progressing our 15 liveable neighbourhoods; brought in a bike hangar trial; and opened electric vehicle charge points. And we have plans for much more.

On nature we are caring for 80 hectares of woodland and 100 grassland sites, as well as creating 12 new flower-rich meadows through Bathscape; securing funding to create nature-rich areas across 34 hectares of green space Somer Valley; and changing management practices across 32 hectares of our parks and green spaces to benefit pollinators through our Let's Get Buzzing campaign.

And this evening, we are approving our brand-new Ecological Emergency Action Plan. Highlights of this Plan, include the following priorities:

- Increasing the extent of land and waterways managed positively for nature across B&NES, for which we have secured millions of pounds. This will reverse the decline in wildlife and provide other benefits such as carbon sequestration and flood management. We will be increasing the amount of our own estate managed for nature and working in partnership with local charities to improve our engagement with farmers and landholders.
- Increasing the abundance and distribution of key species across B&NES through reducing: pollution, the use of pesticides, and the impact of infrastructure on wildlife, whilst improving our monitoring of wildlife so as to target our action towards the species most in need.
- Enabling more people to access and engage with nature, benefitting the health and wellbeing of our communities, and encouraging people to take

action for nature. In the next year we plan to secure funding for posts that will support communities in managing their local green spaces for nature.

In summary, the progress on climate and nature that we have made over the last 4 years is significant and impressive, and over the same period we have increased our capacity to do more and faster over the next four years. Adopting the new ecological emergency action plan is an exciting development finally bringing to life our ambitions for nature in our area.”

Cllr Tom Davies seconded the motion and made the following statement:

“As the paper and my colleague Cllr Warren has noted - whilst there is so much more to be done, the report undisputedly shows the significant impact that we are having as a Council in leading our area to the hugely ambitious target of net zero by 2030. I am also very pleased to see the Ecological Emergency Action Plan which I welcome as another very impressive and well considered approach to tackling this crisis.

Taking the Climate Emergency Report - decarbonising and generating locally our energy is an area of notable success which should be celebrated in this report as a collaborative effort across our area - in particular I am pleased to see that the rate at which domestic and business solar PV is being installed has doubled since 2019.

But in my capacity as Cabinet Member for Council House building, I would like to also focus on what is one of the huge challenges in us meeting as our local target - decarbonising our stock of buildings. The requirement for retrofitting our buildings is huge - with 65,000 properties identified as needing some degree of retrofitting to increase energy efficiency.

National Government - especially under this Conservative Government - have a terrible track record in tackling this key aspect of our carbon emissions - with failed and poorly designed retrofitting initiatives. I welcome the progress and the foundations for scaling up the region’s retrofitting work which are detailed in the report, but I am sure that all of us here are cautious and concerned about the scale of the work which is needed to tackle the challenge of our stock of buildings.

However, there are causes for optimism in this area too and I am particularly proud of the work which the Council is doing in its own stock of housing under our B&NES Homes Programme and through our subsidiary Aequus - I think for example of 23 Grosvenor Place - a grade 1 listed building, the recent refurbishment of which included measures that will see emissions drop by 40% - and the exemplar new Sladebrook Road development to name just two schemes.

And perhaps most exciting of all - there was the huge decision taken at the Council meeting in January in which we became the first council in England to adopt an energy-based net zero housing policy that places ambitious targets on housing developments and all new major non-residential developments.

And so yes - there is so much more to be done that will require us all - residents, the Council and the National Government to each play our part - but to those involved in this report tonight, and in particular to Cllr Warren and the leadership she has shown, and for everyone who has already played their part in taking us closer to our

ambitious targets to tackle both the climate and ecological emergencies and we pass on our collective thanks.”

Cllr David Wood highlighted the best ever recycling rates that have been achieved in B&NES, the building of a new recycling centre and also being on target to plant 100,000 trees.

Cllr Richard Samuel thanked Cllr Warren for the work she has undertaken and the progress that has been achieved. He noted that most people want to see action taken regarding the climate and stated that it is important to limit the growth in transport emissions.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

- (1) To note the positive progress and achievements over the last year on implementation of the Council’s Climate Strategy. This is summarised in the Climate Progress Report, at Annex 1, which includes a range of climate and nature case studies and the annual carbon performance dashboard for the whole area.
- (2) To note the particular progress made in understanding renewable energy in Bath and North East Somerset and in the development of the delivery pipeline shown in the renewables section of the Climate Progress Report, at Annex 1.
- (3) To note the Climate Action Plan and Route-map to 2030, at Annex 2.
- (4) To note the updated Climate Strategy, at Annex 3.
- (5) To note the development of the Ecological Emergency Action Plan, at Annex 4.
- (6) To note that the ambition on nature recovery contained in the Ecological Emergency Action Plan will only be fully realised with external investment and through working in partnership.
- (7) To approve the Climate Annual Report and the new Ecological Emergency Action Plan, before submission of the report package to full Council on 16 March 2023.

80 JOINT COMMUNITY SAFETY PLAN

Cllr Dine Romero introduced the report, moved the officer recommendation and made the following statement:

“Overall B&NES is considered a safe place this is reflected in the feedback Avon & Somerset Police received from local communities. But like much of the country there have been challenges, including directly and indirectly the consequences of the pandemic as well as vicariously of other global events. This is picked up in the work of the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) which is targeting efforts on early trauma informed intervention supporting those children and young people most at risk of being involved in crime.

In 2022 12k recorded crimes which is a 15% increase on the previous year however anti-social behaviour reduced by 11.6% 380 fewer reports. Generally, crime and demand in police is returning to pre pandemic levels.

The Council, Avon & Somerset Police and office of the Police & Crime Commissioner have a clear shared aim which is to take every opportunity to protect and promote safer communities.

This plan focuses on joint working which very much fits with the way we in B&NES fulfil our statutory requirements with one board combining the functions of the local safeguarding children board, the adult board and the responsible authorities group.

The plan identifies key shared priorities and issues and shows how all partners will work together over the next 3 years to protect vulnerable people, prevent crime and build strong resilient communities.

This plan serves as both the community safety plan and local police and crime plan for B&NES. The overarching priorities are to protect vulnerable people from harm and to strengthen local communities and do improve outcomes for local people. “

Cllr Alison Born seconded the motion and made the following statement:

“One of the most striking elements of this report is the recognition of the extent of funding cuts across public services and the impact that has on crime and community safety.

As services have reduced and as crimes have become more complex, the need for agencies to work together and to pool resources and intelligence has never been greater and the B&NES approach to community safety supports that partnership approach. This plan recognises the particular needs of vulnerable people whilst also seeking to prevent crime and to support our communities, helping our residents to feel safe.

I commend the work of the community safety partnership and support the adoption of this report.”

RESOLVED (unanimously):

To agree the Joint Community Safety Plan and to recommend it for adoption at Council.

81 HERITAGE SERVICES BUSINESS PLAN 2023-2028

Cllr Kevin Guy introduced the report, moved the officer recommendation and made the following statement:

“I am very happy to propose the Heritage Services Business Plan for 2023 to 28. This report is the annual update to a rolling five-year plan, and it comes at a very positive and exciting time for the Heritage Services team.

I say positive as we are seeing a significant improvement in visitor numbers at the Roman Baths, following the shock of the pandemic. It's very pleasing to see visitor numbers returning to around two thirds of pre-pandemic levels. This is higher than

anticipated and spending in the Pump Rooms and Heritage Services' shops over the past year has also increased. These figures may be driven by recovering international tourism and domestic 'staycations'.

The report suggests we can expect to see a return to pre-pandemic visitor levels from 2025 – subject to the overall economic situation.

I welcome the ongoing projects to further improve the visitor offer at the Roman Baths and Clore Learning Centre, including an updated audio tour, a revised Audience Development Plan and additional investment in conservation activities.

We also have a lot of detail in the report about exciting projects being led by Heritage Services.

The new Fashion Museum is clearly the highest profile of these projects. Despite the disappointment of not receiving Levelling Up Funding, this council and this administration are fully committed to the Re-Fashioning Bath Project. The process of delivering the Levelling Up Fund bid demonstrated the inherent economic and societal benefits of the scheme, which will be of importance going forwards.

We have already secured the Fashion Museum's new home. The Old Post Office will be a fitting home for one of the world's greatest museum collections and will mean a wider range of people can access and engage with the collection in a more modern, prominent, and flexible location.

Later this evening we'll hear more from Cllr Roper about 'meanwhile uses' for the Old Post Office spaces and I note the Fashion Museum collection is now being protected at a high spec and secure storage facility owned by Dents glovemakers on the outskirts of Warminster. We are working closely with Bath Spa University on plans for the Fashion Collection Archive at Locksbrook.

We have a fantastic team in place to deliver the project, and I was very pleased to meet the new lead last month – Sophie McKinlay has joined us from the V and A Dundee.

Sophie joins a Heritage Services team with a solid track record of raising capital funding and delivering major capital projects, as demonstrated by the successful recent Archway project. Resources – from the West of England Combined Authority – are in place to develop a full vision, business case and funding strategy over the coming financial year. So, we can have the utmost confidence that the Fashion Museum will reopen in 4 or 5 years and will form the centrepiece of a new fashion destination in the Milson Quarter.

I would like to thank the Climate Emergency and Sustainability PDS panel for their work in scrutinising the business plan last week. Panel members raised some queries about the Victoria Art Gallery. It is clear that there has been a change in visitor behaviour from the Gallery's current visitor base and the figures are not yet where we would wish them to be.

The council continues to be fully committed to supporting and improving the Victoria Art Gallery to increase its appeal to residents and visitors. We have recently appointed a new senior curator and planned investment in the gallery includes:

- 230 thousand pounds to fix the roof;
- 75 thousand pounds – from external funding – to create new spaces and encourage community, family and commercial activation;
- the appointment of a new community engagement post – explicitly to deliver programming to appeal to a wider cross-section of local people and diversify the visitor base.

One of the greatest assets we have as a council is our staff. So, I'm pleased to see that the new Heritage Services strategy emphasises investment in staff development, engagement and welfare to ensure we can attract and retain the brightest and best officers.

I will turn to income generation in a moment, but I'll just mention some other objectives from the strategy which include:

- A clear focus on care of the monuments, buildings and collections in our care;
- Investment in the journey to net zero, which is something every council department is involved in;
- Continued distribution of Discovery Cards – with a focus on less well-off local communities – and I'm pleased that the council has issued 26,000 Discovery Cards since the scheme was relaunched in May 2022;
- Community engagement and audience development – and especially delivering direct benefit to local people
- Engaging with initiatives to improve the Destination and Culture across B&NES and the wider region – I particularly note the proposals around developing products with partners to encourage more overnight stays.

Clearly the focus of Heritage Services is the guardianship of our treasured historic assets and encouraging residents and visitors to make the most of them.

But the income from the council's heritage attractions helps fund the vital public services residents rely on. I'm delighted with the strong recovery of the department in this respect. Income is expected to return to pre-pandemic levels over the next financial year and this is a key aim of the service.

The figures in the report anticipate an £8.2 million pound surplus being returned to the council in 2023/24. This marks Heritage Services as one of the most commercially successful heritage organisations in the UK and I'd like to congratulate the whole team on this achievement.

Finally, as we're talking about heritage, I'd also like to take this opportunity to say how pleased we were to welcome the second General Assembly of the Great Spa Towns of Europe last week.

Bath's rare second UNESCO World Heritage Site inscription is a massive achievement, and I was very proud to accept the official UNESCO certificate confirming the city's inscription as one of the 11 Great Spa Towns of Europe on behalf of the community.

Cllr Richard Samuel seconded the motion. He noted the income stream provided from the Heritage Services Team which is very important to the Council. He stated that the heritage assets in the city provide a showcase to the world.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

To approve the Heritage Services Business Plan.

82 QUARTER 3 CORPORATE STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23

Cllr Richard Samuel introduced the report and moved the officer recommendation. He stressed the importance of receiving regular reports on performance and to connect this with what the Council is doing in terms of finance. The report provides a spotlight on performance which enables the Council to improve.

Cllr Kevin Guy seconded the motion and stated that he was very pleased that the Council has implemented this new system for tracking progress against its corporate strategy, this is an important aspect of improving transparency and a good opportunity to highlight achievements.

He was very pleased to see the continuing engagement with residents through the Voicebox survey and the indication that 84% of residents are happy with the local area as a place to live and 59% are satisfied with the Council.

Cllr Tom Davies noted that this was Cllr Samuel's last Cabinet meeting. He thanked Cllr Samuel for his hard work and range of knowledge relating to his portfolio.

The Cabinet then unanimously passed a vote of thanks to Cllr Samuel in appreciation of all his work over the last four years.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

To note progress on the delivery of key aspects of the Council's service delivery, details of which are highlighted in section 3.6 and Annex 1 of the report.

83 MILSOM QUARTER UPDATE

Cllr Mark Roper introduced the report, moved the officer recommendation and made the following statement:

"This paper covers two topics relating to the Milsom Quarter project – the Post Office and the Old King Edwards School building – iconic properties in the city centre that all Bath residents know well - and many have watched and wandered at the sad state of the latter for far too long.

The Post Office conversion to the new and exciting Fashion Museum is a work in progress and there are solid plans being developed to raise the finance needed to create a fabulous new asset for our city. Proposal 3 in this paper delegates the decision on meanwhile uses for the Post Office whilst that plan is implemented – giving officers the ability to make quick decisions on short term lets and other usage for the building, raising revenue for the museum and offering local organizations the opportunity to, for example, run art exhibitions or pop-up sales by local makers – similar to No 11 New Bond Street, which has been hugely successful. Incidentally

colleagues may like to know that we will shortly be moving No 11 to a unit next door to the Post Office – because the demand for retail property in the centre is such that we need to release it to the open market- we are running out of stock of shops! The current vacancy rate in the centre is around 3% compared to a national rate of over 10% and footfall in the centre is nearly at 2019 levels – despite what you may read on some dubious Twitter feeds.

Proposal 1 and 2 are the follow up to work requested by this Cabinet last autumn where we asked for a workable solution to the long-term thorn in the side of our city that is the old King Edward School building. This architecturally important handsome property has sat empty for nearly 40 years. It is at risk. Visual inspections of the exterior show a deterioration in its condition. The paper outlines a methodology for the Council to help bring the old school back to its former glory. We can do this by our preferred route of working with the owner Samuel Smiths Brewery – and yet again I appeal to them to engage with us - but there are several other options available to us outlined in section 3.3 – and if all else were to fail then ultimately there is the last resort of a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO). That however would be our least favoured option – and in effect a failure by the owner and the Council - and would be in no-one’s interest – apart from our respective lawyers. We know that there was a very similar situation in Bristol – and Samuel Smiths Brewery and Bristol City Council negotiated - and got the building back into use. We would be delighted to do that with you Samuel Smiths.

The recommendations in section 3.4 of this report are there for all to see and I commend them to cabinet. Yet again, this administration is tackling head on a difficult issue that previous ones have chosen to ignore.

Thank you to the officers involved in preparing this excellent report. It has been a pleasure working with you over the last 6 months.”

Cllr Richard Samuel seconded the motion and moved an amendment to the motion to add the following additional wording:

“Officers are requested to produce a public report on the internal and external condition of the building for consideration at the next scheduled meeting of the Cabinet.”

The amendment was accepted by Cllr Roper, mover of the original motion.

Cllr Samuel then stated that the King Edwards School building is deteriorating and has water damage. It is on the national at-risk register. The building is important to the Milsom Quarter regeneration and progress must be made to safeguard it.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

- (1) To confirm the Council objectives with regards to the King Edward’s School building as being the following:
 - (a) To assist in expediting the delivery of a suitable scheme for the King Edward’s School building to bring it back into use;
 - (b) To safeguard its listed building status;

- (c) To ensure that the building makes a positive contribution to the broader regeneration of Milsom Quarter and Bath city centre in general;
 - (d) To avoid excessive cost and risk for the Council.
 - (e) Officers are requested to produce a public report on the internal and external condition of the building for consideration at the next scheduled meeting of the Cabinet.
- (2) To delegate approval to the Director of Sustainable Communities, in consultation with the s151 Officer, to agree to “meanwhile use” lettings (as described in paragraph 3.7 of the report) of vacant units within the Old Post Office block at less than open market value for regeneration purposes, on the basis that the benefit of the regeneration-led meanwhile use proposals outweighs the need to achieve best consideration on a case-by-case lettings basis.

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm

Chair _____

Date Confirmed and Signed _____

Prepared by Democratic Services