

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

### **RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Monday, 12th September, 2011

**Present:-** Councillors John Bull (Chair), Manda Rigby (Vice-Chair), Colin Barrett, Charles Gerrish, Dave Laming and Nigel Roberts

**Also in attendance:** Michaela Gay (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Vernon Hitchman (Solicitor to the Council Monitoring Officer Electoral Returning Officer), Angela Parratt (Head of Transformation), Andrew Pate (Strategic Director – Resources) and Ian Savigar (Head of Revenues & Benefits)

#### **12 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **13 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor Chris Watt sent his apologies.

#### **15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

There were none.

#### **16 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

There was none.

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

There were none.

#### **18 MINUTES - 1ST AUGUST 2011**

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

#### **19 UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND NEW COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT SYSTEM**

Ian Savigar – Divisional Director Customer Services and Graham Dove – Group Manager Customer Services, introduced this item and gave a presentation to the Panel covering the following: *(A full copy of this presentation is held on the minute book for this Panel – Democratic Services, Guildhall)*

- Welfare reforms/Timeline
- Scale
- Fraud Investigation Service
- Localised Council Tax Support
- What are we doing/can we do?
- Universal Credits
- Overall Issues
- What are we doing?

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

Councillor Gerrish asked if this government driven scheme would create extra work in revising direct debit payments. Ian Savigar explained that it was likely that there would be an impact on collection rates, there would also be 10% less funding. He explained that the authority would need to find £1million in order to continue the scheme as it is.

Following a question from Councillor Bull on the function of the authority, the officer explained that the Council would be working with the Job Centre to look at the person and not always send people down the digital route. He further explained that 17% of claimants at the Job Centre have used online facilities but with this new scheme the Government were expecting 80% (now lowered to 50%) of applications to be completed online. Members expressed their concern about this expectation. Councillor Gerrish stated that this scheme will add to the pressure on the most vulnerable residents. He added that there must be people who can help claimants fill in forms. He stated that he felt that the Government had got this wrong and must protect the most vulnerable. Graham Dove explained that he had told representatives at the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) every month that 50% was too high an expectation but that they are determined to go down the online route.

Andrew Pate – Divisional Director Resources explained that this authority is good at helping people face to face and has an efficient service and has to be careful not to lose all of this experience in the new system. Ian Savigar explained that he did feel it was right in principle to have one system but that he was concerned about the delivery mechanism.

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

Panel members discussed whether they should have a review on this. Councillor Roberts stated that he doubted whether much could be achieved with an internal review. Councillor Gerrish stated that the Panel could help to develop policy when the final version of what is being proposed is clear. He added that we should have a scheme the same as neighbouring authorities. The pros and cons of working with

other authorities was discussed. The Panel talked about holding a half day session on this issue where representatives from the DWP and Job Centre could be invited. Andrew Pate – Strategic Director Resources, explained that there were two issues, firstly Council Tax Benefit and secondly implementing and delivery of Universal Credits. He advised that a half day session would need to be at the right time to influence the agenda and that this would be in the new year.

Graham Dove explained that on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2011, representatives will put the case to the DWP about face to face delivery and officers will know more after this meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that, subject to the availability of a relevant DWP representative, the Panel should hold a half day informal session (2012). Officers to investigate the possibility of a representative attending.

## 20 CHANGE PROGRAMME

Angela Parratt – Head of Transformation introduced the item and gave Members a presentation covering the following:

- About the Change Programme
- Change Programme benefits and deliverables
- How the work is managed
- Progress to date
- What's next?
- Challenges coming up

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

Following a question from Councillor Barrett, Andrew Pate – Strategic Director Resources, explained that £8million is the recurring saving expected four years into the programme, this is on track.

Councillor Laming stated that he understood the dilemma of a spread of services with a few staff in each, he stated that the priority should be to cut services (rather than staff) such as the Mayor, Chair of Council or Council Connect. The Director explained that the Change Programme was about finding ways to do things better and the choices around budget savings were separate to this.

Nigel Roberts stated that there had to be boundaries to externalisation. Councillor Bull stated that the more that is outsourced, the harder it is for the local councillor. There was some debate around changes in the authority with Academies and Social Enterprise.

Panel members discussed the merits of joining with other authorities. The Director explained that there had been discussions around joining with other authorities for certain things and that these discussions would be ongoing. He explained that there was a partnership with Bristol City Council regarding procurement.

The Panel noted the report.

## 21 SCHEME FOR RETIRED COUNCILLORS

Vernon Hitchman – Divisional Director Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report.

Councillor Gerrish asked for advice regarding members making decisions on this report where they could have an interest. Vernon Hitchman advised that this was a technical interest but could not be seen as prejudicial.

It was **RESOLVED** to recommend to Council that a scheme for the Appointment of Honorary Aldermen and Honorary Alderwomen be approved with the following views:

1. The number of years qualifying service should be 12;
2. That cumulative service should be counted;
3. That service be counted on Bath and North East Somerset Council and its predecessor authorities;
4. That the scheme should apply to all former councillors irrespective of the date on which they left office; and
5. That the scheme be approved as set out in appendix 1 to the report.

## 22 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor David Bellotti – Cabinet Member for Community Resources updated the Panel on the following:

- Elections will take place next year for a Police Commissioner. The Community Safety budget will come under the new Police Commissioner but it will remain the Council's role to scrutinize Community Safety. There were some questions such as would the new Police Commissioner be able to discontinue the taxi warden service. Councillor Bellotti explained that a detailed report would be sent to the appropriate Policy Development Panel along with a report to this Panel detailing the resources implications. Councillor Laming (River Champion) asked if river safety would come under the Police Commissioner's remit. Councillor Bellotti stated that he thought it would still be the Council's responsibility.
- Councillor Bellotti stated that he wished to clear up a misunderstanding regarding the funding of a Homelessness Hostel. He explained that he had not cancelled this project and the £3million, it had in fact not existed in the first place.
- Councillor Bellotti updated the Panel on Keynsham Regeneration – he explained that officers were already speaking to three or four major retail companies. He explained that he would have a full update at the November meeting of the Panel.
- The Cabinet Member updated the Panel on the budget, he explained that there was pressure in some areas such as mental health and adult services. He also explained that parking income was not as good as it had been in previous years.

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

Following a question from Councillor Gerrish regarding pressures on the corporate estate, Councillor Bellotti explained that most shops are let and while there is not a problem yet, it is good to keep informed of this issue.

## **23 PANEL FUTURE WORKPLAN**

The Panel noted the future workplan subject to the following:

*'Review of Electoral Services' be removed from the January 2012 meeting. (There will be an informal meeting in the second half of December to look at the elections process. Invitees should include: agents; candidates; councillors and returning officers. Issues to cover to include: ballot paper issues; voter registration; access to polling stations and costs).*

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**