

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Tuesday, 19th November, 2024

Present:- **Councillors** Robin Moss, Lucy Hodge, Toby Simon, Malcolm Treby, Colin Blackburn, George Tomlin and Duncan Hounsell

Apologies for absence: Councillors: Ian Halsall and Hal MacFie

101 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

102 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

103 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Halsall sent his apologies.

104 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

105 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

The Chair updated the Panel on the following:

- With the Panel's agreement, there will be an extra meeting in January 2025 to discuss the budget. The existing date (28th January 2025) will stay in place.
- Regarding the HCRG contract, there has been a lack of public consultation from the ICB. It was noted that the Chair of the Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing PDS Panel is going to speak to the ICB Board.
- The Chair reported that Councillor Lucy Hodge will be stepping down from her role as part of the Panel and therefore as Vice Chair. The Chair thanked Councillor Hodge for her work.
- The Chair thanked Andy Rothery (Director of Finance) for his work with the Council as this would be his last meeting with the Panel.

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

Councillor Karen Walker made a statement regarding '2025/26 Budget – Peasedown St John'. The statement is appended to these minutes.

The Chair thanked Councillor Walker and stated that the statement would be referred to the relevant Cabinet Member.

107 MINUTES

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

108 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Mark Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources, gave an update which covered the following:

- Since the last meeting of the Panel we have had the national budget – he welcomed the extra finance for local government but also noted that it could be characterised as a sticking plaster.
- He welcomed the change of tone from the new Government at the LGA conference but still sought more detail on tackling the crisis in local government funding.
- The Household Support Fund has been allocated. The main areas of focus are: winter fuel payments to pensioners, free school meal vouchers and CAB funding (Citizens Advice Bureau).
- The Cabinet Member thanked the Finance Director Andy Rothery for his work with the Council and wished him well in his new role. He reported that an interim appointment had been made and the process of recruitment is underway.

Councillor Treby asked if anything had been dropped regarding the HSF (Housing Support Fund). The Cabinet Member explained that it is a fixed pot of money, he is not aware of any areas that have been dropped but proportions may have changed.

Councillor Moss noted that the new Government has indicated that there will be 3-4 year local government settlements from next year which will help.

109 COUNCIL OPERATING MODEL AND BE OUR BEST (BOB) UPDATE

Councillor Dave Wood, Cabinet Member for Council Priorities and Delivery, introduced the item.

The Panel received a presentation on 'Being Our Best' which covered the following (slides are attached to these minutes):

- Objectives
- Key pain points, drivers and aspirations (Korn Ferry 2023)
- Korn Ferry
- Context: Being our BEST Programme
- Great Jobs (ED lead: Manday Bishop)
- Linking role profiles to define career maps

- Heat map of people by job category
- Enabling long term equity
- Key principles
- Smarter structures (ED lead: Andy Rothery)
- Council operating model principles
- Council operating model
- The functioning operating model
- Culture of excellence (ED lead: Sophie Broadfield)
- How we are changing

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

Councillor Treby stated that this item had been through Cabinet already and asked why it could not have come to scrutiny before that process. He also asked how the Panel could be involved going forwards in how this is embedded. The officer explained that the work had been going on for a long time. The Cabinet Member stated that this was a fair challenge and he would take it back. The officer stated that she welcomed the Panel involvement with embedding this scheme and stated that she could bring the Panel regular updates. The Director of Finance explained that the Operating Model is a visual guide and any changes to the model would go through consultation and scrutiny.

Councillor Simon stated that there had been some difficulty recruiting regarding the Avon Pension Fund (APF) due to pay levels and asked about market supplements. The officer explained that there was a set of pay proposals for APF specifically which is out for consultation at present.

Councillor Simon asked if the January (2025) meeting of the Panel could look at pay. He also stated that highways/place shaping are different teams working in different programmes and not always integrated. He asked how we de silo this. The Operations Director stated that she works closely with the Director of Sustainable Communities and there is liaison around transport schemes but acknowledged that there is always room for improvement.

In response to a query from Councillor Simon about working with WECA (West of England Combined Authority), the Operations Director explained that the grant funding is co-ordinated by the Sustainable Communities team. Councillor Blackburn stated that scrutiny is important in this process. He commended the huge piece of work.

Councillor Hodge how the progression related performance would work and are the savings still expected to be achieved. The officer stated that from 1st April 2026 incremental progression will be linked to performance. The 'Clear Review' system will be used which sets objectives and reviews feedback. The officer stated that there will be savings through the Director and Heads of Service restructure. There is robust governance in place.

Councillor Hounsell stated that the appraisal process is not easy so how will you train and monitor managers. The officer stated that she could report in more detail to a future meeting of the Panel. She explained that managers conducted 'performance

management conversations' and with Clear Review these conversations are continuing. This is not consistent across the Council so we have until April 2026 to achieve this.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officer and noted that the item would come back to the Panel.

110 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME UPDATE

Councillor Mark Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced the item.

The Panel received a presentation on 'Local Council Tax Support changes 2024/25' which covered the following (slides are attached to these minutes):

- Changes introduced
- Reduction in support
- Discretionary awards
- Case study
- Cost
- Next steps

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

Councillor Simon stated that he welcomed the fact that the effects had been so accurately estimated. He asked if the main change had been to the standard amount. The officer explained that the higher rates will carry on, there is a plan to put in a general rule regarding the lowest amount. Councillor Simon stated that the effects will need to be monitored.

Councillor Simon asked about information on arrears and collection. The officer stated that he could circulate this information.

Councillor Treby asked how often people are getting the discretionary award. The officer explained that approaching the welfare support scheme is different for people. He explained that staff in the Council Tax section are fully aware of the welfare support option but some people do not wish to go through income and expenditure.

In response to a comment from Councillor Simon, the officer confirmed that support agencies are being sign posted and the discretionary support has been widely publicised.

The Cabinet Member thanked the officer and his team and stated that the scheme is working fundamentally in the way we wanted.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officer and stated that it was good to see the modelling had come about.

111 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING, CASH LIMITS AND VIREMENTS - APRIL 2024 TO SEPTEMBER 2024

Councillor Mark Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced the item. He explained that, since the last meeting of the Panel he had been working on the overspend. He explained that the vast majority came from Children's Services and home to school transport. He stated that there are systematic problems with Children's Services and the issue has been raised in Parliament. He stated that he hoped to work with NHS colleagues but realises that their budgets are also stretched. He explained that there would be a significant rebasing. He added that there had been strong parking income and acknowledged that we are in a more robust position than many other Councils.

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

Councillor Hodge stated that home to school transport costs are a national problem. She asked if there had been any benchmarking with other authorities and stated that, as the trajectory of the overspend has increased, how confident are we that it will not get worse. The Cabinet Member stated that he shared concerns regarding home to school transport and agreed that it needs a serious focus. The Executive Director explained that EHCPs (Education Health and Welfare Plans) had increased in other authorities as well and more children eligible for free school meals. Out of area journeys have doubled and we are an outlier in that there are more 1 to 1 cars or taxi's transporting children outside the area. She added that £60 routes can now cost £240 per day. She explained that a new home to school policy has been consulted on and we now try to offer people personal budgets. We try to use minibuses/coaches. She concluded that the focus is on single car journeys and processing in the Special Education Needs department (SEN) to avoid delays. She added that we will shortly receive data from an independent assessment regarding benchmarking which will give some key lines of enquiry.

Councillor Treby asked if the budget papers brought to the Panel in January could show amber/red financial risks in the budget lines to help with effective scrutiny.

Councillor Blackburn asked about property, he stated that we are continuing to not let buildings because they have not been maintained properly. He asked when the Panel would get an update on the Corporate Estate. The officer stated that it is a priority to have buildings available for tenants. The Cabinet Member explained that the problems essentially stem from outsourcing to private provision for the last 20/30 years which has left the Council open to market failures. We have to rebuild capacity in house.

Councillor Moss agreed that, while the headline is Children's Services, Corporate Estate issues must not pass under the radar. He explained that overspends in Children's Services is a national problem and was raised at the LGA. He asked why EHCP numbers are proportionally higher in the UK than other European countries. He also asked why the prediction was so far out and asked what confidence there is that predictions going forward are trustworthy as there are other areas that have met targets but will be affected. The Cabinet Member stated that these are the concerns that he has articulated to officers. He stated that he is being robust on this and that the Cabinet is extremely keen to see the position resolved.

In response to a query from Councillor Treby about the context of the rise in EHCPs, the Cabinet Member explained that parents no longer need to backing of schools to apply for an EHCP but, despite the rise, we are not seeing better outcomes for children. The current system is broken and early intervention is the way forward. The Executive Director added that there is a new SEN early intervention scheme now working closely with schools.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers.

112 PANEL WORKPLAN

Panel members noted the future workplan and also noted the following items suggested:

- Library IT contract (Councillor Simon asked for a report or meeting with Somerset to look into the contract)
- Update on measures to address the costs of agency staff (July? Councillor Hodge)
- Cost of maintenance on the Commercial Estate (Councillor Hodge)
- Strategic Performance Indicators – annual update (Councillor Hodge)
- Update on BOB/Operational Model – July/Sept (Councillor Moss)
- Property Services – May (Councillor Blackburn)

The meeting ended at 5.50 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services