

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Tuesday, 14th January, 2025

Present:- **Councillors** Robin Moss, Ian Halsall, Hal MacFie, Toby Simon, Malcolm Treby, Colin Blackburn, George Tomlin and Duncan Hounsell

113 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Malcolm Treby in the role of Vice Chair which was ratified by the Panel.

114 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

115 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were none

116 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

117 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

There were none

119 MINUTES

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

120 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Mark Elliott updated the Panel covering the following points:

- The major activity has been around budget setting. There has been increased demand on Children's Services over the Christmas period.
- There is an interim Section 151 Finance Director. There will be a new appointment in March 2025.

Regarding the Quarter 3 outturn report, The Cabinet Member explained that this would likely come to the Panel's March meeting. He explained that the outturn looks as expected but there has been increased pressure on Children's Services.

Councillor Moss stated that budget proposals seem very similar to last year, do we expect different outcomes? The Cabinet Member stated that he would cover this in the item on the Budget.

Regarding the pressure on Children's Services, the Cabinet Member explained that all three areas in that service (Transport, Children in Care, Schools) were problematic, but the recent pressure had come from a significant increase in children coming into care over the Christmas period.

Councillor Halsall mentioned the positive Ofsted outcome for the service area.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member

121 BUDGET REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Mark Elliott, introduced the report and explained that it covered items within this Panel's remit. He explained that the full budget is being worked on but there is an unusual level of uncertainty particularly around mitigation around National Insurance contributions. He stated that the hard figures will be published in early February.

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

Councillor Blackburn stated that the report was a pale reflection on what was brought to scrutiny previously. Councillor Moss agreed that a fuller picture had been given in previous years. The Cabinet Member stated that the Executive Director had flagged up that full budget papers could not be produced for this meeting. Councillor Moss stated that in 2022/23 the full budget papers came to this Panel. The Cabinet Member stated that he was happy to support this in the future provided the deadlines can be met.

Councillor Simon stated that the Panel have been assured that a balanced budget is achievable and the report represents about the right amount of information for early January. He stated that it would have been helpful to have more on the capital side. He added that focus on the detail of the relevant portfolios is the best use of the Panel's time today.

Councillor Halsall asked about Council Tax rises. The Cabinet Member stated that, while it will rise, BANES still remains 4th lowest in terms of Council Tax.

In response to a query on telephony from Councillor Simon, the Cabinet Member explained that it would be an ongoing cost as it is a service not a purchase.

Councillor Simon asked about the Being Our Best (BOB) programme. The Chief Executive, Will Godfrey explained the programme and that details would be brought to the Employment Committee on 14th February 2025. There is a meeting with Trade Unions tomorrow.

Councillor MacFie asked where the change in Business Rates had come from. The officer explained that this related to the Business Rates Pool and a change in allocations. In response to a query from Councillor Simon, the officer explained that there is a concern that the Government are moving towards a deprivation/needs-based allocation. The Cabinet Member explained that this was another factor in the theme of uncertainty, there is some extra money in the system this year but we do not have the information to plan ahead and we need more clarity from Government regarding a multiyear settlement. Councillor Moss stated that, at the LGA Conference, the Deputy Prime Minister indicated a move towards multi year settlements from next year. The Cabinet Member stated that he was pleased to hear this.

Councillor Halsall mentioned reference to AI in the press and asked for assurance that this would be used to improve our service and that members are trained. The Cabinet Member supported this. The Chief Executive stated that it was early days but he could see the benefits of this and the Council wide impact in that colleagues will be freed up. He stated that the Panel would be briefing on this at a future meeting.

Councillor Treby asked for more Capital information and for more information around whether things are up/down/the same as last year. In response to his query regarding the indicative increase in contract inflation, the Cabinet Member explained that this was largely related to National Insurance increases in our suppliers. The officer further explained that there was an increase with social care contracts. In response to a query in Capital financing, the officer explained that this was a rolling programme.

Councillor Moss stated that regarding paragraph 3.3 – Savings Income Generation, he was not sure the sentence reflected the facts as there is a seeming inability to predict potential pressures which tend to skew our budgets half way through the year. He asked if BANES was an outlier in this regard. The Cabinet Member stated that we do have a good track record on savings but we have suffered by not predicting rising costs.

Councillor Simon stated that maybe there could be investment in a better model for forecasting regarding Children's and Social Care Services. The Chief Executive stated that our discipline on delivering savings is pretty good but there is increasing demand and increasing cost of provision and both of these factors are outside our control. The Cabinet Member added that at the high needs end of child care, it can be a very small number needing a high level of funding which is hard to predict.

Councillor Moss stated that the Council knew about Newton House since January 2024 but did not highlight it until December 2024 and now emergency provision will cost money. He stated that it was important to avoid this.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers.

122 DEVELOPMENT OF DRAFT HERITAGE SERVICES PLAN

The Council Leader, Councillor Kevin Guy introduced the item and the officer gave a presentation which covered the following:

- Heritage Service Business Plan – Early Stage Briefing
- Vision
- Strategic Priorities
- Roman Baths 2024/25 - Challenging Market Conditions
- Additional Income Generation
- Value for Money – Benchmarking/Awards
- 2025/26 Service KPIs
- 2025/26 Key Activity
- 2025/26 Risk

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

Councillor Moss asked that the figures (KPI slide) regarding increase in net profit p/council tax household be checked.

Councillor Halsall asked how we can support other heritage assets outside of the city. The officer stated that this presentation has focused on the assets in Bath as part of the business plan but the service is also responsible for culture and tourism across the area. He explained that cultural plans for BANES are being worked on as we can think more widely having steadied the ship post Covid.

Councillor Halsall asked how we can develop our understanding of the past while looking to the future with apprenticeships and training. The officer stated the service has a strong track record on apprenticeships. The Council Leader stated that satisfaction of staff in the service is very high, he praised the officer and his team.

Councillor Blackburn asked if the discovery card provided data and if this will be captured with the new CRM. The officer explained that data on Council owned sites can be collected. The CRM will collect data on new packages such as the family trails.

In response to a query from Councillor Blackburn regarding ticket prices, the officer stated that he would come back to the Panel with a full answer in the future. He explained that setting a ticket price is a tight rope, good value scores have to be considered.

Councillor Blackburn asked about the Far East market. The officer explained that we engage with the Chinese Embassy via Visit West.

Councillor Moss thanked the Council Leader and officer for the early opportunity for the Panel to see this information. He stated that he understood the focus on assets in Bath which are key in the budget but it would be useful to get numbers of people

in groups (coaches/day trips/longer stays etc) and promote North East Somerset. The officer stated that some of that information is available such as group volumes, but we do not hold information regarding onward intentions. The Council Leader mentioned the Northeast Somerset cultural strategy – there have been discussions around how to get people to stay longer and visit the wider area.

The Chair thanked the Council Leader and officer.

123 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted the future workplan.

The meeting ended at 5.40 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services