

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

### **MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING**

Tuesday 8th July 2025

Present:- **Councillors** Robin Moss, Ian Halsall, Toby Simon, Malcolm Treby, Colin Blackburn, Duncan Hounsell, Jess David and Gavin Heathcote

Apologies for absence: Councillors: Hal MacFie

#### **148 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **149 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **150 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor Hal McFie sent his apologies.

#### **151 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

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

There was none.

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

There were none

#### **154 MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting will be brought to the September meeting of the Panel for confirmation.

#### **155 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

Councillor Mark Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources, updated the Panel on the following:

- Item 10 on the agenda sets out the year end outturn. There are some initial indications around monitoring in the new year. The pressures in Children's services are continuing.

- Work has begun on the Jolly's store (Capital Project) which is on track. Morleys are set to open in early Spring.
- Being Our Best – the decision has been made on implementing the new job roles/pay scales. 60% of staff have a pay rise. The uncertainty has been removed.
- The communications improvement project is being rolled out. We are replacing the old phone system which will reduce the number of phone numbers on the website from 60 to 1.

Panel members asked the following questions:

Councillor Simon stated that he and Councillor Halsall sat on the Employment Committee and were involved in the decision regarding staff pay.

Councillor Moss asked for an update on a tourism tax. The Cabinet Member explained that Council Leaders had met recently to discuss this and hope to be given the power to bring this forward. Councillor Halsall noted that devolved nations have the power to levy. Councillor Blackburn asked if any potential figures had been discussed. The Cabinet Member stated that this had not been discussed but he would like the potential levy to be locally set.

Regarding BOB (Being Our Best), Councillor Moss asked why there are so many appeals and where are we in discussions with Trade Unions. The Cabinet Member explained that there are over 200 appeals, mostly by employees not affected by a pay change. The Operations Director stated that an extension had been given regarding the appeals and Trade Unions will be attending many of the meetings.

## **156 CORPORATE STRATEGY 2023-27 - END OF YEAR REVIEW**

Councillor Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced the report. He stated that this was the first time this report had been presented in this style. He added that KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) need to be regularly reviewed and formally invited the Panel to give their input. He suggested it would be useful to consider the KPIs being suggested by Government which would enable like for like comparisons across Councils. The Scrutiny Officer explained that the Government consultation ends on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2025 and he would set up a meeting with the Panel late summer and feedback.

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

In response to a question from Councillor David, the Cabinet Member confirmed that all indicators had been signed off by Cabinet last year.

Councillor David stated that it is good to make a distinction between things the Council can influence and what it cannot. She asked if indicators allowed us to directly follow Children's Services. The Cabinet Member agreed with the first point but pointed out that it has been suggested that the Government indicators may contain things that are not directly controlled by the Council. Regarding Children's Services indicators, he asked what would be useful. The Executive Director explained that there are two issues – outcomes for young people (in the remit of

another Panel) and financial issues. Councillor Moss stated that there was a Task and Finish Group looking at Family First.

Councillor Simon stated that the format does not expose critical areas of the Council and does not give enough context to enable comparison. The Cabinet Member stated that he took this on board and acknowledged the benchmarking opportunities if KPIs are the same in other Councils.

Councillor Moss stated that it would be useful to have a discussion on KPIs and that there would be a session on this. He stated that he would not want a return of league tables, the mood music is devolution. He asked about fair funding – looking at deprivation indicators and the element of accessibility of services in rural areas. The Cabinet Member stated that the fair funding review will have an effect on Local Government across the country. The officer explained that the consultation on the fair funding formula was complicated and will affect every local authority. He explained that deprivation is a significant factor and that we will lose as a result of that. We are not at the confirmed position currently. Councillor Moss suggested that a transition period would be in place for a significant time. The Cabinet Member stated that if the transition is good and we get stability, at least we can plan.

Councillor Halsall asked if there were any discussions around being a university city (a third of residents are students) and possible compensation for lack of council tax. The Cabinet Member stated that the response from the Minister suggested that they are looking at this.

Councillor Moss stated that previous measures of deprivation were on a ward level and he understood that the new levels would pick up smaller pockets of deprivation. The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers.

## **157 REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN REPORT 2024-25**

Councillor Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced the report. He stated that there has been an improvement since Q3. He congratulated officers on the corporate effort to deliver a balanced revenue budget. He stated that the biggest overspend is in Children's Services - £6.18 m due to increased residential placements and foster care pressures.

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

Councillor Leach asked if the demand led pressure in Children's Services could be offset by under budget areas. The Executive Director stated that the demand led pressure often results from the move from independent foster care into residential care. There have been more children in residential care this year. The Executive Director reported that there had been some commissioning improvements and recruitment of a senior commercial lead. Also, local provision development (e.g. Charlton House), high-cost placement review panels and SEND strategy alignment.

Councillor Simon asked why the overspend on high needs did not show in the negative reserves balance table. The officer explained that the negative reserve is not included in this report and will be shown in the statutory accounts. The Cabinet Member reported that plans for the Culverhay School site are held up at the treasury

at the moment. Councillor Moss stated that all Capital Programmes were suspended when the Government came in but there this should be moved forward soon.

Councillor Blackburn stated that Highways is under budget, parking has generated high income and highways maintenance is small. The overall picture looks like we are not spending the money. The Cabinet Member stated that it is difficult to report local government balance sheets in a meaningful way and stated that Panel advice on this would be gratefully received.

In response to a questions from Councillor Blackburn regarding Cleveland Pools, the Cabinet Member stated that he was not aware that more had been invested in this but would report back. He mentioned a presentation on highways to the last Cabinet meeting which sets everything out.

Councillor David asked for an update on the play area refurbishment. The Executive Director stated that we could move at pace with the programme as a result of mixed areas of funding.

Councillor Moss asked if departments are having to make cuts to make up for the shortfall regarding Children's Services. The Cabinet Member stated that there is pressure on the rest of the Council but that pressure was mainly on income rather than savings. He gave credit to Council staff for efforts to meet the budget. He stated that staff morale had been good at the recent 'Values Week' events.

The Chair thanked the staff for high quality services in tough financial times.

## **158 PANEL WORKPLAN**

The Panel noted the future workplan and following suggestions for future items:

- Monitoring the impact of VAT changes on private education and SEND demand.
- Procurement policy review, including member involvement at pre-tender stage and local procurement strategy.
- Progress update on library systems (suggested for November meeting).

The meeting ended at 5.18 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**