

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

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

Tuesday 25th November 2025

Present:- **Councillors** Robin Moss, Toby Simon, Malcolm Treby, Duncan Hounsell, Jess David, Gavin Heathcote, Stuart Bridge and Shaun Hughes (in place of Colin Blackburn)

Apologies for absence: Councillors: Colin Blackburn

#### **170 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Chair noted that Councillors Ian Halsall and Hal MacFie had stepped down from the Panel and thanked them for their work.

The Chair welcomed new member Councillor Stuart Bridge

#### **171 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **172 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor Colin Blackburn sent his apologies and was substituted by Councillor Shaun Hughes.

The Chair noted that Councillor Stuart Bridge had joined the Panel.

The Chair noted that Councillor Ian Halsall and Hal McFie had stepped down from the Panel and thanked them for their contributions.

#### **173 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

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

There was none.

#### **175 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 to the Panel regarding budget setting process and Peasedown St John (a copy of the statement is attached to the minutes).

## **176 MINUTES**

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

## **177 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

Councillor Mark Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources, reported that his main activity had been around the budget setting process and items on the agenda.

Councillor Moss asked about changes such as housing costs and also mentioned the tourism levy which would potentially be under the Metro Mayor. He stated that in other countries the funds are used to enhance the area. The Cabinet Member stated that he did not have the full information from Government yet but overall it was understood that the Fair Funding Formula would be negative for this authority. Regarding the tourism levy, he stated that this authority had been at the forefront of lobbying for this and again, he needs to see more detail. Councillor Moss stated that the authority has a good working relationship with the Mayor.

## **178 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026/27**

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Mark Elliott, introduced the report.

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

Councillor Hounsell stated that there had been speculation that the government might allow councils to levy a council tax above the current cap of 4.99% without a referendum. He asked if the Cabinet Member could give an indication of what raising the council tax beyond the cap would do to alleviate our deficit.

The Cabinet Member explained that every 1% on council tax is about £1.4 million extra revenue.

Councillor Moss stated that there have been rumours that the top bandings of council tax may well be extended. Has there been any modelling on how many houses in Bath and North East Somerset we have that are at the top band and what that could possibly mean? The Cabinet Member stated that he is not aware of any modelling as there is no detail as to what that might be yet. There are also concerns that if central government go ahead with this, they might not allow Councils to keep the money.

Councillor Simon stated that there is going to be a body to look at pay in the social care sector and set national rates for social care. Have we factored that in when looking at adult social care costs? The officer stated that he is not aware of any specific modelling for that around adult social care funding and believes that it may not kick in until April 2028.

Councillor Hughes asked that, other than the Fair Funding which obviously adds an element of uncertainty, where are the main areas that are causing that?

The Cabinet Member explained that the uncertainty part comes mainly from the fair funding issue because we don't know what income we're going to get. There is always uncertainty in predicting demand in children's and adult's services particularly in children's as a very small change in the number of children in care can be another million pounds on the budget if they're very high need.

Councillor Hughes asked if the assessment of £13 million on fair funding over three years could be wildly out? The Cabinet Member stated that he did not think it'll be wildly out and that we should know by the end of the week once we've worked through all of the modelling. We won't know for definite until the middle of December when we actually get a number from the government.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers

## **179 Q2 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2025/26**

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Mark Elliott, introduced the report.

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

Councillor Hounsell asked why staffing underspends and vacancies are being used to manage overspends. The Cabinet Member explained that vacancy management is a common financial tool. Current vacancy levels are within tolerance and not considered a significant risk.

Councillor Hughes asked what is causing delays in capital projects like Somer Valley Enterprise Zone. The Cabinet Member explained that the project is a key priority.

Councillor Hughes mentioned Bath Quays not being full and the Roman Baths income targets not being met and asked if there is overoptimism. The Cabinet Member explained that visitor numbers from international markets (e.g., China) have not recovered as forecast. Income per head is strong, but overall footfall is lower than expected. He explained that Jolly's opening has moved from late Spring to Summer – this is due to the extensive work to mend the roof.

Councillor David asked what is done when it looks like areas may go over budget, for example Parks department forecast overspend. She added that the team is already stretched so vacancy management may have a strong effect. The Cabinet Member stated that he would take these comments back.

Councillor Hughes asked about the status of Being Our Best (BoB) savings target. The Cabinet Member explained that the point was not to drive savings but to pay at the right level – some jobs were graded upwards. The officer added that full savings expected by 2026/27, mainly from structural changes yet to be implemented.

Councillor Malcolm Treby asked if capital rephasing affects revenue savings. The Cabinet Member explained that the impact varies by project. For example, delays in the SEND school rebuild (Culveryhay) affect long-term revenue savings. Treasury management ensures borrowing is optimized.

The Chair stated that it was good to hear that there is more confidence regarding Children's Services.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officer.

## **180 HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT FINANCE AND ACTIVITY**

The Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport Delivery, Councillor Lucy Hodge, introduced the report. There was a presentation that covered the following:

- Home to School Transport Finance and Activity
- Services provided
- National context
- Service pressures in BANES
- Independent review
- Improvements & efficiencies already undertaken
- Further improvements being explored

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

Councillor Hughes stated that it is good to see a lot of proactive steps are being taken. He asked if we have a rough number on how many journeys are going out of area each day. The Cabinet Member explained that exact data is difficult to extract due to system limitations; work underway to improve reporting. Placements are based on best provision for the child.

Councillor Hughes asked about the trajectory. The officer explained that this is difficult to predict and will depend on the Government White Paper. The Cabinet Member explained that existing SEND capacity is full and there are plans for new schools in house (e.g., Culverhay) with an aim to reduce out-of-area placements.

Councillor Treby asked if we know what saving Culverhay and Charlton House would make and would better bus services also make a difference. The officer explained that bus routes have a marginal impact as most SEND journeys require specialist transport. He did not have figures regarding savings.

Councillor Simon asked if transport costs are considered in SEND tribunal appeals? The officer explained that relatively few go to appeal and they are usually down to eligibility.

Councillor David asked if the use of council-owned cars delivering savings. The officer explained that early savings are reported. Recruitment of suitable drivers remains a challenge and if a driver is off sick, we use an agency.

Councillor Moss noted that the number of Councils moving to an in house model is increasing and there could be coordination with home to hospital transport. He stated that the appeals system is a grey area and supported the suggestion that the financial cost should be included. He asked if this authority contributes to the LGA debate. The officer stated that we do contribute nationally and are at the forefront of

discussions. The Cabinet Member stated that she wanted to get more detail in the future.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officer.

## **181 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME UPDATE**

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Mark Elliott, introduced the report.

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

Councillor Simon thanked officers and the Cabinet Member for their work on this. He stated that the CAB (Citizen's Advice Bureau) had been flagging this as a potential issue. He stated that he is persuaded and that this is a well-argued paper.

Councillor Hughes stated that he is surprised that this capital figure of £6,000 is so low - it penalizes financial prudence. He suggested a percentage of household total income. The Cabinet Member stated that 3.3 were receiving 100% relief.

Councillor Treby asked how arrears are managed for affected households. The officer explained that typically this is done via deductions from Universal Credit; enforcement agents are a last resort. Discretionary write-offs and welfare support available.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officer.

## **182 PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS AND BY-ELECTIONS RECHARGES**

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Mark Elliott, introduced the report.

(Councillor Moss declared that he acts as clerk to 2 small parish councils)

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

Councillor Hughes stated that North East Somerset will pay for our own elections and asked how elections in Bath are financed. The Cabinet Member stated that there aren't parish elections in Bath, the equivalent would be the Charter Trustees elections, and I believe those are recharged. Councillor Moss stated that it is a running issue that North East Somerset residents pay additionally.

Councillor Treby stated that a lot of income is brought into the Council by tourism and the Roman Baths which is redistributed. There are arguments both ways. Councillor Moss stated that North East Somerset residents come into Bath which adds to the economy.

Councillor Moss stated that this is an ongoing discussion and there are a percentage of residents that are resentful of what they see as a second tier of Council Tax. He stated that it would be interesting to see some numbers around elections in North

East Somerset. Many vacancies are filled by co-opting. He stated that the cost for wealthy areas is different to other parishes. Councillor Hughes stated that it is a worrying trend that more and more is getting sent down to Parish and Town Councils.

Councillor Heathcote asked what feedback had been received from clerks of parish councils up to now. The officer explained that one parish clerk commented that the parish council were not happy about the decision, no other emails received.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officer.

## **183 CAPITAL DELIVERY PROJECT ASSURANCE**

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Mark Elliott, introduced the report.

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

Councillor Simon stated that according to the risk table, it seems the risks are pretty low, especially cyber security. The officer stated that the numbers themselves are more an illustration, the actual risk register goes through assurance at steering group and capital strategy group before informal cabinet.

Councillor Hughes asked if councillors will have access to dashboards and training. The officer stated that they would.

Councillor Treby stated his concerns with borrowing £325 million over five years. He stated that during scrutiny of the budget, we would need to understand the breakdown of what comes from grants/borrowing etc. The officer explained that borrowing includes internal borrowing. Councillor Treby stated that money internally borrowed is not then available for other things.

Councillor Hughes stated that that the graph should be detailed in a way that reflects what we're doing. The Cabinet Member explained it isn't misleading, corporate supported borrowing means financed from council's funding, not necessarily external loans. Treasury management ensures we don't borrow unnecessarily.

Councillor Treby stated that when the Panel scrutinize the budget, we need to see what pays back and how long it takes otherwise we can't prioritize properly. The officer stated that future reports will include clearer linkage between project benefits, funding sources, and repayment timelines.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers.

## **184 PANEL WORKPLAN**

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

- Motion from Council regarding AI

The meeting ended at 6.11 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**