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Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Place Scrutiny Commission

17th March 2016 at 2.00pm



Members Present:-

Councillors Bolton, Cheney, Cook, Hiscott, Pearce, Thomas, Watson, Wright

Officers in Attendance:-

Peter Mann – Service Director Transport, Laura Pye – Service Manager Culture, Howard Swift – Service Manager, Economic Development, Jason Thorne, Senior Project Manager Economic Development, Richard Fear – Service Manager Investment, Adrian Randall – Services Manager Facilities Management. Steve Matthews – Service Manager Asset Strategy, Joe Jeffrey – Service Manager Development, Lin Lynett – Principal Corporate Property Officer, Abigail Stratford – Principal Corporate Property Officer (agenda item no.11)

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made

2. Apologies for Absence

None were received

3. Declarations of Interest

None were received

4. Minutes – of 11th February 2016

The minutes of the 11th February 2016 were agreed as an accurate record.

5. Work Programme

The Chair highlighted the Devolution Statement released on the 16th March. Scrutiny Commission Members wished to receive briefings from officers and scrutinise the proposals as soon as possible and within the work programme for the coming municipal year. The Chair agreed to write to the Chair of OSM on behalf of the Commission **(ACTION: Councillor Bolton)**

The Chair asked the Policy Adviser Scrutiny to send Members of the Commission the latest list of items for consideration during the next municipal year. **(ACTION: Johanna Holmes)**

With reference to the proposed four year scrutiny programme which it is suggested would commence in October 2016, concern was raised that there would be a six month delay within which decisions could be made that required scrutiny. Members believed that the workshop sessions held before first meetings in July 2015 were considered very successful and the pattern should be replicated. The Chair agreed to write to the Chair of OSM and Party Group Leaders to raise the concern of the Commission. **(ACTION: Councillor Bolton)**



RESOLVED:

(i) The Chair agreed to write to the Chair of OSM to request briefings from officers about Devolution and scrutinise the proposals as soon as possible within the work programme for the next municipal year.

(ii) The Chair agreed to write to the Chair of OSM and Party Group Leaders to raise concern about the possible six month delay for scrutiny if a four year cycle did not start until October. It was suggested that the process for 2015/16 be replicated for 2016/17.

6. Action Sheet

It was noted that all actions had been completed (with the Climate Change and Energy Strategy action to be discussed under the next item).

7. Chair's Business

The Chair proposed a response to the Climate Change and Energy Strategy (which had been circulated via email prior to the meeting) which was agreed by Members of the Commission at the meeting.

The Chair thanked officers, Members of the Commission and Councillor Cook for their efforts during the year.

8. Public Forum

The Commission received and noted the following statements (a copy of the statements has been placed in the minutebook (accessed via Democratic Services):

PS 01	South West Transport Network	Cribbs Causeway Proposals
PS 02	South West Transport Network	Rail Travel
PS 03	South West Transport Network	Enhanced Delivery Plan Update
PS04	South West Transport Network	Devolution (late statement)

The following comments in relation to the submissions were made:

- The Shaw Report had been released by Government on 16th March 2016 which ruled out the wholesale privatisation and breakup of Network Rail but left open the possibility of bringing more private finance into the running of the railways at a local level or for specific projects.
- The Hendy Review had taken place in November 2015. It was important that the Equalities Act is applied to stations such as Lawrence Hill/Stapleton Road and Temple Meads. It was confirmed that a response would be submitted to the 18th March 2016 meeting of the West of England Joint Transport Board at item 10 Appendix 4 of the agenda. It was agreed that the Policy Adviser Scrutiny would circulate the report and response (**ACTION: Johanna Holmes**)

9. Culture Inquiry day Report and Recommendations (agenda item no.8)

The Commission considered the proposed report of the Culture Inquiry Day and associated recommendations. The following comments were made:

- a. A strategy and framework for Arts and Culture within the City could help encourage and help the Arts Council continue funding for projects.
- b. It was important to recognise the positive work already taking place within deprived communities and encourage engagement with audiences that would not necessarily travel to City Centre venues.
- c. With reference to Recommendation 12, the increasing number of big events taking place on the central parks was raised with central parks and/or public spaces was raised as some had been inaccessible to the public for a number of weekends over the summer and due to recovery time. Officers reported that there was an ongoing quality review and capacity study of the Parks, which would involve public consultation after the election. Officers did work to relocate events in green spaces out of the City Centre as an opportunity to spread culture out however, the number of affected residents increased further away from the Centre.
- d. With reference to Recommendation 24, it was important to emphasise the importance of minor as well as major cultural groups and events and continuing to develop talent within the City. It was agreed that some of the explanatory paragraph would be amalgamated with the recommendation to emphasise that point. **(ACTION: Johanna Holmes)**.
- e. Recommendation 24 was highlighted as an example of a specific event within the ward. It was reported that the Government budget had offered funding to promote sports and arts through the extension of the school day and it was suggested that funding should be sought for after school clubs.
- f. Councillor Pearce highlighted the Know Your Place tool for the built environment as well as image and language banks. He suggested Recommendation 8 should read “suitable spaces both real and digital” and Recommendation 20 should read “uniqueness *both in the physical and digital environments*”.
- g. It was highlighted that Bristol City Council were one of only six local authorities that had maintained arts funding at the same level since 2010 although retaining funding at the current level would be difficult as the pressure on discretionary services increased during further budget cuts. Councillor Cook considered it a prime role of the local authority, along with the Arts Council, to fund Culture and support the groups that do great work. He questioned how the application of a strategy could affect work outside of the City Council but highlighted the importance of enabling the work of small organisations and community groups to continue.
- h. The Chair suggested the following additional words be added above the key recommendations “We recognise the value of Bristol’s ‘cultural offer’ (in all its forms) to the vibrancy of economic wellbeing of the City of Bristol. As such we believe funding for Bristol’s cultural offer should be maintained in so far as it’s possible in the current economic climate”
- i. The Commission requested that the report be presented to Cabinet after which an officer action plan could be devised. The Commission requested a report of progress in six months time. **(ACTION: Johanna Holmes)**

RESOLVED: The Commission accepted the report and recommended it to Cabinet and Full Council for debate and discussion.

10. Economic Development (agenda item no.9)



The Committee received a presentation from the Service Manager Economic Development which outlined the strands and services of the Economic Development Service. During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- a. The vision for Economic Development subscribed to the local economic partnerships strategic economic plan for the sub region. In the future BCC would develop a standalone position statement.
- b. The Commission noted that more that could be achieved by the team with further resource. The level of activities of 2008 continued but with reduced staff levels. The team were congratulated on what they achieved however it was recognised that more would need to be done in the future to sustain development.
- c. Match funding from third party organisations could be used to maximise Council funds. Groups were commissioned as per a commissioning strategy such as the Prince's Trust for entrepreneurial development.
- d. Neighbourhood Partnerships were encouraged to develop good relationships with businesses but often officers were better placed to engage with residents. Bedminster was a good example of a Town Team to communicate with and support businesses.
- e. Invest in Bristol and Bath (IBB) remained a direct Council body although a Board had ultimate responsibility. The day to day management of the service rested with the Chief Executive of the Local Enterprise Partnership.
- f. The Bottleyard Studios operated at capacity and any plans for expansion would be best focused on adjacent accommodation rather than new land. The crews and staff of productions brought £13.8 million to the City over and above the rent of the studios. The Studios also worked with the Skills Academy trades and employment schemes. The Metrobus and arterial routes would satisfy the transport needs of both BottleYard and the Filwood Green Business Park. The Scrutiny Commission requested a visit to the Bottleyard Studios and Filwood Green Business Park in the next municipal year **(ACTION: Johanna Holmes)**
- g. The role of the Economic Development Service was all the more important to help continue the City's financial sustainability in a time of low government funding.
- h. The local economy required resilience, a mixture of businesses and healthy high streets. The Team helped support that mix of businesses which included the smaller independent companies. The team endeavours to support the city's 48 high streets and local centres, but with low resource it was a reactive service. It was also increasingly difficult to use the planning process to control the overpopulation of one type of business e.g. takeaways, coffee shops.
- i. The introduction of Resident Parking Zones should benefit shopping streets with the removal of commuter parking and the facility for short stay pay and display parking aiding turnover. Research suggested that there was mixture of benefits for businesses although mixed views had been received about the economic impact in some areas. It was suggested that some areas should have more bays for mixed use, the 30 minutes free pay and display option could be publicised more and that the number of business permits issued needed reconsideration as often they were used for commuting. There was a mechanism in place for adjustment and improvement for every zone and the Commission reminded officers that where a scheme showed negative effects on local business there should be a quick response and assistance.

Resolved:- (i) to note the report.

(ii) to visit the Bottleyard and Filwood Green Business Park during the next municipal year

11. Property Portfolio (agenda item no.10)



The Committee received a presentation which outlined the work undertaken by the different elements of the Property Service. A Councillors briefing had taken place on the 10th March for which the slides had also been included with the agenda and taken as read. During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- a. It was an exciting way to develop revenue for the Council. It was important that the team had the right people and skills to profit from the high property cost at present.
- b. The Grade 2 listed building in Hotwells which housed the Dance Centre was classed as an operational building with services provided by a third party operator. As with all peppercorn rent leases the lessees were under obligation to carry out maintenance and most comply with that obligation. If there was a problem fulfilling that obligation, there was an onus on the operators to approach the Council. The leases for community buildings needed further consideration as there were classic examples of where buildings had not been maintained and where the asset was under council ownership the liability could return to the Council in future. The Commission requested that an item be added to the future work programme outlining buildings let to the community and states of repair, highlighting any risk to graded and listed buildings **(ACTION: Johanna Holmes)**.
- c. Fleet management was an asset of good size and expertise that could be explored under the commercialisation agenda for revenue options. The fleet already brought in revenue through private based MOT testing. The recommendation was to keep that within the council as it brought protection for the Council for statutory obligation for those vehicles and units.
- d. The gilt+4 return on investment was predicted at present based on normalisation of interest rates to 3-4%. If the base rate remained at 0.5% then the picture was positive as leases were locked into a long term increase on yield.
- e. 'Risk' was not necessarily a bad thing, what was bad was unbalanced risk.
- f. Members were pleased to see that the Redcliffe Wharf development had moved forward. Officers outlined challenges since preferred developer status was awarded in 2009 including a changing market and changing requirements from the Council. The developer had worked well with the Council and the upturn in the office accommodation market meant there was now a viable scheme.
- g. Ambition for O and N sheds on Redcliffe Wharf had been quelled slightly due to the conservation area and planning requirements to retain the existing docks warehouses.
- h. There was some concern about the length of time it takes for property to be declared 'surplus to requirements' by the Council and sold which led to frustration for the Council, Councillors and the community. Officers hoped that the procedure would be streamlined but highlighted that on occasion interim uses benefitted the Council. Members requested information about how many properties within the process were currently stalled (with the specific example of St.Peters EPH) and information on what is happening. The information should be sent to Councillor Hiscott and copied to the Policy Advisor Scrutiny for the rest of the Commission. **(ACTION: Property officers)**
- i. It was clarified that the £40m cost to the Council was to service the operational property and run the services provided. If the Council were to rent those properties it used operationally costs would be significantly higher. The revenue benefit was therefore the saving of not paying lease costs. The income of £11m was from tenants and other parties.

Resolved:- (i) to note the report.



(ii) to add an item to the future work programme outlining buildings let to the community and states of repair, highlighting any risk to graded and listed buildings

12. Performance Report Quarter 3 (agenda item no.11)

The Committee received a report from the Service Director Transport which summarised the main areas of progress towards delivery of the Corporate Plan 2014-17. During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- a. Appendix B contained explanation of the reasons for the affordable housing target not being met and what actions had been identified. Officers continued to work with partners and take as many actions as possible. It was suggested that perhaps some land released as surplus to requirements (as discussed during the previous item) could be made available for affordable housing targets therefore influencing delivery of affordable housing in the City. Members supported the release of short term resource to support the Property Service to help deliver the backlog of surplus property. **(ACTION: Johanna Holmes)**
- b. Members questioned the reasons for delay for each of the examples listed and requested more information about each case as it was it was acknowledged that each site was different. **(ACTION: Abigail Stratford)**. It was noted that there was little that could be done to influence developers who bought supplies at costs which made it impossible to deliver specified affordable housing.
- c. Air quality was highlighted as not within acceptable limits and Members asked if a clean air zone or low emission zone (which appeared to have cross party Member support) would be introduced within the central area. Officers confirmed that it had been specified within the OLEV bid for funding to take that work forward. In practice it was not likely that fines would be levied but the threat remained and action was needed.

Resolved:- (i) to note the report.

(ii) Members supported the release of short term resource to support the Property Service to help deliver the backlog of surplus property with options for it to be made available for affordable housing.

Meeting ended 5.15pm

CHAIR _____

