

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission



25 November 2016 at 10.00 am

Members Present:-

Councillors: Martin Fodor, Steve Jones, Chris Jackson (substitute for Margaret Hickman), Anthony Negus (Chair), Jo Sergeant, Mhairi Threlfall and Jon Wellington

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Margaret Hickman (Chris Jackson substituting), Councillor Carole Johnson (Vice-Chair) and Councillor Matt Melias

Officers in Attendance:-

Alison Comley (Strategic Director - Neighbourhoods), Nick Hooper (Service Director Strategic Housing), Kate Murray, Zara Naylor, Andrew Mallin (Directorate Leadership Team Support Manager), Romaine de Fonseca (Policy Advisor) and Jeremy Livitt (Democratic Services)

Also In attendance: Councillor Paul Smith (Cabinet Member for Homes) and Councillor Asher Craig (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods)

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

All parties present introduced themselves.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence for this meeting (listed above) were noted.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Jo Sergeant stated that she used to work in libraries.

4. Minutes - Thursday 27th October 2016

Action Sheet - Minute Number 10 27th October 2016 Meeting: Progress Report – Cotham Trail for Glyphosate – Free Weed Treatment



In response to a Member's question concerning the need for discussion with Universities to establish if further research can be carried out into trials of cider vinegar to also include the University of the West of England, the Strategic Director of Neighbourhoods stated that she would investigate this issue and report back.

ACTION: In addition to the University of Bristol, discussions to also take place with the University of the West of England – Alison Comley/Teija Ahjokoski

Resolved – that the Minutes of the above meeting be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. Action Sheets - Monday 3rd October 2016 and Thursday 27th October 2016

Members noted the Action Sheets for the last two meetings and that, where additional actions had now been confirmed since the dispatch of papers, details of these would be circulated to all members of the Scrutiny Commission after the meeting. There would be one rolling Action Sheet with outstanding actions for future meetings, with the date on which the action was requested provided in each case.

6. Public Forum

Members noted that no Public Forum statements had been received for this meeting.

7. Chair's Business

The Chair reported that:

- (1) canvassing for providers of the Sexual Health Service in the city was currently taking place
- (2) After a long process, the DCLG had indicated that they would release the City's byelaws

8. Libraries Update Report

The Head of Libraries stated that the report outlined the principles which had been set out in the Cabinet report and provided a complete overview of ongoing work.

Councillors made the following comments:

- (1) Whilst this report was an improvement on the one that had been submitted to the Planning Meeting, this was nevertheless a report looking back/ still "treading water". More future options for the service were required as well as further detail concerning the impact of budget cuts;
- (2) Further information was required on the impact in certain areas such as Library Development workers. It also needed to be clear if these proposals would help to solve the difficulties faced across the city;



- (3) There was no indication of how gaps in service provision would be filled;
- (4) The review did not recognise the constraints within which the Council operated ie that the review had been required due to budget cuts;
- (5) Since the introduction of revised opening hours, in some areas all libraries were open at the same time rather than being co-ordinated;
- (6) In relation to the 7 day service, some staff had been required to work Sundays despite not wanting to do so and despite the lack of demand for the service on this day, As confirmed by a recent Freedom of Information request;
- (7) A different form of service might be required in certain areas ie Community Asset Transfer (CAT) but that this must be done through the Council. Also, if libraries were not run successfully in the community, the possibility of the Council retaking control needed to be considered;
- (8) Access to libraries was very important – a sensible strategy to deal with the issue of opening hours was required;
- (9) The Corporate Plan needed to give an indication of the impact of the responses to the libraries consultation process and may need further consultation since the situation had now changed;
- (10) It would be helpful to give an indication of when the proposed changes will be known;
- (11) Volunteering – until the issue of paid and unpaid staff provision had been properly looked at, local library provision could not change.

In response to Councillors' comments, officers made the following points:

- (12) It was still too early in the process to assess the different range of options required to make a very big budget saving;
- (13) There were informal and formal friends groups operating in communities, some of which had become active when the future of some libraries had been threatened. These groups needed to be ready to support the future role of libraries;
- (14) There were significant Savings required for Year 2 and 3 for libraries, parks and Neighbourhood Partnerships. A budget consultation was taking place and there was likely to be a further service consultation post April 2017 involving all citizens
- (15) The approach taken by the Council not to close any libraries means that resources were stretched thin – future discussions concerning the service were required to avoid a “one size fits all” service;
- (16) The Citizens' Panel results will be available in early December 2016 to assist in the process;
- (17) No Freedom of Information request had been received so far;
- (18) Every library had now been updated to 100 megabit speed;
- (19) Volunteering – the Council decision had been clear that volunteers would not be replacing staff in libraries. A Sub-Group of the Neighbourhood Partnerships was looking at the network of provision across the city and its implications

In response to a question, the Head of Libraries confirmed that she would provide Councillor Jon Wellington with information concerning the number of books borrowed at libraries on how statistics were recorded and collected on issues and visits

Action: Kate Murray



9. Housing Delivery - Positioning Briefing Update Paper

The Scrutiny Commission received a presentation on the above issue from Paul Smith (Cabinet Member for Homes) entitled "Tackling Bristol's Housing Crisis – the First Six Months".

During this presentation, he made the following points:

- (1) Consultation had taken place with tenant groups, landlords, Housing Associations, developers and builders;
- (2) An advisory group comprising experts and academia had just been established;
- (3) Despite the population growing in the last year by 6,800, only 460 extra homes had been built;
- (4) Over 500 families were in temporary accommodation;
- (5) Whilst the Chancellor's announcements had helped in some respects (ie pay to stay now being voluntary, high value home sales for right to buy being out back to 2018), there were nevertheless significant problems (ie viability assessments, welfare reforms, the spatial plan). Since average rents were £1,000, the operating environment for people was not great;
- (6) There remained 550 empty homes as at 2015/16;
- (7) The Council's priorities for 2015 were to build new homes, reduce temporary accommodation, reduce the number of empty homes and improve standards in PRS;
- (8) 80 hectares of land had been taken off the market to build new homes. Sites in Hengrove and Brislington had been given to Housing Associations. Private housing would be used to subsidise Council housing;
- (9) Members' attention was drawn to forthcoming schemes in Lawrence Weston and Dunmail and in the Corporate Private Rented sector (ie Redcliff Quarter);
- (10) Whilst there were 6203 schemes in total, over half of these were from Hengrove and Temple Quarter – there were also smaller community led schemes for 1748 affordable homes;
- (11) A new Housing Delivery Company was being set up to project manage housing on land;
- (12) Issues relating to the legal options and relationship with the Council (ie shares, community interest etc) would be considered in a report to Cabinet in February 2017;
- (13) 6 empty properties had been let to housing charities on a peppercorn rent;
- (14) The Council was also focusing on long-term voids and how to provide more structured temporary accommodation (ie in a block rather than singly), as well as re-engineering the way tenants were supported to intervene at the earliest possible opportunity to prevent eviction;
- (15) It was estimated that 250 families would be affected by a benefit cap. This could be a problem in early 2017;
- (16) Officers were working with landlords across the city to carry out necessary improvements on properties;
- (17) There was also a rogue landlord programme which included the extension of HMO's to smaller units and the adoption of a lettings charter;
- (18) The Bristol Living Rent was being set up as a means of getting balanced communities and avoid demeaning people;



- (19) Other key areas of work included balancing the HRA, further work in tenant involvement and empowerment, work with areas such as health and sustainability, increasing density and urbanisation, as well as a piece of research to assess how realistic viability assessments were. The administration would like viability assessments to be made public;
- (20) It was important to build the right housing for the right people in the city. The Council could learn a lot from places such as Germany, France and the Netherlands to increase property numbers, whilst ensuring communities had control of schemes, that existing standards were maintained and that environmentally sustainable schemes were created;
- (21) It was important to obtain the maximum value from land.

Scrutiny Commission Members made the following comments:

- (22) Work was required to stop private landlords converting properties into HMO's simply to increase profit at the expense of families who could end up being evicted;
- (23) Whilst there were 521 families in temporary accommodation, there were 513 void properties which could virtually solve this problem;
- (24) Pre-exit interviews of tenants would help with re-lets of properties;
- (25) There was a lot of temporary accommodation in Fishponds, some of which was poor quality. Consideration should be given to the possible use of new temporary build and to creating affordable starter homes in the social housing sector – the lack of affordable housing in schemes such as the upcoming Chocolate Factory planning application was a sign that this needed to be addressed;
- (26) Further work was required in terms of issues of viability and affordability and the standards that needed to be met, as well as to the need to link number of properties to issues such as density, quality and community;
- (27) It was important to use the board consensus that existed across all political parties on this issue to lobby Central Government for change.

In response to Scrutiny Commission Members' questions, the Cabinet Member for Homes made the following points:

- (28) If proof of tenants' regular payments could be shown, this could underpin a mortgage application and would remove rental properties from the system and free up properties;
- (29) Work was being carried out with landlords to reduce the number of properties converted into HMO's;
- (30) There were 4 million people living in temporary accommodation but since about half in work, if a means could be found to make it affordable for them to live in permanent housing, this would save money;
- (31) A report would be submitted to the Cabinet Member in December 2016 which examining schemes with properties built with timber frames in Brighton and Kent;
- (32) A scheme of land aid was being developed for early 2017 by which a Property Developers Trust would use money to pay for property developers;



(33) Since developers were able to make a 20% profit before a scheme became viable, the process was heavily stacked in favour of developers. In certain instances, both he and the Mayor had discussed schemes with developers if they felt further affordable housing could be provided;

(34) A compulsory purchase scheme across the city in certain situations was being considered.

Officers made the following points:

(35) Whilst 4 years ago there were 3,000 social rented homes, these numbers had now decreased to 1600/1700;

(36) The Credit Agency Experion was including rent re-payments as part of their credit rating for people trying to get permanent accommodation.

10 Work Programme

The Chair referred to the Work Programme. Whilst he indicated that it was now more populated than before, more items were still required. He indicated that he was happy to listen to any suggestions to add to it and stated that he would call an additional meeting of the Spokespersons if he felt this was useful.

He confirmed that some of the spare capacity for the March and April 2017 meetings was likely to be used for items such as libraries.

The following issues were raised as suggested items for inclusion in the Work Programme:

(1) Hot Food Takeaways – An assessment of work carried out by other Local Authorities On Their Impact

ACTION: Romaine De Fonseca to add to Work Programme

(2) Trees and Vegetation – Community Involvement and Development of a Tree Management Policy

The Council needed to consider the relationship between communities and trees on Council land, as well as a lack of funding for a Tree Management Policy. It was important to get communities more closely involved in certain issues such as the management of vegetation in particular areas of land.

ACTION: Jo Sergeant to clarify details with Anthony Negus and subsequent to this, Romaine De Fonseca to add to Work Programme

(3) Neighbourhoods Services – Corporate Plan (Include as part of the Finance Update report on Thursday 26th January 2017)

ACTION: Romaine De Fonseca to Add to Work Programme

There was also discussion concerning an item currently on the Work Programme relating to the Bristol Waste Company which would be considered by the Scrutiny Commission on Friday 24th February 2017. It



was noted that this item would discuss progress concerning the development of the 10 Year Contract, household waste and issues relating to waste generally (such as Performance Indicators).

11 Urban Parishes - For Information

Members received the above report for information

12 Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the next meeting is scheduled for 2pm on Thursday 26th January 2017.

Meeting ended at 12.10 pm

CHAIR _____

