

# Bristol City Council

## Minutes of the Growth and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission



14 September 2020 at 5.30 pm

### Members Present:-

**Councillors:** Paula O'Rourke (Chair), Fabian Breckels (Vice-Chair), Mark Bradshaw, Tom Brook, Martin Fodor, Kevin Quartley, Jon Wellington, Mark Weston, Mark Wright and Tim Rippington

### 1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed the attendees. The meeting was conducted via video conference.

### 2. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies were received from:

- Cllr Carole Johnson
- Stephen Peacock (Executive Director - Growth & Regeneration)

### 3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

### 4. Annual Business Report

As per the recommendations in the report, Members noted the following:

- The Commission's Terms of Reference and that the two future meeting dates in 2021 were to be confirmed.

It was also noted that Cllr Rippington's name was missing from the list of Commission Members.



## 5. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a correct record.

## 6. Chair's Business

There was no Chair's business.

## 7. Public Forum

Public Forum questions and statements were published prior to the meeting and can be viewed [here](#)

Questions 1-4: Suzanne Audrey did not attend the meeting.

Question 5. Cllr Clive Stevens was in attendance and thanked officers for the reply to his original question. His supplementary questions were as follows:

Supplementary Question 1: In the final line of the officer reply it was highlighted that 'affordable housing would be delivered in other local authority areas in the West of England facilitated by the Duty to Cooperate' and that the new Planning White Paper discusses potentially removing this duty. Cllr Stevens asked Officers if they could give an indication if they thought this was a good thing or a bad thing.

The Director of Development of Place responded to the question by saying that the answer was linked to the replacement of the Joint Spatial Plan (JSP) and the Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). So, South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) and Bristol with the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) have already committed to jointly producing the plans together. So arguably the actual duty to cooperate isn't that critical. There was however a need to revisit the evidence that the numbers were based on because it's possible that the numbers have now increased. The duty to cooperate was more relevant to North Somerset however but it was understood that they had committed to work alongside the other local authorities on this. Officers were still working on the basis that it is still a requirement though and are looking across West of England (WoE) to address the total number.

Cllr Stevens Supplementary Question 2: With regards to the Planning White Paper and the indication of 25% being removed from the 'developer funding' for affordable rented housing and using it to subsidise purchases .i.e. allowing people to buy houses cheaper. How did officers think this might affect the Councils ability to meet the required numbers?

The Director of Development of Place responded by saying that this would likely cause an impact in the WoE because the housing need was for 'social rented housing' and that a change to subsidise purchases therefore wouldn't address the locally identified need.



Statement 1: David Redgewell attended the meeting and summarised his statement which focussed mainly on local bus services and the need for a review of the network.

Statement 2: Cllr Stevens's statement focussed on the Planning White Paper.

**RESOLVED – that the public forum business be noted.**

## 8. Performance Report Quarter 1

The Strategic Intelligence & Performance Manager briefly introduced the Q1 Performance Measures Report and responded to queries from Members. The key points discussed were as follows:

- BCPC425 Increase the number of affordable homes delivered in Bristol: Members were keen to ask about this indicator but were requested to postpone questions on this subject until the Housing Delivery Update item on the meeting agenda.
- DGRC120 Road Safety: reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic incidents: Members asked why only annual targets were provided for this indicator and therefore no comparative data. Officers said they would provide comparative data from the previous year against this year's figure for Members.  
**ACTION: Officers agreed to provide data from the previous year against this year's figure for Members to compare against.**
- BCPC434 Reduce the proportion of deaths attributed to particulate air pollution: Members commented that the data didn't appear to have a clear start time and so asked how this indicator was being measured. Officers said that the target relies on Public Health England (PHE) data. This is annual data and so wasn't due at Q1. Officers would check what was available and feedback to Members.  
**ACTION: Officers to feedback any data that can be obtained from PHE**
- BCP428 Increase annual revenue generated from the council's investment estate: Members commented on the loss in rental incomes of the period and asked if the Council's property strategy needed to be re-looked in in light of Covid-19. Officers said that the question needed to be directed to the specific service that covered this. The Chair agreed and said it would be something to pick up with Officers at the next opportunity.
- Members enquired whether the figures reported that say 57% of indicators were above target and 43% were below target were good or not. Officers said the figures were an improvement on last years.  
**ACTION: Officers to provide previous summary data for Members to compare against.**



## 9. Risk Report Quarter 1

The Director of Development of Place introduced the report and responded to queries from Members. The key discussion points were as follows:

- The failure to meet income targets was as a result of COVID-19. Members were informed this figure included all of the Council's income streams not just property.
- Further questions were asked about the Council's sources of income. It was asked how if the Council is committed to improving air quality it can continue its apparent dependency on income from car parking. A Member said that in their view it didn't make sense and it created a tension between congestion and clean air. Officers agreed that this did need to be looked at there would need to be a re-think of how to rebalance things and look at new ways of funding as the number of cars travelling in to the city centre reduced.
- GDRR10 Failure to deliver enough affordable Homes to meet the City's needs: Members stated they had raised concerns about the Council being able meeting its targets before the pandemic.
- GDRR14: Delivery of the Future Parks Project: Members appreciated that this indicator came under the Communities Scrutiny Commission but requested it was noted that the explanation in the report did not in their view make sense. **ACTION: Officers to feedback this point.**

### Mayor's Climate Emergency Action Plan

The Service Manager for Sustainable City and Climate Change introduced the item to Members and explained the progress that had been made on the key actions in the Mayor's Climate Emergency Action Plan and the work undertaken to develop the Bristol City Council Climate Change Programme for consideration by Cabinet in November 2020.

- Strategic leadership is provided by the One City Environment Board (OCEB). This is now complimented by an independent Bristol Advisory Climate Change Committee (BACCC).
- The One City Climate Strategy is a key piece of work for the OCEB and provides a comprehensive assessment of the emissions and climate vulnerability of the City as well as setting out the strategy for a carbon neutral and climate resilient city.
- Promotion of the strategy and development of delivery plans had been delayed due to Covid-19. However as the City moves from response to recovery phase there were now opportunities to re-open many of the conversations.
- A 3 year communication and engagement plan is being developed.
- The Council has an important role to lead by example where it can and so the Mayor had previously set a target for the Council to be carbon neutral by 2025 (scope 1 and 2 emissions). Officers said they are quantifying some of the details but good progress has been made in recent years by reducing them by 80%. Now however came the most difficult bit which was the last 20%.

The Chair thanked officers for the all information that had been provided. The following points were then discussed:



- A Member said that they had been provided with a lot of information, evidence and data at the meeting and at Members Briefings. He agreed with the plans for education and training but said he was slightly concerned about the One City Climate Strategy in that it appeared to be 'lots of good sounding proposals but not so many actual commitments for action'. Was there a risk that some actions in the strategies would not be delivered and could officers provide firm assurance they would be? Officers said that the Mayors Action Plan was about responding to the emergency and enabling work to happen. Also, the One City Climate Strategy was a much longer-term document. There will also be a number of delivery plans, for example on housing and transport with specific projects.
- Members asked about the last 20% of carbon neutrality that officers had said was the hardest part to achieve. Did this mean that the City Council had already achieved an 80% reduction in the emissions? Officers said yes that was correct for our direct emissions (Scope 1&2) but it didn't include procurement of goods and services or the Council's Capital Programme which were not part of the 2025 target.
- Members asked if a data 'dashboard' had or would be developed for this work given it is such a collaborative piece of work? Officers said yes they were currently looking into creating one. Roughly speaking the current Government targets are for the UK to be carbon neutral in 30 years' time for half of its emissions. But the Motion passed at Full Council was for the Council to try to achieve that 3 times as fast and 2 or 3 times as much, because it includes the indirect emissions not just the direct ones from energy, transport etc. So the job for Bristol was said to be 6-9-times bigger than the national target. The scale of the challenge and whether or not it can be achieved will partly depend on how quickly people can be mobilised to rapidly accelerate the action and turn them in specific interventions.
- The Government had announced billions of pounds of investment funding for retrofitting home grants and officers anticipate that there may be further announcements in the Autumn Statement. However officers want to ensure Bristol home owners and landlords are well placed to access the grants and the Bristol supply-chain is able to provide those services. However, officers said that even if say for arguments sake, Bristol residents were able to secure all of the billions of pounds of Government funding it would still not be enough funding to complete the work.
- Officers were asked to clarify the elected Member representation on the two key groups that were being discussed i.e. One City Environment Board (OCEB) and the Bristol Climate Advisory Committee (BCAC). It was said that councillors are not members of OCEB but it is currently co-chaired by Mayor and that there were no political representatives BCAC it was instead a grouping of academics, scientists and technical experts.
- Members asked about the climate change training that were referred to in the presentation slides and asked for the purpose of the training to be further clarified? Was it to explain the problems to people or to help with the solutions and should this be more outreach work with communities? Officers said that it would be aimed at colleagues and there were three layers to it 1) awareness and knowledge 2) solutions and approaches 3) leadership within the organisation and championing issues. It was agreed that due to the range of knowledge and experience that different councillors have Member training should be more bespoke in future. Officers said this was something that they wanted to discuss with Members because they were keen to design something that is useful, practical and provides the tools required.



- Members asked about the £3M in the Councils financial reserves that had been earmarked for the action plan and asked if it was possible that could now be taken away given the financial deficits the Council now faced? Officers said they were referring to the Council budget where this was allocated earlier in the year and that a proposal for cabinet in November was being developed.

The Chair commented on the amount of positive work that had been done. Officers were thanked for their time.

## 10 Housing Delivery Update

The Head of Housing Delivery introduced themselves and also the Strategy & Enabling Manager for Housing Delivery. It was said that both officers had recently joined the now enlarged Housing Delivery Team in order to address issues with the delivery of affordable housing.

The Strategy & Enabling Manager for Housing Delivery took Members through the published presentation slides which provided an overview of forecasts of affordable housing delivery over the next 3 years and the actions being taken to meet future housing targets.

It was stated that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on housing delivery in general and there was now a 6 month lag on previous targets. Further details about the reasons for this were included in the presentation slides.

There is currently what was described as a 'hot housing market' because of measures such as the temporarily reduced stamp duty rates. However, when measures such as the furlough scheme come to an end and there were risks of more redundancies that could cause the housing market slowing down. That would likely have a negative effect on the number of affordable Houses being built and shared ownership schemes available.

Officers explained what action was being taken in order to meet future house targets, such as securing as much Section 106 (S106) funding as possible, unblocking any blockages, utilising grant funding and enabling land release where possible. The Council had also recently released 2 sites to Gorum Homes and were working with them to see how they could support and accelerate delivery on those sites.

The following points were discussed:

Members thanked officers for the information and said it was impressive that was such a lot going on. However, was there a case of optimism bias in the report because the figures were forecasts and the actual number of houses built could still be very different? Officers said yes the figures were forecasts but were based on the most up-to-date intelligence that was available. They were about to produce a Quarter 2 data return which would show how on track things were and as time goes on it will be possible to be more confident about the figures.

It was asked if Officers had some information on previous forecasts and actual delivery so it could be seen if there had been optimism bias in previous years forecasting. Officers did then provide Members with some historical information to determine if this had been the case. It was said that the data reflected 2



main points; one was the cyclical nature of affordable housing (AH) delivery and also the impact of the economy on the housing development process. It was said that affordable housing was much more easily delivered in volume when there is significant grant funding available.

The point about optimism bias in the data was reiterated by another Member who said he had little confidence that original targets would have been reached and that he nervous that he was being told everything is in-hand when actually in his view it was not.

The Chair asked if officers had the information on all previous housing delivery forecasts as well as AH delivery. Officers said they didn't have that information with them but would provide it to Members after the Meeting.

**ACTION: Officers agreed to provide further information about all housing delivery data compared with previously forecast figures for the same period after the meeting.**

Officers were asked what percentage of the AH homes would be built on brown-field sites? The Head of Housing Delivery said they didn't have that information to hand but they could provide it after the meeting.

**ACTION: Officers to provide the figures on the percentage of AH that will be built on brown-field sites.**

The Chair asked about Gorum Homes and commented that the 2 projects looked promising. Officers agreed and said that they were working hard with Gorum Homes at moment because it was a good delivery route. It was asked if there would be more sites in future. Officers said yes they were currently de-risking one site and there would be a number of other sites in future.

The Members thanked Officers for their time and the information provided.

## 11 Planning for the Future - Government White Paper

The Service Manager for Strategic City Planning introduced the item to Members by stating that the Government was consulting on two key documents published on 6th August 2020:

- Planning for the Future White Paper deadline for comment by 29th October
- Changes to the current planning system for comment by 1st October 2020

In summary the headline proposals of the White Paper were said to address:

- the preparation of Local Plans – timing, content and process
- Planning applications and decisions
- Development contributions and delivery

The headline proposals of the changes to the current planning system were said to address:

- The 'standard method' for calculation of the housing need number for Bristol
- The delivery and form of affordable homes



- The use of the 'Permission in Principle'

The changes include a revised 'standard method' to calculate housing numbers required in each area. In Bristol this could mean that the housing 'need' figures could increase from the former Joint Spatial Plan figure which was 11,000 new homes to the current standard method now is 23,000 to new figures of 24,900 built in the next 10 years.

The following points were discussed:

A Member highlighted that there didn't appear to be anything included about 'space standards' or 'land banking' and said this appeared to be a potential 'power grab' that would completely centralise the UK's planning system.

The term 'fast-track for beauty' was thought to be subjective and could lead to a loss of democratic control away from local authorities and communities.

Members queried the point that stated 'design codes will be more binding on planning decisions' and how this could in reality be agreed. It was likened to processes in America and questioned whether the UK would really want such a process here. It was suggested that the design codes could also undermine professional architects.

The Chair asked the other Members to consider if they wished to write a joint response to either of the consultations. A discussion then ensued about this.

Members generally agreed that as the papers currently stand they would be very challenging. One Member said they had previously written an article in the local media about this very subject because of the number of concerns they had.

Members generally agreed they could write a cross-party response to the consultation.

The Director of Development of Place said that officers shared some of the same concerns as Members. However, she asked them to consider whether there was anything that they thought was good or useful in the two documents. For example, it was highlighted that the paper did appear to recognise that the process of producing Local Plans was in reality far too long. This recognition that some processes don't work well was potentially very helpful and it could be something that was feedback by Members if they submitted a statement.

Another Member said that they agreed with the sentiments expressed by others Members but highlighted there was a Local Plan Working Group (LPWG) that would also be looking at these same papers and they would very likely be making a statement as well. They also commented that in their view that previous changes to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) had not been an improvement because most funding is now held centrally and that the previous Section 106 policy had worked better for the communities directly affected by property developments. In their view there were challenges with the papers but he didn't think that very much would survive the parliamentary process anyway.





The Cabinet Member for Spatial Planning and City Design commented that although the officer presentation had been very detailed she recommended the Commission Members read the whole of the White Paper. She said it was clearly not the answer to everything but supposed to stimulate debate. For example she thought it jumped to outcomes with no details of processes and they currently didn't say anything about industry or employment or other challenges across the city, it was very housing focussed. It was suggested that Members consider which elements of the papers, if any, they could work with in principle.

It was suggested that the Commission could potentially feed into the statement that LPWG will be making.

**ACTION: Members to agree if or how they would like to respond to the consultations.**

## **12 Work Programme**

Members noted the Work Programme.

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

