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Bristol City Council Minutes of the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission



24 April 2017 at 10.00 am

Members Present:-

Councillors: Martin Fodor, Carole Johnson (Vice-Chair), Matt Melias, Marg Hickman, Steve Jones (part), Anthony Negus(Chair), Jo Sergeant, Jon Wellington

Officers in Attendance:-

Alison Comley (Strategic Director - Neighbourhoods), (part) Nick Hooper (Service Director Strategic Housing), Gemma Dando (Acting Service Director), Richard Fletcher (Area Manager, Environmental Management) , Teija Ahjokoski (Head Gardener, Horticultural Improvements), David Bunting (Transport), Kate Murray (Service Manager Libraries), Kirsty Stillwell (Corporate Communications), Lucy Fleming (Scrutiny Co-ordinator), Romaine de Fonseca (Policy Advisor)

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

All parties were welcomed to the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mhairi Threlfall.

3. Declarations of Interest

Declarations of interest were received from Cllr Negus in respect of: being a member of the Tree Forum; being a ward councillor for Cotham with respect to Item 9 on the agenda: being a member of Bristol Buildings Preservation Trust.

Declarations of interest were received from Cllr Fodor in respect of being a member of the Downs Committee and having attended the Tree Forum.

4. Chair's Business

The Chair advised that he had met with the Mayor to discuss taking forward the Commission's work with supermarkets, The Mayor had acknowledged that his response had omitted the issues of food waste and packaging and that the response would be rephrased. An officer had been designated to take the lead in liaising with supermarkets (and Cllr Negus would join this group) and with Core Cities.

5. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 31st March 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the following alterations:

- (1) Minute Number 6 – Chair’s Business – Added at end of (1) “..to augment the knowledge on all forms and opportunities for community structures.”
- (2) Minute Number 7 – Council Tax Reduction Scheme - “£13,000” amended to read “£13,500”. Point 2, in “£6c million” delete the “c. Point 3b, wording after “for those of working age” deleted.
- (3) Minute number 8 – points 1 and 4, the word “points” to be replaced with “libraries”.
- (4) Minute number 9 – Neighbourhood Partnerships – Point 3a, “replacement body” replaced with “continuation body”. Councillors comments Point 2, added at end “Distribution of CIL required to be to Neighbourhood Partnerships where they exist.”
- (5) Minute number 10 – Hot Food Takeaways – “Note” in bold text, point a) deleted.

6. Public Forum

Members noted the following statements and questions (together with answers) and which had been received for this meeting, details of which are available in the Minute Book:

	STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY:	AGENDA ITEM
1	Vassili Papastavrou, Vice Chair Bristol Tree Forum	Agenda Item 7 – Tree Service
2	Cllr Clive Stevens	Agenda Item 7 – Tree Service
3	Julie Hart, Chair, Redland May Fair Committee	Agenda Item 8 – Parks Service
4	Cllr Donald Alexander	Agenda Item 8 – Parks Service
5	Pesticide Safe Bristol Alliance	Agenda Item 9 – Glyphosate-Free Trial
6	Cllr Donald Alexander	Agenda Item 7 – Tree Service
7	Nick Mole, Pesticide Action Network UK	Agenda Item 9 – Glyphosate-Free Trial
8	Cllr Carla Denyer	Agenda Item 9 – Glyphosate-Free Trial
9	Thomas Beale	Agenda Item 8 – Parks Service
10	David Redgewell	Agenda Item 8 – Parks Service

	QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY:	AGENDA ITEM
1	Vassili Papastavrou, Vice Chair Bristol Tree Forum	Agenda Item 7 – Tree Service
2	Councillor Clive Stevens	Agenda Item 7 – Tree Service
3	Pesticide Safe Bristol Alliance	Agenda Item 9 – Glyphosate-Free Trial

The following supplementary questions were submitted:

- a) *Question:* Cllr Clive Stevens (Agenda Item 7) - Do officers think that adequate consultation has been done on this proposal? *Response:* Officers agreed that a written response would be provided after consultation with Legal.

Action: Alison Comley to liaise with Strategic Director (Place) to provide response.

- b) *Question:* Vassili Papastavrou (Agenda Item 7) – How many tree stumps are awaiting replacement? Is it correct that no new street trees will be planted? *Response:* Officers advised that 1028 stumps

were awaiting replacement, and confirmed that any existing commitments would be honoured e.g. trees from Neighbourhood Partnership budgets due to be planted this season or next.

7. Tree Services

(Cllr Steve Jones entered the meeting partway through this item at 11.00am)

Following an introduction from officers the following points were made:

- There was a general consensus amongst members that this was a very short sighted proposal, which could incur long term costs and increase health and safety risks such as branches falling. These risks should be flagged on the Risk Register as a serious risk to public safety.
Action: Alison Comley
- There had been no consultation on this proposal as far as members are aware.
- It was unclear what happens when planting misses the end of the season i.e. whether the proposed planting is then carried over to the next season.
- The total cost to the Council of this proposal would need to include the impact of flood risk management, tourism and amenities, as well as the long terms costs incurred by lack of regular maintenance.
- Not all residents have the same views on trees – trees have a different impact in some areas, for example, causing loss of light, excessive leaf fall etc.
- We should consider whether the Tree Policy is relevant to all communities across Bristol. Members agreed that the policy should be reviewed, possibly as part of a task and finish group.
- Consideration should be given to how best to support communities to become actively involved in managing vegetation themselves if services are to be reduced in future.
- It was clarified that Bristol Waste Company are responsible for clearing leaves from streets.
- It is unclear how much is the “balance” of the budget that is coming from Parks (as opposed to the amount from Highways as detailed in the report.)
- Councillors are informed about tree felling but not about maintenance works – consideration should be given as to how/whether/to whom maintenance works are notified in future.

Resolved:

- (1) That a review of the Tree Policy be taken forward for consideration for the 2017/18 work programme, potentially as a task and finish group.**

8. Parks Service

Officers introduced the item making the following comments:

- This was a genuine attempt to collate a full list of options to achieve our goal of cost neutrality for the parks service within three years - although not all items will make it to the final list of options we have included all here in the interests of transparency. We have not yet assessed which options will be commercially viable.
- Visits have taken place to other authorities including Nottingham and Sheffield.
- Officers were aiming to strike a balance between maximising income without impacting negatively on residents.
- This will be the start of an ongoing conversation with members. We are hoping to have some tangible validated options by summer.

The following points were made as part of the ensuing discussion:

- Services provided in parks need to be competitive and charges levied by the council should be tailored to the type of operator i.e. commercial operator or community organisation.
- Barriers to providing services (eg. at Blaise) need to be addressed.
- Parking charges can raise revenue but we must be mindful of the possible effect on local residents. Mitigation options need to be explored.
- The option of selling bottled water is inconsistent with the council's desire to reduce waste.
- Although community groups will get a 50% reduction their fees will still be doubling which will impact on small community events in particular.
- Account must be taken of the impact of paying or private events on general public access to parks and potential disruption of peace and quiet for local residents.
- What is the preferred model? Should there be a central unified body or should individual areas have more autonomy? The former may suit the Council better but maybe not the localities. It needs to be set out as to how commercialised the approach will be.
- Two missed opportunities that should have been included in the report: firstly, the use of parks should be considered as a means of energy generation; secondly, charging for the impact of public/paying events (e.g. Arcadia in Queens Square).
- Appendix 1: It was clarified that EG16 refers to £2m capital fund for parks which is to be used to invest in parks and green spaces to enable income generation. GE01 and GE02 will be clarified via written response.

Action: Gemma Dando

- Officers confirmed that Bristol is aiming to develop a close "critical friend" working relationship with the National Trust and this work is ongoing.
- Ashton Court was not making any profit and the weddings business was being wound down, this would save £120,000. There was no longer any commercial expertise in-house. When looking at a future new model, issues around flexibility and responsiveness were important. Report from 2014 to be circulated to members.

Action: Gemma Dando

9. Cotham Trial for Glyphosate-Free Weed Treatment – Outcome Report

Officers introduced the report making comments as follows:

- The original aim was to trial different methods of control. There were questions about safety of glyphosate and affordability of alternative methods, and our aim is to reduce the use of chemicals.
- The conclusions are that glyphosate it is not dangerous enough to cease use, and that other solutions have financial or environmental cost issues e.g. in terms of water or energy use required.
- Only methods that were affordable could be trialled, so we were unable to use e.g. foam stream machines. The trial therefore compared glyphosate with acetic acid.
- Glyphosate attacks the roots and kills the whole plant whereas acetic acid does not act in the same way. Non-chemical methods such as digging out weeds have been tried but are far more labour intensive. There are no other licensed products that are more effective.

Councillors noted this report and made the following comments with officers responding as indicated:

- It was suggested that the use of wire brushes, although used elsewhere, would be prove difficult in Bristol due to access problems caused by parked cars etc.

- The Chair requested responses to questions in Public Forum Statement No.8 (Cllr Carla Denyer).
Question 1: Recommendation is that the trial is extended in Parks for a further 12 months – members should note that there is no authority to include Highways in this.
Question 2: Parks are hoping to be part of the trial using pelargonic acid. Although this has recently been approved for use in the EU, each country must then approve it individually for its own use. Certain types of use have recently been approved in the UK.
Question 3: The proposed pelargonic acid trial should be given greater prominence. The preferred approach would be to include public highways in the trial as well as Parks, although this would need to be agreed to by Highways.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Commission recommends that a cost-neutral trial be carried out with pelargonic acid on an area of highways of enough scale to ensure that the trial is credible.**
- (2) The Service Manager to take forward for discussion with Highways.**

10. Work Programme

The Work Programme was agreed as it was presented.

The Chair thanked everyone for their work this year and noted that the future scrutiny structure was as yet undecided. Members commented that the knowledge and expertise of councillors in the areas under scrutiny had grown over the course of the year. It was agreed that members would continue to informally network amongst themselves pending the new scrutiny structure.

- 11. (Item for information) Preventing Homelessness – Accommodation Pathways Commissioning Plan – Adults and Families**
- 12. (Item for information) Homelessness Prevention and Reduction**

With regard to Items 11 and 12, the Chair stated that he would email the Service Director (Housing Programmes) with a number of queries. The responses could then be reported back via an appendix to the minutes, when these are published.

Action: Cllr Negus

The meeting closed at 1.00pm.

CHAIR _____