

# Bristol City Council Minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Commission

3 October 2022 at 1.00 pm



## **Members Present:-**

**Councillors:** Barry Parsons (Chair), Martin Fodor and Gary Hopkins

## **1 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information**

The Chair welcomed the attendees. Housekeeping information was shared. It was noted that the meeting had been rescheduled due to the public mourning period of Her Majesty the Queen.

## **2 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Cllr Michallat, with Cllr Weston attending as a substitute; from Cllr Scott, with Cllr Eddy attending as a substitute; from Cllr Edwards with Cllr Francis attending as substitute, from Cllr Bailes, and from Cllr Ali.

## **3 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations were received.

## **4 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Minutes were approved as an accurate record.

Matters Arising included:



Item 12; Community Asset Transfers. The Minutes noted that the Commission intended to continue to monitor the issue of Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) and the fact that some properties would require support in obtaining these. A Member noted that there was a presumption that this had not been sufficiently addressed and that the issue persisted.

Item 12; Community Asset Transfers. The Minutes noted that there was agreement that social value exceeded the narrow interpretation of 'value'. A Member suggested that more effort should be made to track and establish the value of contributions to determine a more accurate value.

The Chair noted that Community Asset Transfers had been recorded as an item to add to a potential future work programme where the issues raised could be considered.

**RESOLVED; That the Minutes of the previous meeting be approved, and that Matters Arising be noted.**

## 5 Action Tracker

The Action Tracker was received. All actions from the 2021/22 year were noted as completed.

## 6 Chair's Business

The Chair requested that Officers present their reports in plain language with acronyms and jargon explained.

It was noted that the Q4 2021-22 Performance Report and Q1 Risk Register were information items only.

## 7 Public Forum

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

Ron Heath representing the Allotment Forum submitted a Public Forum question regarding Item 11, Update to Allotments and Food Growing Strategy, and received a written response from Officers. A supplementary question was raised noting that some interested parties may have concerns regarding the achievability of a 15 year strategy, and asked what assurances could be provided. Officers responded that any specific concerns would be welcomed, and that with such a long time period updates and refinements would be expected in due course. It was noted that this policy was in the early stages of development and work with Scrutiny was considered part of the development process. If it was felt that the Policy was not working, then the Communities Scrutiny Commission would be an appropriate forum to address that.



Frances Robertson representing the Friends of Badock's Wood submitted ten Public Forum questions regarding Item 11, Update to Parks and Green Spaces Strategy, and received written responses from Officers.

A supplementary comment to question 7 clarified that the assessment referred to was an Equalities Assessment produced in 2016, and it was requested that sight should not be lost of this work.

A supplementary question following question 9 was raised asking how the strategy would ensure the revenue would be for the benefit of all parks, including those that could not generate income. Officers stated that the Parks revenue budget was spread across the full estate and had no allocations by individual park. It was requested that this be clarified and enshrined in the final strategy.

Len Wyatt representing the Bristol Parks Forum Committee submitted eight Public Forum questions regarding Item 11, Update to Parks and Green Spaces Strategy, and received written responses from Officers. No supplementary questions were raised.

Martyn Cordey submitted a Public Forum statement which was presented to the Commission by Cllr Francis. It was noted that this statement was supported by a number of additional individuals and organisations.

Frances Robertson presented a Public Forum statement.

Len Wyatt presented a Public Forum statement.

Julia Victor submitted a Public Forum statement which was presented to the Commission by Cllr Francis.

The Commission noted the submitted Public Forum statements.

**RESOLVED; That the Public Forum be noted.**

## **8 CSC Annual Business Report 22-23**

The Communities Scrutiny Commission Annual Business Report was received by the Commission. It was noted that the substance of the report had previously been approved by Cabinet.

The Chair asked the Commission to particularly consider the role of Scrutiny as a 'critical friend' and noted an intended collaborative approach. The necessity of the consideration of the Public Sector equality duty was also highlighted.

**RESOLVED; That the CSC Annual Business Report 2022-23 be received and noted.**

## **9 Bristol Housing Allocation Scheme Review**



The Head of Housing Options delivered the presentation on the Bristol Housing Allocation Scheme Review. Key points raised included:

- The Bristol Housing Allocation Scheme was under review with the intention to make improvements to the scheme, ensuring housing for those in the greatest need while recognising the limited housing stock available. The scheme had last been reviewed in 2014.
- The project had gathered input and developed proposals which had been adapted into a survey available as part of Public Consultation. The intention was to finalise the proposals and write the policy once the results of the survey were received and analysed.
- A 'Managed Choice' model had been proposed, which combined a Choice based approach to bids with a mix of Direct Offers.
- Further work around accessing existing housing stock (such as incentivising down-sizing) was intended, as well as ensuring that Banding prioritisation was appropriate.

Commission Members commented and raised questions regarding the report. The Head of Housing Options and Director of Housing and Landlord Services provided responses.

- A Member praised the intended Managed Choice approach, and queried to what extent factors such as local support networks or children in local schools were considered in placing people in their requested areas. Officers clarified that under the Choice based system that tenants could place bids according to their own requirements and were left to determine their own priorities, while it was recognised that those choices were limited due to the available stock. Officers were working on local lettings policies in order to support sustainable communities.
- A Member suggested consultation with veterans as a group of interest. Officers had developed good relationships with army charities, and veterans had been allocated additional priorities around housing.
- A Member noted that the existing approach to supporting tenants to downsize required improvement, with some tenants concerned that another property would not have the appropriate accommodations or be less hospitable. Officers had had discussions on this issue and were looking at restarting a 'downsizing pilot' to be more proactive in this area by working with existing tenants.
- A Member raised a concern about the proposal not to move tenants who display anti-social behaviour, as this can 'lock in' behaviour and disrupt a community. A move in those circumstances might be more beneficial. Officer discretion at each level of decision making was required. Officers stated that part of the consultation was around finding the appropriate balance between discretion and regulation; in the example of anti-social behaviour it would be expected that parallel enforcement action would also be taken but where this rose to the level of property loss this would of necessity be a long process and some action would need to be taken in the interim.



- A Member asked for further information around reducing waiting list demand. Officers stated that the review of bandings and proactive management of the Housing Register would provide reassurance that the top priorities were appropriate, then work would be undertaken to reduce demand by managing expectations for those on lower bandings who were less likely to be housed.
- The challenges of housing Care Leavers was raised, including instances where Care Leavers found themselves unable to manage a property and being forced into homelessness. Officers acknowledged these challenges and the importance of this work, and had worked closely with Social Care colleagues with a refreshed Housing offer for Care Leavers. This involved inter-departmental working to monitor Care Leavers' cases.
- A Member noted that there were both positives and negatives around local lettings policies, as it might have a knock-on effect on the mix of housing available across the city and the diversity of communities. Officers acknowledged this issue; local lettings policies should be discussed with Ward Councillors to ensure each is appropriate to its area.
- The Officers were congratulated for the clarity of choices and questions in the provided survey.
- It was queried why a fully managed Register /direct bid system had been rejected as an option considering the limited choices of available property, and whether there was a risk of this defaulting into a fully managed system if the refusal rate remained high. Officers responded that the Housing Register issues were a nationally recognised problem, but few Local Authorities had found it necessary to use a fully managed system, and the preference would always be to allow choice where possible. A priority was to be up front about the choices available and working to reduce refusals while being sensitive to the challenges of declined offers.
- A Member asked how the proposals would fit with Bristol City Council's wider objectives around homelessness prevention. Officers responded that homelessness prevention had been part of the discussions in developing the proposals, and part of the consultation focused on banding for those threatened with homelessness in order to prevent tenants becoming homeless.
- It was confirmed that the Housing Register was open to all Housing Associations through HomeChoice.
- A Member recommended proactively looking at private properties that could be used as part of an active rather than responsive approach, and recommended speaking to Councillors who may already have been made aware of appropriate properties. Officers noted this suggestion.
- A Member raised a concern about the mix of Housing stock being built. It was stated that Planning and Housing Development worked closely together and advocating for an appropriate mix of builds was one of the responsibilities. The Housing Register demonstrated the types of builds required.
- A Member queried whether there would be a benefit in providing a service to tenants who may have an interest in downsizing or moving but encountered barriers, i.e. were unsure how to commission work needed on a new property. Officers noted this suggestion.



- A Member requested further information about the impact of changes in prioritisation on existing applicants who may have protected characteristics. Officers responded that work with Care Leavers had already been referenced, and an Equalities Impact Assessment would be completed. More information could be provided after discussion with the Project Manager.

The Chair thanked Officers, and requested that further information be provided following the outcome of the consultation.

**RESOLVED; That Officers note the comments of the Communities Scrutiny Commission for consideration, including the requests i) to provide further information to Scrutiny once the outcomes of the consultation were known, ii) to provide further information around the impact of proposals and/or the Equalities Impact Assessment once completed.**

## **1 Parks and Green Space Strategy - Update Report**

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The Parks Services Manager and Parks Development Manager delivered the presentation on the Parks and Green Space Strategy Update. Key points raised included:

- A new parks and green space strategy was being developed to replace the existing strategy from 2008. Engagement with stakeholders had taken place through workshops and other research and the strategy was at the drafting stage.
- An overview of the Vision (“A city where everyone benefits from excellent quality parks and green spaces”), Guiding Principles, Priority Themes, and Attributes of a quality park were provided. These had been developed based on stakeholder input.
- The importance of Parks to the Health and Wellbeing of a population was emphasized.
- A new quality framework was being proposed.
- Mapping work was taking place around identifying the relationship between quality of parks and social need, and around assessing land use according to priority.
- The mapping work would contribute to quality improvement plans that prioritized the greatest needs.

Commission Members commented and raised questions regarding the report. The Director for Management of Place, Parks Services Manager and Parks Development Manager provided responses.

- It was noted that the information provided was high level and therefore difficult for Members to envision specific applications.
- A Member queried whether the strategy would provide a basis for the development of new parks, suggesting Temple Quarter as a potential area. Officers stated that the process for developing a new park would be included, but the first principle was to identify deficits through mapping and



address. There would be viability tests for development, and where a deficit was identified but new development not possible a second hierarchy providing other resources would be put in place. In the specific example of Temple Quarter another Member suggested that green space would be considered through the Local Plan.

- It was clarified that there was no intention to go to Consultation on the new strategy based on the existing engagement work that had already taken place. This had consisted of workshops / facilitated sessions on the suggested themes with stakeholders in attendance. The proposals had also been submitted to various relevant forums and committees. Officers emphasised that the work was deliberately being undertaken as part of a suite of other strategies in development (e.g., tree strategy, allotments strategy) so wider information had been gathered from other pieces of work. Members expressed disappointment over the lack of consultation, and identified interest groups (such as the Parks Forum) willingness to be involved.
- A separate discussion regarding previous funding commitments was held. It was agreed that the discussion was outside of the remit of the Communities Scrutiny Commission.
- The Green Flag standards was discussed intending that the new strategy will adopt this method as an independent measure of parks quality.
- Members recommended that the final strategy would need to be definitive about what would and would not happen and why; the information currently provided was not 'user friendly' about what actions could be taken by local neighbourhoods around their own parks. Officers clarified that the mapping work would help to clarify some of this with a technical overlaying of portfolios that describe opportunities on the ground. The Green Infrastructure Strategy would likely address local interpretations for specific neighbourhoods. Officers emphasised that the strategy was intended to clarify principles and an approach, not necessarily provide details for every parcel of land.
- A Member noted that in the previous strategy some amendments to sites were suggested that Councillors knew were likely to be unsuccessful in their aims (e.g., a youth shelter placed in woodland), and suggested that Councillors be consulted before similar amendments be made. Officers stated that that level of granularity would not be part of the new strategy, but instead show where health inequalities would point to high priority areas.
- A Member suggested clarifying that deprivation is not just economic but can also refer to lack of access. Officers noted this suggestion.
- Officers clarified that the standards for assessing provision had not fundamentally changed from the previous strategy. It was recommended that this be made explicit. Officers noted this suggestion.
- A Member noted that reference to children's play spaces should be included. Officers stated that the Green Flag standard requires these spaces, although this was not made clear. Officers noted the suggestion.
- Members of the public present for the meeting strongly urged reconsideration of a consultation, and this was supported by Members. One stakeholder who had attended the consultation



workshop had found that the process was not conducive to appropriate participation by restricting attendees with poor accessibility. Officers noted the feedback.

The Officers were thanked for the report and presentation.

**RESOLVED; That Officers note the comments of the Communities Scrutiny Commission for consideration, including recommendations to i) clarify deprivation of access as well as economic deprivation, ii) clarify that standards for provision would remain unchanged, iii) make references to children's play areas explicit, and iv) reconsider a consultation process.**

## **1 Allotments and Food Growing Strategy - Update Report**

### **1**

The Parks Services Manager delivered the presentation on the development of an Allotments and Food Growing Strategy. Key points raised included:

- A new Allotments and Food Growing Strategy for 2023-2028 was being developed, replacing the previous Allotments Strategy from 2009. The remit had been expanded to include smallholdings and other food growing locations.
- The strategy was being developed in parallel with the Parks and Green Spaces strategy which allowed for a wider land use assessment.
- The new strategy was intended to address the increase in demand and land pressures by considering a number of challenges by theme; these were identified through feedback with tenants and the Allotment Forum.
- Proposed themes included: Tenancy management; Site management; Community management; Managing for Nature; Managing for Climate Change; Supply and demand; Investment and sustainable finances; Sustainable food production; Health and wellbeing; Welcoming and accessible; Education and learning.

Commission Members commented and raised questions regarding the report. The Director for Management of Place and Parks Services Manager provided responses.

- Members welcomed the report and considered this timely.
- A Member requested further information on the use of phosphates in Allotments. Officers agreed to provide this information.
- Clarification was requested over the stakeholders that had been involved in land use discussions. Stakeholders included Bristol Food Producers, Bristol Food Network, and community food growing groups. It was noted that transparency over access was needed.
- A query was raised over any plans to expand the land made available for allotments and food growing. Officers responded that the mapping exercise to understand current use was intended to



help to increase land on existing spaces through tenancy management. Public open spaces had not been ruled out, and it was likely that there would be a hierarchy to release land.

- Members were unsurprised at the long waiting list as this matched their experiences. It was agreed that some Council investment would always be required.
- It was clarified that where animal smallholdings existed these were largely in sheds.
- A Member suggested that more could be done around considerations of accessibility and raised an example that changes to locks had prevented their use by people with limited mobility. Accessibility concerns were also raised around the hose pipe policy as some tenants were not able to carry water over distance. Members requested further discussion around the use of water butts.
- Members suggested that they may be able to provide information around potential sites, providing an example of a known privately owned area that could not be developed due to a Public Right of Way.
- Local Authority borders were discussed, as some sites are located close to or crossing borders and tenants may originate from inside and outside Bristol. A concern was raised regarding the language used to refer to 'Bristol citizens' as it may exclude some out of area users. Clarification of this was requested.

**RESOLVED; That Officers note the comments of the Communities Scrutiny Commission for consideration, including requests i) for further information regarding the use of phosphates, ii) to examine issues around accessibility, iii) to examine issues around water use, and iv) to clarify the reference to 'Bristol citizens' in reference to tenants and users.**

#### **1 CSC Performance Report Q4 2021-22**

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The Performance Report was noted for information.

#### **1 CSC Risk Report Q1 2022-23**

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The Risk Register was noted for information.

#### **1 Scrutiny Work Programme**

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The Work Programme was noted for information.



Meeting ended at 4pm

