

Notes

of the Informal Meeting of the

Place Policy and Scrutiny Panel Wednesday, 24th November 2021

held as a Virtual Meeting.

Meeting Commenced: 14:30 Meeting Concluded: 16:15

Councillors:

P John Crockford-Hawley (Chairman)

P Peter Crew

P Mike Bird

A Gill Bute

P John Cato

A James Clayton

A Sarah Codling

P Mark Crosby

P Karin Haverson

P Patrick Keating

P James Tonkin

A Richard Westwood

P: Present

A: Apologies for absence submitted

Also in attendance: Councillor Mike Solomon.

Officers in attendance: Lucy Shomali, Jo Jones, Gemma Dando, John Flannigan, Emma Wellard, Michael Reep, Richard Kent (Place); Leo Taylor, Brent Cross (Corporate Services)

PLA Notes of the Meeting held on 14 July 2021 (Agenda Item 2)

Resolved: that the notes of the meeting be approved.

PLA Month 5 Place Directorate Budget Monitor (Agenda Item 6)

As officers needed to attend another meeting, the Panel agreed that this item be moved forward.

The Finance Business Partner went through the Month 5 Place Budget Monitor report and highlighted the current predicted overspend of £1.856m. This was mostly the result of the Covid-19 pandemic impacts which were detailed in the report, although other pressures on the budget, such as the

increased demand on the Home to School Transport Service and reduced programme savings related to staffing, played a role. The Director of Place confirmed that the budget position statement for month 7, which was currently being worked on, showed that some of the deficits were decreasing and some of the overspends were expected to reduce through the year.

Members and officers then discussed: recovery of parking receipt and library service shortfalls and managing these through MTFP planning; whether parking charges across the district would be looked at over the long term; that the outsourced litter enforcement team was not yet making a surplus due to staffing issues, but that once a surplus was reached this would be shared with North Somerset Council; options were being explored with town and parish councils to share resourcing for assets such as street lighting, litter bins, dog waste bins and allotments; how the garden waste service income had exceeded anticipated targets, but a cost could be incurred in providing compensation for gaps in service; that ways to relieve pressure on the Home to School Transport Service were being explored and would be an area of focus for the coming year.

Concluded: that the report be noted, and comments sent to officers in the form of minutes.

PLA Rewilding and Great Lakes Update (Agenda Item 3)

The Community and Environment Service Manager updated the Panel on work being done on Rewilding and the Great Lakes Project.

In discussion, the following points were raised on rewilding: whether there had been any negative feedback from communities regarding tree planting work, and the resulting changes in policy that open spaces which were targeted for tree planting were now better signposted beforehand, and that communities that preferred their open spaces not be planted would have these rewilded instead; that the aim of the rewilding projects was to increase biodiversity and not to save the Council money by reducing maintenance; the success rate of tree planting and the impacts of vandalism; the feasibility of and costs associated with planting wild flowers instead of natural growth; the land targeted for rewilding, and the peatland recovery project with Natural England on moorland; whether tree planting or hedgerows could be part of planning policy for new developments under the new Local Plan; encouraging the planting of memorial and birth trees.

Members then discussed the Great Lakes Project and the following points arose: the importance of Weston Marine Lake being reopened by the summer season; that the MMO licence was expected to be granted around February, and the direction from consultants that the aim was to redistribute the estuary's silt budget from the Lake; that EDF were allocating some of their contractors to assist with work at Portishead Lake Grounds, and details on this were expected imminently; that as Portishead Lake Grounds was a freshwater lake, silt build-up could not be redistributed to the estuary and could potentially be used as topsoil depending on the level of pollutants.

Concluded: that the report be received, and comments sent to officers in the form of minutes.

PLA Libraries Strategy Update (Agenda Item 4)

The Head of Libraries and Community went through the update report on the Libraries Strategy, which reflected community needs pre-Covid and during the post-Covid recovery phase. She highlighted that the report covered activity in the first two quarters, as well as work done to secure funding from Arts Council England.

Discussion centred around: library support for speakers of other languages to further position libraries as learning spaces within communities; the possibility of using libraries as surgeries for town and District Councillors; the progress of the asset review, and the possibility of an Arts Centre in Nailsea; how S106 funds had been used for libraries; and the possible expansion of the music service in libraries.

Concluded: that the report be received, and comments sent to officers in the form of minutes.

PLA Local Plan Update (Agenda Item 5)

The Planning Policy Manager presented the report on the Local Plan, and reminded Members that the final report on the preferred option would go to the Executive Committee in February. He thanked the Community and Environment Service Manager for his input on the suggestion that a tree planting policy for new developments could be incorporated into the Local Plan, and would further investigate this. He drew attention to paragraph 3.9 of the report, which detailed critical issues that had been raised during the plan-making process, and asked the Panel to consider these.

In discussing the report, Members were concerned that there would be a perception that the public had not been consulted on the plan, and were assured that the draft plan would be consulted on in the new year, and again after the final draft plan had been written.

Members discussed how people could be informed that North Somerset Council had no control over the housing numbers allocated by national government.

Members also discussed the training for Members of the Planning and Regulatory Committee.

There was additionally to be an all-Member briefing on the Local Plan on the 1st of December.

Concluded: That the report be received, and comments sent to officers in the form of minutes.

PLA Place Panel Work Plan - November 2021 (Agenda Item 7)

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Panel's Work Plan and asked for Members' input into areas to focus on.

Members were reminded that the Highways and Transport Steering Group meeting was scheduled for the 1st of December, and that a working group to help inform the Annual Place Directorate Statement would be formed and meet imminently.

Concluded: that the work plan be updated, picking up actions and discussion outcomes from the present meeting.

Chairman
