

Minutes

of the Meeting of

The Placemaking, Economy and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Panel Monday, 31 July 2023

Kenn Room - Town Hall

Meeting Commenced: 10.00 am

Meeting Concluded: 11.50 am

Councillors:

John Crockford-Hawley (Chairperson)

Peter Crew
Ciaran Cronnelly
Patrick Keating
Bridget Petty
Helen Thornton
Joe Tristram

Apologies: None.

Absent: Councillors Ashley Cartman, Marcia Pepperall, Luke Smith, Timothy Snaden and Martin Williams.

Also in attendance: Councillors Steve Bridger, Peter Burden, Mark Canniford, Mike Solomon.

Officers in attendance: Richard Kent, Michael Reep, Jane Harrison, Luke Johnson, Jo Jones, Philippa Penney, Harriet Isherwood and Brent Cross.

PEP 1 Election of the Vice-Chairperson for the 2023/24 Municipal Year

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The Chairperson welcomed Members and officers to the meeting.

The Panel then nominated for the position of Vice-Chairman.

Recommended: that Councillor Peter Crew be elected as Vice-Chairman for the 2023/24 municipal year.

PEP 2 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

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None.

PEP 3 Addresses by Members of the Public (SSO 9)

3

None.

PEP 4 Declaration of disclosable pecuniary interest (Standing Order 37)

4

None.

PEP 5 Minutes

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Minutes of the Panel meeting held on 8 March 2023 – to approve as a correct record.

Concluded: that the minutes of the meeting of 8 March 2023 be approved as a correct record.

PEP 6 Matters referred by Council, the Executive, other Committees and Panels (if any)

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None.

PEP 7 Role, Remit and Work Plan of the Placemaking, Economy and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Panel

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The Chairman introduced the item, taking the report as read. Members would discuss the formation of any working groups by emails to the Chairman or Policy and Scrutiny Senior Officer following the meeting.

Concluded: that Members would discuss the formation of working groups after the meeting.

PEP 8 North Somerset Local Plan: progress update

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The Planning Policy Manager presented the report updating the Panel on the progress of the Local Plan before the consideration of the pre-submission document by the Executive in October 2023.

The steps leading up to this point were summarised to enable new Members of the Panel to gain some insight into progress thus far. Two significant issues arising from the government consultation on planning reforms related to the how the housing requirement should be calculated and what discretion there was for a local planning authority to depart from the standard method, and how local plans should address Green Belt and other constraints. It was also highlighted that some sites in the previous draft plan were likely to be undeliverable or unviable and the Regulation 19 draft would need to address this.

In discussion, the following topics were raised:

- The scale of the housing challenge and scope for a lower target in advance of the government's response to the consultation on planning reforms.
- There was no evidence that developers were land banking once planning permission had been granted, but all developments with planning permission had been identified in the figures for the Local Plan.

- The indication from the evidence was that the proposed 40% affordable housing target was unlikely to be viable. There was variance in viability across the district, and site-by-site viability assessments are made at the planning application stage, but this also needed to be balanced with wider infrastructure needs for a given development. Officers suggested that an informal briefing be held to update Members on this topic.
- There was currently no identified five-year housing supply, but this would be restored through the plan making process.
- The next step for the Local Plan will be approval of the pre-submission (Reg 19) version by the Executive Committee, followed by public consultation and then submission for independent public examination. The final stage would be the adoption of the plan by Council.
- An informal meeting be set up in September to further discuss the Local Plan and with all Members invited – hopefully once the government had published its response to consultation and revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework.

Concluded: that

- (i) the report be received, and comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes; and that
- (ii) an informal meeting be set up to brief all Members in September.

PEP 9 UK Shared Prosperity Fund Year 3 Allocation

The Head of Economy provided some background to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), explaining that it was formed to provide continuity with European Structural and Investment Funding following the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. The former Place Panel had been informally briefed on the year 2 allocations in January 2023, and this report would give details on the allocations for the £1.6m of funding for the third (out of three) year of this funding before sign-off by the Executive Committee in September.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund Programme Manager then went into detail, explaining the allocations and risks associated with the funding and the use of an external evaluator to monitor results and outcomes.

Members then discussed the following: the possible duplication of projects being organised by Town Councils (such as the Weston-super-Mare visitor engagement intervention using Visit West Membership); how future maintenance of projects such as improving hedge and tree planting would be funded; who was being targeted by the energy efficiency helpline, and how this was being measured; and that the Disability Access Forum be consulted on the plans for the Employment Support projects.

The Head of Economy suggested that an informal briefing be held for the Panel to look at case studies, the outcomes and delivery of the Year 2 allocations.

Concluded: that

- (i) the report be received, and comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes; and that
- (ii) an informal meeting be set up to brief all the Panel on the outcomes and delivery of the Year 2 UKSPF funding allocations.

PEP 10 Place Finance Update

The Finance Business Partner (Place) presented the report summarising the final out-turn position for 2022/23 and gave some detail on the current budget and associated risks for the 2023/24 financial year.

A large part of the Place Directorate budget had been allocated for contract payments, but external factors such as inflation and energy price increases had put pressure on this. Additionally, the Home to School Transport team had seen a large increase in demand. This along with inflationary pressure and staff shortages had led to an overspend of £1.2m. The directorate had however achieved most of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) savings and had been very successful at bidding for funding from national government and other partners.

The 2023/24 budget had growth of £2.2m which would go some way to alleviating the shortfalls encountered in 2023/23. Further MTFP savings had been built into the budget, although in future these would become increasingly difficult to make as the more obvious targets for savings had already been designated. The main challenge to this year's budget was that inflation was not coming down as fast had been previously predicted.

In discussion, the following points were raised: that there had been several vacant posts carried over the previous year, and that the use of consultancy and agency staff was mostly limited to capital projects and statutory services; whether the Home to School Transport could be fully brought back in house; that rarely one-off funding from the reserve budget was used to fund services; which services the income shortfalls affected; and that while there had been an overspend in 2022/23, there were positives in the budget.

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

Chairman
