

**Note of the meeting of the Working Group- options to strengthen  
community representation and civic governance within Bath  
held on Thursday, 22nd January, 2015  
in Council Chamber - Guildhall, Bath**

**Meeting Attendance**

<b>In Attendance</b>
Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones
Councillor Ian Gilchrist
Councillor Robin Moss
Councillor Anthony Clarke
Councillor Paul Crossley
Councillor Malcolm Lees
Councillor Brian Webber
Councillor Paul Myers
Councillor Tim Warren
Robin Kerr
Van DuBose
Dave Dixon
Mark Hayward
Ian Perkins
Andy Thomas
Nicolette Boater
Susan Bowen

<b>Apologies Received from</b>
Councillor Cherry Beath
Councillor John Bull
Councillor Francine Haeberling
Councillor Ben Stevens
Councillor Douglas Nicol
Jo Morrison
Anji Henderson
Trevor Osborne
Vernon Hitchman
David Trethewey

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones took the Chair for the meeting. Apologies were recorded.

**2. Minutes from the last meeting**

One correction was requested to the minutes from 20<sup>th</sup> November 2014 meeting, Councillor Malcolm Lees was present for the meeting.

With the above exception the minutes were agreed as a correct record.

### **3. Overview of the evidence base**

Andy Thomas summarised the overview of the evidence base that this working group has been working on as requested by Council.

This evidence base would be available to the newly elected Council to make a decision following the May 2015 elections.

It had not been the aim of this working group to conduct a full scale community governance style review. From within the existing resources and timescales the working group had identified the following evidence:

- Large amounts of information which had been made available in Summer 2014 which included an interim report which set out a number of options and contained a number of appendices to support the options. This work compares to what some other authorities have conducted for a larger scale review. The majority of this information remains valid and is in good standing.
- The outcomes from the request for views that came from responses on the interim report. The numbers of responses was low but the quality received had been very useful. The comments made in the views received can be reflected upon and used to form an opinion.
- The presentations that had put forward at the last meeting of this working group by Weston-super-Mare Town Council and Winchester Town Forum and the comments arising which had been recorded the minutes from the last meeting.
- The fieldwork data from the last Voicebox questionnaire has now been returned and is being broken down by the research and intelligence team within the Council. The information that will be reported back will be presented back in an easy to understand format later in the year when its release had been agreed.

All of the evidence base will be ready for the incoming Council to use. It will be available on the web.

Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones asked for assurance that there will be a straightforward easy to find set of information that is presented well.

Andy Thomas gave his assurance that all the evidence will be presented in a clear way.

Councillor Tim Warren asked what the number of responses had been for the Voicebox survey and when the information could be expected to be made available.

Andy Thomas explained that his understanding is that the number required for statistically valid information (around 1000 responses) had been received. The fieldwork data now needs to be analysed and presented properly and the group will be informed once the process for agreeing release of Voicebox data had been completed.

Councillor Ian Gilchrist was encouraged to here that the responses are over 1000. Will there be a way of working out the split between inside and outside of Bath?

Andy Thomas clarified that the questions were included within the Voicebox survey; the responses are at the level because by using this method we will see a higher number of responses than if we asked the questions in an isolated survey. This would allow for breakdown of data.

Councillor Anthony Clarke asked if there was a definite date that the results would become available.

Andy Thomas explained that the data needs to be worked upon and a process agreed for release and at this time there is not a set date for when it will become available.

#### **4. Bath City Conference 2015**

Andy Thomas explained that this item had been placed on the agenda as the City Conference provided a platform for a wider community discussion. This would take place after the elections.

Dates and details for the conference are yet to be finalised and a steering group will reconvene to work on the arrangements. A large section of the Conference is a showcase of organisations in Bath demonstrating how they contribute to the City. We however have another side to the event that will allow us to book out rooms in The Guildhall to take on the debates and workshops based around Bath City Governance.

In 2013 Bath City Governance had been discussed at the Bath City Conference with a presentation from Van Dubose.

Councillor Paul Myers raised the point that although this is an issue for Bath there are implications for those areas outside of the City. There needs to be additional places for discussion to take place in addition of at the Conference.

The meeting Chair, Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones asked that further discussion on this take place after Van Dubose had completed his presentation.

The Chair invited Van Dubose to make his presentation. He presented his overview as an individual who works and lives in the city. A copy of the presentation is included with the minutes of this meeting.

Points made by Van Dubose during the presentation.

- All the political groups involved in the process so far were thanked
- Bath is a small sized City and requires leadership, accountability and governance to address its primarily urban concerns. Parishing as it works in North East Somerset does not fit the needs of the City of Bath.
- The “democratic deficit” is not the main concern, as everybody has access to a ward councillor and consultations for the City take place on specific issues.

- Instead, the design of governance should follow some criteria. He suggested seven city “portfolios” that might form the basis for this, namely: Transport, Public Realm, Spatial Planning, Worker Prosperity, Cultural Vibrancy, Civic Cohesion and Heritage Care.
- The City needs to further reach out globally to build on its culture and the heritage status needs to be looked after.
- The city needs civic cohesion; if we have civic pride we will see better social cohesion and civic responsibility.
- To meet the criteria and purpose, appropriate powers need to be put in place; leadership should be effective with expert help being brought in when it is needed.
- Set up and operating costs as well as the speed with which an option could be delivered were also key criteria.

Van du Bose then gave a short analysis of his view of how the “Senate” and parish models presented different outcomes. The senate model would see a committee style that would not need separate formal powers but would see accountable duties delegated by B&NES Council. The limited powers of a parish do not address the issues that Bath needs to address. Both options however fulfil democratic criteria as a Senate would be a subordinate of B&NES made up of a majority of elected people. A Senate style of committee also provides the opportunity to co-opt members and select expertise as well as adding to the leadership skills of Councillors. Set up costs are minimal and no additional staff would be required for a Senate and it could be set up in under a year.

Van finished his presentation by explaining how a ‘Bath Senate’ could operate. He thanked the meeting for the opportunity to present and commended the group for their efforts so far. He also highlighted that the Bath City Conference could offer an opportunity to have a traditional “Oxford Union” style debate between Senate and Parish options.

Councillor Paul Myers felt that the presentation in fact pointed towards the need for a separate authority for Bath. There is a danger that a Senate would want to do more things that would be reliant upon B&NES officers time which is currently difficult enough to access if you are living outside the City. The parished areas are paying an additional council tax charge to pay for services that Bath is getting for free (with exception of the small civic charge of £7 that Bath raises).

The understanding had previously been that a Bath Senate would not be able to bring in additional Council Tax funding, although he now understood that the Winchester model provided for this. If Bath wants to deal with matters for the City then the people will need to pay for this and this would therefore not see objections from those outside the City. This is a debate that affects the whole authority and it is important that everybody is involved.

Peter Duppa-Miller asked that it be noted that there is a parish liaison meeting taking place in the Civic Space in Keynsham on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2015 from 18.30hrs. There will be the opportunity for parished areas to debate the Bath Governance issues at this meeting.

Councillor Tim Warren highlighted the Winchester Forum “special expenses” model. Andy stated that at the previous presentation Winchester had highlighted that the Winchester Town Forum area (which is un-parished area) uses a special expenses charge of £61 which is raised by the City Council as a means of making a distinction between local and District-wide expenses.

Councillor Paul Crossley objected to the statement from Cllr Myers that work was not taking place in North East Somerset. The request was made that the minutes reflected that Councillor Crossley was in complete disagreement with these comments made. The proposal that has come from Van Dubose is an interesting idea and it is clear and precise. This information along with the evidence base we have collected will allow the new Council to make a decision. There are differences between Bath as a City and North East Somerset and we now have Connecting Communities forums that represent communities' in North East Somerset. We will need to take a look at what is needed in Bath and at the same time B&NES Council will carry out its duties in ensuring that an equitable review takes place covering the needs of the whole of the authority. We have different mechanisms for different community needs and have to find ways to deal with these. Van du Bose was correct to highlight the specific urban needs of Bath but it was not realistic to expect that this could happen through a smaller unitary. The national picture actually points to government having the desire for larger arrangements not smaller units.

Councillor Ian Gilchrist felt that the presentation that Van made was a good and persuasive argument. The question was asked if we have had any other offers or invited anybody else to present to enable us to meet a conclusion?

Andy Thomas explained that there had been many detailed responses on the options that this working group had asked for comment on. Council has asked this group not to come to a view but to bring the evidence base together to take to Council after May 2015. Further views are welcomed and added to the evidence base as we move the process along. The involvement of the Parishes Liaison Forum so far shows that we are committed to being inclusive of the whole of Bath and North East Somerset. This remains important as it will ultimately be the full Council that need to make a decision on how we progress in the future. The Bath City Conference is the natural next step to have a debate on the two current options and to take a look at the criteria for a solution.

Councillor Robin Moss explained that if Council Tax was allowed to rise in Bath then it would remove the barrier between The City and the outside area. Bath needs a platform that will allow the City to take part in its requirements and to report back to Bath and North East Somerset with confidence. This needs to be an option that allows Bath to act independently as well as having opportunities to work with others for funding opportunities. A full community governance review will come with high cost and take a longer period of time to conduct. By taking the approach of adding a supplementary rate to Bath could provide the option for additional governance the City needs.

Robin Kerr explained that FOBRA had debated Bath governance several months ago and had not been able to agree on a common conclusion; it does however believe that something does need to happen to move the issue on. The presentation that Van had made could see a couple of additional items added. Firstly the costs that comes with either additional taxation or precept payment and secondly, the item under senate powers needs to demonstrate that these powers are embedded and not easy to circumvent.

Councillor Paul Myers felt that he would happy with the idea that if an opportunity exists that allows Bath residents the choice to raise the money for their own form of representation as long as the North East Somerset residents do not have to pay anything more. The views from Van are a personal view and additional views should be allowed; others from Bath need to be

allowed to be involved with a focus being on the City. The role for Bath would be to have a focus around urban worries with Bath and North East Somerset focused on the unitary role.

Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones felt that the presentation had energy and showed initiative. This is the right forum to have presented to and others are open to present should they wish to.

Councillor Paul Crossley explained that Bath has a City Conference and this works alongside the unitary authority. There are vast numbers of committees that already look at a range of issues and events for the City. The offer to parishes to take part in the debate over what happens next is open. The Bath City Conference offers the opportunity to hold a number of events across the day using the Council Chamber to bring together a wide range of viewpoints. The outcomes from the event need to be written up with the conclusions ready to present to the new Council.

Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones felt the Governance needs to be the “stand out” part of this year’s conference and it is important how the day is set out.

Peter Duppa-Miller felt that the conference would sit well between the Parish Liaison Forums in June and 21<sup>st</sup> October where the wider area would also be able to contribute. Should Bath start to make contributions to running services in Bath the knock on effect is that the amount of tax being collected for B&NES from all B&NES residents should see a reduction, an example of where this has happened is in South Gloucestershire.

Ian Perkins commented that this is in danger of becoming a City Centre Forum. We need to know how to move forward and avoid being seen as a solution that is looking for a purpose. There needs to be a realisation of the mix of people’s views on Bath; there are people that are unhappy because of the history of how Bath City Council was abolished and there are others with a genuine will to want to see things happen. There is a need to see how things will happen and how the ideas that have previously been put forward at the City Conference can be implemented. The discussion that looks at the purpose needs to be clear and needs to be in place before the mechanisms for delivery are agreed.

Nicolette Boater felt that although much helpful evidence has been assembled, the Bath Forum approach has been much better argued for than the option for creating new parished areas. She also warned of the danger of polarising the debate around only two options. She noted for example that there were fundamental differences between The Senate model advocated by Van de Bose (which recognises the importance of non-politicians being included), and the Winchester “area committee” model expounded at the previous Working group meeting. She also wished the exploration of options to include those adding more value to civic representation and enhancing participation from non-affiliated individuals. She thus hoped that discussions at the 2015 Bath City Conference would allow a wider and more open consideration of all options and all issues surrounding the governance of Bath & North East Somerset.

Councillor Paul Myers suggested that Bath needs to identify the issues it is seeking to “put right”. There were visible issues that Midsomer Norton had experienced with governance which it addressed through the review. Bath will need to have the assurance that they have the right level of powers that allow them to make a difference in the longer term. If there were to be changes with the Unitary becoming larger there would be real difficulties if other towns were to become part of the Council.

Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones asked for any closing comments

Councillor Tim Warren felt that the debate that has taken place so far has been good and that certain original ideas and perceptions had changed as it had progressed. The Conference could see two governance sessions held at 1pm and 4pm that are open to everybody to take part in and have a strong chair to manage the debates and workshops.

## **5. Future meeting dates**

Councillor Tim Warren felt there may be one more meeting before the Conference and then the next Council will take over.

Councillor Paul Myers asked if there could be another speaker brought into another meeting before the election.

Councillor Paul Crossley felt that the next meeting should take place after the election has taken place.

Councillor Ian Gilchrist felt that all the information should be wrapped up before the election ready to be taken on by the next administration.

Councillor Robin Moss asked that the topic does not disappear after the election has taken place.

Councillor Anthony Clarke felt that comments continue to be collected but there now needs to be a period that we pause and reconvene after the election.

Peter Duppa-Miller suggested that the information that comes from the Voicebox survey may produce results that say something different than we have already considered.

The group voted for the next meeting to take place around June once that elections are completed, seven voting in favour and two against. The next meeting will be scheduled for around June 2015.

A realistic date for the Conference would be early July 2015: this allows for a steering group to agree the structure of the day.