

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 July 2020 at 2.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr P Broadhead – Chairman
Cllr M Haines – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr M Anderson, Cllr S Bartlett, Cllr M F Brooke, Cllr M Earl,
Cllr G Farquhar, Cllr L Fear, Cllr M Greene, Cllr N Greene,
Cllr M Iyengar, Cllr C Rigby and Cllr T Trent

Also in attendance: Councillor Lesley Dedman
Councillor Mark Howell
Councillor Sandra Moore
Councillor Vikki Slade
Councillor David Brown
Councillor Lisa Northover

1. Election of Chairman

A nomination was received and seconded for Cllr P Broadhead. No further nominations were received.

RESOLVED: That Cllr P Broadhead be appointed Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board for the 2020/21 municipal year.

2. Election of Vice-Chairman

A nomination was received and seconded for Cllr M Haines. No further nominations were received.

RESOLVED: That Cllr M Haines be appointed Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board for the 2020/21 municipal year.

3. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr P Miles

4. Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

5. Declarations of Interests

Cllr M Brooke and Cllr P Broadhead both declared local interests in agenda item 6a the Action Sheet from the previous meeting as they had been appointed as Council representatives on the Bournemouth Development Company.

6. Confirmation of Minutes

Subject to the inclusion of Cllr T Trent in the list of those present at the meetings held on 15 June 2020, the minutes were approved as a correct record.

7. Action Sheet

Cllr M Brooke advised that the outcome on the action sheet relating to the item on Durley road was incorrect and should read “The Recommendation was not accepted”.

8. Public Speaking

There were no public issues for this meeting.

9. Chairman's Update

The Chairman advised the Board that the other O&S Committees were now meeting in their own right therefore the Board would not be routinely considering matters related to Children's Services or Health and Adult Social Care and the respective Chairman of the other committees would not normally be attending Board meetings.

10. Update on the Council's Response to the Covid-19 Epidemic

The Chairman invited the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to outline the latest developments to the Board. The Chairman reminded the Board that for this item they were also asked to consider the Cabinet report on Update on BCP Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic a copy of which had been circulated and which appears as Appendix A to the Cabinet minutes of 29 July 2020 the Minute Book. The Chief Executive advised the Board of the changes which were due to take place in the near future including that support for those shielding would be coming to an end from the end of the month. The Together We Can helpline was also being stepped down and things were getting back to 'business as usual'. A Local Outbreak Management Plan had been recently produced. The Government had announced its contain strategy and the powers that would be introduced for local government to bring this into effect, including local lockdown.

During the crisis BCP Council had been well represented nationally and the Council had come through this in a strong position despite the fact that we were still settling in following the merger of the preceding authorities. This has included the delivery of grants to local business, the distribution of PPE, the plans put in place for additional provision for an outbreak and the excellent response from volunteers.

In reference to the major incident which occurred three weeks ago issues arising from this were being followed up on and a 'crowded places' app had been developed.

The Leader advised that the app was now live, and it was hoped that it would be launched soon. The app would also be able to provide the location of toilets, lifeguards, which sections of the beach allowed dogs, etc. The Council had been able to respond quickly in relation to the Council's peers, for example the Council opened 75 percent of playgrounds as soon as possible. All departments had been working at an incredible pace. The work with the homeless population had gone extremely well with helping 74 people into longer term accommodation provision, as well as helping with employment and substance misuse. There was significant work still on going in exceptional circumstances in adult social care. In Children's Services there had been over 400 school admission appeals to be heard in a virtual environment, which had a knock-on impact in terms of member meetings. There were concerns regarding the increased risk in safeguarding and the lack of available childcare when people were being asked to return to work and the Council were working to address this. Environmental Health Officers and Trading Standards officers had been on hand to address issues regarding violation of Covid-19 rules and guidelines. The Second tranche of the discretionary grants scheme was due to go live shortly and the issues of why people had not met the criteria previously had been taken into consideration for this.

The Board raised a number of issues in the ensuing discussion including:

- Clarification was sought on whose responsibility it was to check on Covid-19 related matters with businesses as a Councillor had been directed to Health and Safety staff rather than Environmental Health. It was noted that there were approximately 3000 business in the area which fell under the jurisdiction of the Health and Safety Executive and 13,000 premises under Council enforcement.
- In relation to the incident which occurred over the 24 and 25 June the Board questioned the capacity of seafront operations. It was noted that staffing at the end of June wouldn't in normal circumstances be up to 100 percent but there was a good complement of staff working at this time. However, a recruitment had been underway and significantly more staff were in place than there were at the end of May. There were a number of senior staff I seafront operations who had been shielding. All toilets were open and there were a number of parking enforcement staff available, although there were a significant proportion still shielding.
- In relation to the incident the Board was advised that the visitor profile was unusual for the area and a number of visitors were still arriving into the evening. The behaviour of a number of the visitors on these dates was extraordinary. There were also similar incidents of concern across the country and the Police had to react to various incidents.
- There were a number of tents along the beach during this incident, beachfront staff were dealing with these and moving on campers where possible but were also needed to deal with litter picking and making the beach safe. In addition, beachfront staff did not work into the night and people were still arriving after the staff had left. The seafront teams needed to work with the police if people did not respond to the request to move on. The Leader advised that they were looking into the wording of Council bylaws to make enforcement of this issue easier. It was noted that 26 eviction notices were issues for tents on the beach on 24 June.

- There was concern raised at the number of parking enforcement officers operational in the effected area over this time period. There were some staff shielding but there were no staff on eave during this period. Due to shift patters there were 18 staff on the streets during the course of the day but Councillors reported swathes of illegally parked vehicles in this area which had not been ticketed. It was noted that parking could check an area and vehicles arrive after this time and it was not possible to cover all roads all of the time.
- A Councillor commented on the difficult situation that the staff had to deal with during the 24 and 25 June and thanked officers for dealing with this and doing there job in a very difficult situation.
- A Concern was raised about the capacity of the Council to provide support to those who were shielding who would still require it when the government support ended. It was noted that the vast majority of volunteers were still available. People were being advised that the food packages were discontinuing but that they remained eligible for enhanced online shopping offers.
- In response to a question it was noted that there was no need to shut down beaches and the Council were capable of dealing with thousands on the beach as it did every year. Social distancing was the responsibility of individuals and if somewhere seemed to busy people were encouraged to go home.
- With reference to the consultation period on emergency active travel fund schemes it was noted that there was a six-month consultation for the proposals in tranche one. Tranche two would begin three weeks from now. There was a live consultation underway on all schemes. These could be made permanent more quickly if that is what the community wants.
- A Board member asked about looking ahead as currently we had low levels of Covid-19 but this could change in the future and may coincide with seasonal flu. It was noted that track and trace was important and it was asked if there was any further information on this. It was noted that work was already underway on the impact of a peak during flu season and the measure. It was noted that Track and Trace was being led by public health so at present further information could not be provided on this.
- Concerns were raised by the Board with regards the calling of a major incident. It was noted that the situation was exceptional and all parties on SAG were involved in the decision to call the major incident in standby. The consequences of this meant that armed police and the coastguard were more readily available, everybody was able to work together more effectively. The Board questioned whether there was reluctance from any of the parties to the calling of a major incident and the impact that this would have had on various services. The decision was taken by operational leaders through the local resilience forum. The Safety Action Group was called on Wednesday and was working in a multi-agency approach prior to calling the major incident. There was further concern raised regarding the impact of making this decision.

RECOMMENDED: That Cabinet seeks to bring in year rigorous, responsive and robust enforcement action into current operational practices, particularly in regard to parking and overnight camping on the beaches.

Voting: For: 8, Against: 6, no abstentions.

Cllr G Farquhar asked that his vote against the recommendation be recorded

11. Covid-19 Recovery - Economy and Tourism

The Chairman welcomed the representatives from the local Business Improvement Districts, the Destination Management Board and the BH Area Hospitality Association.

Poole BID – The Director of the BID outlined to the Board a number of issues which were being faced by the members of the BID. It was noted that the situation regarding levy collection was currently unclear, but the independents were the biggest paying group by type. The BID had been very active in supporting the business directly in improving the area during lockdown. A community project was underway to improve various aspects of the high street and surrounding areas with painting utility facilities with the aim of trying to build confidence and make it a n improved place to visit. It was noted that travel schemes had allowed seating areas outside some businesses to be increased. An area had been pedestrianised in order to allow for local arts and crafts and food stalls to attract people to the area. Poole was aiming to gain entry to a heritage scheme to enhance this aspect of the town. The CSAS officers were also welcomed in order to help reduced anti-social behaviour.

Bournemouth Town Centre BID – The Chairman and the Chief Operating Officer provided the Board with information on the challenges and operations and some ideas for ways to work together in the future. Overall it was noted that the consensus from the town centre business was that the Council had done a fairly good job during the crisis. The Shop Local / Stay Local message had been rolled out. It was noted that the future of High Streets/ Town Centres was already changing prior to Covid-19 but that the impact of Covid had accelerated the process. The Board was told that the change in criteria for the second round of the discretionary grants was of vital importance. The message around wearing masks was being rolled out with messages in windows thanking people for wearing one. It was noted that with the calling of the major incident in Bournemouth resources tended to be diverted away from the Town Centre. It was noted that the challenge going forward was what we wanted the Town Centre to look like in the future and how this could be shaped through the planning and highways processes. The life in the Town Centre would be different from how it was previously.

Bournemouth Coastal BID – The Chairman of the Coastal BID advised that they had been doing lots of campaigning locally and there were lots of people who should have bee holidaying abroad who would be staying in

Bournemouth. The 'eat out to help out' initiative was seen as a positive. The BID requested that the Council consider a reduction in parking charges as this would have a serious benefit for local businesses. The Chairman commented that it was encouraging to see what was happening on Poole Quay and there were similar initiatives for Boscombe, Southbourne and Westbourne. Further work was needed on the power infrastructure in place for Southbourne and Westbourne. The BID requested that the Council share its plans for measures should there be a second wave, with the BIDs. As a more informed position would allow business to be more proactive. It was explained that some hotels had experienced bookings being cancelled following the declaration of a major incident. However last weekend hotels were at 86 percent which was inline with that expected for this time of year. However, rates for the while month were much lower in comparison to the previous year.

Christchurch BID Steering Group – The representative for the steering group advised that one of the main challenges for Christchurch businesses was that they did not yet have a BID in place to represent them and provide professional support during this difficult time period. However, the high street was starting to become busier again and the overall mood could be summed up as nervous optimism.

In response to a question regarding the reduction of VAT it was noted that there were national issues with regards to online sales and potential differential VAT rates or an online sales tax. It was noted that it would be helpful if the Council could retain all business rates not just some. The Board was advised that local businesses promoted the social aspects of coming into shops and worked on improving customer service. A suggestion was also made regarding reduced parking rates for later on in the day. Another suggestion was for a Town Centre gift card which could only be spent when physically in a shop rather than online. Another suggestion made was for some kind of loyalty scheme with the local bus companies in a similar vein to the reductions that supermarkets offer to shoppers for car parking.

BH Area Hospitality Association: The Chairman of the Association advised the Board that hotels had remained positive during the Covid-19 lockdown period. The Association was also working with other local areas on Tourism issues including Weymouth and Southampton. It was noted that there were hotels which closed down during the Covid period. A number had reopened on 4 July but with lower occupancy rates than expected. It was explained that some hotels had experienced bookings being cancelled following the declaration of a major incident. It was explained that it would be beneficial for all hotels in the area for the Council to consider the long term calendar of events moving forward. In particular confirming events such as the air show for several years in advance. It was noted that the tourism team needed to be even stronger to support events throughout the year.

Destination Management Board – The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board were in attendance. They informed the Board that the impact of Covid on

the areas tourism had been significant. It was suggested that the Council's support was required in order to ensure that the less salubrious hotels were removed in order to allow greater opportunity to allow quality hotels to succeed. One of those suffering the biggest impact from Covid 19 was the coach industry. Hotels had closed during the epidemic as they were owned by a major coach company. The other area seriously impacted that the Board had not yet heard from was the international education sector. It was expected that students would not return to this sector until next year at the earliest. It was noted that the local organisation representing restaurants and hospitality businesses, Wonky Table, included venues of a number of different sizes and had reported that there had been a slow start to reopening but things appeared to be improving. The Board was also advised that with regards to outdoor events the lead in period to organising these on a national scale was two years and therefore the impact from this had been significant for events which had been cancelled.

A Board member expressed concern regarding the impact of the major incident. It was noted that the response when it was announced that hotels were to reopen was very positive but that older guest who would normally visit outside of the summer season had been put off and this also appeared to effect Christchurch and Poole as well.

A Councillor asked about the potential road closures/pedestrianisation around hotels on the East Cliff which was provided in emails. The Leader confirmed that this was not taking place. The ward Councillor asked about why they didn't receive information about this and asked if further information regarding this could be provided outside of the meeting.

The Chairman suggested that an informal working group would be useful to continue to conversations on this topic to come up with a number of ideas regarding tourism and economy recovery moving forward, in particular to further consider practical ideas which had been suggested during this meeting.

RESOLVED: That a working group on Tourism and Economy Recovery Post Covid-19 be established.

This was agreed by unanimous consent.

The meeting ended at 4.51 pm

CHAIRMAN