

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 September 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 D Mellor, Cllr C Rigby and Cllr T Trent

Also in
attendance:

48. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr P Miles.

49. Substitute Members

There were no substitute members

50. Declarations of Interests

Cllr M Haines declared a local interest in Agenda Item 7, Covid-19 Recovery – Community and People as she was a member of the Access to Food Working Group in relation to the feedback provided from Faithworks Wessex. She would stay and participate in the item.

51. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on Monday 24 August at 2.00pm and 6.00pm were agreed as correct records.

52. Action Sheet

The Board's current action sheet was noted.

53. Public Speaking

There were no public questions, statements or petitions received for this meeting

54. Chairman's Update

The Chairman updated the meeting on the current focus of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings in that it had recently been taking a deep dive into listening mode to look at issues concerning Covid-19 recovery.

Previous meetings had focused on tourism & economy, and transport & infrastructure with feedback from partner organisations. This meeting would look at this issue from the aspect of 'community and people'. Including partner organisations but also the Council response to this issue.

The Chairman advised that, due to the presenting officer's other commitments related to Covid-19 and if there were no objections, the Board would consider the first part of agenda item 8 prior to agenda item 7

55. Covid-19 Recovery - Community and People

The Director for Community, gave a presentation to the Board which provided an update on the current situation and included information concerning community issues within the BCP area, including:

- The level of domestic abuse and BCP Council's work in preventing domestic abuse, which included a helpline and online support. It was noted that there was an 8 percent increase in cases on last year.
- Anti-Social Behaviour reports to the police were up by 30% on last year, this included breaches of Covid regulations. Reports to the Council team were also up. These could be treated as related to the current situation including neighbour disputes and Covid breaches.
- The Anti-Social Behaviour team had been undertaking significant work concerning a number of areas, including working with licensed premises and shops on reopening to tackle street-based ASB, begging and issues linked to licenses premises

Together We Can, including the partnership working to provide direct support in more than 4000 cases in response to over 14,000 calls received to the telephone helpline.

It was noted that the volunteers had done an excellent job in supporting shopping, delivering information postcards phone call support for those self-isolating.

The initiative also secured funding for community and voluntary sector groups, supported several initiatives to target food poverty, and introduced a financial resilience helpline to provide a simple route to talk about debt, finance and benefits.

Work was going on in conjunction with Public Health Dorset to develop contingency plans under the Local Outbreak Management Plan if shielding were reintroduced.

The Director advised that everyone had worked so hard and so fast to support vulnerable people in our community at a difficult time and expressed her thanks to all involved. Through the initiative strategies had been put in place to strengthen the voluntary and community sector.

The Chairman thanked the Director and team for all the work which has been done and opened the meeting up to questions from the Board, during which time a number of issues were raised including:

- Whether Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) officers could be deployed in Charminster as there had been a recent outbreak of Anti-Social Behaviour in the area.
- The Director advised that although CSAS resources were limited the Council did now have the power to use CSAS officers over the whole BCP area rather than in specifically targeted areas. It was noted that it was hoped to move some resource to the area. The Director asked the Councillor to keep the Council and Dorset Police updated on the situation and encourage residents to report any instances of ASB.
- A Councillor raised a query concerning the Domestic Abuse Helpline and the Financial Resilience helpline as he wasn't able to easily access the numbers through the BCP website. The Director expressed her disappointment in this as they were extremely important. The Councillor was advised that a link to the helpline would be posted for Board members, but they would also look at the accessibility of these.
- A Councillor commended staff for their work. A concern was raised that anti-social behaviour was on the increase since the end of lockdown, but a significant proportion was due to a single group of young people who moved to different areas around the town. The Director advised that the Anti-Social Behaviour team worked with Children's services to address these issues.
- Anti-social behaviour during lockdown. Low levels but has now increased. Same group of young people migrating around the town.
- It was noted that there were lots of people who wouldn't ask for help and it was questioned whether the most vulnerable were being found and helped and how they were identified and supported. The Board was advised that lessons had been learnt from the first period of lockdown and process had been put in place to ensure that those most in need could be targeted.
- A Councillor noted that the governance arrangements allowed for a step down when necessary and sought assurance that there was an opportunity for a step up as and when this was required. The Director advised that they had the ability to step up the programme in a matter of days if necessary and although the steering group was currently paused both groups had agreed to stand back up as necessary.
- A Councillor commented on the incredible adaptation of the Council to become a volunteer management structure which was a major change from where council was before and the development of a positive community spirit. The Councillor thanked the volunteers for the community response.

The Chairman echoed the comments of the previous Councillor and suggested that there was unanimity from the Board on the positives from the Covid pandemic that had been seen through the Together We Can Initiative.

Citizens Advice – The Chairman welcomed Zoe Bradley, Chief Executive and Tom Lund, Head of Operations and Service Delivery, Citizens Advice BCP, to the Board to provide an update on how the organisation has been

reacting throughout Covid and during the recovery period. The Board was advised that the organisation had been working throughout the pandemic.

Citizens Advice had been using digital and telephone engagement since the start of lockdown. Face to face meetings were by appointments only and were taking place in Bournemouth Town Hall and Christchurch Library and they were investigating using the Poole Civic Centre customer area. Debt advice was being provided at Bournemouth Town Hall. Outreaches services were also beginning to resume which included specialist services. However, a return to full face to face drop-in services was not anticipated in the near future. BCP Citizen's Advice was also exploring new ways of engaging through digital means.

Throughout the pandemic since lockdown there had been 4500 benefit enquiries, over 1000 employment enquiries, over 2000 financial enquiries and over 400 housing enquiries. In terms of moving forward there was concern with the job retention scheme coming to an end and they were looking to extend capacity for employment and financial advice in the near future. The 'Lets Talk Money' financial resilience helpline was highlighted and the details were available on then Council website.

It was noted that there was a large cohort of clients who could not be reached through digital means and there needed to be a wide range of ways to reach these members of the community which needed to be done in partnership with other organisations and the Council. The cohort of people that Citizens Advice was dealing with had been influenced through the situation and furlough. However it was recognised that there were many clients who would approach Citizens Advice with mental health, disabilities, and range of substance misuse issues who needed to be reached. The Chief Executive advised that they hoped to be able to get a mobile unit to reach out to the community.

The Chairman asked whether there were any areas in which there had been a significant impact from Covid that were not necessarily expecting. It was noted that whilst perhaps not surprising there had been a number of queries received about unfair dismissal or employment discrimination. This had been a growing issue of over the past couple of weeks and appeared to be related to the end of the job retention scheme.

In response to being asked what the Council could do it was noted that there will be a spike happening again as government support was ending concerning evictions and debt issues which were not so great a factor during the pandemic due to the moratorium on evictions and the increase in universal credit. Citizens Advice confirmed that they had been able to retain 90 percent of volunteers and have had more volunteers sign-up through 'together we can' and had more waiting to sign up.

A Councillor asked about where the mobile van was planned to be deployed and if specific communities or clients would be targeted. The Board was advised that the location of the mobile van would be planned against where outreach used to take place prior to lockdown which

included supermarkets, doctors' surgeries and other locations within a large network. There would be a planned rota for where it would go.

There was a significant funding target and there was a hope that something would be in place for December or January.

The Chairman thanked the representatives of Citizens advice for attending the meeting and providing the information to the Board on the excellent working the organisation had been undertaking

Faithworks Wessex – The Chairman welcomed the Chief Executive of Faithworks to update the meeting on the work that the organisation had been undertaking. The Board was advised that part of the purpose of the organisation was to ensure access to food for all and ensure no one in the community was missed out.

They had been involved with the Head of Community engagement to appoint a food coordinator for the BCP just before the lockdown period and they had been and involved with coordinating the network of foodbanks and other food poverty initiatives. There had been work in streamlining the response which previously was only coordinated with the crisis team in Poole and people were now able to get a more holistic response by going through the crisis team.

A directory of local food businesses who wanted to help had been established in order that surplus food was able to be directed to where it could be used. Creative ideas for sharing food and had been developed including a link with Hope for Food and allotments in North Bournemouth, a school pop up pantry was working with Poole Housing Partnership and there was also work around helping people to cook and having confidence to cook through the Friendly Food Club initiative which provided a bag of food, recipes and links to the completed meal. The initiatives set up were about local people responding to need in local areas.

There were a number of community groups coming together to share knowledge and resources in a number of areas including Christchurch, Townsend, Hamworthy and Boscombe.

The Food Map/Network Map identified where resources were, including four community fridges, food pantries and food banks. It also identified where the gaps were in terms of community food support, this could also be overlaid with deprivation statistics to identify where support should be required. It also allowed electronic vouchers to be provided direct to foodbanks to avoid unnecessary contact during the Covid pandemic.

The Chief Executive advised the Board that there was a strong desire that momentum was not lost. There were several measures now in place ready for a future lockdown or second wave. The vision for the future of BCP was one where everyone was able to feed their family nutritious food all of the time. A good local response was very important but they were also looking at other areas of the country to look at different responses to food poverty.

The Chairman commented that some of the unintended consequences of the Covid Crisis were both surprising and positive and on the great work of Faithworks and its partner organisations across the area. The Chairman asked whether there was confidence in the continuing positive partnership working after the pandemic. The Chief Executive advised that groups had on the past all being going for the same money and grants but with closer links developed it was easier to see which community organisations or groups would benefit the most from different initiative and could gain important feedback from the groups on the ground and the impact of their areas. However, it was noted that it takes a lot of work and time put into it.

A Councillor commented that the Food Co-Ordinator had been essential for everyone involved in food poverty and that Faithworks Wessex had provided a good base for everyone to work together using technology including the map and WhatsApp group. The Councillor commented that she hoped the Council would continue to support work on food poverty and that everyone continues to work together.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive of Faithworks Wessex for attending and for their work and hoped that the Board would be able to hear again from them in the future.

Community Action Network - The Chairman welcomed the Chief Executive and the Partnerships Development Manager to the meeting. The Chief Executive advised the Board of the purpose of the organisation and the work that they had been undertaking during the period of lockdown and since. Right at the beginning of lockdown they had been able to recruit additional volunteers. They had also been extremely busy offering advice and information about funding to small grassroots organisations. The voluntary sector had been able to respond quickly and agilely to the changing situation. The Board was advised that three quarters of organisations were operating at the same or an increased level from before lockdown. All local voluntary organisations seem to have handled working with Zoom or Teams. However over half of the voluntary sector groups were concerned about the sustainability of their organisations.

The Chief Executive advised the Board of some of the different initiatives that the voluntary sector had undertaken during lockdown, these included: a friendship group by phone in collaboration with Prama, young volunteers writing to older people, Crumbs had developed online training, Age UK had completely changed the way they worked and Dorset Children's foundation - distributed fortnightly 'bags of happiness'. Dorset race equality support. In addition, there were many positive stories from across the sector that had been captured on the CAN100 website.

It was noted that the work locally was looked at from a national perspective as being a success with how everyone had come together. Having the volunteers from the 'Together We Can' initiative had been essential. It was noted that a thank you and planning session was being planned for the volunteers in order to find out what went well and ensure that if there was a need to deploy again there was a strong cohort of volunteers. The Chief

Executive advised that they would be ensuring that they continued to collaborate and communicate with other organisations and patterns including lots of work with the NHS and how they were working with the voluntary sector.

A Councillor placed on record their thanks to all volunteers and asked how volunteers were being kept informed. A survey had recently been undertaken to ask how many people were still interested in volunteering particularly as previously a lot of people were on furlough but the results came back that a lot still wanted to be involved. CAN was also working with BCP Council to write its volunteering strategy with BCP. Although CAN had always worked in partnership with the Council in now felt that there was a much greater feeling of being one team.

A Councillor asked about the impact of funding on sustainability and it was noted that the ability to fundraise had been greatly restricted at present It was asked what barriers or challenges were CAN hearing about at the moment. The Chief Executive advised that a lot of the funding available at the moment was focused on covid response for example the National Lottery was totally focused on that. The sector was being creative with accessing funding. Groups were wanting to collaborate more. Smaller groups were being supported to ensure that their governance arrangements were robust in order to be able to access funding.

56. Covid 19 Recovery - Community and People Council Response

The Director Organisational Development outlined to the Board that the Council had taken public health approach as to where staff should be working. It was noted that staff should be working from home whenever possible and should continue to do so in the future. Many of workforce were able to work successfully from home. However, this did not mean that the offices were closed, they remained open with appropriate covid measures in case. More vulnerable employees were also being supported.

Significant technology support was required including providing over 4500 laptops to enable home working, Microsoft Teams telephony for customer service staff was in place. Exposure to mobile phones would be reduced when Teams telephony was introduced in the next few months. However, it was noted that remote working didn't suit everyone's home circumstances but for most staff it had been a welcome feature and will impact how they continue to work in the future.

A staff survey conducted in June received 1900 staff responses. Ninety percent of responses showed that staff either enjoyed, really enjoyed or found working from home ok the main reasons given were the convenience and time to focus without office environments. IT issues were a concern in some cases, but it was unclear if this was related to equipment, broadband, other bandwidth use within the household.

The Council were supporting staff during this period with a number of wellbeing measures, including Counselling for members of staff who require it. The pace of change from a largely traditional office-based environment had been significant. Roll out of ICT had been rapid and vital. Overall the changes had been well received which allowed for greater opportunities in future for a more flexible approach to working.

A Councillor commented that they fully understood the issues members of staff have had working from home as he needed to access the Council buildings due to not having a suitable place to work from home. It was noted that since lockdown there had been difficulty in obtaining timely responses to generic Council email addresses and emails appeared to get trapped in an endless loop. It was noted that with lots of people working from home as individuals there have been challenges, certainly in the transition period. Previously embedded and generally infallible ways of working needed to be changed to ensure they continued to work with the new conditions.

In response to a question it was explained that the previous technology used by the customer contact centre only worked within an office based environment. Microsoft Teams with telephony had been rolled out so that customer contact staff could continue but the system did not work in the same way. The current system could not be used remotely and the Council was working on procuring a new system that could be used with remote working.

A Councillor asked about those who hadn't been able to work from home and how they have coped with work and the impact on their mental health. The Corporate Director advised that most were able to work from home and most were coping well with it. It was noted that the Council wanted to live up to expectations from pre-lockdown and pre-covid. Technically there wasn't a reason why this should have slipped however there were issues which each department and team would need to address. In the last two months there had been a far greater focus on achieving something approaching normality and there was a need to ensure that staff responded to contact centre enquiries when raised.

A Councillor asked about the expected efficiencies to be made in relation to jobs required and staff retention post local government reorganisation and post covid to deliver the Council services and whether LGR and would be revisited under these circumstances. Through LGR all savings forecast as deliverable had been made. In relation to the anticipated reduction in headcount that the Council were expected to make. There was a need to reconcile the need to make efficiency savings with the public services needed and the potential increase in demand stemming from covid. There was a need to reconcile the Medium Term Financial Plan for the next four years over the next three months. The Council will have to come to terms with the situation as the budget cycle is developed for next year.

A Councillor commented that they were pleased to see that the staff survey showed broadly positive experience of officers. However there had been an

issue of how members have been consulted throughout this period, particularly with the lack of ability to make phone calls and speak to officers. Most residents had been very understanding but it made the process very difficult when Councillors had been left waiting for 3 or 4 days for email and was also an issue for officers.

A Councillor noted that it was positive that staff had responded to changes and working from home but also noted that there had been some slips in some areas of customer service. The Councillor asked whether the Council had any measurable statistics for staff productivity? It was noted that with a diverse range of services there were some areas where it was more difficult to monitor productivity than others, some would be able to compare data from pre Covid and the current situation. Most areas had been maintaining their customer service levels but issues which occurred had been highlighted. The performance report going to the next Cabinet meeting would provide an indication of where the levels of performance were and there may be areas where performance was not at the level that was anticipated from previous years.

Thanks to the Council Officers for the insight into how the Council as an organisation has been dealing with its response to Covid recovery.

The meeting ended at 4.09 pm

CHAIRMAN