

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on 01 April 2021 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Bartlett – Chairman

Cllr T O'Neill – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr L Allison, Cllr D Borthwick, Cllr L Dedman, Cllr B Dion,
Cllr M Earl, Cllr J Edwards, Cllr D Farr, Cllr L Fear, Cllr M Howell,
Cllr D Kelsey, Cllr V Slade, Cllr M F Brooke and Cllr K Wilson

Also in attendance: Councillor Hazel Allen
Councillor Mark Anderson
Councillor Mike Greene
Councillor Mohan Iyengar
Councillor Robert Lawton
Councillor Drew Mellor

181. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr C Rigby and Cllr M Cox

182. Substitute Members

Cllr K Wilson substituted for Cllr C Rigby and Cllr M Brooke substituted for Cllr M Cox

183. Declarations of Interests

Cllr H Allen declared for the purpose of transparency that she had a disclosable pecuniary interest in agenda item 7, Scrutiny of Homes Related Cabinet Reports, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Policy as she worked for Dorset hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, she would be contributing to the presentation of this item

Cllr S Bartlett declared for the purpose of transparency in relation to agenda item 7, Scrutiny of Homes Related Cabinet Reports, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Policy that he owned a company which privately let out properties in the BCP area.

Cllr J Edwards declared for the purpose of transparency in relation to agenda item 7, Scrutiny of Homes Related Cabinet Reports, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Policy that she privately let out properties in the BCP area.

184. Public Speaking

There were no public statements, questions or petitions.

185. Forward Plan

The Board considered its existing Forward Plan and the latest published Cabinet Forward Plan. The Chairman outlined the items which were proposed for May as detailed in the Forward Plan. It was noted that the item on Tree Management would now be deferred to a later meeting which was likely to be June. The Chairman also suggested that it would therefore be possible to include a Cabinet Portfolio Holder update and suggested the Community Safety Portfolio Holder may be appropriate. A Member suggested that with the election of the new Police and Crime Commissioner at the beginning of May it may be useful to have this as an item later in the year as this formed one significant aspect of the Portfolio. The Chairman agreed to take this away for further consideration.

There was discussion concerning the scheduling of Member briefings versus when these items were considered by scrutiny. Although these were felt to be useful it was noted that sometimes they were scheduled with relatively short notice and it was suggested that documents could be circulated sometimes as an alternative.

In response to a query the Chairman confirmed that there were still specific issues with regards to Tree Management and Highways following the Member briefing which it was felt would be best addressed through a specific item coming to the O&S Board.

A Councillor commented that there were a number of subjects which were considered by the O&S Board which were of questionable use at times. It was noted that it could be difficult when considering reports for pre-Cabinet decision scrutiny as it wasn't always clear what would be included within the papers.

The Chairman asked Board members to look forward at the Cabinet Forward Plan and if there were any issues they felt should be considered by the Board, to draw these to the attention of the Chairman as soon as possible.

The Chairman also discussed the possibility of establishing an environment and related issues Overview and Scrutiny body and advised that discussions on this issue would be taken forward with Democratic Services outside of the meeting.

With regards to the suggested item on Poole Quay it was noted that this appeared to be a more general problem across all key tourism sites and there was no mechanism within the Council to maintain sites to certain level of quality of infrastructure. It was suggested that this could be looked into further and added to the Forward Plan for possibly six months' time.

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan be updated as detailed above.

186. Scrutiny of Transport and Sustainability Related Cabinet Reports

Highways Asset Management Policy - The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Sustainability presented a report, a copy of which was circulated to Board members and which appears as Appendix 'A' to these minutes in the Minute Book. Issues raised in the subsequent discussion included:

- The asset inventory as outlined in the report and whether priority was given to measuring current assets. This information was still being collated from preceding authorities, including outstanding data on footways.
- Surveys – Highways were scanned in a specialised vehicle and pavements were walked. There was a four-year inspection programme during which every footway would be inspected.
- The outcomes of the climate review and Health and Safety review as outlined in the appendix of the report and the potential positive impact. That the document was extensively proscribed by the Department for Transport.
- The increasing number of cycleways across BCP.
- The two types of surveys for footways - serviceability inspections to determine future works and forward plan, and risk-based safety inspections.
- Reactive and proactive maintenance and how the policy may help reduce reactive maintenance issues. A Board member suggested that there was a mismatch between these issues.
- Issues were raised regarding CO2 reduction, methods which took account of climate change, flooding, tree planting and gulley cleaning. How actions being taken to address these issues could be reflected within the Policy.
- Making crossings more intuitive and including more experimental technology and assets which would make life easier for people within the Policy. The Portfolio Holder advised that the prescriptive nature of the policy would mean it needed to include information on the assets being maintained in the most cost-effective way. However, he undertook to look into whether it would be possible to include this within the policy.
- Whether electric charging points were included within the highway assets structure. The Portfolio Holder undertook to follow up on whether these were included and whether the strategy needed to be updated to include them.
- The most intelligent type of crossings were zebra crossings, which were also cost effective. The Portfolio Holder was asked what the policy position was on these and it was noted that this would sit within the realm of health and safety and there was currently lots of consideration about which type of crossings were most appropriate.

The Chairman suggested that the Portfolio Holder gave this further consideration and thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers present for their input.

187. Urgent Business: Scrutiny of Officer Decision to Supply and Fit Electric Barbecues Across the Seafront

The Chairman advised that he had agreed that this item had been added to the agenda for this meeting as an urgent item of business, this was at the request of a Board member and as the decision had already been taken scrutiny of the issue needed to take place as soon as possible and it would not be practical to wait for a future scheduled meeting. The Chief Executive introduced the issue concerning the Officer Decision Record a copy of which had been circulated to Board members and which appears as Appendix 'B' to these minutes in the Minute Book. The purpose of the decision was to upgrade the offer on the seafront and to help alleviate previous issues which had occurred with disposable barbecues. In the ensuing discussion a number of issues were raised by the Board including:

- Why the funding was not included as part of the capital budget and why the decision was taken under emergency powers. In order to introduce the scheme for summer 2021 this was the only route available. Different funding streams were considered and whilst it was a judgement call the decision was appropriate on the weight of evidence.
- That it would not reduce people using disposable barbecues.
- Officers expressed their confidence that they would be a good edition to the seafront as facilities for local people.
- Whether the Council had looked at experiences of other Council's who had installed electric barbecues. It was noted that there was already one installed in Boscombe which was used.
- There were concerns raised that CIL funding was being used for this project as it was felt not to be a strategic issue or much needed infrastructure. Ongoing costs would not be funded through CIL but would be absorbed within operational expenditure.
- There were concerns raised as to why this was treated as an urgent decision and why it was not considered earlier.
- Whilst the Board didn't suggest that there should be a ban on disposal barbecues, introducing the electric barbecues without restrictions on the use of disposable barbecues on the beach would not help.
- The Board asked why a smaller test amount was not introduced with the option to increase numbers if successful.
- The reason the barbecues would be free to use was to help encourage their use and it would not be cost effective.
- In response to issues concerning theft or vandalism it was explained that there were cameras in place and people would need to go to a significant effort to remove them.
- That encouraging use of communal barbecues in a Covid environment didn't appear to be a good idea, especially with expected visitor numbers as the barbecues would encourage people to congregate and cause congestion along the prom.
- Board members also commented that they thought the barbecues were a good idea.
- Timing of the installation and that disruption along the seafront should be minimal.

A motion was proposed and seconded that:

“The O&S Board support the proposal on the basis that it would be trialled as intended, measured and reviewed in 12 months-time”.

This motion was discussed by the Board, there were some concerns raised that the motion did not propose any reduction in the number of barbecues being installed and therefore there would not be any reduction in financial expenditure so there didn't appear to be a particular benefit in reviewing the decision to trial them.

The Chairman proposed a short adjournment to allow the full wording of the motion to be submitted.

- The meeting adjourned between 8:00pm and 8.06pm -

When the meeting resumed the Chairman outlined the motion and suggested it be put to the vote. The motion was put and lost by 6 votes in favour and 7 against.

A further recommendation to Portfolio Holders and Officers was then proposed and seconded as follows:

RECOMMENDED: That Portfolio Holders and Officers be recommended that the Board recommends the purchase of six double barbecues at three locations for summer 2021 to evaluate risks identified. This will then be reviewed in October 2021 in terms of expansion to Phase 2 in 2022.'

Voting : For – 8, Against 6, 1 Abstention

A Councillor requested that the concerns raised by the members of the O&S Board should be put before Cabinet in relation to the issues arising as this was a decision which had already been taken. The Chairman undertook to follow up on this issue.

A Board member requested urgent scrutiny on how strategic decisions are made. There was a need to understand what constituted an urgent decision and a need to scrutinise the process around urgent decision making and the use of strategic CIL funding.

It was suggested that this could be added to the workflow of the Board. The Chairman advised that he would be happy to add this to the work programme.

A further motion was moved and seconded that it be:

RECOMMENDED to the Audit and Governance Committee to consider a review of urgent decision-making powers.

A Councillor requested that there should be safety messages in several languages along with contact numbers. It was noted that there would be pictorial safety messages in place.

188. Scrutiny of Homes Related Cabinet Reports

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy - The Portfolio Holder for Homes presented a report, a copy of which was circulated to Board members and which appears as Appendix 'C' to these minutes in the Minute Book. The Lead Member for Homelessness was also present to present the report and respond to any questions from the Board. Issues raised in the subsequent discussion on this report included:

- The positives of the strategy and action plan, working towards lower numbers of people rough sleeping and the great work of the Housing team.
- Definition of homelessness, including access to accommodation abroad.
- The numbers and gender of those rough sleeping, specific approach to women and younger homeless persons. The Lead member commented that this was a work in progress, and it may be good to look at this when moving forward.
- Making the concept of dignity more prominent within the document and the use of the term rough sleeping. It was acknowledged that use of language was important, and this would be carefully considered.
- The policy was flexible and could be adapted to best meet provision. Officers confirmed that the associated actions plan could be updated on an ongoing basis but the strategy itself would not necessarily need to be changed.
- The information given to rough sleepers from hospitals, a smaller laminated booklet was more likely to be kept by homeless people. Suggested A&E's should be included as partners. The St Mungo's night shelter also gave out lots of information.
- What could be done to help those who didn't want to be helped. The Council aimed to be flexible and work with partners in assisting people who did not want to move into traditional housing due to complex situations, although the Council were getting better at accommodating people. There was a need to consider wider ideas about what we would consider a home in order to solve the problem.
- The increase in families with children presenting as homeless. Cases involving children were very difficult. Projects providing temporary housing had to be paused. What the solutions were? There was a focus on upstream liaison with landlords and tenants and addressing issues with rent. There were also schemes to provide additional family hostels as an alternative to temporary B&B accommodation.
- What was being done about promoting downsizing in order to free up additional housing stock where it is needed and to address empty homes. A full-time empty homes officer was being arranged which would assist with the housing supply. Seascope would also be borrowing to purchase empty homes to provide emergency accommodation for

homelessness families. Work was also underway on encouraging people to downsize through the new allocations policy.

- Homeless Reduction Board – private landlord representative. The Council had been in discussion with the National Residential Landlords Association and will follow up on this issue.
- How the Council monitored homelessness and rough sleeping numbers. The Portfolio Holder suggested that in approximately 12 months they could report back on the issue to the Board. The Chairman advised that this would be noted in the Board's Forward Plan.

189. Scrutiny of Transformation and Finance Related Cabinet Reports

Futures Fund Governance - The Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Finance presented a report, a copy of which was circulated to Board members and which appears as Appendix 'D' to these minutes in the Minute Book. The issues raised in the subsequent discussion on this paper included:

- The criteria for how the Programme Board would decide spending. There would be an opportunity for scrutiny for any spending decisions over the appropriate thresholds. The Section 151 officer advised that the Council had to adhere to the prudential code for borrowing for local authorities. There was ongoing work to look at the appropriate level of debt for a local authority of BCP's size.
- The paper included a loose definition of infrastructure and did not seem to relate to previous information provided on the Futures Fund regarding big ticket projects.
- A Councillor proposed that a quarterly update be published on activity of the Futures Fund in order to keep everyone updated on the activity of the Board.
- The Leader noted that issues coming forward would most likely be items over £500k but even lower cost items may be considered by Cabinet or an all member seminar. The Leader wanted to be transparent in this process.
- The drawdown of £10m – it was confirmed that this would only be drawn down when assuming will not be sat in the bank. The Chief Financial Officer advised that the Fund would only draw down the money only when business case was signed-off. The figure outlined was illustrative to show the potential impact on the MTFP.
- Clarification on where funding would come from to pay back costs and interest as not all of the items were revenue generating. It was noted that the repayment figures were based on a 50-year period. The interest amounts had been factored into the MTFP. The Leader commented that low interest meant that it was a good time to invest.
- Criteria for investment. The business case needed to add up – including costs, level of contingency, associated risks, details and achieving external grant, inward investment or income.
- The main areas of focus would be regeneration projects with viability issues, public realm enhancements and infrastructure pieces around these issues.

190. Future Meeting Dates 2021/22

The Board noted the dates for future meetings for 2020/21.

The meeting ended at 9.44 pm

CHAIRMAN