

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on 02 November 2020 at 2.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Bartlett – Chairman

Cllr T O'Neill – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr M Cox, Cllr M Davies, Cllr B Dion, Cllr J Edwards,
Cllr G Farquhar, Cllr D Farr, Cllr L Fear, Cllr P R A Hall,
Cllr M Howell, Cllr D Kelsey, Cllr C Rigby, Cllr V Slade and
Cllr T Trent (In place of Cllr M Earl)

Also in attendance: Councillor Mark Anderson
Councillor Drew Mellor
Councillor Mohan Iyengar
Councillor Lisa Northover

67. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr M Earl.

68. Substitute Members

Cllr T Trent substituted for Cllr M Earl.

69. Election of Chairman for the Overview and Scrutiny Board

Nominations were proposed and seconded for Cllr V Slade and Cllr S Bartlett for Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.

The nominations having been received a secret ballot was conducted to decide the Chairmanship of the Board. Cllr S Bartlett received 9 votes and Cllr V Slade received 6 votes.

It was then RESOLVED that Cllr S Bartlett be appointed Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.

70. Election of the Vice-Chairman for the Overview and Scrutiny Board

Nominations were sought for the position of Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year. Cllr V Slade and T O'Neill were duly proposed and seconded.

The nominations having been received a secret ballot was conducted to decide the Vice-Chairman of the Board. Cllr T O'Neill received 9 votes and Cllr V Slade received 6 votes.

It was then RESOLVED that Cllr T O'Neill be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.

71. Declarations of Interests

Cllr S Bartlett declared a local interest in agenda item 14, Feedback from the Working Group on BH Live Leisure Services as he was now a Director of BH Live Enterprises Limited and had taken part in the working group.

Cllr Jackie Edwards also declared a local interest in agenda item 14, Feedback from the Working Group on BH live Leisure Services but did not take part in the working group.

Cllr Farquhar advised, for the purpose of transparency, in relation to agenda item 14, Feedback from the Working Group on BH Live Leisure Services that he was also a member of the working group.

72. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 21 September at 2.00pm and 6.00pm were agreed as a correct record.

73. Action Sheet

The Board considered its action sheet. Following a proposal from a member of the Board, it was agreed that the action at 113 on the action sheet should remain and be followed up with Children's Services as the project was not yet complete. It was suggested that it would be useful to hear what the financial implications were in order to rule the action as complete. It was agreed that it would be discussed in relation to the Board's Forward Plan.

74. Public Issues

There were no public questions, statements or petitions.

75. Items Requested by Councillors for Scrutiny

The Chairman introduced the item and invited Cllr T Trent who had made the request for the Overview and Scrutiny Board to consider the following items to explain the reasons for this to the Board:

- Road Maintenance Across the BCP Area
- Tree Management Across the BCP Area

Cllr Trent advised that there had been members of the public raising issues about the quality of road and pavement resurfacing. He explained that he felt the Overview and Scrutiny Board should be asking if there were any issues and whether we were getting value for money. It was noted that there was currently a review of road maintenance underway and therefore it

seemed like an opportune time for the Overview and Scrutiny Board to get involved and undertake a piece of work which could influence this work.

Cllr Trent explained to the Board that he was aware of a number of tree related issues currently and that he felt that there was a need to review policies regarding maintaining current stock and future development. There was a need to scrutinise these issues properly and be part of the process and not just review a policy which had already been drawn up. We should be part of the process and not when there is something already drawn up.

The Board discussed both of these issues and there were comments made that the Board should be doing more overview work and that these issues should be looked at as part of the development of the Board.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Cleansing and Waste thanked Cllr Trent for raising these issues. He advised the Board that he would be setting up a workshop on biodiversity with the Corporate Director of Environment and Community along with outside partners such as the woodland trust, etc. It was noted that this workshop was intended to cover tree management as well as other biodiversity issues.

The Director of Environment advised the Board of the current situation and the work that his service area was currently undertaking related to both of these issues.

Members of the Board raised a number of issues that they would like to consider in relation to these areas included:

- Damage to the roads and pavements when any building work is undertaken, including minor home extensions.
- Long term maintenance of trees as there were too many not in a good condition
- Quality and standard of road surface repairs.

The Portfolio Holder asked that if anyone had any suggestions for the planned workshops to contact him.

It was then RESOLVED that items on Road Maintenance and Tree Management Across the BCP Area be added to the Board's Forward Plan.

76. Scrutiny of Finance Related Cabinet Reports

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Report - The Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Finance introduced the report, a copy of which had been circulated and which appears as Appendix 'G' to the Cabinet minutes of 11 November in the Minute Book. A number of issues were raised by the Board in the subsequent discussion, including:

- A Board Member asked whether the £3.8 million - tranche 4 funding referenced in the report was the same funding of £3 million which the

Leader of the Council referenced in his Twitter feed regarding the programme of food parcels being delivered over half term for those entitled to free school meals. The Leader confirmed that this was the case and that some of the funding had been used for the provision of meals during the half term holiday. The Leader commented that central government had been clear that local authorities were best placed to understand local needs.

- In response to an enquiry regarding what provision had been removed in order to fund free holiday meals it was explained that nothing had as yet, and needs were changing frequently as to where the funding would be best spent. In response to a further question the Board was advised that the funding wasn't ringfenced and spending it in this way was no different to any other way of spending Covid funding. It was noted that funding of under £100k could be agreed by officers and other material spends were recorded in the MTFP report to Cabinet. In response to how much was actually allocated the Board were informed that there were approximately 6000 children entitled to free school meals in the BCP area and each food parcel cost £15, so a maximum of approximately £90k. The take-up over half term was good but not full and there was work underway on how to promote the provision for the Christmas holidays. The Chief Financial Officer advised that the in-year financial position of BCP Council Covid-19 grant allocation was outlined within the report.
- A Councillor asked about the change in review from £50m to £13.4m large swing and whether that included any sale of assets or whether that was a later consideration. The Leader advised that there would be no sale of assets to fund black holes in Corona Virus impacted budgets, but the Council was looking at more creative ways of using assets.
- A Board member noted that funds previously received from central government had been inadequate to meet requirements leaving the council with a significant Covid funding hole. There was concern about the funding required to support the provision of free meals during the holidays and asked if the Council would be proactively contacting families in advance of the Christmas holidays. The Leader of the Council stated that feeding children was a priority and confirmed that the programme at Christmas would be done in consultation with schools and businesses.
- It was noted that the number of children engaged with Children's Social Care was increasing month on month and becoming more expensive. The Leader advised that standards within Children's Services was one of the administration's top priorities and following the recent Ofsted inspection, supporting the long-term improvement of the directorate. The Chief Financial Officer informed the Board that the Children's Services Corporate Director would provide a separate report to the December Cabinet meeting setting out the mitigations which were being put into place.
- A Board member raised concerns about the large funding hole which needed to be addressed, there was need to find £50m in transformation savings and it was suggested that further priorities should not be added into the budget. It was noted that the first two

tranches of funding of £22million in total covered the initial Covid spending. The Council had now put in a claim for £12 million in terms of fees and charges lost. The Leader confirmed that he felt that it was important that political priorities should continue to be included. A Board member noted that the rules were that only 70 percent of lost income could be covered, and most council leaders had raised concerns about the level of support from central government.

- A Board member raised a query regarding the use of reserves – whether this was general or earmarked reserves and whether there were any changes in terms of planning assumptions which had been used. The Councillor applauded additional borrowing provided it was being used for investment. The Councillor commented that the paper was building on the good position left by the previous administration. The Leader confirmed that it was earmarked reserves. Some assumptions had changed in year 2 and year 3, 100 percent impact next year and 50 percent in the following two years. The Leader commented that this may be too prudent but would need to see.
- A Councillor commented on point 64 of the report that things moved forward and changed with covid, particularly in relation to outdoor green/ spaces. New plans were working up significant investment into green spaces and asked when a report would be seen on this. The Leader noted that there would be a report on unlocking green spaces within the first one hundred days and was keen to see things brought forward. It was noted that the covid crisis was affecting lots of areas and asked members to please come forward with any ideas on this and looked forward to working with O&S in future on this.
- The Leader was asked about the sale of assets, in particular Christchurch Civic Centre which if not being used would be a prime site for development. The Leader advised that capital receipts from Poole Civic Centre sale were going to fund redevelopment. But it had now been possible to remove this from the budget. However, both the Poole and Christchurch sites would need to come forward, the Council were committed to keeping the listed section of the civic site. There was a massive regeneration opportunity, but it was noted that the Council had been able to step back from an immediate requirement to sell assets.
- A Board member asked for the opportunity to correct some of the statements made by the Leader of the Council to confirm that the previous administration didn't bring forward a paper with any detail on what would be happening with sale of Poole and Christchurch civic centres.
- The Chief Financial Officer explained, in response to a question, that there were elements of the capital programme where we would be purchasing assets and creating assets. With regards to the borrowing caps it was within the gift of council to revise the caps each year. It was put to the Chief Financial Officer that he would not allow the Council to set up an unsustainable level of borrowing. The Board was advised that comparisons with other local authorities of a similar size would be set out for Councillors to consider.
- In response to a question the Leader of the Council confirmed that he would not be selling civic centres to pay for developments but would be

looking at gaining best value whether through sale or dealing with the site ourselves or as a joint venture.

- In response to a question the leader advised that he had a strong plan of work for the first 100 days. The Leader of the Council advised that he wanted to place members at the heart of its administration and residents at the heart of Council and welcomed input from Overview and Scrutiny.
- The Chairman asked about the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit of £9.6m next year. The Chief Financial Officer explained that from 2021 onwards, there had been an update on guidance from government on how the Council would need to deal with the Dedicated Schools Grant. Reserves were no longer required to be held to balance the Dedicated Schools Grant Position. The Council recognised the deficit and was working with the department of education to recover it over a period of time and to reduce the deficit going forward.
- In response to a question regarding the £9.4m shortfall in the organisational design budget, it was explained that this meant that any expected costs would be taking into account for the budget setting process for each year so that spending was matched to the year where the benefit would arise from it. The Leader advised that the external auditors had confirmed that the Council's current borrowing levels were low.

Following the debate and questions raised by the Board, a Councillor moved the following:

“Recommend the cabinet prioritises the balancing of the General Fund rather than spending funds on political priorities.”

The motion was duly seconded. The Monitoring Officer advised that the wording of the motion may be ambiguous and suggested that it should be amended to read:

“That the Cabinet prioritises the balancing of the General Fund before any other funding priorities”

The motion was debated before being put to the vote. Some members raised concerns with the new priorities which were being introduced by the new administration ahead of balancing the budget when there were significant financial pressures, Other Councillors indicated that the new administration should have the opportunity to move their priorities forward.

The vote on the motion was lost by 6 votes to 9. Councillor Farquhar requested to be recorded as voting in favour of the motion.

77. Development of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

The Chairman proposed that the next scheduled meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board should be used for the purpose of a development session in order to consider the future direction of the Board.

The Monitoring Officer advised that there would be support provided from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. Given the change in composition

of the Board it was a good opportunity to consider how scrutiny was running and to look at the business that the Overview and Scrutiny Board would want to look at into the future. There would be a chance to discuss and put together a more robust and further forward looking forward plan for the Board

Board members agreed that this would present a good opportunity and also suggested that there should be some refresher training particularly given the new membership of the Board and the previous operation of the Board. Members raised concerns as to how the Board was viewed over the past few months and it was suggested that this would provide a good opportunity to make improvements.

The Board also suggested that the scheduled 6.00pm meeting should be used for the Board to receive an update on the current Covid-19 situation.

It was noted that the development and training session would not be open to the public. It was suggested that the training session should be open to all councillors particularly for those who may act as substitutes on the Board

It was RESOLVED that a training and development session be scheduled for 2.00pm on 16 November and the meeting originally scheduled at this time be cancelled and that the meeting scheduled for 6.00pm on 16 November be used to consider an update on the current Covid-19 situation.

78. Forward Plan

The Chairman advised that there would be an opportunity to update the Forward plan and agree the agenda for the meeting in December at the development session on 16 November. The Chairman asked the Board for any comments or thoughts on this.

It was noted that a new Cabinet Forward Plan was due to be produced tomorrow. It was expected that there would be a number of significant issues on the Cabinet agenda for December. This also presented a good opportunity to start looking forward.

With regards to the Design and estates strategy working group it was noted that the group had met but the situation was now moving forward and it was agreed that the group was not needed at the present time. A paper on the new civic centre in Bournemouth was due to come forward which the Board would be looking at, it was agreed that the working group should reconvene if required.

The Board agreed to note the Forward Plan and that further work on it would be undertaken at the Training and Development session scheduled in two weeks.

79. Future Meeting Dates 2020/21

The dates of future meetings as outlined in the agenda were noted.

80. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act and that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs such interest in disclosing the information.

81. Feedback from the Working Group on BH Live Leisure Services

The Board considered a verbal report on the outcome of the working group provided by the now Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Leisure and Culture who was also previously a member of the working group which was set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Board at its meeting in July 2020.

The previous Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Board in July 2020 considered two reports on operation by SLM in Poole and by BH live in Bournemouth. The Cabinet's decision was made in principle subject to a member working group.

The Overview and Scrutiny Working Group which was set up to consider this issue continued in this role.

The Board considered the update from the Portfolio holder on the outcome of the working group and the decision which had been delegated to the Chief Executive.

RESOLVED that the outcome of the working group be noted.

The meeting ended at 4.54 pm

CHAIRMAN