

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 March 2021 at 4.30 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Bartlett – Chairman
Cllr T O'Neill – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr L Allison, Cllr M Andrews (In place of Cllr V Slade),
Cllr D Borthwick, Cllr M Cox, Cllr L Dedman, Cllr B Dion, Cllr M Earl,
Cllr J Edwards, Cllr L Fear, Cllr M Howell, Cllr D Kelsey and
Cllr C Rigby

Also in attendance: Councillor Drew Mellor
Councillor Bobbie Dove
Councillor Philip Broadhead
Councillor Nicola Greene
Councillor Andy Hadley
Councillor Peter Hall
Councillor Beverley Dunlop
Councillor George Farquhar

168. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr V Slade

169. Substitute Members

Cllr M Andrews substituted for Cllr V Slade

170. Declarations of Interests

Cllr T O'Neil declared for the purpose of transparency in relation to agenda item Scrutiny of Sale of Christchurch By-Pass Cabinet report, that he had family members through marriage who worked at Waitrose Head Office.

171. Scrutiny of Sale of Christchurch By-Pass Car Park Cabinet report

The Chairman advised that this special meeting had been called in order for the Board to consider this issue prior to full Council consideration on 23 March, of the recommendation from the Cabinet meeting of 10 March which was outlined at item 7f on the Council agenda. The recommendation which was due to be considered by Council was,

“RECOMMENDED that Council:-

- (a) agree to dispose of the Christchurch By-Pass Car Park, as outlined in red on the attached plan in Appendix 1, for the purchase price detailed in the confidential appendix to this report; and

- (b) delegate authority to the Corporate Property Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer to finalise the detailed terms of the disposal.

A copy of the related report had been circulated to the Board members and appears as Appendix 'A' to these minutes in the Minute Book. The Chairman asked the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Transformation to introduce the report. The Leader outlined the key issues for consideration and explained that there was a balance to be achieved in considering this issue. He also advised that as this issue was particularly relevant to the Christchurch area, he felt that it was important that the local ward Councillors were able to take the lead on this decision. A number of issues were raised during the consideration of the report including:

- Asset stripping – the Leader confirmed that there were no assets identified to be disposed of and there would be significant investment in Christchurch. However, the recommendation was to enable a permanent solution to be identified.
- Regarding Waitrose requiring a single lease including the car park, that the current Waitrose lease didn't run out until 2027, which was still several years away. Negotiations had only been taking place with Aberdeen Asset Management and not directly with Waitrose.
- Whether other options had been considered, including leasing direct to Waitrose, or sub-letting the site. The Leader advised that the transaction outlined was as good as they believed was achievable.
- That Waitrose had advised staff that they had no intention of leaving the site in Christchurch.
- Concerns were raised with the valuation sum for the site and other financial impacts including the amount of revenue from the site and how this had been calculated and the licensing fee funding.
- Lack of consultation with Ward Members prior to the decision being considered by the Cabinet.
- That it would appear reasonable to sell the site provided that the price was acceptable. However, a number of Councillors expressed dissatisfaction with the conditions of sale outlined within the report.
- It was clarified that, whilst the proposal was in its initial stages when the Unity Alliance were in administration and the previous Leader was informed of the proposal, nothing had been presented to the previous Cabinet in a formal or informal way.
- Whether borrowing for investment in the site had been considered. The Chief Financial Officer advised current PWLB (Public Works Loan Board) rules was that borrowing should not be for commercial yield purposes and CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) was currently consulting on borrowing for commercial purposes.

During the debate a recommendation to Council was proposed that the Council should not sell the Christchurch By-Pass Car Park and retains the ownership and operation within BCP Council.

There was also a proposal for a resolution to request the Head of Estates, as a matter of urgency to produce a Capital Assets Disposal and Acquisition policy. In response to this the Board was advised that the legacy authorities did have asset management plans. However, the BCP plan needed to be updated and this had been slightly delayed due to covid and also the change in administration, this was now in development and would be presented to Cabinet and Council. The Councillor who proposed this resolution was satisfied with this response.

In order to continue with consideration of a number of issues which were included within the exempt appendices to the report the Board:

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 Paragraph 3 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.’

The meeting moved into exempt session.

During the exempt part of the meeting there was further discussion related to the financial aspects of the proposal including operating costs and the valuation report.

The meeting resumed in public session and the Chairman proposed that a vote was taken on the following motion which was proposed by Cllr L Dedman and seconded by Cllr D Kelsey that:

It be RECOMMENDED to Council that the Council does not sell the Christchurch by-pass car park but keeps the ownership and operations within BCP Council.

Voting: Unanimous

The Chairman confirmed that there were no further Board Members wishing to speak and thanked everyone for participating in the special meeting.

The meeting ended at 5.38 pm

CHAIRMAN