

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
(RENAMED OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD 29/09/2023)

Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 September 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Bartlett – Chairman
Cllr S Aitkenhead – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr P Broadhead, Cllr C Goodall, Cllr S Moore, Cllr L Northover,
Cllr Dr F Rice, Cllr M Tarling and Cllr T Trent

11. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dedman, Dove, K Salmon and Walters.

12. Substitute Members

Formal notice had been received appointing Councillor Adams as substitute for Councillor Dove, Councillor Armstrong as substitute for Councillor K Salmon and Councillor Chapmanlaw as substitute for Councillor Walters.

13. Declarations of Interests

Having been previously interviewed in a professional capacity by 'FuturePlaces' prior to his successful election as a Councillor in May 2023, Councillor Tarling informed the Committee that he would take no part in voting on this issue although confirmed he had no further professional association with 'FuturePlaces' either before or after his election.

14. Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

15. Public Issues

The Committee was advised of the receipt of one Public Question and one Public Statement.

Public Question from Mr Alexander McKinstry

Question

With regard to Option (h) in tonight's draft report, "disposal of the former civic offices in Poole and Christchurch": I'm assuming the estates team has already weighed up the pros and cons of letting out either of these sites, while the Council retains the freehold ownership. If so, can we have a detailed summary of the potential merits and drawbacks of such a letting?

In addition, can you confirm if a report already exists on the pros and cons of letting out these sites, as it may be the case that councillors would like to see such a report - along with any supporting documents, such as structural surveys or details of recent maintenance spends - prior to the Cabinet meeting of 27 September, or indeed the full Council meeting of 5 October?

Response

Cabinet and Council will be provided with a copy of the Outline Business Case as produced by BCP FuturePlaces Ltd with a covering statement from the Estates Team to reflect the new recommendation in recognition of the change in circumstances. Ahead of any disposal the Estates Team will carry out a process of due diligence to ensure that the Council achieves best consideration for these sites. This includes whether a long leasehold should be sold or whether the sites should be broken down into smaller plots.

Public Statement from Gail Mayhew, Managing Director, 'FuturePlaces'

Statement

I am extremely proud of the work that FuturePlaces has done in raising the aspirations for regeneration and placemaking in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. This work has attracted interest from national public and private investors alike.

I recognise that the ongoing financial situation of the council requires a different solution. BCP FuturePlaces has played a part in setting a new agenda and proposed structures for placemaking and high-quality development delivery which may be taken forward positively by the Council as it takes over the lead role on key sites such as Holes Bay and the BIC.

FuturePlaces drive has been to deliver the highest quality development for communities and people in BCP. It is therefore regrettable that the DLUHC report raised questions around governance which may have been wrongly interpreted as attaching to the FuturePlaces team.

16. The future of BCP 'FuturePlaces' Ltd, investment and development

The Leader of Council presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The Leader of Council introduced Members to the scrutiny of the report to Cabinet. The Leader emphasised that the proposals within the report had arisen from the decision of the Council to progress work on regeneration in a way that was more fitting for the Council within the context of the new Political environment since May 2023 elections and within the context of the rapidly changing economic environment generally. The Leader explained

that the new proposed approach intended to focus resources upon areas of work that the Council had identified as its key priorities. It was emphasised, however, that, although the suggestion was to bring the operations and activities of 'FuturePlaces' into the Council, the report should not be considered as a commentary upon the quality and value of the work already undertaken and produced by 'FuturePlaces'. This was also endorsed by Karima Fahmy, the interim Non-Executive Chair of 'FuturePlaces', who had been invited and was in attendance at the meeting and the Non-Executive Board members had been closely involved with discussions. The Committee recorded their thanks to the Board and their appreciation of the role undertaken by them.

Members of the Committee raised questions about the implications of the proposals in terms of Human Resources and were assured that staff currently employed directly by 'FuturePlaces' had been closely involved in the discussions so far and with Human Resources representatives also involved. It had been made clear that all staff would have the opportunity to transfer into the employment of the Council with their terms and conditions of employment protected in accordance with legislation.

The Committee explored the relative merits of the in-house option compared to the existing 'FuturePlaces' model. There was recognition that through bringing the operation in-house the Council would have more direct control of the operations than was currently the case and that, because of that, the desired focus upon delivery of priorities for the local community would be more effectively achieved. There were also expected to be advantages in bringing the Council's Housing Delivery and Commissioning teams into the same in-house Directorate. Similarly, there was an expectation of lower office accommodation and resources costs arising from using office space which was available within the Council offices rather than incurring costs of sourcing office space externally. In response to questions, it was confirmed that notice to terminate the lease of external office space had already been given.

The Committee considered and questioned estimates of the financial costs of closing 'FuturePlaces' and it was hoped that it would be possible to more accurately express the closedown costs. In response, it was explained that 'FuturePlaces' were currently carrying out a process of providing a summary of each specific project and that once this was complete, very much more accurate assessments of value were expected to become possible but with the aim of achieving winding-up costs that were as low as possible. The principles under which such an open assessment of value would be made were set out within the report.

Members also examined the relative financial implications of the options and the detailed costing comparisons set out in the report were explained. There was also an explanation about the way in which the Intellectual Property value of work already undertaken would be retained by the Council and how, in very many cases, that prior work already undertaken and in existence would be taken forward by the Council and used to inform and support future delivery programmes. For example, work already

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undertaken in respect of the 'Holes Bay' site had already enabled significantly quicker progress on bringing forward the development and this momentum would be continued and prioritised.

There was recognition by Members of the significant changes financially, both within the Council and nationally, that had taken place since 'FuturePlaces' was first established and that this had led, understandably, to tensions within the commissioning process which needed to be resolved.

The Chair advised the Committee that scrutiny of proposals relating to the future of the former Civic office sites in Christchurch and Poole would be undertaken later in the meeting.

RESOLVED that Corporate and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that recommendations (a) to (g) as outlined in the report be approved by Cabinet.

Voting: 9:0 (2 abstentions)

The Committee scrutinised progress with taking forward disposal of the two former civic centre sites at Christchurch and at Poole. A number of important issues for further discussion by all Councillors were identified including the most beneficial format of disposal and the arrangements for dealing with the historic civic part of the former Poole Civic Centre building known as 'the vertical slice' and there was acceptance that, whilst recognising the importance of minimising delay, this matter would best be deferred for further consideration.

RESOLVED that Corporate and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that recommendation (h), as outlined in the report for recommendation to Council, be deferred by Cabinet, to enable further work to be undertaken on the subject of the future of the civic offices in Poole and Christchurch. This deferral is recommended to enable all councillors to fully understand the options for the civic offices, particularly around leasehold and freehold options, and to address issues around that part of the former Poole Civic Centre known as 'the vertical slice', whilst recognising that there is a need to progress this whole issue as quickly as possible.

Voting: Unanimous

The meeting ended at 8.20 pm

CHAIRMAN