

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on 08 January 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Bartlett – Chairman

Cllr S Aitkenhead – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr B Dove, Cllr C Goodall, Cllr S Moore, Cllr K Salmon,
Cllr M Tarling, Cllr T Trent, Cllr O Walters and Cllr P Hilliard (In place
of Cllr L Dedman)
Present Cllr P Broadhead and Cllr F Rice
Virtually:
Also in Cllr J Hanna, Cllr A Martin and Cllr V Slade
attendance:
Also in Cllr P Canavan, Cllr S Carr-Brown
attendance
virtually:

29. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr L Dedman and Cllr L Northover.

Cllr P Broadhead gave apologies for joining late and joined the meeting virtually. Cllr F Rice also joined the meeting virtually.

30. Substitute Members

Cllr P Hilliard substituted for Cllr L Dedman.

31. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

32. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting were confirmed as a correct record subject to an amendment to clause 27 - Consultation on the Draft BCP Local Plan and the Draft BCP CIL Charging Schedule to clarify that the site referred to in the Plan was for a permanent site, discussion concerned the location of a permanent site and it was confirmed that options for a transit site could be considered separately to the Local Plan process.

33. Public Issues

There were no public issues received on this occasion

34. Q2 2023/24 Corporate Performance Report

The Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Dynamic Places 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 Committee was advised that the Corporate Strategy set out the objectives and outcomes that the Council's performance will be judged against and as such was a vital component of the Council's performance management framework. An understanding of performance against targets, goals and objectives helped assess and manage service delivery and identify emerging business risks.

The Board was advised that a new Corporate Strategy was approved by Cabinet in December 2023 and had now been adopted, therefore new delivery plans and key performance measures would be considered by Cabinet in April 2024. Until then, performance would be assessed on the actions and measures detailed in the Corporate Strategy adopted by Full Council in November 2019 and the delivery plans that were revised in February 2022. The Board was informed that Individual exception reports provide explanations and planned actions to address under performance. In addition, the report included a progress update on the Council's response to the 'Best Value Notice' issued by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC). The Board raised points on a number of issues including:

- How the reporting has changed or been aligned to the DLUHC review
- The continuation of existing indicators with the change of the Corporate Strategy
- Whether the areas with exemption reports have sufficient resources to address these in light of the required budget reductions
- Overall 55 percent of actions were on target which didn't appear to be very high. Improved smart targets needed to be developed.
- The Leader welcomed communications on any specific points which members wished to raise, particularly in relation to how targets could be both meaningful and able to be measured to track progress.
- The situation regarding capital expenditure for Winter Gardens and the Bournemouth International Centre, whether these currently existed as a programme.
- The outcome of the exception report on the delivery of BCP housing targets.
- That the provision of some information was now quite out of date, and provided more of a template to use to consider different issues.
- Inclusion within the new corporate plan of an indicator to measure carbon emissions. It was noted that there were delivery plans linked to the report and that this would be linked to the climate strategy, if appropriate this could also sit within the corporate performance report.

It was noted by the Chair and Leader of the Council that the paper would be useful in supporting deep dives and could be used by the board along with other measures to help create a work programme independently of the Cabinet schedule.

35. Council Companies - Shareholder Governance Review

The Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Resources presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix B to these minutes in the Minute Book. The Board was asked to consider the proposed shareholder governance arrangements, and the proposed plan and methodology for reviewing council companies, and report its views to Cabinet. The report set out the action taken to ensure appropriate and effective governance of Council owned companies including the independent governance review undertaken by DLUHC, a self-assessment review of Council-owned companies undertaken by the Council's internal audit team, and the governance review undertaken by the Interim Chair of BCP FuturePlaces Ltd which considered lessons learnt over the first year of operation. Following the closure of BCP FuturePlaces Ltd, a review of shareholder governance arrangements for all Council-owned companies was undertaken by the Interim Corporate Director of Resources in November 2023. The review recommended changes designed to provide clearer understanding of the respective roles, decision-making arrangements, and improved accountability along with next steps for implementation. The Board raised a number of issues in discussing this item including:

- That the review was in respect to Council owned companies and not charities such as BH Live and BH Live Enterprises.
- How the Council behaved as a shareholder for these companies
- Whether the reasons for having the companies were still valid.
- The Best Value letter highlighted FuturePlaces as one of the areas which required improvement and there were a number of lessons to learn in relation to how the Council acted in this instance. However, there was no evidence of fraud or malpractice.
- Removal of Councillors from boards of companies. Concern was raised that there were too many layers between Councillors and the companies themselves. It was noted that there was a risk that information did not flow through the Council structure in the desired manner. Although it was thought with the right structure and delivery plans in place this shouldn't be an issue. Concerns were also raised regarding accountability. It was suggested that members could be present as observer members on company boards.
- That company boards were not a good vehicle for democratic accountability. Perception that decisions were being taken in secret. Companies were a delivery vehicle and not a forum in which policy should be discussed.
- A caution was raised around bringing services in house just because it seemed easier, it was suggested that this needed to be fully considered and evaluated.

- When FuturePlaces was formed there were Councillors on the Board but only until others could be appointed.
- Seascope Homes and Seascope Group had never quite operated in the way set out in the report.
- A member questioned whether it was broadly accepted that elected members should not be on the Boards of these companies. The Board was advised that one of the issues which could arise for members sitting on the board of a company would be a conflict of interest. Members would also bring a political dimension to the position. Taking these issues out of the equation would leave the Council with a simpler approach.
- Aspire Adoption Ltd – The report recommended a review of each company and would come back with recommendations once completed.
- It was suggested that there should be a broader role for Overview and Scrutiny in relation to Council Companies than suggested in the appendix to the report.

The Portfolio Holder advised the Board that he was considering the recommendations to put before the Cabinet meeting and welcomed any comments from the Board. It was explained that it would be a single stage process of review for each company which would consider both the governance and the reasons for establishing it as a company initially and whether the reasons were still valid. The Portfolio Holder advised that he value the Board's contribution this evening and would consider how the recommendation can be further modified.

RESOLVED: It was agreed that the Chair would report comments raised by the Board to the Cabinet. The comments reported to Cabinet included:

- **When reviews are undertaken consideration must be given to not only the costs of providing services but also the benefits to residents in how the services are provided.**
- **Reviews must take into account the level of accountability and transparency with whatever model is decided.**
- **Reviews must consider that the Companies aims should be aligned with the Councils aims and strategies.**
- **Consideration should be given to the role of Councillors on company boards and the involvement from Councillors in Council owned companies. There were too many levels between Councillor involvement and company operation. There should be the highest level of transparency for Council owned companies.**
- **That the Scrutiny Function of BCP would decide how it will engage with and scrutinise Council owned companies and may choose to invite company representatives to participate in the scrutiny function.**

- **Whether there was a need to undertake this process for all Council Companies including those which have been operating satisfactorily for a number of years.**

36. Library Strategy - discussion item

The Portfolio Holder for Customer Communications and Culture introduced this item to the Board and explained that there had been further delay with this issue and it was hoped to bring the Library Strategy report to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Board if requested in February 2024. The Board was advised that issues had arisen around the potential reductions in library hours arising from reduced library hours. Members views were sought on the library service and what the future library service would look like. The Board were informed that its feedback would be very useful as the consultation document was being finalised. The aim was to have a library service which met the needs of local communities. The Board raised a number of points in the subsequent discussion, including:

- What did financially sustainable mean in the context of the current budget constraints, what would be considered affordable in these circumstances. It was noted that this was part of a larger discussion but the future library offer would need to meet the budget conditions.
- Christchurch Library – It was noted that this was a community hub and offered a number of different services. Members suggested it would be useful to know which libraries were hubs and to have a matrix for each library and what they offered either as part of the library service or other services.
- Councillors commented that the libraries provided a vital service for the wider community.
- A Councillor recommended that the consultation be predominately paper based or at least available through the libraries. There was some concerns raised regarding the length of the consultation on Council savings and it was suggested that it needed to be an accessible length, focused and relevant.
- It was suggested that it was important for the survey to capture the views of both those who currently use the libraries and those who didn't. It was important to find out how people get to the library and what they valued most from the service. The Portfolio Holder advised that the survey would look at usage of the current model but would also consider other options for how these could be run.
- Consultation should be genuine with an aim to find out what the community really feel about the service.
- Councillors suggested that they could be a resource in ensuring the questionnaire reached as many residents as possible.
- That there should be a calculation of the social value of libraries and whether there was a way to do this.
- Librarians were unsure as to whether they were able to promote the consultation.
- That there should be open ended questions about what people would like to see in the library service if money was no issue.

The Portfolio Holder advised the Board members that he wanted to approach the issue with the most positive view on what could be achieved. The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and Director for and confirmed that he would like for the Cabinet paper to come to the Board prior to Cabinet.

37. Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan

The Scrutiny Specialist presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix C to these minutes in the Minute Book. The action plan was approved by Council in September 2023. The purpose of the action plan was to detail what action the Council were undertaking to uphold statutory guidance for Scrutiny. There was also assurance review activity taking place. Many of the actions were identified within the Assurance Review Guidance. The O&S Board was asked to consider and comment on the progress made against the O&S action plan. The Overview and Scrutiny Board had requested an update on the progress against the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) action plan which set out strategic actions agreed by Council to assist in improving O&S within BCP Council.

The Chair suggested that it would be useful to bring the Plan back to the Board in approximately 6 months-time.

38. Forward Plan

The Chairman presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix D to these minutes in the Minute Book. The Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Board was asked to consider and identify work priorities for publication in a Forward Plan.

It was agreed that the library strategy should be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

A member requested that consideration of Wessex Fields – Options and Appraisals, should be added to the Work Plan for a meeting date as soon as possible as it was understood that negotiations were in progress and it was important for the Board to understand this.

The meeting ended at 8.37 pm

CHAIRMAN