

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 January 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr C Rigby – Chairman

Cllr R Herrett – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr C Adams, Cllr D d'Orton-Gibson, Cllr J Martin, Cllr S Moore,
Cllr L Northover and Cllr V Ricketts

Also in Cllr M Earl and Cllr A Keddie
attendance:

10. Apologies

Apologies received from Cllr Felicity Rice and Cllr Jo Clements

11. Substitute Members

There were no substitute members

12. Declarations of Interests

Cllr Moore declared for transparency an interest in agenda item 7 School Streets – as being a Trustee of the TEACH trust which included Canford Heath Junior School.

13. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Environment and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 October 2023 were approved as a correct record.

14. Public Issues

There were no public issue requests received for this meeting.

15. Planning Service Improvement Update

The Portfolio Holder for Connected Communities 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 were informed that there had been good progress in stabilising and improving the Planning Service, with a performance management culture being strengthened which has weekly coordinating groups meeting to actively address and reduce the backlog of outstanding cases. There had been a backlog of planning applications for a long time and in 2021 there was a plan to try to deal

with the backlog to get the number of applications in the planning system down and deal with things much quicker. Significant progress had been made with these and the backlog had been reduced to 50% of what it was previously. Old applications dating back to 2015 had been removed and the service was now focusing on early 2022 applications. Ongoing performance monitored by the Department for Levelling-up, Housing and Communities and seemed to be at a place to meet their requirements and no intervention was needed. There was still a way to go to reduce the backlog and the barriers that caused it.

The Council was awarded £100,000 from the planning skills delivery fund to try to deal with the backlog and keep on the trajectory of improving.

The planning improvement journey doesn't stop and it was hard to recruit planners currently.

In the following discussion a number of issues were raised by the committee which included:

- That it was disappointing to see applications that had been referred to the inspectorate due to non-determination. Whether there were any measures in place to ensure it doesn't happen as it incurs a risk of cost to the authority. Non determination of appeals are quite rare there are particular circumstances that dictate them.
- What the £100,000 from the Planning Skills Delivery Fund was being spent on and whether there would be any spent on planning training as there would be two planning committees. It would be used to address the backlog as agency staff were currently being used to assist with this. Agency staff costs were in excess of that amount. It was not related to the training budget.
- The current split between planning and agency staff is currently 16 agency members of staff which is just under a quarter of staff.
- The report included an update on MasterGov which is the new system that will replace the 3 legacy systems. There was a clear desire to move to MasterGov to make it easier to look up applications. Data cleansing has taken a while to move information over. It was due to go live in Summer/Autumn 2024.
- The current system allows people to look back at historic data, would the new system do that? It was intended that there will be a full data migration to the new system.

- Whether the new system would allow better cross department working with premises licencing or HMO licensing. The system will be more transparent and easier to use which will make referencing easier. However, licencing have different objectives and the system cannot intercede on other areas due to legislation, so there will be separation.
- Were agency staff to solely to address the backlog or to address the 25% shortfall of staff. The ideal situation would be to not use any agency staff. There was an interim structure in place with people moving up into roles and a number of vacancies. Those staff were asked if they were applying for those roles or if they were a senior and there was internal re-appointment into those roles which allowed agency staff to leave those roles. There was an intention to go out and fill vacancies.
- The Council performance chart shows performance levels with red and green rating, red meaning below the government target of 70% for minor projects in Poole, was there any insight into why. Minors include applications for 1 to 9 houses expectation that could be determined in 8 weeks BCP was a tight urban area with lots of constraints, they can be quite complicated which is why they take longer. Minors is an issue due to complexity.
- Whether the higher number of complaints in Poole is in line with the minors? There had been issues in relation to staffing in Poole where capacity was lost which meant that the application process wasn't able to go as quickly. It was a short term staffing issue that couldn't have been planned for. The work was highlighted in regards to how well they have reduced the complaints.
- Journey on the reliance of agency staff, although using 25% now, how has that changed in the last couple of years. It was noted that this had reduced but not at a fast pace and was higher 2 years ago but the journey is continuing.
- What proportions of planning staff live locally. No exact data but pushing to try and to recruit people who are local.

RESOLVED

That the update on the BCP Planning performance be noted.

16. School Streets

The Portfolio Holder for Connected Communities 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 Committee was advised that School Streets were a way to manage traffic around schools in a way that is particularly beneficial for children and their families travelling to them on foot or by other active modes.

Six School Streets have been successfully implemented/trialled with the BCP area with the last 2 years and the report provided an update on the programme to date. School Streets are aligned with the existing and emerging new Corporate Strategy objectives. Over the last 2 years school streets have been put in to manage traffic around schools and to make them safer and cleaner places for children and young people as they are going into or coming out of school. They were regulated by volunteers or staff from the school and operate at certain times of the day.

There had been lots of positive feedback from the schemes in place. Around 85% of people with a school street in their area have been keen to keep them.

Part of the success of the scheme was engagement with parent, children, schools and neighbourhoods.

The teams involved have a lot of learning now in this area, which is now scalable and funding was available to roll it out to other schools in the area. It was reported that this was a good news story. More children travelling actively to school means a great success and headteachers had reportedly seen a difference in the children that actively travel to school.

In the following discussion a number of issues were raised by the committee which included:

- How scalable and how quickly can this be rolled out and how do residents perceptions change over time? Engagement with individuals and households that live in the areas and getting them involved was important. Scalability was contingent on funding to determine what can be done. Four school streets achieved in a year and that's the sort of level that could be rolled out in future years. There was a £400,00 capital grant to go towards school streets.
- Impact around wider area of school streets. There are no displacement issues around school street, it makes people think about alternative travel.
- Can the roads be closed using signs rather than being manned by staff. There is ongoing learning and working with schools to work with parents to work the barriers to close the streets.
- Scope to push this further out from schools. As more school streets are created there is hope that more roads will be connected.
- Other schools are interested and currently a ranking position is being looked at for school that are interested.
- Beryl Bikes would be considered to provide opportunities for scooters to be used for alternative travel.

- The prioritisation of schools depends on budget and where they will do most good, there is no wish to exclude schools.
- There are measures to engage with schools to develop a travel plan. Part of the plan is to engage with parents, pupils and staff and find out why they drive. It was noted that not all schools will be suitable for school streets.
- Bikeability have gone into schools to do level 2 training with pupils.
- School streets are helping air quality, in that cars are not idling outside schools but it was very hard to accurately measure air quality.

RESOLVED that the progress to date be noted and the continuation of the roll out of School Streets across the three towns be endorsed.

17. Appointment of Independent co-opted members to Environment and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Senior Democratic and Overview and Scrutiny Officer 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 Committee was informed that it was agreed as part of the recommendations on the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Structure, which were considered by the Council at its meeting on 30 September, that the Environment and Place Overview and Scrutiny (E&P O&S) Committee be permitted to appoint two independent co-opted members. The selection and recruitment process for the co-opted members is to be approved by the committee.

Informal discussions have indicated that there is agreement that the principle of co-opted independent members to contribute to the committee is supported. At its last meeting the committee requested a report be brought forward to consider the issue.

There are a number of decisions required to enable suitable recruitment, through open advertisement, to the E&P O&S Committee.

The recommendations in this report will help shape that recruitment process, with an aim to have two co-opted members in place for the beginning of the next municipal year.

The report was prepared for the September meeting and the dates were therefore out of alignment.

There was a discussion around the recommendation and concern that the committee were independent from Cabinet and therefore independent members were not required.

It was noted that independent members were invaluable on Standards and have since been appointed to Audit and Governance committee.

It was suggested the committee bring in independent people for certain areas of discussion as an option.

There was an amendment made to the proposal to add a line which says “to increase diversity of the board”. It was also decided to have applicants over the age of 18 only.

RESOLVED that:

- 1. Two independent members be co-opted to the BCP Council Environment and Place O&S Committee to increase diversity on the Committee.**
- 2. The term of appointment will be for an initial 3 years with an option for a further 2 years if mutually agreed.**
- 3. A selection and recruitment panel be created, comprising of the Chairman of the Committee and two other Committee members. The panel will be supported by the Monitoring Officer and Scrutiny Officer.**
- 4. Each independent co-opted member appointed under these arrangements be entitled to the Co-opted and Independent Members’ Allowance as defined in Part 7 of the Constitution (currently £1,084 per annum).**
- 5. Following the recruitment process, a report from the panel is presented to the next available Environment and Place O&S Committee, which outlines the process and the panel’s recommendations. This report will be considered by the Environment and Place O&S Committee to formally approve the appointments.**
- 6. The Committee delegate to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Environment and Place O&S Committee,**
 - any changes to the role profile and person specification required;**
 - operational details associated with recruitment, shortlisting and interviews.**

Voting: Nem. Con. 7 for :1 against (0 abstentions)

18. Work 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 Environment and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee was asked to consider and identify work priorities for its next meeting pending a wider review of its forward plan at a future meeting.

The next meeting will focus on climate in 2 parts the first part is the Climate Action plan and second part will be about the climate team.

The Chairman also reminded members about the programming workshops that were taking place.

ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
17 January 2024

RESOLVED that the programme for the next meeting as outlined above be agreed.

19. Future Meeting Dates

The date of the next meeting is Wednesday 28 February 2024

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm

CHAIRMAN