

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 September 2021 at 2.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Bartlett – Chairman
Cllr V Slade – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr L Allison, Cllr M Cox, Cllr L Dedman, Cllr B Dion, Cllr J Edwards,
Cllr D Farr, Cllr L Fear, Cllr S Gabriel, Cllr C Rigby, Cllr M Howell,
Cllr T O'Neill, Cllr D Borthwick (In place of Cllr D Kelsey) and
Cllr T Trent (In place of Cllr M Earl)

Also in attendance: Councillor Robert Lawton
Councillor Philip Broadhead
Councillor Michael Brooke
Councillor Nigel Brooks

73. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr M Earl and Cllr D Kelsey

74. Substitute Members

Cllr T Trent substituted for Cllr M Earl and Cllr D Borthwick substituted for Cllr D Kelsey.

75. Declarations of Interests

Cllr Bartlett declared for the purpose of transparency that in relation to agenda item 6 he was the director of a property company and also owned several properties in the area. This did not prevent him from taking part in consideration and voting on the item.

76. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 23 August 2021 were approved as a correct record.

A Councillor commented that the item on consideration of the Council's Transformation programme was very useful and hoped that the O&S Board would be able to undertake similar in-depth scrutiny in future.

76.1 Action Sheet

The Chairman advised that the action at minute no. 28 was still awaiting a full response from the Portfolio Holder and would remain on the action sheet.

It was noted that the issues referenced on the action sheet at minute nos. 45 and 46 in relation to the Local Plan Consultation Document would be addressed by the Local Plan Working Group and could therefore be removed.

The Chairman confirmed that, in relation to the suggestion from the Board that Lead Members should produce annual report on their activities, a response had been received from the Leader of the Council. The Chairman advised the Board of the response which indicated that a report shouldn't be necessary and the reports through Cabinet should provide an indication of their work. Therefore, this action could be removed from the Forward Plan.

77. Public Speaking

No Questions, Statements or Petitions were received for this meeting.

78. Scrutiny of Homes Related Cabinet Reports

BCP Housing Strategy 2021-2026 "Our commitment to our communities" – The Portfolio Holder for Homes presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each member of the Board and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these minutes in the Minute Book. The Portfolio Holder and officers addressed a number of points raised by the Board including:

- Concerns that the commitment to social housing in new developments wasn't being adhered to. There was a need to ensure that developers worked to the targets rather than make excuses that the location or development was the wrong place for it. In response the Board was advised that the majority of Council stock was socially rented housing but the points raised would be taken into consideration
- There was a team in place who worked with external providers to address issues with housing need. It was noted that Priority no. 3 stated that the housing service had to work closely with internal and external partners, identifying specialist housing requirements and recognise the current unmet need and predict future housing requirements.
- In response to a query it was confirmed that the priority was currently identifying and addressing the current unmet need and trying to avoid crisis situations and emergency placements. However, there was also a need to look to future demands and needs and this was being done alongside the immediate priority.
- A Councillor suggested that the reason why only properties in Bournemouth and Poole were referred to should be clearly explained and an explanation that all social housing was owned by the Sovereign Housing Association in Christchurch should be provided.
- A Board member sought assurance that property construction using Modern Methods of Construction (MMC). The Portfolio Holder advised that they would not do anything which was 'cheap or quick'.

The Council would employ good labour methods and correct materials.

- In response to a query regarding homes which were unoccupied the Chief Financial Officer advised that there was a strategy set out by government on Council tax requiring a 100 percent premium if a home was empty for more than 2 years. A Board member asked if there was a strategy for bringing these back into use. The Portfolio Holder advised that there was previously an empty homes officer which they would like to reinstate, and they were looking at the resource needed to move forward the empty homes strategy.
- A Board member asked how the target Energy Performance Certificate rating of D was arrived at, given the mix of housing stock, both old and new, the newer stock being able to achieve a higher rating. By 2030 the objective was to get council houses to an EPC rating of C. A working group was examining the modelling to get properties up to this standard. It was suggested that this was confusing when there was a proposed government target set at a different level for new tenancies. Councillors commented that the strategy should be more ambitious.
- The housing waiting list was currently at 5000. A Councillor asked if it was expected that this would increase with the end to the restrictions on evictions. It was noted that there had been no indication to date that evictions or demand would significantly increase. However, this couldn't be ruled out as court dates became available.
- It was noted that there was a focus on the private rental sector but not on affordable homes for purchase. There were lots of younger people who did not want to remain in rented accommodation. There was demographic inequality in terms of the existing social housing stock and the new affordable housing stock, which disproportionately affected younger people. A Member felt that there should be a stronger commitment toward social housing
- A Councillor observed that although this was a five-year strategy it appeared to focus on a point in time. It was noted that it was a fluid and evolving document and would be under annual review.
- In response to a question, the Board was advised that the council employs measures in line with the current requirements to seek to avoid returning 'right to buy' receipts to central government.
- Regarding the income to housing cost ratio, it was confirmed that there was information in the housing needs assessment report. The Local Housing allowance was based on affordability in relation to income provided people were housed in the right accommodation for their needs. It was observed that market rents were rising significantly above the local housing allowance.
- In response to issues raised it was explained that selective licensing had been put on hold for the moment, but the housing service considered every available avenue when dealing with rogue landlords.

The Chairman summarised that whilst a number of issues had been raised the overall the Housing Strategy was welcomed. The Chairman thanked Officers and the Portfolio Holder for their responses.

Council Newbuild Housing and Acquisition Strategy – (CNHAS), 2021-26 – The Portfolio Holder for Homes presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each member of the Board and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these minutes in the Minute Book. The Portfolio Holder and officers addressed a number of points raised by the Board including:

- A Board member asked for confirmation that Templeman House was social housing. It was confirmed that this was designated for social rent and it was explained that affordable housing was often used to cover all types of affordable housing, including social rent and shared ownership.
- The majority of housing coming forward in 2022/23, would be for social rent, a total of 49 homes out of 89. The five-year programme would include a mix of affordable and social. Statistics would be brought to full council year on year.
- A Councillor commented that affordable housing would not get people off the housing register and asked whether there had been any study of what the requirements of those on the housing register were, in order to help shape what might be built on a particular site.
- A concern was raised over the definition of what 'adequately housed' meant and whether the detail of what people required from housing had been considered. There was also the hidden homeless and those in unsustainable housing, who were paying rents above what they could afford, to take into consideration.
- A Board Member asked for further detail on how the Council would actively try to retain homes within the Council's housing stock. It was noted that there were criteria which would be used to determine whether someone can apply to buy their home.
- The space for one bedroom accommodation did not provide a lot of room for people to live comfortably and sustainably. These were listed as bronze standard. There was an aim for 40 percent of builds to meet the silver standard and 10 percent should reach the gold standard.
- In terms of environmental standards it was noted that A and B standards would be the target for all new builds. All applications would be required to meet disabled standards.
- A Board member queried why the Council was investing in a sales and marketing manager when demand for homes was so high. It was noted that income generation was important for the Council and would help to keep Council Tax rates down.
- A Board member commented that the sustainability assessment had marked the paper as amber, which indicated minor negative impacts and questioned why this was proceeding if there were negative impacts.
- It was noted that there were certain areas which it was not possible to be definitive about and therefore it was recommended that it should be given an amber rating. It was noted that there were developments underway such as Luckham House which would be almost zero carbon.

- There was a query around the design guidance in relation to outside space, the importance of which had been amplified by the impact of covid. It was suggested that an amendment could be made to the document on this basis and the Portfolio Holder supported this suggestion.

The Chairman expressed his thanks to officers for a well-presented report and was pleased to hear that work on new social housing builds would be moving forward.

Following this item, the meeting was adjourned at 4.00pm resumed at 4.07pm

79. Scrutiny of Regeneration Related Cabinet Reports

BCP: New Approach to Regeneration - The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Economy and Strategic Planning presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each member of the Board and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'C' to these minutes in the Minute Book. The Portfolio Holder and officers addressed a number of points raised by the Board including:

- A concern was raised regarding the implications of not achieving transformation savings on the commitments now in place. Savings on regeneration had been effectively halved. There were a number of different ways to address the sites outlined. It was not expected that a majority would be delivered directly. Preparation would be required, and the financial envelope was considered in a separate budget monitoring paper.
- In response to a question the Board was advised that there were very low borrowing rates at present and that this represented an opportunity for investment. It was noted that the first quarter budget monitoring report for 2021/22 set out two levels, should the scheme, at any point in future, need to be rebooted.
- A Councillor commented that the scheme seemed ambitious, but debt ridden and there was a 150 percent jump in budgeted spend. It was noted that there was a projected £12.6m overspend for the year and transformation savings had already been halved. It was suggested that it may be a good idea to defer agreeing to additional spending until after there had been an opportunity to consider the medium-term financial plan.

The meeting adjourned to address technical issues from 4:28pm to 4:36pm.

- The Portfolio Holder advised that the numbers were small in the context of what was trying to be achieved for the area. It needed to be taken in context of the budget for development over the next five years. The recommendation for approval of resources for 2022/23 would form part of the budget proposals and Council would not sign off this matter until December. The Development Lead advised that there was demand for

development and investment in studies at the beginning, was needed to ensure that the right options were progressed.

- A Councillor questioned how the Urban Regeneration Company would operate with inhouse functions and how they would work together to deliver projects. It was noted that there was a formal arrangement between the Council and the company as laid out in the report. There would be a full business plan for the urban regeneration company which would be coming forward in the next month. There would be a commissioning plan and contract in place. Expertise from the Urban Regeneration Team was needed to pull everything together. The Lead Officer advised that the URC Business Plan and the Council's Commissioning Plan would be mirror documents of each other. These would ensure key value for money and other success criteria. There would be regular reporting in to ensure governance was sound at appropriate gateway stages. It would provide a dual role of both enabling and monitoring.
- A Councillor commented that the Board would like to see the governance set up, as had been requested previously. It was also noted that there was expected to be cross party representation on the board of the URC. There was further work coming in in next couple of months on the URC business plan, which was supported by external advisers.
- A Councillor commented that an additional £3.4m in-year seemed a significant increase. It was suggested that this should be put into a future budget and not this year's budget. The Portfolio Holder was asked to confirm if the £3.4m was for the URC and what the costs were for the recommendations in relation to the BDC. The Chief Financial officer advised that the make up on £3.404m was detailed in the report – £1.375m was extra towards the URC and £1.649m for development enabling costs. There was also £384k towards seafront projects and Poole Quay. All of these were revenue resource requests. In terms of BDC this was the findings of the local partnerships review. These would be reviewed and implemented and would come back for decision. It was confirmed that the BDC issues were not included as part of the £3.404m.

Following discussion, it was moved by Cllr M Cox and seconded by Cllr L Dedman that Recommendation C as outlined in the report should be deleted and replaced with the following, "Cabinet notes the current year projected overspend of £12.6m and recommends that the approval of 3.404m of additional resources be put on hold until there is greater clarity from the updated MTFP in October or November".

In discussion on the motion members commented that this funding was required as investment but there was also concern that the issues were being rushed through.

Voting: 5 in favour, 10 against

The move was therefore not carried.

The Chairman noted that there was a positive plan in place to improve our towns but noted that the issues raised would probably be around for sometime.

High Streets and District Centres Strategy – The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Economy and Strategic Planning and the Lead Member for BCP Retail Strategy and Christchurch Regeneration presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each member of the Board and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'D' to these minutes in the Minute Book. The Lead Member and officers addressed a number of points raised by the Board including:

- Board members commented that it was good to hear that Broadstone, Highcliffe and Kinson would be part of a pilot scheme and it would be good to hear more about it in future.
- A Councillor expressed their thanks to officers for sharing the report in August with ward councillors affected by district centres and providing them with an opportunity to influence it.
- In response to a question regarding where the funding would be targeted, it was confirmed by the Director for Economic Development that it would be through other areas not covered by the three Business Improvement Districts which the Councillor had suggested placed them at a disadvantage.
- A Councillor asked why the results of the survey which took place some time ago hadn't been analysed. It was noted that this included 19 different centres and the reimagining report did draw some of the outcomes from the survey together and provided a pointer for issues but there was fine tuning which needed to be addressed to start forming a proper action plan.
- It was suggested that there was a tendency to a generic approach around issues such as parking. Reductions in car parking charges for longer stays wouldn't provide support to district centres as people didn't tend to spend long periods of time there. Officers were asked if there were any initiatives which would target district centres. This was being looked at through an economic and community lens and it was hoped that issues like this could be picked up in terms of developing a way forward. It was recognised that these things existed and influenced the high street, but the strategy wasn't about addressing them directly.
- A Councillor commented that there was very little in the report around community buildings and uses. Buildings in high streets could be put to community use but this was not covered at all within the plan. It was suggested that groups and how they went about meeting post-covid was very important.
- A Councillor commented on the place marketing strategy and the descriptive wording. It was suggested that there should be a focus on the different local towns and areas. The Lead Member suggested that successful areas had a strong place identity and that a lot of positive issues could come from this.

The Chairman thanked the Members and Officers for the report and the work that had gone into this.

The Chairman advised the Board that due to the time the next report on 'Spending Priorities for Strategic CIL' would be deferred to the 6.00pm meeting.

The meeting ended at 5.38 pm

CHAIRMAN