

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 November 2021 at 2.00 pm

Present:-

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

Present: Cllr L Allison, Cllr D Borthwick, Cllr L Dedman, Cllr B Dion,
Cllr M Earl, Cllr J Edwards, Cllr D Farr, Cllr S Gabriel, Cllr M Howell,
Cllr D Kelsey and Cllr C Rigby

Also in attendance: Cllr A Hadley, Cllr P Broadhead, Cllr G Farquhar, Cllr M Green, Cllr
M lyengar

107. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr J Butt and Cllr T O'Neill.

108. Substitute Members

Cllr D Borthwick substituted for Cllr T O'Neill.

109. Declarations of Interests

There were none.

110. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 18 October 2021 were approved as a correct record.

110.1 **Action Sheet**

The Chairman highlighted that there was a typo in the Action Sheet regarding point 96. In Point 96, the date of the Cabinet meeting read: '27 November 2021' and should have correctly read: '27 October 2021'. The Committee noted this.

111. Public Speaking

There were no public issues submitted for this meeting.

112. Scrutiny of the Economic Development Strategy for BCP Cabinet Report

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Development, Growth and Regeneration, supported by the Head of Economic Development and Sustainability 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.

Officers responded to comments and requests for clarification, details included:

- BCP Council would create the right environment for businesses to flourish through four priority areas of action. In return, BCP Council expected businesses to commit to a '7-point pledge'. Members heard that BCP Council would lead by example and work collaboratively with businesses in order to improve productivity and prosperity.
- On the reference to a BCP 'cityscape' within the Economic Development Strategy (EDS), the Board were informed that BCP Council were not intending to citify the conurbation. The Deputy Leader clarified that existing areas of an industrial or city-like nature would receive relevant attention in order to regenerate and improve them appropriately.
- The EDS throws weight behind four key priorities, such as supporting productivity of small and medium sized businesses, rather than being too broad and prioritising all aspects of economic delivery. The Board hear that the expectation was for this process to be transactional between the Council and businesses and that productivity was to be the barometer to show if the EDS was working.
- BCP Council had awarded over £160million in grants to local businesses and charities in the last 18 months, to assist them in moving forward after the pandemic. The 'Bounce Back Fund' was used as an example of financial support that BCP Council could use to meet the rising expectations of the business community.
- BCP's Economic Development team, consisting of 10 members of staff championed the business community and facilitated the transactions between the Council and businesses. The team included dedicated account managers for separate sectors within the business community. The Portfolio Holder was confident that they had the resources in place to meet the rising expectations of the business community and deliver the priorities within the EDS. Members heard from the Head of Economic Development and Sustainability that this would require certain small changes to the team's focus. An example of where this focus would shift to was in developing the local supply chains. Finally, the Board were told that the Economic Development team would continue to meet with industry leaders to discuss the big issues facing the business community.
- On the matter of the Small Grants Fund, the Deputy Leader explained that at this point in time he did not know the detail of the fund but wanted to replicate the success of the pandemic funding schemes going forward, for example the Bounce Back Fund.
- The Deputy Leader stated that BCP was not a wholly industrial region and that he did not believe that it was a binary choice between economic productivity and climate action.
- On the employment skills gap, the Deputy Leader explained that he was eager to view the situation as a positive opportunity to be creative. Members heard that BCP Council had created a Skills

Commission for Dorset. There was recognition that this matter required the input of many individuals and therefore BCP Council had also created lead member roles that focused on skills and levelling up.

- The Deputy Leader welcomed comments on the Equalities Assessment and the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), both of which would be used to measure the strategy's success and agreed that there would need to be consideration of the climate crisis given the Council's climate commitment.

In concluding the discussion, the Chairman referred to the Dorset Industrial Strategy and questioned whether this was a potential area for synergy alongside the EDS. The Chairman acknowledged the quality of the strategy and the efforts of the staff involved, noting how highly regarded the Economic Development team are by the business community. Finally, the Chairman expressed that he looked forward to the strategy's action plan coming before the Board for scrutiny in the near future.

113. Seasonal Response Review 2021

The Portfolio Holder for Tourism and Active Health and the Portfolio Holder for Sustainability and Transport, supported by the Head of Seasonal Response and the Head of Operations for Tourism 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 Portfolio Holders and Officers responded to comments and requests for clarification, details included:

- On the matter of anti-litter signage, the Portfolio Holder for Tourism and Active Health explained that this was a pilot scheme, and that feedback was important. He acknowledged that the language on the signs may not be to everyone's tastes but expressed that the priority was for the signs to be effective.
- On the matters of footfall figures and traffic counts, it was explained that there was no way to differentiate between the number of petrol/diesel vehicles and the number of electric vehicles that were used to travel to and from the beaches during Summer. Furthermore, Members heard that footfall cameras at Pier Approach were utilised in order to capture an accurate figure for the number of people who passed through that area during Summer. It was explained that the Council were looking at other ways of using digital technology to collect visitor data and that this was being proposed across different areas of beach.
- On Park and Ride, it was acknowledged that the numbers of people that used the park and ride service, particularly from the Poole Civic Centre, were low and that this should be reviewed for next year. The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Sustainability welcomed comments and suggestions on the park and ride service, including

the possibility of a centralised park and ride location that could link to all three towns, different pricing rates for residents and visitors and congestion zones in particularly busy areas.

- On the matter of towing, the decision was made to locate the contracted tow trucks in areas they would have the greatest effect as a deterrent to illegal parking. The Board heard that a total of 43 vehicles were towed during the Summer and that the Council would review this when looking ahead to next Summer.
- The cost of fines that can be issued to illegally parked cars is set by national government. Members heard that the Council had been lobbying and meeting with ministers to convince the Department for Transport to increase the level of fines. Proposals on this matter going forward would be made available for people to see.
- On the matter of government funding, the Board were informed that £3.5million was awarded to BCP Council to fund their seasonal response. Members heard that there was an underspend of £800,000 which therefore left some flexibility in their seasonal response budget. It was acknowledged that this funding may not be available every year but the Portfolio Holder for Tourism and Active Health confirmed that they would be applying for any and all available funding in future.
- The Board heard that the Beach Check app was used by 37,000 people over the Summer. It was confirmed that the app did include the Christchurch beaches but a slightly different approach was taken for the Mudeford sandbank area where it was flagged as a 'red' zone in order to deter too many people from visiting due to the nature of the sight.

In concluding the discussion, the Chairman referred to the issues seen with the park and ride service but thanked the Seasonal Response Team for their hard work and high standards over the Summer months. The Chairman acknowledged the quality of the response and hoped that the requisite funding would be in place to maintain the standard set over the Summer.

114. Scrutiny of Pokesdown Railway Station Improvement Cabinet Report

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainability and Transport, supported by the Section 151 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 Portfolio Holder and Officers responded to comments and requests for clarification, details included:

- On the matter of funding, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that this would be a tripartite agreement between BCP Council, South Western Rail (SWR) and Network Rail (NR), with the Council paying up to a maximum of £2.6million. SWR and NR would pay a combined £3.1million toward the final cost. NR had entered the

funding agreement as a voluntary partner as their investment would see an enhancement to their own asset. Members heard that the matter of the public subsidy had been well explored and that this was an appropriate way of using the future's fund.

- The Portfolio Holder was not aware of any other contractual obligations, similar to what was agreed with Pokesdown Station, within the franchise agreements of other BCP area stations.
- The Department for Transport (DFT) would not allow any additional spending above contractual requirements by rail companies.
- On the matter of footfall, Members heard that 350,000 people enter and exit Pokesdown Station throughout a normal year.
- The matter was at the outline business case and was awaiting approval by the DFT, subject to any requirements they may have.
- On the matter of financial liability, the Section 151 Officer explained that if one of the other parties were to go bankrupt, the expectation would be for the contractual obligations, in this case the funding contribution and construction of the lifts, to transfer to whoever subsequently takes up the responsibility. If this was not fulfilled or if the asset was not maintained in future, the Council would look to recover the sums that it had invested through this arrangement.
- Network Rail (NR) are not a revenue-based organisation and their job is to provide infrastructure to the railway industry. South West Rail (SWR) have a responsibility for the station itself. NR do not have an obligation under the existing franchise contract to provide the £1.5million of funding. NR's investment is to ensure the safety and structural integrity of the bridge that connects the two lifts. However, the Council successfully negotiated for any surplus funds from NR's £1.5million investment to be put toward the other elements of the station enhancements.
- The lifts element of the project provides the greatest risk and detailed costings still need to be clarified and agreed. The hope is that once the detailed costings are finalised, the financial risk of the lifts element would reduce.
- On the suggestion of a loan of funds from the Council to SWR for the purposes of this project, the Section 151 confirmed that this option had not been explored.
- Several Members raised concerns over SWR seeming to avoid the commitments of their franchise agreement. The Board discussed the use of taxpayer money for this project and the Portfolio Holder agreed that SWR had seemingly avoided their commitment to funding these works and acknowledged that this was not optimal for the Council.
- Clarity was provided on the wording within the report, specifically relating to points 25, 26 and 37 and it was acknowledged that reference should be to 'lifts' plural, rather than the stated 'lift' singular. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that this would be amended to read accurately.
- On start times for the project, the Board were told that the earliest start for initial works to commence would be the end of 2022/ start of

2023. The estimated delivery programme timeline would then be 18 months.

Following discussion, the Chairman acknowledged the need for the enhancements to be made but raised concern over the business case for the project, stating that there was no quantifiable detail on the human need nor financial justification for the infrastructure improvements contained within the business case. The Chairman also highlighted that there had not been a clear answer as to why the obligation on the private company had not been fulfilled.

Following the Chairman's summary, a motion was proposed by Councillor V Slade and seconded by Councillor C Rigby that an additional recommendation should be made to the Cabinet report. It was then **RESOLVED: That funding options with the Dorset LEP, in terms of infrastructure funding, are considered and failing that that BCP Council fully investigates the option of a long-term loan to SWR before committing to making this funding allocation.**

Voting: For – 9, Against – 3, Abstained – 0

Following this, a motion was proposed by Councillor S Bartlett and seconded by Councillor L Dedman that an additional recommendation should be made to the Cabinet report. It was then **RESOLVED: That cabinet do not proceed with recommendations in the report.**

Voting: For – 8, Against – 5, Abstained – 0

The Chairman thanked Board Members and Officers for their contributions.

The meeting ended at 5.25 pm

CHAIRMAN