

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 November 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Bartlett – Chairman

Cllr S Aitkenhead – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr P Broadhead, Cllr L Dedman, Cllr B Dove, Cllr C Goodall,
Cllr S Moore, Cllr L Northover, Cllr K Salmon, Cllr M Tarling,
Cllr T Trent and Cllr O Walters

Present virtually: Cllr Dr F Rice

Also in attendance: Cllr M Cox, Cllr A Martin, Cllr V Slade

14. Apologies

There were no apologies.

It was noted that as Cllr Dr F Rice was present virtually she would not be able to take part in any vote.

15. Substitute Members

There were none.

16. Declarations of Interests

Cllr M Tarling declared for transparency that his partner worked for the Council's library service, an item which was not on the agenda for discussion but which might get raised in the context of the Forward Plan.

17. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2023 at 6.00pm* and the meetings held on 9 October 2023 at 4.00pm and 6.00pm were confirmed as a correct record for signing by the Chairman.

* Corporate and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee, renamed the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 29 September 2023.

18. Public Issues

There were no public questions, statements of petitions for this meeting.

19. Responding to the Best Value Notice – Progress Update

The Leader of the 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 report gave an update on progress in responding to the 'Best Value Notice' that was issued to the Council by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC), in August 2023 following the completion of an external assurance review by DLUHC. DLUHC's findings tallied with the Chief Executive's internal governance review in June 2023. The Leader referred to the speed in which the Chief Executive and his team had prepared and implemented an action plan to respond to each recommendation from the two reviews. The Leader and the Chief Executive drew attention to the following aspects of the action plan circulated at appendix 1 of the report:

- Action 34 was the only action not yet started, this would commence following the internal review of BCP Council companies in early 2024 and was not due for completion until June 2024.
- Action 41: a cross party working group had now been established to provide member oversight in the review of the Transformation Programme.
- Major items included agreeing a Corporate Strategy and clear set of priorities ahead of budget setting and the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- Action 5: Assurance had been received from all group leaders that the party whip was not applied to overview and scrutiny.
- DLUHC had indicated that it was content with progress at the first quarterly review meeting.

Members commented on the following actions listed in the plan:

- Action 1: The Board agreed to ask the Constitution Review Working Group to consider including a provision in the Constitution for Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Chairs to be elected from outside the Administration where political balance allowed.
- Actions 2/18/19: There was support for ongoing training beyond the initial induction to meet emerging needs and manage expectations. It was noted that a follow up session with members was being arranged before Christmas to identify ongoing needs and any gaps. Members asked if more duplicate evening sessions and the ability to join remotely could be considered as this would help those who worked during the day. It was noted that O&S Board work programme development sessions with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) were taking place between November and February.
- Action 3: There was a difference of views on the changes made to the O&S structure and the priority given to pre Cabinet scrutiny. It was noted that while this Board was now more closely aligned to the

Cabinet cycle than other O&S Committees to facilitate pre Cabinet scrutiny, this did not prevent the Board from having a broader focus. The O&S Specialist explained that there were ways for O&S to be engaged with policy development at an earlier stage. These issues could be discussed further at the CfGS work programming sessions.

The Leader explained that items were sometimes added to the Cabinet Forward Plan at a late stage, e.g. as a result of changing priorities or funding bids. She asked if it was preferable to include items at an earlier stage to raise awareness with O&S but with a caveat that circumstances may change.

- Action 17: There were differing views about the value of having a weekly email from the Leader to all councillors - whether this should be regular but on a less frequent, more 'need to know' basis - and it was noted that this was a matter for the Leader to decide.
- Action 28: The Board agreed that the wording of this action should clarify that 'councillor correspondence with external parties' only applied when classed as official correspondence written on behalf of the Council (Section 5 of the Protocol for Councillor/Officer Relations).
- Action 30: The Leader explained that all Future Places staff were now in house and working through costings with identified priorities being Poole Leisure Centre, Holes Bay, BIC and Wessex Fields.
- Action 34: There was no longer a need for a rapporteur on this issue.
- Action 38: Participation in the Safety Valve Programme would require Council approval.
- Action 40: The benefits of the new Enterprise Resource Planning system were discussed and it was suggested that members receive a 15 minute demonstration before the start of the next meeting.
- Action 41: Members were encouraged by progress made in reviewing the Transformation Programme.

The Chair thanked the Leader and the Chief Executive for a clear and comprehensive update on progress. It was agreed to review this item again at the O&S Board meeting in April 2024 as part of the quarterly report on performance management.

20. Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Update

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance 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 Holder outlined the context for the development of the 2024/25 budget, as detailed in the report. Work continued to focus on closing the £44million funding gap for 2024/25 and on delivering £34 million in savings for 2023/24, £9million of which had been unidentified. He highlighted that the savings and efficiencies being considered would include some reduction in services, painful in some cases. He also referred to

additional pressures which included corporate costs, such as the pay award and unidentified transformation costs, and 12.6million funding pressure in the current year.

The Portfolio Holder responded to questions and observation on the report, including:

- A member questioned the realism of the 2019 Transformation business case and it was noted that while savings had been made, whether this was as much as originally presented was debatable.
- A member asked why the Council's pension fund contribution rate was in excess of 22% and why the projections were not falling. It was explained that funding levels had improved to 96% and that it was better to maintain at a consistent level and only reduce when clearly overfunded.
- A member summarised the current position, referred to the positive feedback at the Transformation Working Group and wondered whether more savings and less cuts could be factored into 2025/26. The Portfolio Holder did not agree with the suggestion that the unidentified savings had been identifiable and while good work was being done, it was too early to make assumptions and there was still up to £7million to be identified in the current financial year. A major issue was that third party savings had not delivered as anticipated.
- It was confirmed that the budget monitoring report would detail which services came under which directorate, so as to be clear and transparent for councillors and residents.
- Latest information was that the Local Government Settlement would be provided before Christmas.
- It was confirmed that the assumed £1.4million cost to establish the regeneration team was an ongoing revenue cost until such time as any future profit could be capitalised.
- With regard to the inflation figures in the projection the Portfolio Holder advised that these were provided by the treasury management team. It was noted that while some councils had been criticised for the figures they had used, BCP had a prudent approach.
- It was clarified the £3.2million itemised as salary costs charged to Transformation would come out of the budget in 2025/26.

There were no recommendations from the Board arising from this report.

21. Forward Plan

The Board considered 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 Chair invited the Portfolio Holder for Culture to give an update on the Library Strategy, which would now come to the Board in January 2024. The Portfolio Holder explained that this item had been delayed in order to get

the consultation right in view of its importance. He would welcome feedback from members on library services. He assured the Board that the strategy was not about making decisions on the future of services, it was about reimagining the role of libraries in a community-based Council within the context of transformation.

Members commented on the services provided by their own local libraries and their value in the community. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the strategy would address issues such as staff being on site to assist people in accessing services. There was a broader discussion to be had on the role of libraries in the community. Members were encouraged by the use of a needs-based assessment. Members also talked about the success of the library hub model. A member emphasised the need for harmonisation and it was confirmed that Bournemouth libraries would be migrating onto the Poole/Christchurch system. It was noted that there were less than ten years remaining on the PFI agreement for Bournemouth Central Library. It was also confirmed that revenue generation would be looked at, e.g. hiring out of rooms.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and the Director of Customer and Business Delivery for their attendance.

Board members discussed the timetabling of items on the Forward Plan and other suggested items and agreed the following:

- December meeting – Items as listed, with the meeting starting at 5.00pm. Members were advised to consider outside of this meeting how they wished to receive the Corporate Plan.
- January meeting – Cabinet reports on the Library Strategy and the Options Appraisal to Review Options Around 20mph schemes and agree the Council's position, plus Update on O&S Action Plan.
- No longer required – it was noted that items on Complaints and Company Reviews were both now being addressed elsewhere.
- Two Scrutiny Review Requests on the Cost of Bus Passes and Road Danger for Children to be formally considered at the forthcoming O&S Work Programming Workshops, along with other suggestions for the Forward Plan.
- Other items to add to the Forward Plan and discuss further at the workshops included an Update on Wessex Fields and other regeneration projects and an Assurance Review Update due in April 2024 alongside the Corporate Performance report.

The Overview and Scrutiny Specialist gave an update on the workshops taking place at 6.00pm – 8.00pm on 12 December, 18 January and 12 February, and explained that these would also provide a development opportunity for members in work programming skills.

A Board member asked if an item to look at how the Council engages with residents in comparison to other local authorities could be considered and was advised to complete a scrutiny request form. Members noted that this

formed part of the governance review and that the Engagement Strategy was due to be reviewed next year.

The meeting ended at 8.12pm

CHAIRMAN