

**BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL**  
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 January 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Bartlett – Chairman

Cllr S Aitkenhead – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr P Broadhead, Cllr L Dedman, Cllr C Goodall, Cllr S Moore,  
Cllr L Northover, Cllr M Tarling, Cllr T Trent, Cllr O Walters,  
Cllr J Beesley and Cllr A Keddle  
Present Cllr F Rice  
Virtually:  
Also in Cllr R Burton, Cllr P Canavan, Cllr S Carr-Brown, Cllr M Cox,  
attendance: Cllr A Martin and Cllr C Rigby  
Also in Cllr B Dove, Cllr D Brown, Cllr M Earl, Cllr A Hadley and Cllr M  
attendance LePoidevin  
Virtually:

39. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr B Dove and Cllr K Salmon. Cllr B Dove joined the meeting virtually in their role as Chair of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

40. Substitute Members

Cllr J Beesley substituted for Cllr B Dove and Cllr A Keddle substituted for Cllr K Salmon.

41. Declarations of Interests

Cllr J Beesley declared for transparency an other interest in agenda item xx– BCP Council Libraries that they were a member of Arts Council Area Council for the South West.

Cllr M Tarling advised for transparency of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in agenda item x as their spouse was employed by BCP in Library Service

42. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 January were approved as a correct record.

43. Public Issues

There were no public petitions or statements. Two public questions were received in relation to agenda item 7 from Mr A McKinstry and were responded to by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance, as follows:

1. Can we have confirmation of whether the following assets have been disposed of for capital receipt generating purposes:

35 Willis Way, Fleetsbridge;  
Land on the north side of Crescent Road, central Bournemouth;  
Southbourne Crossroads car park, Southbourne Coast Road.

None of these sites had been disposed of when I last looked into the matter in November 2023, though this position may have changed, as "forecast receipts" from the Fleetsbridge and Southbourne sites are mentioned in tonight's report for Item 7, Appendix 6. If any of these assets have now been disposed of, can we have details of the sale prices and the net proceeds arising; and if the Crescent Road site (unmentioned in the report) has not been disposed of, or is no longer being disposed of full-stop, please can we have the reasons?

Response:

It can now be confirmed that 35 Willis Way, Fleetsbridge was sold in December 2023 for £1.089m.

The sale of Southbourne Crossroads car park has not yet been completed but is still anticipated before 31 March 2023.

In respect Crescent Road, the private treaty sale in 2023 did not achieve the minimum Red Book valuation and was therefore withdrawn from the market. The Housing Delivery Team within BCP Council are now looking into the feasibility of a residential scheme.

2. Apropos the Section 25 report - Paragraph 71, "Legal claims against the Council" (p. 160). Am I right in assuming that the costs of hiring consultants to defend the Highmoor Farm appeal, and/or any costs award that may go against the Council, would be treated as "unforeseen events" and thus met using the Council's unearmarked reserves? Can you also confirm whether the Council's external auditor has been made aware / is being kept informed of this matter?

Response

You are correct the councils unearmarked reserves would need to be used to cover any costs falling to the council in respect of the Highmoor Farm planning appeal.

#### 44. BCP Council Libraries – Creating a sustainable future

The Portfolio Holder for Customer, Communications and Culture and the Libraries and Customer Service Manager 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 Board was advised that local authorities were constantly evaluating the way they deliver services, not only taking account of financial pressures but equally changes in social trends, new technology and the evolving needs of their communities. However, since BCP Council was formed in 2019, there had not been a comprehensive look at the library service to ensure it remained relevant to the needs of local communities and to the circumstances in which the council now operated. The Board was informed that a review

was therefore overdue and that the Cabinet report set out the review framework.

It was noted that exploring interest in the alternative models of delivery may allow libraries to sustain and even improve their offer to communities as hubs for a variety of council/community services. A range of models including those that capitalised on the capacity in our communities, and the technology that was now available to support open access, would be explored to inform the final strategy. The Board raised a number of issues in the subsequent discussion including:

- The Private Finance Initiative for Bournemouth Library – It was noted that the £1.6million payable was for each year, for the next 8.5 years. The figure may vary slightly due to utility costs, etc. After investigation it had not been found that it was financially viable to withdraw from the contract as the scheduled payments would still need to be made.
- Use of Bournemouth Library – It was being used by the Citizen's Advice Bureau. Whilst there was some office space there wasn't additional space suited for other commercial uses.
- Support from the Arts Council – It was noted that it had no statutory responsibility for Libraries but were through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport working to encourage advocacy and collaboration. There were two types of grant funding available for projects and collaborative work. The next round of grants funding was due to take place in 2025.
- Consultation Process - It was acknowledged that it was good that the consultation would be engaging with non-library users. There was a need to understand why people were coming to libraries and also the reasons people were not using libraries.
- Building Survey - It was noted that the building survey seemed to be out of date for a number of locations, for example Christchurch and was not particularly relevant for the consultation.
- Volunteers – It was highlighted that this wasn't always an effective means to deliver a service and it was something which officers and the Portfolio Holder would need to take into account.
- Stock Budget – It had reduced marginally over the years but there was a healthy budget which was shared. Consultation should be included on how the stock budget was utilised and it needed to be spent in a way which provided an efficient service.
- Data collection – it was noted that libraries collected figures on number of people entering the library and also the stock borrowed.
- Asset Management – In response to an issue raised on wording in the report the Portfolio Holder advised that they had not had any discussion with officers on closures of libraries. The paragraph in question was about how the Council could be more efficient with building use. The Board advised that if any libraries were in jeopardy this should be made very clear in the consultation.
- Social Value Assessment – It was important that this was included in the consultation and included the vulnerability of users, isolation and socioeconomic factors.

The Chair thanked the Officers and Portfolio Holder for attending and bringing the Cabinet report to the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7.03pm and resumed at 7.11pm.

45. Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan

The 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 Board was advised that the report set out for Cabinet consideration and recommendation to Council the proposed 2024/25 budget and council tax based on; increasing council tax by 2.99% in 2024/25 in line with the government's annual basic threshold, Collecting the full additional 2% Adult Social Care (ASC) precept in 2024/25, implementation of the approved financial strategy, £41m of further savings, efficiencies, and additional income generation required to correct the structural £30m deficit inherited from 2023/24 and other pressures, to set a legally balanced budget, and provide the basis of a more financially sustainable council moving forward. Recognise that the council is projecting to spend £29m more on Special Educational Needs and Disability services in 2024/25 than the funding specifically being made available by government. The consequential deficit this creates in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) will mean the council is technically insolvent on 31 March 2024 (as the deficit on the DSG will be greater than the total reserves held by the council with a negative overall general fund position). Statutory guidance which means the deficit can be ignored by all councils until the 31 March 2026 provides interim protection for the Council. In the subsequent discussion a number of issues were raised by the Board including:

- Additional Funding - The use and amount of additional funding expected to be received from Central Government was discussed. It was expected that the Council would receive an additional £3.5million in addition to the previously notified finance settlement. A number of suggestions were made throughout the meeting with regards to the use of the additional funding including restoring the complex safeguarding service in Children's Services, general pressures around children's social care, day centres, areas identified within the public consultation.
- Report recommendations - It was confirmed that the report recommend the delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive in consultation with others to agree the proposed use for additional funding. However, it was noted that if the amount was confirmed prior to the Cabinet meeting it may be possible to take an addendum to the recommendations to Cabinet.
- Financial priorities of the administration – The Portfolio Holder advised that his personal priorities was to ensure a good level of reserves to mitigate any arising risks with some of the funding but in terms of spending it should be used on services which to reduce the most impact on end users.
- Impact on arts and culture provision – It was noted that a 10 percent reduction in the grant for the BSO had been negotiated. The Arts by the

Sea festival was currently funded for next year but it was suggested that more community based events should be considered. The social value of the music service was highlighted.

- Housing Revenue Account - It was noted that this was a ringfenced account with clear legislation governing what could be included. The changes were about ensuring absolute consistency between the two different area accounts and generally due to using inflation factors.
- Nature support – It was noted that the level of resources for the three Councils combined was the same as was in place for one predecessor Council.
- One-off Resources – The Portfolio Holder noted that these had previously been invested in services but these had been taken to be used in various ways to improve the overall financial health of the authority.
- Medium Term Financial Plan – It was noted that it was very difficult for Councils to plan their budgets when only receiving a one year settlement from central government. A Four-year period to balance the budget was outlined as longer-term decisions were required. Services would be transitioned to be fully self-funded over period of 4 years or to consider alternative provision.
- Income generation – The Board questioned the decision to close King's Park Nursery and whether there were any alternative options. There were proposed increase in fees and Charges. The Portfolio Holder advised that their intent was to do this safely and securely as the Council was not a commercial enterprise upon which risks could be taken.
- Adult Day Care – Whether consideration had been given to the important social value, for example use of the service had meant full time carers were able to retain their jobs. The Board were advised that the results of the consultation would be considered.
- Key Financial Risks – The O&S Board considered the S25 report which outlined the various different kinds of risks the Council was facing. Issues were raised concerning whether the contingency would remain unspent. It was noted that risks scores were outlined. If the savings were not realised, then the Council would look to implement an expenditure freeze from 31 March. The Board was advised that the Portfolio Holder would take all opportunities to improve the Council's financial health. It was noted that the contingency was considered sufficient to cover the possible arising risks, but it was noted that it was dependent upon which risks arose and when.
- High Needs SEND Budget – it was noted that the Safety Valve Plan had been submitted and that initial feedback indicated that it was credible and realistic, but a response was still awaited from the DfE. It was noted that a realistic solution to the problem was required. Questions were raised around the financing of the £4.9 million DSG deficit and the borrowing charges to finance the deficit.

The meeting adjourned at 7:54pm and resumed at 9.00pm.

(cont.)

- Community Asset Transfer – Questions were raised regarding the process and impact of community asset transfer. It was noted that the Communities Team alongside the estates and legal teams were looking into the process at present. There were a number of community organisations interested. The Board asked if all areas which had been losing money had been identified.
- Equalities Impact Needs Assessments – In response to a query it was noted that the whole budget was addressed in that attached to the report but that there were a number of individual assessments for different things. However, it would not be possible to include all of these with the report, Individual EINAs would still need to take place for other items.
- Freeze of all non-essential expenditure – In a response to a question on what was defined as non-essential it was explained that there were clear processes and procedures in place. There was a level of judgement call outside of statutory requirements. Everything would be challenged by budget holders. If assurance was provided that savings would be achieved by 1 April the recommendation did not need to apply.
- Budget Consultation – There were a number of issues raised regarding the consultation process and what the public were asked particularly as all areas within the consultation were still earmarked as cuts within the budget.
- Harmonisation – It was noted that CSAS officers in Christchurch were being funded through the parish precept and there were still differences with issues such as street lighting and food waste collection between the predecessor authority areas.

The Chairman and several members of the Board placed on record their thanks to the finance team in producing the budget. No recommendations were made by the Committee, but the Chairman reminded members that any requests for use of additional funding could be provided directly to the Portfolio Holder and that all members were welcome to attend the Cabinet meeting and make comments directly.

46. Work Plan

The Board noted the work plan and the items included for the next meeting. The Board was reminded that the next work programming workshop was scheduled for Monday 12 February.

The meeting ended at 10.25 pm

CHAIRMAN