

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 January 2025 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Aitkenhead – Vice-Chair in the Chair

Present: Cllr P Broadhead, Cllr J Beesley, Cllr L Dedman, Cllr C Goodall,
Cllr S Mackrow, Cllr L Northover, Cllr K Salmon, Cllr T Trent,
Cllr O Walters and Cllr C Weight

Present Cllr S Bartlett, Cllr Dr F Rice
Virtually:

Also in Cllr M Earl, Cllr J Hanna, Cllr R Herrett, Cllr K Wilson
attendance:

92. Apologies

It was noted that Cllr S Bartlett and Cllr Dr F Rice were in attendance virtually.

93. Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

94. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

95. Public Issues

The Board was advised of the receipt of the following public statement from Mr Adam Sofianos which at his request was read out by the clerk in his absence:

Agenda Item 7, Centralisation of Complaints across BCP Council update –

“It’s heartening to see Council addressing issues in the Complaints service. However I wonder if the extent of these issues are clear.

In May 2022 I registered a formal complaint around the Jesmond Wood saga. The Council took 2 years and 2 months to provide a Stage 1 response. This staggering delay came despite over 30 chasing emails direct to officers, including the Chief Executive, despite meetings with the former Head of Planning and former Monitoring Officer, and despite consistent support from ward councillor Andy Martin.

I could go on; but in short, this appalling experience was only ended when the current Monitoring Officer arrived, and I appealed directly to her.

The issues are far greater than simply inconsistency between departments. I urge the Council to turn over every stone and consider every avenue in its review of the Complaints service. The public interest must come first.”

The Vice Chair in the chair thanked Mr Sofianos for his interest.

96. The Centralisation of Complaints across BCP Council - Update

The Chair and the Board agreed to bring this agenda item forward to enable the Portfolio Holder to attend.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer and Communications 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 highlighted the importance of handling complaints correctly and learning from them in order to improve customer experience. It also had an impact on the reputation of BCP Council. He gave an example of recurring problems which had been experienced by residents in his own ward. The report provided an update on the work to centralise the management and oversight of complaints within the Council, due to be completed by April 2026. The centralised service aimed to ensure that complaints were dealt with consistently across all departments, with reduced costs and better accountability. It also responded to the national Ombudsman recommendation to improve all local authorities' complaints services. The Portfolio Holder referred to the key benefits of the proposal and the progress made to date, as set out in the report. In addition, it was noted that the Ombudsman required the Council to nominate a Lead Member for Complaints, a role which the Portfolio Holder had agreed to fulfil.

A number of points were raised and responded to including:

- Would staff be required to enter complaints received into the centralised system? Yes, as the aim of the single case management system was to ensure a consistent approach. There would also be a complaints lead in each service area. It was clarified that the oversight, guidance and monitoring of complaints would be dealt with centrally. Existing staff in each service area would respond to service specific complaints.
- Was the April 2026 launch date achievable? It was noted that work had been ongoing since 2022. The Board was informed that development of the requirements for the database had been completed. Dates for the build, completion and testing of the system had been scheduled. The timetable reflected the significant

competing pressures in ICT services associated with the number and complexity of improvement programmes cross the Council.

- It was noted that there would be a threefold process for dealing with complaints, service requests and compliments which should make the system more effective. Services were being supported in differentiating between a complaints and a service request, to ensure that only complaints went through the formal complaints process, whilst simple requests for service could be dealt with and concluded promptly.
- Between now and the launch date staff continued to be engaged in the process and work was ongoing to develop and implement staff training.
- It was noted that a procedure for dealing with unreasonable and persistent complainants (UPCs) would be added to the Complaints Policy, including the creation of a new UPC panel.

The Portfolio Holder thanked the Director of Customer and Property and Head of Business Support and their teams for their work to date in developing the centralised complaints system.

The Board noted the progress made and the future steps required to deliver a more centralised complaints process.

97. Transformation Programme Completion

The Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Resources and Governance, 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 provided a summary of achievements against the Council's Transformation Programme original business cases, the aims and objectives of each of the programme's core themes and made recommendations to Cabinet for the programme's completion. The Portfolio Holder referred in particular to the savings achieved, as detailed in paragraphs 6 to 9, and the success in bringing together three versions of every service into a single unified operating model. The report outlined key areas of focus including IT, estates and accommodation and people and culture. The ongoing operational delivery of the People Strategy and Estates and Accommodation Programme was noted along with those objectives which remained outstanding. The Board was advised that the future governance of transformation beyond completion of the programme was to be undertaken by the Corporate Strategy Delivery Board. The Portfolio Holder expressed his appreciation to all service directors and staff who had been involved in the transformation programme and to the elected members on the Transformation Working Group. It was acknowledged that much of what had been achieved was not necessarily obvious to residents.

A number of points were raised and responded to including:

- How many staff were made redundant as part of the programme? These figures would be compiled and circulated to the Board after the meeting. It was always known that there would be a significant reduction in posts as part of transformation. It was noted that much of these came from vacancies being offered, with some voluntary redundancies and where required a very small number of compulsory redundancies.
- What was the basis for the £665,000 per annum attributed to moving the economic development service to full cost recovery, this appeared to be ambitious? The Board was advised that the service was intended to generate revenue to cover the costs of the team, including through the use of grants.
- There was universal recognition that the savings predicted in the original business case had been achieved despite the challenges of the last five years and some previous misgivings about the level of savings anticipated although it was noted that these levels had been carefully considered at the time.
- There was a concern about an apparent lack of elected member oversight in the future governance arrangements. The Portfolio Holder assured the Board that there would be little change, in terms of his role and the ability to bring reports to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny. It was noted that the members' working group would also continue.
- What was involved in ongoing revenue licencing and financing costs of £15.5m? This related to the cost of Microsoft licences for the Council's systems and security over the five year period. This was subject to regular monitoring internally to ensure it was providing best value for money.
- What had been achieved in five years while Pay and Reward remained outstanding? The Board was reminded of the unique complexity of local government reorganisation (LGR) in BCP with differences of pay, grading and terms and conditions between the three sets of staff from the preceding councils, the transfer of external staff into the Council and new starters post 2019. The Council had succeeded in bringing everything together into a single Pay and Reward proposal. Negotiations continued with GMB. Should agreement be reached and a further ballot be successful, implementation could be around six months from that date, otherwise the process could take another year at least. The Portfolio Holder reported on progress since September, including that negotiations were going well prior to Christmas and a further update was pending.
- It was acknowledged that the challenges over the last five years, particularly the financial pressures, made it difficult for residents to see the benefits of LGR. There had been an expectation of improved services as a result of transformation and this could and should still be achieved.

The Board noted the report on the Transformation Programme completion.

98. Regeneration Progress Report

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 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The Leader provided an overview of progress in delivering the priority programmes for regeneration. Following the closure of FuturePlaces, a new 'in house' Investment and Development Directorate had been established to continue this work. The current focus was on delivering the first four priority sites, before the ability to deliver more. Factors affecting the delivery of these projects had now been identified and an effective delivery model had now been established with input from partners. The delivery model aimed to work more efficiently across regeneration and housing, based on the priorities set out in paragraph 10 of the report and linked to the corporate strategy. In the context of the national housing crisis, it was noted that housing delivery was the driver for two of the sites in particular. The Leader referred to the challenges which had emerged over the last five years, including the current financial climate and the impact on funding and borrowing, changes to legal and planning obligations, the labour and skills shortage and changes to affordable housing grants.

The Board was advised that decisions on the following four sites were due to be made through the democratic process in March 2025:

- 1) Holes Bay former power station site – the next step was to prepare a development brief to ensure the site delivered what was required and to attract a partner at an early stage. The advantages of the site had attracted interest and investment from Homes England.
- 2) Dolphin Leisure Centre – there was more flexibility in considering options now the leisure centre had been brought back into council ownership. The outcome of the structural surveys was awaited. Options were to improve the current centre or redevelop it completely. It was noted that the use of some of the land in the area to finance the build was no longer viable (but this land could still be used for housing)
- 3) Winter Gardens – the previous planning consent had expired and was no longer viable but it had established a blueprint. The current car park provided a good revenue stream and an option was to see if the revenue stream could continue alongside the delivery of homes on site.
- 4) Bournemouth International Centre (BIC) – consideration of the building being functional/operational balanced against the question of whether it was best use of a landmark location. Options were to consider external funding, if there was interest, or to work with what was already there in partnership with BH Live.

The Leader explained that a more collective approach was now being taken to the regeneration projects across the three relevant Cabinet portfolios.

A number of points were raised and responded to including:

- Would the Dolphin Leisure Centre likely become housing? It would not be replaced by housing. The area was being considered as a whole to try and maximise its potential, taking a place-based approach. The leisure centre remained the focus.
- Had the inclusion of a datacentre beneath the leisure centre been considered? Not specifically but the Council had looked at other leisure facilities around the country and was willing to consider all options which encouraged a low carbon footprint.
- Decarbonisation should be at the forefront of development, including transportation and reducing the need to travel. The Board was assured that the Council's Corporate Strategy was clear in its priorities. It was also important not to lose opportunities for biodiversity net gain and the provision of greenspace.
- What was happening to the other sites which FuturePlaces had been looking at? There would be a renewal of focus once the four regeneration priority sites had been dealt with. The Board was advised that sites had been placed correctly, with some sites being dealt with in house as part of CNHAS programme and others being led by external stakeholders (e.g, Poole Marina).
- The focus on regeneration and the economy should work in tandem with housing but the focus should not be lost.
- There was a lack of information about the BIC. It was suggested that there needed to be an assurance to BH Live that they would be involved in any remodelling plans for BIC. It was noted that the BIC was now disaggregated from the Winter Gardens. The reasons for this and the reasons why the two sites had previously been coupled were discussed.
- On the Winter Gardens, there was a concern that the loss of income from car parking may serve as a disincentive. It was also suggested that removing car parking would have a detrimental impact on the town centre at a challenging time. The Board was assured that this was not the intention. The role of the Bournemouth Development Company (BDC) was questioned. It was explained that there was a need to have discussions with BDC, not only on the Winter Gardens but also to keep the Council informed should they not be able to take forward other sites in their portfolio.
- Who was providing advice on viability for the Holes Bay development brief? As detailed in the report the Council was working closely with Homes England to develop a plan for the site. The Board was informed that Homes England now had a clear understanding of what the Council wanted from the development. The private sector was also involved.
- It was commented that there could be risks in relying on Homes England as a long-term strategy
- The frustrations expressed at the lack of progress over the years and the costs involved were acknowledged. The Board was advised that

the current approach and the new directorate was intended to kick start regeneration to put it into the best shape to deliver. The funding for the Holes Bay site was clarified and the Council was now working with partners to identify further funding opportunities.

The Chair thanked the team for the report and hoped that the comments made in the discussion could be taken on board. It was agreed to add an item onto the Board's forward plan to request an update on progress at a future meeting.

RESOLVED that:

- 1. The Board notes the strategic direction and progress made on the regeneration priorities; and**
- 2. The Board notes the pressures in the housing market and the solutions being explored to unlock delivery, including proactive partnerships with Homes England and developers.**

Voting: Nem. Con.

99. Forward Plan

The Vice Chair in the chair presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member with the agenda for the 6 January Board meeting, and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'D' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Board was asked to consider and identify work priorities for publication in a Work Plan. In particular members were asked to identify which budget related reports they wished to scrutinise at the next meeting on 3 February. Following discussion the Board agreed to focus on the reports on the Budget 2025/26 and Budget Monitoring 2024/25, Quarter 3. It was agreed that the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees should be invited to the next meeting to provide input into the budget discussions.

NOTE: It was agreed to accept this item as urgent business as the Forward Plan had been deferred at the previous meeting on 6 January and the Board was required to confirm which budget reports it wished to consider at its next meeting on 3 February.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm

CHAIR