

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY, ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON TUESDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2016 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor JC Spanswick – Chairperson

DK Edwards
JR McCarthy
R Williams

CA Green
HE Morgan

CJ James
G Phillips

CL Jones
KJ Watts

Officers:

Angie Bowen	Group Manager - Housing & Community Regeneration
Sarah Daniel	Scrutiny Support Officer
Julie Ellams	Democratic Services Officer
Andrew Jolley	Corporate Director - Operational & Partnership Services
Mark Shephard	Corporate Director - Communities
Andrew Thomas	Group Manager – Sports and Physical Activity

61. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Tildesley.

62. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

63. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Community, Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 28 July 2016 be approved as a true and accurate record.

64. THE OPERATION OF PORTHCAWL HARBOUR INCLUDING THE MARINA AND RELATED SERVICES

The Corporate Director Communities presented a report outlining the current operation of the Porthcawl Harbour and Marina facilities and services and identifying the opportunities and challenges in relation to the Harbour and Marina. The development was completed in 2013 benefitting from external investment and European funding. As a result of this development, the Marina now had a range of additional features including a tidal lock gate and a pontoon access system providing 70 berths for berth holders and visitors. It had also generated increased interest in other regeneration and investment projects including the sale of the Jennings Building and the potential development of the Harbourside project.

The report also identified challenges to the service to generate additional income and to control costs where possible within the budget and also longer term challenges of asset maintenance and replacement. The Marina had performed well in terms of income

generation and had exceeded its berth holder and visitor related income targets. There were however facility related costs that were less easy to predict relating to technical installations infrastructure and the impact of the coastal environment particularly due to adverse weather.

It was important that the Marina remained financially competitive and the costs were currently lower than those neighbouring Marinas because of the limited facilities currently available. There would be progressive annual increases as further developments were completed and facilities improved.

Members asked for clarification regarding the definition of a Marina and a Harbour. The Group Manager Sports and Physical Activity explained that in Porthcawl we had both, the Marina formed part of the area that supported the larger harbour footprint.

Members questioned the staffing structure and the contracts of those staff who worked at the Marina including the contracted hours of the Harbour Master and support staff and whether or not there were any staff on zero hours contracts. The Group Manager Sports and Physical Activity explained that the Marina operated with tidal access originally supported for all tidal movements 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. More recently, the gates would open during the night on a request basis and mainly for commercial fishermen and this required a flexible workforce including sessional staff deployed hourly to supplement the full time staff. The original plan was to run all tides and then review the position after 18 months. The decision was then taken to staff the core tides and the unsociable tides on request. Members suggested that the operational management of the Marina be reviewed including the option of procuring a Commercial Operator to manage the Marina to make better use of the Authority's resources.

The Committee asked if income from the Waverley was included in the figures. The Group Manager Sports and Physical Activity explained that the Waverley would have docked at the Harbour but not at the Marina but a fee was charged.

The Committee requested further information regarding the membership of the Harbour Board, the decision-making process and if Minutes from meetings were available to the public. The Group Manager Sports and Physical Activity explained that BCBC had a number of legal responsibilities identified within the Mid Glamorgan County Council Act 1987 including putting in place reasonable charges for services and facilities. Decisions were then taken by using existing Cabinet approval processes. Council representatives from a range of service areas sat on the Board and focussed on key issues including asset management, business performance and pricing. The Harbour Board reviewed operational issues and made recommendations on issues requiring corporate approval and the Marina Operational Board made recommendations to the Harbour Board. There was no Local Member representation on the Harbour Board however the Minutes from all meetings were available. Concerns were raised about demand for berths outstripping supply and the need for this to be controlled by officers with no Member involvement and appropriate Terms of Reference. Members stated that public money had been invested in the Marina and therefore business should be open and transparent and there should be Local Member representation on the Harbour Board.

The Committee asked for further information on the financial costs to the Authority to subsidise the costs of running the Marina and also a detailed breakdown of the projected closing budget for the financial year 2016/17 to include staff costs, maintenance costs and any other ongoing associated costs associated with the running of the marina. The Corporate Director Communities explained even though there was a long term vision and strategy for the Marina, there would be an element of expenditure required for coastal defences and other issues. There had been considerable investment in gates

and the pontoon and one off costs had already been incurred but this was unpredictable. The Committee specifically requested to see evidence on the further development of the business model so the Marina was running at break-even costs.

Members asked for more information on the further developments mentioned in the report. The Group Manager Sports and Physical Activity explained that this included a crane and lifting gear, improvements to the overall environment and the Jennings building, showers and toilets.

The Committee asked where the Marina sat when benchmarked against neighbouring providers. The Group Manager Sports and Physical Activity explained that fees at the Marina were low in comparison to neighbouring marinas because of limited facilities and restricted tidal movements and this was reflected accordingly.

Members asked how visitors gained access to the Marina 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. The Group Manager Sports and Physical Activity explained that any request would be capable of being accommodated, that advance booking based on vessel suitability was required and the Marina was staffed at the appropriate times.

The Committee asked how many berths were held for visitors. The Group Manager Sports and Physical Activity explained that there had been 174 visiting vessels to the Marina with some staying for extended periods. If the visitor berths were full, the berths of those sailing or travelling were resold as detailed in the Terms and Conditions.

Members asked how often there were visits from Custom and Excise. The Group Manager Sports and Physical Activity explained that there had been visits but they were unannounced and not scheduled.

The Committee asked if there were any policing issues around the Marina. The Group Manager Sports and Physical Activity explained that there were incidents of inappropriate behaviour and work had been carried out with the community police to reduce the problem. There was CCTV in operation and the Harbour Master controlled the footage. There were incidents of petty theft at certain times of the year but no major vandalism.

Members asked if it was viable for the site to be used for productions such as Casualty and Sherlock. The Group Manager Sports and Physical Activity explained that this was already taking place, interest was welcomed and companies were asked to contact communications to negotiate a fee.

The Committee asked what the issue was with the £10k per annum required for dredging activity. The Group Manager Sports and Physical Activity explained that there were protocols set by the Environment Agency and it depended on how much silt was required to be removed and the method of approved disposal. It depended on the depth of the silt and how much room was required for boats to move around and dredging would be necessary in the next few years.

Members asked how the Marina could be made more accessible for the disabled. The Group Manager Sports and Physical Activity explained that the steepness of the ramp depended on the tides and support was needed for wheelchair users. There was also the issue of risk.

The Committee asked what the financial projections were for the future. The Corporate Director Communities reported that with additional lifts and the Marina now able to

accommodate bigger, longer boats (by replacing some pontoons) it was an improving picture.

Members thanked the officers for the report.

Further Information

The Committee requested further information on contracts of those staff who work at the Marina to include the contracted hours of the Harbour Master and support staff and specifically if there were any staff on zero hour contracts.

The Committee requested further information on the financial costs to the Authority to subsidise the costs of running Marina

The Committee requested a detailed breakdown of the projected closing budget for the financial year 2016/17 to include staff costs, maintenance costs and any other ongoing costs associated with the running of the marina. The Committee specifically requested to see evidence on the further development of the business model so the Marina was running at break-even costs.

Recommendations

The Committee recommends that the minutes of the Harbour Board and Stakeholder Group meetings are publicly available and easily accessible to ensure openness and transparency

The Committee strongly recommends that there is Local Member representation on the Harbour Board and that they form part of the decision making process of the Marina. Members suggested a local Member plus one other County Borough Member.

The Committee recommends that the Operational Management of the Marina be reviewed and the option of procuring a Commercial Operator to manage the Marina be considered to make better use of the Authority's resources.

The Committee recommends a review of the visitor berths and how they are managed to ensure there are utilised to full capacity to maximise the income to the Marina.

65. HOMES IN TOWN GRANTS (HITS) - PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL AND DISABLED ADAPTATION POLICY

The Group Manager - Housing and Community Regeneration presented a report updating the Committee on the Homes In Towns (HiTs) grant providing details of applications received and explaining the application process. The report also advised Members of the barriers and issues administering the grant and how the service was responding to them.

Cabinet received a report in November 2013 to approve an amendment to the Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations Policy to include the introduction of two new grants and the revision of existing grants. Homes in Town Grants were introduced as a new grant at this time.

Welsh Government approved a £5.98 million grant for Bridgend town centre under the Vibrant and Viable Places framework for the period 2014/15 – 2016/17. As part of the overall funding package to meet VVP, the HiTs scheme was submitted as match funding in the bid of £390,000 grant and £260,000 private finance to provide 14 units of

accommodation. Officers actively encouraged expressions of interest in the HiTs scheme and undertook a number of exercises on order to attract the maximum interest. To date the Council had received 11 expressions of interest, of which 5 had not progressed further. Six property owners were pursuing this grant funding and officers were in regular contact to assist and encourage them to proceed with their applications however no grants had been awarded to date.

As part of the Planning process an assessment of the impact of noise was required. This requirement had been highlighted as a major stumbling block in bringing the properties into use as the assessment would cost the applicant up front, with no guarantee that Planning would be forthcoming. In order to enable the potential applications to proceed, a specialist contractor had been appointed by the Council to undertake the work.

The Committee were asked to acknowledge the effort made by officers to progress schemes under the HiTs and assistance to RSLs for Strategic Regeneration.

The Committee asked what would happen if BCBC was unable to approve grants and spend the funding by the end of April 2017. The Group Manager- Housing and Community Regeneration explained that WG had confirmed to colleagues within the Regeneration Team that match funding would be acceptable if the grant is approved and planning permission had been granted.

Members asked if HIT funding could be made available in three other towns. The Group Manager- Housing and Community Regeneration explained that the Private Sector Renewal Policy outlined all funding available subject to various conditions.

The Committee raised concerns that take-up appeared low and asked what other options were being considered. The Group Manager- Housing and Community Regeneration explained that they did try to broker relationships between owners and potential landlords to encourage take up. There was also a mailshot sent with Council Tax papers. At present there was no cost to own an empty dwelling, however applying for a grant could result in costs for the owner or result in disruption to their business.

Members queried the grant aid figure of £390,000 for 14 units of accommodation. The Group Manager- Housing and Community Regeneration explained that each scheme had a different cost and that the policy set out a maximum and minimum cost per unit.

The Committee asked for the number of potential properties that had already been identified. The Group Manager- Housing and Community Regeneration explained that nine schemes had been identified consisting of various numbers of units.

The Committee asked how active the Council were in trying to assist the RSL's to buy properties. The Group Manager- Housing and Community Regeneration explained that the RSLs were consulted regarding any change to policy and there were quarterly meetings with Development Managers and close working arrangements with colleagues in regeneration.

Members queried the objections from Natural Resources Wales because the Town Centre was within the flood plain area. The Group Manager- Housing and Community Regeneration explained that this would generally be picked up under planning issues and that some ground floor schemes could not be supported but most were on the first floor.

The Group Manager- Housing and Community Regeneration explained that negotiations were underway with one RSL regarding purchasing properties and no further information

was currently available because negotiations were still commercially sensitive. A number of factors had to be taken into account such as availability of land, the area, experience delivering town centre accommodation and affordability for tenants.

The Committee asked if there were adequate resources to support the project. They were advised that there was a dedicated surveyor and this was not currently an issue.

Members asked if a positive response was received from Public Protection in regard to the issue of noise in the town centre. They were advised that the planning authority considered each scheme on its own merits rather than allowing the issue of noise to trigger an automatic refusal.

Members discussed the issues associated with extending the boundary to include the core town centre area and the availability of funds to cover the increased area. They also referred to the allocation policy and the importance of it reflecting groups in priority need such as looked after children.

The Committee asked what progress had been made regarding changes to the policy. The Committee were advised that the policy would be presented to the November Cabinet meeting and a briefing note could be sent to them to update them on the amendments to the policy after it has been approved. An update on the proposed Building for the Future Programme (BFF) could also be included.

Further Information

The Committee requested that a briefing note be sent to them to update them on the amendments to the policy after it has been approved at the November Cabinet meeting and also an update on the proposed Building for the Future Programme (BFF)

Recommendations

The Committee strongly supported the engagement with Registered Social Landlords and stated that the Authority should encourage them to apply for the Grants to relieve pressure on the Common Housing Register

The Committee encouraged that an amendment be made to the policy to extend the boundary in order to increase more take up in the Grant

The Committee recommends that there is no reduction in staffing resource so that appropriate support can continue to be provided to applicants to support them through the formal application process

66. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report which detailed the items to be considered at the next meeting of the Committee and sought confirmation of the information and invitees required.

RESOLVED

The Committee

- i) Noted the topics due to be considered at the meeting of the Committee on 20 October 2016 and confirmed the specific information to be provided by the invitees.

- ii) Revisited and considered the list of future potential items for the Committees Forward Work Programme and reprioritised accordingly.

67. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 5.00 pm