

TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM - MONDAY, 13 MARCH 2017

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON MONDAY, 13 MARCH 2017 AT 4.00 PM

Present

Councillor HJ David – Chairperson

S Aspey	E Dodd	CA Green	EM Hughes
M Jenkins	HE Morgan	Cllr BL Nash	RL Penhale-Thomas
G Phillips	CL Reeves	M Reeves	CE Smith
HJ Townsend	R Williams		

Apologies for Absence

CL Jones, Cllr Oram, D Sage, R Lee and D John

Officers:

J Parsons	Group Manager – Development
C Flower	Planning Support Team Leader
J Ellams	Democratic Services Officer – Committees
A Rees	Senior Democratic Services Officer – Committees

139. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr H Morgan stated that he wished to declare a personal interest in Agenda item 5 as a member of Bridgend Town Council and One Voice Wales. The Forum noted Cllr Morgan's additional national responsibilities and role in One Voice Wales and he was advised that a number of Councillors were also Town/Community Councillors and that did not preclude him or them taking part in the discussion or decision relating to this item.

140. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED That the minutes of a meeting of the Town & Community Council Clerks dated 12 December 2016 be approved as a true record of the meeting subject to Councillor H Townsend being added to the list of apologies (Council Business).

141. WEB BASED PLANNING FACILITIES

The Forum received a short presentation and a live demonstration on the range of planning facilities available online, including the facility to comment on planning applications from the Group Manager - Development.

Over the last decade as part of its commitment to make planning information more widely accessible BCBC had invested in information technology to improve its service. This included back scanning of historical information; adoption of an electronic document management system; publication of key documents on the website; adoption of the Planning Portal to submit planning applications online and introducing the facility to comment on planning applications via the internet.

Whilst improving the service to the public, the online facilities also helped the planning service to maintain acceptable levels of service provision against a background of budget cuts amounting to £216,000 in the past two years out of a budget of £517,000, a cut of 42%. The uptake of IT based services by the Town and Community Councils and the general public was essential to the delivery of the planning service, as staffing levels were severely diminished.

The Group Manager – Development explained that BCBC facilitated consultees or any member of the public to submit comments online by directly using the links provided in the consultation letter or via the Council’s main website. Town and Community Councils were statutory consultees in relation to planning applications. More recently a new back office IT system improved the service available to the public to submit comments on applications. Key documents including the Local Development Plan (LDP) as well as Supplementary Guidance (SPG) and Design Guides were also available to view and download from the website. It was proposed to expand the online services in the future to include digital mapping information whereby members of the public would be able to locate a property on a map to check if there were any constraints for example tree preservation orders and existing planning consents. There was likely to be an increase in demand for digital facilities and services both locally and nationally. In order to meet this demand services would be accessible from a variety of different platforms, phone, tablet etc. There would also be more emphasis on self-help.

The Team Leader Technical Support demonstrated how the system worked by using the link in a consultation email. This allowed the opportunity to comment on a planning application. There was also an improved search page if the link was not available. Weekly lists of decisions were sent to each TCC clerk for information, but as of 1 April 2017 each TCC will have to search for this information on the Planning Search webpage, as demonstrated

Members raised the issue of the size of the print on location plans. They were advised that the documents were published in such a way that it was possible to zoom in to the document and advice could be given on how to do this if required.

Members queried if it was still possible to view applications where a decision had not yet been made. They were advised that this option was not currently available, but it will be raised with the software provider.

Concerns were raised that in some cases a decision had been made on an application however the system still showed that no decision had been made. If the case officer was contacted directly then he/she would disclose the outcome and this conflicted with information on the website.

Members were also concerned about the quality of some “drawings” on the website. Officers confirmed that poor quality drawings had been rejected in the past and they were aware of the problem and hopeful that more architects would use new technology to improve the presentation of submissions

Concerns were raised about applications in neighbouring wards which would have an impact on another ward but the residents were not consulted. Officers recognised that there could be a problem with cross boundary issues but the case officer should pick this up.

The Forum asked if the planning search system was bilingual. The Group Manager – Development confirmed that this was a work in progress. If an application was submitted in Welsh then it could be translated.

Members agreed that the service had improved and congratulated officers on the service provided.

RESOLVED: The Town and Community Council Forum noted the report.

142. REVIEW THE TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS (T&CC'S) CHARTER ACTION PLAN

The Forum received a presentation updating them on the development of the Action Plan of the Town and Community Councils (TCCs) Charter's and seeking approval for the actions proposed for inclusion in the Action Plan and agreeing the Action Plan going forward. At the Town & Community Council Forum meeting on 18th July 2016, the Mayors and Chairpersons of each of the Town & Community Councils were invited to sign the new TCC Charter at the official signing ceremony held in the Council Chamber.

During the revision of the Charter, it was agreed that an Action Plan would be reviewed at each meeting of the TCC Forum. This would ensure that priorities could be identified and managed appropriately. All Councils would be able to identify items for inclusion on the Action Plan and monitor the progress made throughout the year.

Members were advised that at a recent liaison meeting between Town and Community Council Clerks and BCBC the following issues were discussed:

- The lack of information being provided to Town and Community Councils on the outcome of planning applications.
- The need for better communication and a list of contacts in each Directorate for Town and Community Councils due to a lack of response /actions to correspondence from TCC clerks
- Community Asset Transfer training post- election for Town and Community Clerks and Members.
- The LDP and why triggers were not being actioned due to vacancy rates of commercial properties in Bridgend Town Centre being reached.

The Forum questioned how the Charter was working within the Borough and if there were any problems. The Leader explained that overall, sound progress had been made. There would be an opportunity to review the Charter in July 2017 with the Town and Community Councils

Reference was made to a report from One Voice Wales which stated that one third of its national members had raised concerns relating to their Charter. Concerns ranged from the Charter being unenforceable to a complete lack of apathy. Forum members did not want it to be a talking shop and attendance by Town and Community Councillors was very low.

A member of the Forum reported problems being experienced with Ynysawdre Community Council. Residents had attempted to attend a meeting of the Community council and requested information including Freedom of Information requests but no information had been received to date. Residents wanted to know how the precept was being spent as there appeared to be very little to show for the £240k. The next move for residents would be a request to Wales Audit Office to get involved. A member referred to the requirement for an audit of accounts to be displayed. No information had been displayed on the website since September 2016 until recently when a request had been made for people to support the community. The Leader explained that the Town and

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Community Councils were independent sovereign bodies and BCBC could not interfere in their running.

Members of the Forum discussed the importance of working in partnership. Members suggested that the time and day of future meetings be circulated to the Town and Community Councils to see if they were convenient and attendance could be improved.

A member commented that the new Charter appeared to be a working document under constant review and as such, was far more effective than previous wish lists. The precept was available to the community and if it wasn't used wisely then residents could vote for a change.

A member welcomed the request for Community Asset Transfer training because he believed the current process was not working and town clerks did not understand the process. Members were pleased with the responses received so far from the recently appointed Community Asset Transfer Officer. Members commented that it would be helpful to talk to others who had already been through the CAT process e.g. officers/clerk at Brackla Community Centre.

The Forum agreed that attendance at the meeting was disappointing. The clerks had been invited to develop a stronger relationship but only one clerk had attended.

The Forum was advised to contact the Senior Democratic Services Officer if they wanted any actions to be added to the list.

The Forum wished Mr Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services, a speedy recovery following his recent illness.

RESOLVED: The Town & Community Council Forum:

- a) Noted the report and proposed items for inclusion in the action plan.
- b) Approved the updated Charter Action Plan attached as Appendix 1.

143. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 5.20 pm