

TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM - MONDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 2016

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON MONDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 2016 AT 4.00 PM

Present

Councillor CE Smith – Chairperson

S Aspey	Councillor S Baldwin	M Butcher	E Dodd
CA Green	EM Hughes	M Jenkins	Cllr P Jenkins
CL Jones	HE Morgan	Cllr Oram	G Phillips
CL Reeves	M Reeves	RL Thomas	RE Young

Apologies for Absence

Councillors MEJ Nott OBE, HJ Townsend and R Williams and Town Councillor R Lee

Officers:

Gary Jones	Head of Democratic Services
Carly McCreesh	Community Asset Transfer Officer
Darren Mephram	Chief Executive
Andrew Rees	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Mark Shephard	Corporate Director - Communities
Sue Whittaker	Skills and Sustainable Development Manager

126. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

127. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Town and Community Council Forum of 18 July 2016 be approved as a true and accurate record.

128. IMPACT OF THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY ON THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE COUNCIL AND ON TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL BUDGETS

The Chief Executive presented the report of the Section 151 Officer which appraised the Forum on the budget setting process. He also outlined the potential impact of budget reductions outlined in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) on the Council's ability to deliver key services. He clarified the timeline for engagement with Town and Community Councils on the transfer of services.

The Chief Executive reported that the Forum had been advised at its meeting on 21 September 2015 that the Council was experiencing a period of unprecedented financial challenge, facing a forecast funding shortfall of approximately £49m over 4 years. He stated that the Council in 2016-17 identified budget reductions of £7.477m across a range of services when setting its budget which are currently being delivered.

He informed the Forum that the Welsh Government had yet to provide indicative allocations regarding the 2017-18 settlement and therefore the Council would continue to work towards a 'most likely' scenario of a reduction of -3.2% in the MTFS. He stated that in the best case scenario, the Council would be required to make savings of over £25m over 4 years, which added to the £34m reductions which the Council has made

over the last 4 years, would equate to nearly a quarter of the Council's net budget. This would rise to over 30% under the worst case scenario. He stated that under the most likely scenario, it was highly unlikely that the level of budget reductions can be delivered without changes to the level of scope of discretionary services provided by the Council, which would involve difficult choices having to be made on whether to retain, reduce or remove services.

The Chief Executive informed the Forum that officers had stressed the need throughout the process to transform services and to look at how the Council spent on schools and social care. He stated that the Council had the least discretion on spend on schools which during the MTFs period had seen growth. Schools had been requested to make 1% efficiency savings on schools delegated budgets.

The Chief Executive informed the Forum that the provisional settlement would not be known until 19 October 2016 and the final settlement would be known on 21 December 2016. He stated there was a need to find ways of engaging with Town and Community Councils where they may be able to support and work with the Council on meeting budget reductions and to build into precepts.

A member of the Forum questioned whether schedules of rates for services could be made available to Town and Community Councils to assist them in coming to an informed decision on whether to undertake services on behalf of BCBC. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Forum that Town and Community Councils could approach the Communities Directorate directly should they require an indication of the cost of services. The Chief Executive requested that Town and Community Councils come up with proposals on services they could run on behalf of the Council or top up the existing service provided by the Council. The Chairperson of the Forum highlighted one such example where Cornelly Community Council has agreed to fund the cleaning of the public conveniences at Kenfig Nature Reserve. A member of the Forum asked whether Town and Community Councils would be required to employ those employed by BCBC in the event of them running services for the Council. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Forum that the employment of staff would depend on the scale and specifics of requirements of the individual Town and Community Council. The Chief Executive informed the Forum that some Town and Community Councils could tap into the local community spirit where volunteers may litter pick some areas.

A member of the Forum expressed concern at the prospect of Town and Community Councils having to increase precepts in order to provide services on behalf of BCBC which could be perceived as a form of double taxation. A member of the Forum commented that it would be prudent for Town and Community Councils to collaborate with BCBC. The Chief Executive informed the Forum that the most obvious areas of collaboration would be the maintenance of public realm. He stated that services could also be taken over by sports groups and not solely by Town and Community Councils. He also informed the Forum that services such as social care and early intervention could also benefit from collaborative working and there was potential for collaboration with Town and Community Councils on providing activities for young people.

A member of the Forum commented that discussions on partnership working need to take place now as precepts will be required from Town and Community Councils in January. The Chief Executive informed the Forum that there may be some constraints which preclude Town and Community Councils from collaborating due to their size, but the Council would wish to have conversations with Town and Community Councils as to what they could put in or contribute. A member of the Forum highlighted the experience of Brackla Community Council which had taken over some grass cutting and introduced more litter bins.

A member of the Forum questioned whether other local authorities in Wales had implemented reductions on schools delegated budgets and if so, whether any sanctions had been imposed on local authorities. The Chief Executive informed the Forum that a number of local authorities had implemented budget reductions on schools delegated budgets and to his knowledge had received no sanctions.

RESOLVED: That the Forum noted the report.

129. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER UPDATE

The Skills and Sustainable Development Manager reported on an update on Community Asset Transfer.

She informed the Forum that the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Officer had received approaches from 56 organisations with 18 applications progressing to the business planning stage. She stated that applications were predominantly from sports organisations who aimed to pursue the self-management of pavilions and also keen to explore the maintenance of playing fields. To date, three applications were progressing from Town and Community Councils for the asset transfer of public toilets, bus shelters, pavilions and community centres.

The Skills and Sustainable Development Manager reported that the Wales Cooperative centre had been commissioned to study the CAT process, with one of the recommendations relating to providing additional support to interested groups and organisations to assist them through the CAT process. To this end, independent support had been commissioned by the Council which would be available from October 2016 until March 2019 subject to the contract being award.

The Skills and Sustainable Development Manager informed the Forum that the £50k per annum capital allocation had been increased to £100k per annum between 2016-17 and 2018-19 funded from the Change Fund Earmarked Reserve for CAT related applications. She also informed the Forum there had been a lot in interest in the CAT process but how CAT is implemented is dependent on the outcome of the Strategic Review of parks and playing fields.

A member of the Forum questioned what would happen to assets which had restrictive covenants placed on them which could potentially be the subject of a CAT. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Forum that restrictive covenants on assets would be looked at by the Council's Property Department. Steps would be taken by the Council to protect itself as well as the applicant in the event of an asset being transferred.

A member of the Forum questioned the amount of funding that remained in the capital allocation for CAT. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Forum that allocation of £1m remained in the capital allocation to provide capital investment to refurbish and improve the Council's sports pavilions. However there was intent to support one application and the amount will be subject to their Business Plan application'. A member of the Forum questioned the progress being made with surveys being undertaken in order to progress CAT applications. The CAT Officer informed the Forum that the Property Department has commissioned surveys but there had been delays in reports being received which would inform the parks and playing fields review. She stated that the surveys being undertaken are asset management surveys and not structural surveys.

A member of the Forum questioned whether assets would be put into a serviceable condition prior to transfer. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Forum

that the Council would not invest in facilities where there was no interest coming forward to manage the facilities as this would not prove best value for money. Where there is interest in a CAT and an organisation has submitted a viable and robust business case, funding from the capital allocation would be used towards the refurbishment of an asset to facilitate the transfer to a suitable state of repair for transfer. A member of the Forum commented that where an organisation submits an application for CAT and shares facilities with other users there was a need to protect the other users in order that they continue to have access to those facilities. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Forum that organisations submitting business cases would need to have due regard to other existing users of facilities so that they are protected. He stated there were advantages in organisations pursuing CAT early to ensure the funding does not run out and applications would be considered on a first come first served basis. He also stated that there was a need to demonstrate a level of investment by the Council in facilities to facilitate their transfer. He informed the Forum that it was coincidental that the first CAT required a higher level of investment prior to transfer due to its poor state of repair.

The Cabinet Member Communities informed the Forum that the Council did not wish to close facilities and are looking at CAT as an alternative to this option should further pressures be made on service budgets. She believed once the first CAT had taken place, others would follow. She stated that the Council had visited Blaenau Gwent Council who were one of the first local authorities to progress with CAT at a large scale and still only 4 CATs had taken place, which highlights the complexity of the programme. The Cabinet Member Communities informed the Forum that funding would only be used for essential works to facilitate CAT as some clubs would have proposals to re-build facilities. Concern was expressed by a member of the Forum that clubs could potentially fold if their facilities were removed. The Cabinet Member Communities stated that there would be other reasons why clubs could fold and not due to the closure of facilities. She stated that officers had met with representatives of the WRU recently who had reiterated their commitment to supporting rugby clubs.

RESOLVED: That the Forum noted the report on progress being made on Community Asset Transfer.

130. **UPDATE OF THE TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS' (TCCS) CHARTER AND ACTION PLAN**

The Head of Democratic Services reported on an update on the development of the Action Plan of the Town and Community Councils Charter and sought approval of the actions for inclusion in the Action Plan and to agree the Action Plan.

He informed the Forum that the new TCC Charter was signed at the previous meeting of the Forum and it was agreed that the Action Plan be reviewed at each subsequent meeting to enable priorities to be identified and managed appropriately. He also informed that the new Charter had now been signed by all Town and Community Councils within the County Borough. Initially, the first phase of partnership working would focus on the development of relationships, concentrating on improvements to partnership working. Work would then follow on developing specific proposals for future service reviews to be incorporated into the Action Plan.

The Head of Democratic Services demonstrated to the Forum the web page which had been created on the BCBC website which explained about the Charter and how the charter is to be reviewed. A press release would be made shortly publicising the signing of the Charter by all parties.

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The Head of Democratic Services also reported that as part of the revised Charter regular meetings with Town and Community Clerks would take place be held a month prior to meetings of the Forum. This would provide sufficient time for BCBC officers to produce reports to be considered by the Forum. The inaugural meeting had taken place with Clerks with 11 in attendance. He highlighted the issues discussed and informed the Forum that potential candidate sessions would be held during Local Democracy Week on 11 and 12 December 2016.

The Head of Democratic Services requested that the Forum review the Action Plan and propose items for inclusion in the action plan. He informed the Forum that the annual review of the Charter will take place in July 2017, a year after the date of the signing of the Charter. He stated that in preparation for the review, legislative changes regarding the Local Service Board becoming a Public Services Board have already been identified for updating. Further legislative changes affecting the Charter would be identified throughout the year in readiness for the review.

RESOLVED: That that the Forum:

1. Noted the progress made regarding the Charter and the introduction of the TCC Clerks meeting;
2. Approved the updated Charter Action Plan.

131. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 5.12 pm