

COMMUNITY, ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2016

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 THURSDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2016 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor JC Spanswick – Chairperson

DK Edwards
JR McCarthy

CA Green
JH Tildesley MBE

CJ James
KJ Watts

CL Jones
R Williams

Apologies for Absence

HE Morgan and G Phillips

Officers:

Susan Cooper
Zak Shell
Mark Shephard
Andrew Thomas
Julie Ellams

Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Head of Neighbourhood Services
Corporate Director – Communities
Group Manager, Sport and Active Wellbeing
Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor H E Morgan and Councillor G Phillips.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Community, Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 27 September 2016 be approved as a true and accurate record. .

4. HEALTHY LIVING PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

The Group Manager-Sport, Play and Active Wellbeing introduced Simon Gwynne, Partnership Manager HALO and Scott Rolfe, Chief Executive HALO to the Committee. The HALO representatives then presented a report informing the Committee of the end of year performance of Halo Leisure Ltd with regard to the eight leisure centres and swimming pools they managed on behalf of the Council within the Healthy Living Partnership Programme. The report also advised the Committee of the service objectives set for 2016/17 and the areas of focus within the service development plan.

The report provided detail on the fourth annual year of performance and the objectives identified for year five of the contract. There were 11 years remaining of the original 15 year contract. The completion of the capital works supported the achievement of performance targets including increased levels of participation, improved customer

experience and investment into assets. The report also covered the three corporate priorities and how HALO was working to respond to them.

In partnership with Public Health Wales, the National Exercise Referral Scheme successfully supported 1,186 people to access services including people with chronic conditions. The "over 60" Free Swimming initiative continued to achieve the highest participation rates in Wales with 83,000 visits. This supported the loneliness and isolation reduction targets of the Ageing Well plan for Bridgend.

HALO supported social services by providing 214 looked after children with free membership to leisure facilities with evidence suggesting 86% were regularly making use of this support. The Access to Leisure programme supported the removal of price as a barrier with 1962 people making use of the support.

The partnership contributed to achieving financial efficiencies linked to the medium term financial strategy with further reductions expected over the next three years.

Halo Leisure continued to coordinate the aquatic development programmes with 100% of primary schools now engaged in the intensive schools swimming model.

Recruitment and retention of membership was a core business target and during 2015/16 there were 12,157 members representing 12% growth from the previous year.

Positive results were received following a staff survey and HALO Leisure remained a significant employer of a workforce that included 278 people and 123 full time equivalents. It had also developed an Apprenticeship programme and currently there were two apprentices in place with plans to commence support for two additional posts within Bridgend.

Members noted that an Advisory Panel was in place with representation including Public Health Wales, Sport Wales and the Chair of the Community, Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee and compared the arrangement to the one in place for Porthcawl Marina where there was no Local Member representation on the Harbour Board. Members were advised that their comments were noted however this was an advisory body and not part of the board structure and no decisions were taken apart from where there was a surplus on a contract.

The Committee referred to the National Exercise Referral Scheme and asked for further information on how it linked to the outdoors particularly when the scheme had been completed. The Group Manager-Sport, Play and Active Wellbeing Activity explained that this point had been recognised at both local and national level and that in order to cope with demand, other options such as this had to be explored.

The Cabinet Member, Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing explained that within the Llynfi Valley, LV20 had been set up. He chaired the Physical Activity and Wellbeing Group which worked closely with HALO regarding outdoor activity.

The Committee requested further information regarding the Ageing Well plan. They were advised that the plan was aimed at older people in Wales particularly men over 60 and encouraged building networks including swimming and other activities. Staff had been trained in different areas and there were innovative new plans including support from Community Transport. Staff had also been given dementia training.

Members were pleased with the number of Looked After Children taking up free membership to leisure facilities. The Committee asked to see a breakdown in the

numbers of Looked After Children that had taken up the free membership offer and asked for further information on how often they used the facilities and what activities they participated in. Officers responded that they could not supply the information at the time and would send to Members after the meeting

The Committee asked how HALO were promoting the message that price was not a barrier to participation for disadvantaged groups. Members were advised that the website promoted the message and numbers had increased as a result of this as well as providing a broader range of activities

The Chief Executive HALO confirmed that swimming badge schemes were still run for primary school children in addition to the intensive block bookings and also junior learn to swim schemes were well publicised. The 12% increase in membership covered corporate, individual and family membership.

Members commented that other authorities were closing down leisure facilities and that BCBC were fortunate to be in this position.

The Committee asked for further information regarding the long term absences recorded and how they were being managed. The Chief Executive HALO explained that most incidents of long term sickness were unique but if repeated, staff were sent for occupational assessments. Members congratulated HALO on the average of 6.5 days per FTE even though this was an increase on the previous year.

Members requested further information of staff on casual contracts, to include a breakdown of how many staff have them, what hours on average they work and at what times of the year and what positions they include. The Chief Executive HALO explained that they tried to avoid zero contracts unless it suited staff and that most of their casual workers had full time jobs elsewhere. He added that the casual workers were usually swim/gym instructors that worked on a seasonal basis

The Committee requested further information regarding what happened to the staff following completion of the apprenticeship scheme. Members were advised that HALO only recruited an apprentice where they could guarantee a job at the end, subject to performance.

Members asked for information regarding the net promoter score. They were advised that this was an evaluation tool popular in the retail sector used to evaluate how likely a person was to recommend services to other people. It allowed benchmarking and was a way of highlighting areas that needed to be developed such as Pyle Leisure Centre. Members requested further information on the improvements needed to Pyle Swimming Pool and the reasons behind their low net promoter score and how the concerns were being addressed. Officers agreed to circulate this to Members after the meeting. Members also asked to be notified about any changes to services such as closures before work commenced so that they had the information available if contacted by residents.

Members asked for further information on the Summary of Accidents report in that there were two reported incidents in Maesteg. Members requested information on whether these were staff or customer related incidents and what they specifically related to.

Members thanked HALO and the officers for the update.

Conclusions

Members welcomed the report and thanked representatives from HALO and staff in the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate for the comprehensive and informative report to the Committee. Members wished to congratulate all those involved in the delivery of the contract and hoped the high standards would continue.

Members also welcomed the apprenticeship scheme, whereby it was confirmed by Officers, that upon successful completion of apprenticeship there was a guaranteed suitable offer of employment.

Further Information

The Committee asked to see a breakdown in the numbers of Looked After Children that have taken up the free membership offer and asked for further information on how often they use the facilities and what activities they participate in.

Members requested further information of staff on casual contracts, to include a breakdown of how many staff have them, what hours on average they work and at what times of the year and what positions they include.

Members asked for further information on the Summary of Accidents report in that there were two reported incidents in Maesteg. Members would like information on whether these were staff or customer related incidents and what they specifically related to.

Members requested further information on the improvements needed to Pyle Swimming Pool and the reasons behind their low net promoter score and how the concerns were being addressed.

5. HIGHWAY SERVICES REVIEW

The Corporate Director Communities presented a report advising Members of the impact of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy on Highway Services. Between 2011/12 and 2015/16 there had been ongoing savings to meet reductions in public funding resulting in a reduction in the Highways and Transportation services budget of £2.5 million. This had resulted in a reduction in staff and service levels at varying degrees in different sections.

Members requested that the budget reduction in the Highways and Transportation for 2011/12 to 2015/16, (£2.5m) as detailed in the report be presented to Members as a percentage so they were able to better understand the scale of the reductions so far.

The report also listed proposals that would have to be considered if there were further reductions to Highway Services budgets. Various solutions were being considered to mitigate the impact, including regional collaborations eg City Deal and Regional Transport Authority.

The Committee asked how the authority mitigated against the inability of the service to deal with service requests, FOI requests and correspondence. The Corporate Director Communities explained, for example, that two staff dealt with highway comments on planning applications. If one staff member was off the burden fell on the other officer or work was escalated upwards. This meant there was less capacity for more strategic managerial work which meant external agencies such as Capita were used more than envisaged. The Group Manager – Highway Services added that any absence quickly impacted on the remaining staff requiring a new person to make a decision, not always with the necessary background knowledge or experience and recruitment was also a massive issue in some areas, for example in Engineering. The ability to respond to

enquiries was stretched and backlogs had increased. Members remained concerned at the reduction in staffing levels and stated that they were concerned that they were at a worryingly low level whereby the service would soon be unable to respond to statutory service requests. The Cabinet Member-Communities explained that she had been making this point vociferously and that this area dealt with 80% of member referrals and had disproportionately high percentage budget cuts compared to any other 'front facing' service in the Council.

Members asked if the impact on residents was taken into account when considering the removal of a bus service. They were advised that a matrix originally devised by Rhonda Cynon Taff was used which looked at issues such as isolation and proximity of other services or alternatives before removing a service. BCBC had removed some services; other authorities had removed 100% of subsidies because this was a non-statutory area. Officers advised that previously engagement held with the bus operators, when services had been cut, had resulted in them agreeing to run 7 of the 12 services that had been cut, commercially, and that work was still being undertaken on the remaining 5. The commercial sector had tried to pick up the services where the cost per passenger was relatively low.

Members asked if there were any plans to reduce the hours when street lights were in use and when the introduction of LED units would be extended to cover the whole of the County. The Group Manager – Highway Services explained that street lighting was not a statutory service and there was no further programme of change planned to replace the remaining 12,000 units as the original funding had come from Welsh Government Local Government Borrowing Initiative [LGBI]. The position with street lighting would form part of the budget consultation but further cuts were likely to be proposed.

The Committee asked for more information regarding school crossing patrol provision and noted that discussions had taken place with some Town and Community Councils but not with the individual schools and asked why this was and if discussions were planned. The Group Manager – Highway Services explained that they were in the process of engagement with some Town and Community Councils but not at this stage with individual schools. If and when a particular school crossing was at risk the relevant Town and Community Council could liaise with the relevant school as necessary. Members suggested that some Town and Community Councils could be in a position to fund certain services and encouraged further engagement with them so funding opportunities were not missed.

The Cabinet Member-Communities gave the example of Sarn Cemetery where the Community Council paid a contractor to cut the grass on a number of occasions and this made a huge difference. Members recommended that BCBC approach Town and Community Councils for discussions as to what support and contribution they were able to offer towards Community Services that were at risk due to budget pressures. Members recommended that Town and Community Councils were provided with a "menu" of services to include financial information on the costs for Community Services at risk such as hazing gangs, grass cutting, school crossing patrols, weed spraying, street lighting and winter maintenance.

The Corporate Director Communities explained that care should be taken with TUPE and the possible implications and also the importance of adequate insurance was in place. He also explained that it was not always simple to continue to provide the service even if a town and community council made a financial contribution if as part of making a cut the Council had already made its staff redundant or if economies of scale did not allow the council to do this cost effectively if only a few town and community councils wanted to pay for a particular service.

The Committee asked if the cost of hiring in specialised plant/vehicles or contract staff to deal with severe weather had been calculated and compared to the saving from losing one unit. The Group Manager – Highway Services explained that this would only be required as an emergency response and therefore would fall outside the normal budget.

The Committee asked if it was necessary for 2 officers to deal with Highways planning applications. The Corporate Director Communities explained that the workloads were split so both were required to work on the applications and attend the meetings of the Development Control Committee. He added that the section had just about managed to get the planning applications back to the Committee for recent meetings within the deadline due to a few large planning applications being received but there was a lack of resilience and this could lead to the failure to meet deadlines and complaints in the future

Members asked for the latest position regarding parking. The Corporate Director Communities explained that there were a number of issues relating to decisions made previously which meant that current budgets and income projections were not achievable. A fundamental review of car park charges was required for both elected Members, staff and the public. This also linked to increased residents only parking in the Bridgend area. Members supported the proposal of a full review of Parking and suggested this item be placed on the Committee Forward Work Programme for 2017. The Committee raised the issue of weed control and the number of complaints received and that this could be a false economy along with not investing in highways maintenance. Members raised the importance of liaising with the Town and Community Councils again. Members recommended a review of the proposal to reduce weed spraying to annually as the savings linked to the proposal did not justify the long term risk. Members also raised the issue of missing road signs and suggested that the Town and Community Councils might be in a position to help with this. The Group Manager – Highway Services explained that there was a budget for this and any problems should be referred via the member referral system.

The Corporate Director Communities explained that BCBC had been in an agreement and Joint Venture [JV] with Capita Symonds since 2008 , together with RCT and Merthyr CBC, there was break clause in October 2018, but one year's notice was required to be given. A decision had to be taken whether to continue with the current arrangement for the remaining 5 years of the agreement or alternatively to consider bringing the relevant services back in house, establishing a regional collaboration or setting up a new procurement for a private sector partner. There was merit in reviewing the position and establishing the best way forward for Bridgend.

The Committee thanked the officers for the update.

Conclusions

Members remained concerned at the reduction in staffing levels and stated that they were at a worryingly low level in some areas whereby potentially the service would soon be unable to respond to statutory service requests.

Members supported the proposal of a full review of Parking and suggested this item be placed on the Committee Forward Work Programme for 2017.

Recommendations

Members recommended that BCBC approach Town and Community Councils for discussions as to what support and contribution they are able to offer towards Community Services that were at risk due to budget pressures.

Members recommended that Town and Community Councils are provided with a “menu” of services to include, where possible, financial information on the costs for Community Services at risk such as hazarding gangs, grass cutting, school crossing patrols, weed spraying, street lighting and winter maintenance.

Members recommended that communication between the Local Authority and Town and Community Councils should include the Clerk so that matters can be taken before full Town Council as necessary. Similarly requests to Bridgend County Borough Council from Town and Community Councils should ordinarily come through the clerk.

Members recommended a review of the proposal to reduce weed spraying to annually as the savings linked to the proposal did not justify the long term risk.

Further Information

Members requested that the budget reduction in the Highways and Transportation for 2011/12 to 2015/16, (£2.5m) as detailed in the report to be presented to Members as a percentage so they were able to better understand the scale of the reductions so far.

6. 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 That the Committee

- i) Requested that the MTFs item on 19 December 2016 include percentage cuts across the various directorates for information.
- ii) Requested that the next Highways Update be presented to Committee in March 2017 and that the Cultural Partnership Project be brought forward to January 2017.

7. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 5.00 pm