

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND ON MONDAY, 14 JULY 2014 AT 4.00PM

Present:-

Councillor D Sage - Deputy Leader in the Chair

<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>
M W Butcher	E M Hughes	C L Reeves	R L Thomas
P A Davies	H E Morgan	M Reeves	H J Townsend
E Dodd	G Phillips	C E Smith	

Town and Community Councillors:

Brackla	- C Jones
Coity Higher	- J Brett
Coychurch Higher	- N Oram
Coychurch Lower	- B Nash
Garw Valley	- T Jenkins
Maesteg	- P W Jenkins
Merthyr Mawr	- A Y Morgan
Newcastle Higher	- M C Wilkins
Ogmore Valley	- M Jenkins
Porthcawl	- D Newton-Williams
St Brides Minor	- Y Nott and E Jones (observer)

Officers:

A Godsall	- Traffic and Transportation Manager
G P Jones	- Head of Democratic Services

59 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members for the reasons so stated:

Councillor RJ Hancock OBE	- Work commitments
Councillor M Kearns	- Holiday
Councillor M E J Nott OBE	- Other Council Business
Councillor A Davies	-
Councillor R Williams	- Family commitments
K Mulcahy	- Family bereavement

60 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

61 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Town and Community Council Forum of 8 April 2014 be approved as a true and accurate record.

62 SHOPMOBILITY SCHEME

The Traffic and Transportation Manager presented a report which updated the Town and Community Council Forum on the operation of the Shopmobility Scheme in Bridgend Town

Centre. He advised that contrary to recent press reports that it was not the intention of the Council to cease the shopmobility service when the Vibrant and Viable Places regeneration of Bridgend Town Centre was commenced.

He explained that the Shopmobility scheme was operated by Bridgend County Borough Council from the Rhiw multi storey car park. The service provided mobility devices to members of the public who needed help with their mobility when visiting the town centre. To utilise the Shopmobility facilities customers were required to join the scheme for which there was no charge. Once registered, customers tendered a £2 deposit for the use of the apparatus and on its return the £2 deposit was refunded if requested.

The service received a donation of £10,000 from Bridgend Town Council but still had a projected shortfall of £6,994 which was subsidised by Bridgend County Borough Council. There were various costs associated with the facility which included; the office space, rates and utilities, IT and management and support, all of which were absorbed in the Car Park management costs. Some staff costs were also not apparent, for example when staff were absent due to sickness or annual leave, or on Saturdays when the actual shopmobility staff did not work, their shifts were covered by Council Staff from other areas within the Communities Directorate.

In order to reduce the ongoing financial deficit and subsidies, various options are being considered as to how the service could become more sustainable. Suggestions included:

- Potential to introduce a member registration fee
- Introduce a charge for equipment hire
- Seek contributions from other local town and community councils
- Seek external involvement to provide and develop the scheme
- Seek other service providers to deliver mobility and other services.

It was explained that within Bridgend Town Centre there are aspirations to regenerate the area around the Rhiw Car Park. Following the recent approval by the Welsh Government of the Council's Vibrant and Viable Places Grant proposals it is anticipated that the existing Rhiw multi-storey car park will be demolished and the site redeveloped. This will have significant implications for the Shopmobility Scheme both during the construction period and with regard to the development of a new car park. The impact of such changes needed to be considered within the timing of changes to the shopmobility provision. Any new or revised Shopmobility Scheme will need to be either designed into the new car park or sited elsewhere. This was particularly important if external providers were to be included in the provision of this service.

Members welcomed the news that the Shopmobility scheme would be continuing and requested clarification that the proposals to develop other contributions to fund the scheme be discussed with a range of stakeholders including all Town and Community Councils. He suggested that a survey be carried out identifying where within the Borough of Bridgend the services users lived so that a picture of where contributions could be forthcoming.

Some members were concerned that contributions from other Town and Community Councils would be considered another blow to traders in their own areas. This funding would be seen as councils funding constituents not to use their local businesses. It was suggested that a small increase in the business rates or a subsidy from the Bridgend town centre traders be considered as an alternative.

The Chairperson advised that Bridgend town centre traders were involved in discussions regarding the vibrant and viable places redevelopment and the provision of the shopmobility service. He added that the business rates were set by the Welsh Government who received the income from those rates. It was hoped that the responsibility for business rates would be devolved to Local Authorities in the future.

Members indicated that some Town and Community Council made contributions to the Shop Mobility Scheme but were unsure if this was still the case. The Chairperson advised that he would write to all Councils requesting if they would be willing to contribute to the scheme.

RESOLVED: That the Forum noted the content of the report.

63 SUPPORTED LOCAL BUS SERVICES

The Traffic and Transportation Manager presented a report outlining the current status of local commercial and subsidised bus services operating in Bridgend County Borough and highlighted the current and potential future impacts to these services following changes in local subsidies including BSSG (Bus Services Support Grant)

Within the County Borough public transport operators provided some 34 services operated on a commercial basis every day of the week. These commercial services paid for themselves and require no additional funding. The Authority subsidised a further 22 local bus service contracts operating between Monday and Saturday and provided support for its community transport operator and cross border services. Funding for these the services and Community Transport was provided by a Welsh Government Grant, known as Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG). Bridgend County Borough Council provided additional funding to support these subsidised services.

The reduction of funding from Welsh Government has required local Authorities to make significant savings for the 2014-17 financial years leading to Bridgend County Borough Council approved a budget reduction of £50,000 in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for supported bus services. To minimise the impact of this budget reduction discussions with the bus operating companies identified that the removal of subsidy from Sunday services could be mitigated by the majority of services being run on a commercial basis. These changes were implemented on the 12th May 2014 with the details of the changes being shown in Appendix 1 of the report.

Any future review would seek to minimise impacts by not only taking into account the value for money aspect of the provision but also its relationship to deprivation factors. A full list of subsidies and services was shown at Appendix 2 of the report. These will be subject to ongoing review as further financial savings may be required over the next few years.

Members expressed their concerns about losing services. This was particularly important for those young and unemployed people who were dependent on bus services as the train service was considered ineffective. It was suggested that this would limit the opportunities for those looking for or maintaining employment across the borough.

Members also highlighted the benefits of the community transport service provided by OTED Ltd which included a Sunday service in the Garw Valley and enabled hospital visits for the elderly.

It was also identified that the bus companies needed to be realistic with their timetables and schedule as a number of buses from a single company were often seen at the same time travelling in the same direction with few if any passengers. It was requested that further details of the usage of these services and routes be provided so that the impact of any reductions to services could be identified.

RESOLVED: That the Forum noted the content of the report.

64 ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT

The Chairperson advised that Councillor M E J Nott OBE who was the Armed Forces Champion was unable to attend this meeting but wished to be in attendance for consideration of this report. He had requested that this item be deferred to the next meeting of the Forum.

RESOLVED: That the Forum deferred this item to its next meeting

65 TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL WEBSITE GRANTS

The Head of Democratic Services presented a report which provided an update to the Forum of the progress being made in respect of the grant funding for the development of Town and Community Councils internet presence.

He advised the Forum that the Local Government (Democracy)(Wales) Act 2013, included a requirement for Town and Community Councils (TCCs) to make information available electronically to members of the public. This was intended to enhance their profile and increase the awareness and involvement of constituents in the democratic and decision making processes. The Welsh Government designated Bridgend County Borough Council as the administrator of grant monies to be made available to TCCs in their area to assist in the development of their websites. Bridgend County Borough Council prepared an agreement which detailed how the £500 grant available to each TCC can be used and claimed.

Copies of the grant agreement were sent to each TCC for signing before being returned to Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC). Once received the individual TCC would be able to claim the £500 grant funding. It was explained that a claim for grant funding could be made for any appropriate expenditure incurred from 1 April 2012 until 31 March 2015 in the creation or enhancement of a TCCs web presence. This could include, equipment, IT training or Website maintenance or hosting facilities.

The Forum was advised that seven grant agreements had been returned to BCBC enabling claims to be made. Two claims had been submitted and the grant funding paid accordingly. All Town and Community Councils were requested to ensure that they complete the grant agreement previously circulated and make any appropriate claims as soon as possible.

Members expressed their concerns regarding the establishment of their websites and the requirement for the all of content to be translated into Welsh. The Head of Democratic Services advised that public bodies were expected to have the content of their websites provided in the Welsh Language. However, he explained that Bridgend County Borough Council operated a Welsh Language Scheme which identified those types of webpages and content that needed full Welsh Language translations to be made available. This had been agreed. It was requested that a copy of the scheme be provided to each TCC to enable them to develop their own scheme.

RESOLVED: That the Forum noted the report.

66 SCHEDULE OF AGENDA ITEMS

The Head of Democratic Services presented a report on behalf of the Monitoring Officer, which informed the Forum of requests for items to be presented at future meetings.

RESOLVED: That the Forum noted the report and the items to be considered at future meetings.

The meeting closed at 4.55pm.