

TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM - MONDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 2023

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM HELD REMOTELY ON 13 NOVEMBER 2023 AT 16:00

Present

Councillor HJ David – Chairperson

H T Bennett
B Doughty
J Gebbie
M R John
R J Smith
R Williams

G Chappell
S Easterbrook
RM Granville
M Jones
I M Spiller
E D Winstanley

C Davies
M J Evans
S J Griffiths
S Parker
Y Walton-Davies
T Wood

C L C Davies
P Ford
P W Jenkins
Pratt
MJ Williams

Apologies for Absence

None

Officers:

Zoe Edwards
Carys Lord
Andrew Mason
Kevin Mulcahy
Nimi Chandrasena

Consultation Engagement and Equalities Manager
Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change
Rights of Way Manager
Group Manager - Highways Services
Democratic Services Officer - Support

Declarations of Interest

None

21. Approval of Minutes

Decision Made	That the minutes of a meeting of the Town and Community Council Forum on 29/08/2023 be approved as a true and accurate record.
Date Decision Made	13 November 2023

22. Update on Bridgend County Borough Council Public Rights of Way

Decision Made	<p>The purpose of the report, presented by Group Manager - Highways & Green Spaces and the Rights of Way Manager was to advise on the current status of the public rights of way network.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A member asked for assurance that when the next round on compliance was required that BCBC makes grant applications in time so as to not to lose any proportion of the grant that was available. <p>The Rights of Way Manager responded that if the point made referred to the Access improvement grant from the Welsh Government – If the Authority were able to secure this, there were two conditions attached to it.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Have the local access forum, set up and running, which had been done.b. Review of the rights away improvement plan. <p>He stated that point b had not been achieved. The document was vast and meant that the Council had to review the whole of the network. Determine the exact condition looking at all the issues. The review would require a plan of how the work is potentially improved how funding is secured. It also involves a lot of engagement with the town of Community councils, all user groups, and all statutory undertakers. The task would also involve every member of the Council to be engaged and consulted with. The Rights of Way Manager stated it was a huge undertaking and it was not something they had been able to complete.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A member asked how many Rights Of Way Applications were awaiting consideration from the department. <p>The Rights of Way Manager responded that in 2020 when they recruited the staff member they had over 80 applications outstanding and currently stands at 48.</p>
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- A member asked when they would have access to the new definitive map.

The Rights of Way Manager stated that there was a working copy of the map (updated with all the changes that had taken place since 2005) available on the Council's website through the 'view it' portal. However, they were unable to provide a date for when the definitive map would be updated.

- A member inquired what five local authorities were working in conjunction in relation to the Bridal Way networks and funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund. She also inquired if the funding would be used to improve existing bridal ways or create new ones. The member also inquired if they could be extended and linked using the quiet lanes legislation.

The Rights of Way Manager explained that prior to the implementation of the shared prosperity fund, the authority were required to enrol funding from the Welsh Government, this involved 5 councils, namely, Bridgend, VOG, RCT, Cardiff and Merthyr local authorities. With the Shared prosperity fund, both Bridgend and VOG have benefitted from the funding. He stated that the five local authorities placed a bid for funding through the Enrol Project to create a large network of bridal ways, not only to improve existing ones but also create links between bridal ways that already exist in the Bridgend area by creating new bridal ways or upgrading existing foot paths. The whole project is called the Great Glamorgan Way.

- A member asked, what the reasoning behind the installation of pedestrian gates on a bridal way in the Kenfig Nature Reserve was.

The Rights of Way Manager responded they were in discussion with NRW when consulting on the proposal to put up fences. He stated that BCBC could not enforce any provision for gates or furniture on permissive routes as this would have been for the landowner to decide. He informed the committee that they could speak with the landowner. He stated they were in discussions with the reserve manager about the rights of way network . He suggested the possibility of consulting the Town and Community Councils and other user groups on discussions at a further date.

- A member inquired if there was a way the Community Councils could influence the manner of funding provided for the linking bridal of ways together to make up the Great Glamorgan Way.

The Rights of Way Manager responded that if the town or community councils had specific bridal ways or routes that could be upgraded to bridal ways that they felt the funding should be allocated to and spent on the team could consider those.

- A member asked what time scale was in place to clear the backlog that the team had.

The Rights of Way Manager responded that he was unable to specify an exact time scale but assured the committee that they were getting through the queries according to priority and with the resources available.

- A Member stated that some Community Councils, particularly smaller ones, face difficulties sourcing reliable contractors undertake maintenance work. She asked if the local authority have a potential for a framework of contractors that town and community councils can connect with to contract some of the work.

The Rights of Way Manager stated that the team did not have such a framework. They had a list of one or two contractors that they utilised annually. He stated that they experience a similar difficulty due to the bigger contractors' availability to carry out minor work. The Group Manager - Highways & Green Spaces stated that he would consult with colleagues get back to the committee.

- A member asked how information from the Local Access Forum gets fed back to Town and Community Councils.

The Rights of Way Manager responded that the minutes and the reports are delivered to the TCC Representative to the Bridgend Local Access Forum. He stated that there was no fixed process in place for sharing the information and will look into implementing this.

- A member inquired about spending limitations with regard to agency agreements. He asked if all Community Councils spent the maximum available to them and asked what happens to the surplus if any at the end of the agreed period.

The Rights of Way Manager responded that not all town and community councils reach their spend limit. There were also Community Councils that spent more than their limit, in such instances, they utilised their own resources to supplement the money that they get from the Rights Of Way Budget. He stated that where was an underspend, the Rights Of Way team utilise the funds to carry out maintenance work within the county borough.

- A member stated it was interesting to note that if there was an underspend, the funding would be spent elsewhere rather than in the ward that could have claimed it. She asked if there was something that could be done around improving communication between Community Councils and

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	<p>the Rights of Way to indicate that a council has aspirations but cannot secure contractors and would therefore not be able to spend the funding by the deadline.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Another member asked the possibility of approaching the Welsh Assembly Government for additional funding required for the maintenance of footpaths. <p>The Chairperson responded by referring to a previous point made in the meeting about the improvement grant, stating that the team would be carrying out that review whilst the committee appreciates that it involves significant work for the team.</p> <p>The Rights of Way manager stated the team always look to apply for additional funding to carry out work on the rights of way network. As a note of caution, he stated that the funding usually applied for is generally towards making improvements or big capital schemes. He stated that it was unusual for funding bodies to fund maintenance work because they see that as the Council's statutory duty.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Chairperson summarised the action points from the discussion as follows :<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Obtain information on Community Council expenditure on Rights of Way+ The authority are open to ideas at improving bridal ways and encourage community councils to put their suggestions forward.+ Work is to be carried out to look into opportunities around quiet lanes+Review the Rights of Way improvement planning+Share information with Town and Community Councils regarding the Glamorgan Way+Locate the function on the BCBC website that allows individuals to view the Rights of Way in their locality.• The Rights of Way manager stated that he would be sharing two weblinks with the DS Committees to be sent to the Town and Community Councils. <p><u>RESOLVED</u> : The Town and Community Council Forum noted the report and agreed to proceed with the actions that resulted.</p>
Date Decision Made	13 November 2023

23. Engagement and Participation Strategy

Decision Made	<p>The purpose of the report, presented by Consultation, Engagement and Equalities Manager was to update the Town and Community Council Forum on the current situation and to inform them that a public consultation had commenced to seek views on the proposed Strategy which they can support by promoting within their local communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A member asked what was being done to encourage people within the communities to speak positively about changes in the authority so that there is a broad data set of whether the ideas presented are really unpopular, very popular or somewhere in the middle. <p>The Consultation, Engagement and Equalities Manager stated that they have looked at reaching new or harder to reach groups that they can engage with by making themselves available for more public engagement.</p> <p>The Chairperson stated that it was important the authority ensured that consultation engagement was as representative as it as it could be whilst being mindful that there were some groups that were harder to engage with than others. He welcomed suggestions or ideas from members on how they could engage better with communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Member stated that historically, there has been a reliance on consultation through the means listed and not so much on participation, involvement and Co production. She stated it would be beneficial to gain people's views to Co produce the final version of the document. She asked how the diverse communities that are more difficult to reach could be reached. <p>The Member suggested the need to do things a differently in order to encourage views and to talk to communities. She mentioned the need to engage at a hyper local level with organisations that could be through the 3rd sector and through other partners. The member mentioned that whilst it is a step in the right direction there needs to be more work around involvement and inclusivity.</p> <p>The Consultation, Engagement and Equalities Manager responded that they have pre communication with parties such as South Wales Police, The Youth Service and the College in order that they full range of engagement with the different groups. They were considering a link with People's First Bridgend who cater to different needs with their service users and have an engagement opportunities. They were also considering attending food banks and they were forming a partnership with the Hate crime Awareness sessions expected to be carried out over the next few weeks with the intention of obtaining feedback from residents.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A member mentioned that he was representative for Pencoed for the Youth Engagement Panel and stated that he did not believe any contact had been made to engage. The Consultation, Engagement and Equalities Manager acknowledged that it was a useful to know and engage with in the future. <p>The Deputy Leader suggested that it would be beneficial to engage on several matters together because there is much work being done. She stated that WLGA has asked for a specific schedule about events planned and it would be useful to formulate a schedule together to try and engage on various matters with a view to obtaining more feedback from residents.</p> <p>The Consultation, Engagement and Equalities Manager mentioned that if the Community Councils so wished, she would be able to go through awareness sessions with them in preparation for members speaking with constituents regarding the strategy. She stated that this could be done individually or as a group.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED</u> : It was agreed that the Town and Community Council Forum noted the development of the Engagement and Participation Strategy and promoted the public consultation within their local communities to encourage their residents to provide feedback ahead of final approval by Cabinet.</p>
Date Decision Made	13 November 2023

24. Budget Update

Decision Made	<p>The purpose of the report, presented by Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change was to provide a briefing on the current budget position for Bridgend County Borough Council as at 30th September 2023.</p> <p>The Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change mentioned that they would be requesting a return of the precept figures from Community Councils for the coming year by Friday the 5th of January 2024 and the Chairperson suggested that Community Councils are notified of this in writing as early as possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A member asked if Community Councils could be informed of how the Authority would like them helping, as in turn, it would help town and community councils in setting their precepts. He stated that Community Councils would benefit from knowing the Authority's strategy and vision of how Town and Community councils can fill a gap.
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The Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change responded that the Authority was considering budget options for the coming financial year. The prediction was that there would be considerable financial pressure next year. There will be significant in year pressure and the anticipation was that it would carry forward into the next year. She agreed that it would be beneficial to have a dialogue between both the local authority and the Town and Community councils about how they can support each other. She stated her concern was that precepts were due within the next few weeks, therefore, the opportunity for dialogue felt tight. She suggested that a discussion with the Authority would be beneficial to determining whether there was anything further that could be done support the authority in the next financial year.

- A member asked the impact on the budget of discovering RAC in a council owned building.

The Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change responded that it was too early in the process to determine the impact by speculating on the costs that may be incurred as the building in question was undergoing a detailed survey to determine the work that would be required to remedy the issues.

- A member stated that given that there were Community Councils of varying sizes with greater or lesser appetites to take on services some community councils undertake work at their own cost. He queried how it was possible to break that cycle so that was not always too late to discuss it. He asked if it was possible to have a sub-committee of the TCCF with a representative from each minor authority to have a meaningful conversation about how agency agreements regarding other services can be made. He stated that it would be dependent on each Community Council, their appetite and their capability but with would provide Town and Community councils the opportunity to contribute to what is ultimately a joint effort. He also asked if, in the current time of austerity, that the Community Ownership funds were safe.

The Chairperson agreed that it would be helpful and beneficial to look at individual savings, challenges faced and services provided by Town and Community councils. He stated it would be better to systematically receive the information for consistency.

The Chairperson also stated that all members and Officers see the value of the Community Ownership Fund and therefore there is a willingness to continue, he however stated that like many other things, it would be subject to a review and could only result in prioritising funds differently. The Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change added that as the Community Councils were of different sizes, had different aspirations and capacities any plans put in place would require both

the Authority and the Town of Community Councils to be cognizant of that.

- A member asked, as the Revenue Report had suggested that there was a saving to be made in relation to the operating times of the Community Recycling Facility in Pyle but was not realised due to the delay in receiving a license, if there was now an agreed date for the reopening of the Facility. She also asked if it was known when the closure of a day or a week was due to be implemented.

The Chairperson responded that he was aware of a report being sent into Cabinet on the upcoming the consultation on the opening days of the Community recycling centres. He stated that he was also in discussion with Natural Resources Wales, he shared that progress had been made but the Authority was dependent on obtaining the license allowing NRW to operate the site and while the current facility in Pyle was Authority owned and would generate a saving, the transfer from the existing facility came at a cost.

- A member stated he was unsure if Council Tax rates were due for an increase in May 2024, he was concerned that if his local Community Town Council set their precept higher during a cost of living crisis, his residents were going to find it difficult. He suggested that it would be better introduce a strategy where the Local Authority and the Town and Community Council work in collaboration when making decisions that impact the local communities.

The Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change responded that there were some decisions that would work that way and some others not so much, primarily because some services may be better delivered at scale if they particularly require significant equipment or where certain types of funding are required. She agreed that clear communication is required when reaching out to the residents so that they were absolutely clear of what they are paying for.

The Chairperson stated that the vast majority of the statutory services were continuing to be delivered, by the local authority. He acknowledged that town and community councils had taken significant additional responsibilities. He acknowledged that the Local Authority employ over 6000 people in Bridgend most of whom are employed in schools and social services where most of funding for those services and most of the taxation from those services will come from. He stated that the Authority were working very hard to identify ways of saving money and to identify ways of being more efficient and more effective. He said that if town and community councils had any specific suggestions or ideas that they thought should be considered, the Authority would be glad to know of them.

He acknowledged that Town and community councils had a lot of experience and knowledge of good practice and would welcome the possibility of benefiting from that.

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25. Urgent Items

Decision Made	None
Date Decision Made	13 November 2023

To observe further debate that took place on the above items, please click this [link](#)

The meeting closed at 17:47