

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND ON MONDAY, 30 MARCH 2015 AT 4.00 PM

Present

Councillor MEJ Nott OBE (Chair)

Councillors:

PA Davies
E Dodd
RD Jenkins

Councillors:

HE Morgan
G Phillips
CL Reeves

Councillors:

M Reeves
CE Smith
RL Thomas

Councillors:

HJ Townsend
R Williams
M Winter

Town and Community Councillors:

Bridgend Town	RDL Burns
Coychurch Lower	B Nash
Garw Valley	T M Jenkins
Maesteg Town	P W Jenkins
Merthyr Mawr	W Willis
Ogmore Valley	M Jenkins
Pencoed Town	J McCarthy
Pyle	M Kearns
St Brides Minor	Y Nott

Officers:

A Bowen	Group Manager Housing & Regeneration
S Cook	Chief Executive of Valleys 2 Coast (V2C)
G P Jones	Head of Democratic Services
A Rees	Senior Democratic Services Officer – Committees

83 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the members for the reasons so stated:

Councillor M Butcher – Other Council Business
Councillor E M Hughes – Other Council Business
Councillor C L Jones – Holiday
Councillor D Sage – In hospital
Community Councillor B Davies – Other Commitment
Community Councillor N Oram – Other Commitment
Community Councillor M Wilkins – Unwell.

84 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

85 APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Town and Community Council Forum of 12 January 2015 be approved as a true and accurate record.

86 REPLACEMENT OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Group Manager Housing & Regeneration reported on the demolition works undertaken by V2C and the measures they and the Council have undertaken with regard to the provision of new and affordable housing. She stated that V2C had informed the Council they continually examine the demand and condition of their housing stock, which had resulted in a number of individual option appraisals being undertaken on properties within their estates. In some cases properties had been demolished if it had been determined to be the last viable option for these properties. Demolition of properties had occurred on a number of estates within V2C's ownership and who had separately developed over 30 units of accommodation of a mixed tenure on their own land. V2C was also developing 23 units of social housing at Porthcawl and Cornelly and secured planning consent for the development of 18 units in Maesteg.

The Group Manager Housing & Regeneration informed the Forum that in addition to the works undertaken by V2C, the Council had identified and supported a number of schemes for development by other Registered Social Landlords funded by Social Housing Grant provided by the Welsh Government, with 70 units of accommodation programmed for development in 2015/16 and over 110 units identified for future development.

The Group Manager Housing & Regeneration also informed the Forum that there continued to be a high demand for affordable housing, however due to the scarcity of resources, new affordable housing would be targeted to those areas and property types where the need is greatest. Due to the changes to the welfare system it was envisaged that there would be a considerable increase in the need for smaller or single person accommodation. The Council would continue to negotiate new affordable housing contributions via Section 106 agreements on new development sites to meet the requirements of the adopted Local Development Plan.

The Group Manager Housing & Regeneration informed the Forum that there was growing interest in new and innovative funding models which incorporate institutional investment to build affordable housing, which was currently being assessed.

The Chief Executive of V2C informed the Forum of the role of V2C which is to improve the condition of its housing stock and it also focused on replacing its housing stock and developing more affordable housing. It also took advantage of the availability of Social Housing Grant but was at present undertaking a development of 116 units of mixed tenure housing known as Wood Green at Chelsea Avenue, Cefn Glas from its own resources and in partnership with Bellway Homes without the use of Social Housing Grant.

The Forum referred to the number of properties demolished and developed by V2C which had left a shortfall of approximately 160 properties and expressed its concern that affordable was not being developed fast enough in order to meet the demand. The Chief Executive of V2C informed the Forum that some properties were required to be demolished in order to facilitate the construction of new properties and ideally V2C aspired to have more properties. He stated that some properties require a great deal of money to be spent on their repair. He informed the Forum that V2C had until recently had a modest development programme but he was hoping that its Board would today sign up to a development programme of £25m of 600 properties to be built across the County Borough over the next 10 years.

A member of the Forum questioned the location of the flats in Maes Felin, Wildmill which had been demolished. The Chief Executive of V2C informed the Forum that the flats

which had been demolished were the 4 storey blocks which had low demand and in poor condition with anti-social behaviour in the area. He stated that the remaining blocks had been refurbished. He undertook to provide Members with details of the blocks in Maes Felin which had been refurbished and those which had been demolished.

In response to a question from the Forum, the Chief Executive of V2C stated that the 'bedroom tax' had affected 1,300 tenants of V2C and that a small percentage of tenants had effected a move to alternative accommodation with the majority staying in their present homes.

A member of the Forum questioned whether V2C was satisfied that affordable housing developments had been sufficient through Section 106 Agreements. The Chief Executive of V2C informed the Forum that V2C has good working relationships with the Council and whilst it would prefer to see more affordable housing being built, it had recently been the recipients of funding from the sale of the former Christie Tyler site to purchase 3 properties.

A member of the Forum questioned whether sites which had empty stock would be offered for development in order to bring them back into use. The Group Manager Housing & Regeneration informed the Forum that grants were offered through the private sector renewal policy where properties had been empty for 6 months to bring them back into use and in return the Council require nominations from the waiting list. An empty property loan was administered on behalf of the Welsh Government but this had not proven successful as developers were required to repay the loan. Grant money had been targeted towards owners of empty properties in order to stimulate new development. The Group Manager Housing & Regeneration informed the Forum that the Council had developed a housing allocations policy and as a result of new initiatives which had been developed the Council had avoided putting a family into bed and breakfast accommodation which had been a very positive outcome.

RESOLVED: That the Forum noted the report.

87 DEMOCRATIC DIVERSITY

The Head of Democratic Services reported on the action plan being developed by the Diversity Champion to take forward the diversification of democracy initiated by the Expert group and set out in "On Balance: Diversifying Democracy in Local Government in Wales". He stated that the Expert Group analysed a survey of local Councillors in Wales and set out a plan of action to encourage a greater diversity of candidates to stand for office in 2017. The "On Balance: Diversifying Democracy in Local Government in Wales" report outlined the actions required to increase the diversity of local Councillors in Wales in respect of age, gender, disability and ethnicity.

The Head of Democratic Services informed the Forum that Cabinet at its meeting on 27 May 2014 appointed Councillor H Townsend as the Diversity Champion who had met Welsh Government representatives and other Diversity Champions to discuss plans for progressing the aims of the "On Balance" report. He stated that there were several recommendations of the Expert Panel report which would require the involvement of Town and Community Councils and an initial action plan had been developed with key actions. He requested that Town and Community Councils work with the Diversity Champion, Head of Democratic Services and Equalities and Engagement Officer to collect the relevant diversity data, assess the information as it pertained to each council and determine appropriate strategies to better reflect the make-up of constituents in their respective Councils. Further work will be undertaken to develop the action plan and the Diversity Strategy to meet the requirements of the "On Balance" report and improve the Democratic Diversity within the County Borough.

The Diversity Champion informed the Forum of the work she had undertaken in her role in that she had attended a number of meetings with the Welsh Government and had addressed underrepresented groups. The Diversity Champion stated that she was seeking to share resources with Town and Community Councils and to raise awareness of the need to consider diversity whilst at the same time recognising that all Town and Community were themselves different and diverse. The Diversity Champion informed the Forum that she was seeking to meet Town and Community Councils to ascertain their needs with regard to diversity and in the hope that they would appoint diversity champions. The Diversity Champion informed the Forum that she was intending to collate and assess relevant data to assist in the development of the Diversity Strategy. She stated that the profile of elected Members in the County Borough mirrored that across Wales.

A member of the Forum commented on the importance of diversity in democracy and that administrations were formed from political parties and that political parties needed to increase their efforts to recruit new members. The Diversity Champion commented that her role was non-political but political parties needed to play their part in recruiting new members.

A member of the Forum stated that Bridgend Town Council had discussed Democratic Diversity at its recent meeting and is approximately 50% gender split with a range of religious backgrounds. Bridgend Town Council resolved that it take no action at this time on appointing a Diversity Champion.

The Diversity Champion informed the Forum of the need to ensure training for mentoring and that 15 BCBC Members had been trained to date. The mentoring training which is to commence in June would be funded by the Welsh Government. There would also be a training module on the use of social media. The Diversity Champion informed the Forum that she was part of a network of 22 Diversity Champions across Wales. She stated that work would continue on highlighting diversity despite the re-organisation of Local Government not being known. The Head of Democratic Services informed the Forum that a request had been made to use part of the underspend on budgets to fund the continuation of work on diversity. He stated that a significant number of potential candidates were not politically aligned however officers were willing to signpost them to political parties.

A member of the Forum commented that Maesteg Town Council had welcomed the approach of appointing diversity champions which would help the Council in its decision making.

The Diversity Champion informed the Forum that events were being planned to be held in communities where the role of the Councillor would be explained. The Diversity Champion commented that she would be prepared to attend meetings of Town and Community Councils to address them on diversity.

A member of the Forum stated that St Brides Minor Community Council is considering appointing a diversity champion and that the composition of the Council was now more balanced in terms of gender and stated that Youth Council members should be encouraged to attend Town and Community Council meetings. The Diversity Champion informed the Forum that she had already spoken to the Youth Council as to the possibility of Youth Council members attending meetings of Town and Community Councils. Brackla Community Council was looking at co-opting a member of the Youth Council on to its Community Council. The Leader commented that the Youth Council met regularly with the Cabinet Member - Children and young People.

A member of the Forum commented on the need for the political parties to encourage new members to join which would help with diversity and believed that citizenship should be taught on the curriculum in schools and that democracy needed to reflect society. The Diversity Champion informed the Forum that she had met the Local Government Minister to discuss diversity and that the curriculum in schools is being reviewed by the Welsh Government. She also informed the Forum that the work on the diversity project would be communicated to all Clerks of town and Community Councils.

RESOLVED: That the Town & Community Council Forum:

- notes the content of the report;
- recommend that each Town and Community Council:
 - Identify a Member Champion for Diversity
 - Consider the co-option of a youth member.
 - Encourage their elected members to undertake mentoring of potential successors
 - Work with the BCBC Diversity Champion to collate and assess relevant data and assist in the development of the Diversity Strategy

88 **SCHEDULE OF AGENDA ITEMS**

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

Members requested the inclusion of a review of the Town and Community Council Charter be considered at a subsequent meeting of the Forum

RESOLVED: That the Forum noted the report and the items to be considered at future meetings and requested that reports on the Town and Community Council Fund and a Review of the Town and Community Council Charter be presented to future meetings of the Forum.

The meeting closed at 5.23pm