

TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM - MONDAY, 21 MARCH 2016

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON MONDAY, 21 MARCH 2016 AT 4.00 PM

Present

Councillor CE Smith – Chairperson

M Butcher	CA Green	EM Hughes	CL Jones
HE Morgan	G Phillips	CL Reeves	M Reeves
RL Thomas	HJ Townsend	R Williams	

Officers:

Robin Davies	Group Manager - Business Strategy and Performance
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Lee Jones	Head of Regulatory Services
Cecilia Ware	Integrated Community Network Manager North

113. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members:-

Councillor MEJ Nott
Councillor D Pugh
Councillor RD Jenkins
Councillor D Newton-Williams
Councillor C Griffiths
Councillor D Sage

114. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor EM Hughes declared a personal interest in Agenda item 5, in that she was Chairperson of Heronsbridge Special Needs school.

115. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of the Town & Community Council Forum dated 11 January 2016 be approved as a true and accurate record.

A Member referred to Minute 110. and the beginning of the second paragraph where it stated that 'a Member asked what the fall back situation was if Town and Community Councils do not accept CAT offers as some of the proposals were not realistically sustainable, however, they could not afford to lose assets such as pavilions and sports grounds'. He felt that there was not a sufficient response in the Minute to this question.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that he would look into this point and come back to the Member accordingly, outside of the meeting.

116. DEMENTIA FRIENDS AND HOW THEY SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEMENTIA FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

The Integrated Community Network Manager presented a report, the purpose of which, was to provide an update to the Town and Community Council Forum on the development of Dementia Friends, and how they support the development of Dementia Friendly Communities.

She explained that “Dementia Friends” and “Dementia Friendly Communities” were both initiatives created to improve the lives of people with a diagnosis of dementia, and to offer increased support to their families. Recommended through “the Prime Minister’s challenge” in 2012 and further supported by the Welsh Government and the Older Person’s Commissioner for Wales, the project aimed to create a community in which people with dementia are empowered to have high aspirations and feel confident, knowing that they can contribute and participate in activities that are meaningful to them.

The Llynfi 20 Project Group was established in 2013 to address the health inequality found in the Llynfi valley following a Health Equality Audit which showed that people in the Llynfi Valley have significantly poorer quality of health than other communities within Bridgend CBC. One of the work streams for this project was to establish “Dementia Friendly Communities” to reduce isolation and improve the health of people with a diagnosis of dementia.

The Integrated Community Network Manager confirmed that the aim of the above initiative, was to make small differences in the way people with dementia are supported, so that they can remain independent and socially active in their communities for longer.

She proceeded by stating that work was ongoing with BAVO to arrange consultation sessions and gain the support of other key stakeholders to put supportive measures in place to help people suffering from dementia live in their home for longer.

Information sessions had been held she added, in order to increase the number of “Dementia Friends”, which would assist areas in turn, to become ‘Dementia Friendly Communities’.

The Integrated Community Network Manager explained, that following the project brief introduced by the Alzheimer’s Society, the Council was looking to apply to achieve status to become a Dementia Friendly community hopefully in due course, within a number of areas of the BCB, after achieving this firstly in Maesteg. There were 6 steps to be achieved to become recognised as this, and these were detailed in paragraph 4.3 of the report.

For the benefit of Members, she then played two short video’s on the subject of Dementia and how organisations, family and even members of the community including people working in retail establishments, could assist in playing a part in the support of people suffering with this debilitating illness.

A Member asked if there were local places throughout the community, and in particular in Maesteg, where people suffering with this illness could go and visit as a form of a social and at the same time, supportive outlet.

The Integrated Community Network Manager advised that there were Day Centre's and a café in Maesteg, where people with dementia could visit. She added that it was very important that people with dementia remained out of statutory services for as long as possible, in order to maintain their independence.

A Member asked how other areas of the County Borough could adopt a similar project to that which was taking place in Maesteg, in order that an improvement in the support of dementia could be secured in other communities and towns within the County Borough.

The Integrated Community Network Manager confirmed that the way forward was through using associations of support, such as the Alzheimer's Society, as well as other representatives within a community who would devote time and commitment to assisting in the support of the illness, often on a voluntary basis.

A Member agreed that a considerable amount of help could come from simple things such as public awareness, However, this only applied in the early stages of the illness. As the illness set-in and progressively became worse, then support became more of a financial issue, as individuals then required increased help either at home or in a residential care facility/hospital setting.

The Integrated Community Network Manager confirmed that support for individuals with dementia or Alzheimer's disease in the UK came at an annual cost of £26 billion a year. This was why it was very important to develop Dementia Friendly Communities, as they required little or no financial implications, just different forms of quite simple support mechanisms being put in place. It was just a case of showing patience and committing time. Badges were issued to people with dementia in order that members of society could be made aware that they had this illness. There was a small cost to produce these, as well as leaflets that could be produced for any particular community or community based establishment.

A Member asked if there were any steps that Town/Community Councils could take to assist in supporting dementia.

The Integrated Community Network Manager advised that Town and Community Councils could sign-up to and attend Information sessions, and seek to become Dementia Friendly Communities. This session would take just 45 minutes to an hour to complete. She was a Dementia Champion, and there were others also that delivered these sessions throughout communities.

The Integrated Community Network Manager added that there was an area of the web site in respect of Alzheimer's Disease that made reference to Dementia Friendly Communities that Members could look up and obtain more information upon. Also, further information could be obtained from herself as a lead Officer on dementia. The Alzheimer's Society also have literature and video's that could be downloaded, offering advice and information on this important subject.

The Head of Democratic Services stated that it would be useful if information in respect of the topic of discussion could also be made available on the BCBC Members Intranet.

The Chairperson concluded discussion on this by advising that it would be useful if Members could have a pre-Council Presentation on the subject of Dementia Friendly Communities.

RESOLVED: That the Town and Community Council Forum note the content of this report and the progress on developing Dementia Friendly Communities in the Llynfi Valley.

117. LEARNER TRAVEL POLICY

The Group Manager, Business Strategy and Performance presented a report to Members regarding a previous decision of Cabinet to propose changes to the Council's Learner Travel Policy which will take effect from September 2016, and to inform the Forum on how the policy change will contribute to the overall saving in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17 to 2019/20 (MTFS).

The report provided some background information, following which the report outlined that the Council's Learner Travel Policy was no longer financially sustainable, and the MTFS sought to achieve potential revenue savings relating to the Learner Travel Policy as detailed in Table 1 of the report.

The Group Manager, Business Strategy and Performance advised that the Council had already made efficiency savings of £1m in respect of the Learner Travel transport Contract through the transport operators.

The next section of the report confirmed how further savings were required to be made in future years of the MTFS in respect of reviewing the Learner Transport Policy regarding statutory distances for free travel. £67k had been targeted in terms of savings in this area within each of the three years for 2017 – 2020.

The Group Manager, Business Strategy and Performance confirmed that in order to take forward these savings, the following three proposals to amend the LA's Learner Travel Policy were put forward:-

1. To increase the distance required for free transport between a pupil's home and their school, to match the distance required by law (including Welsh medium and Voluntary aided schools)
2. To charge the full cost of a school bus pass for pupils who do not receive free school transport
3. To stop providing free transport for learners aged 16 or over, who go to school or college

He added that a full consultation exercise was then carried out in respect of these proposals, with the outcome of this presented to Cabinet in September 2015. The decision Cabinet made was detailed in paragraph 4.5 of the report.

The Group Manager, Business Strategy and Performance confirmed that since the Cabinet decision in September, the budget proposal built into the MTFS relating to this saving/estimated shortfall had been removed, mitigating the potential budget shortfall.

Referring to paragraph 4.6 of the report, the Group Manager, Business Transformation and Performance advised that proposal 1 above was accepted. Proposal 2 was also accepted, but the cost of a paying place was amended to £1.90 per day. However, proposal 3 was not accepted, other than post 16 pupils receiving free home to school transport in line with the statutory walking distance for secondary age pupils ie at 3 miles rather than 2 miles.

A Member confirmed that he was unhappy with some elements of the report.

He asked the Officer if an Environmental Impact Assessment had been carried out in respect of the proposed changes. He asked this, considering that there was a distance

of 3 miles from one end of the valley in Maesteg to the other, which was some considerable distance for any pupil who may be required to walk to school if not satisfying any of the criteria in order to qualify for transport arrangements.

He noted that Cabinet had approved the cost of a paying place at £1.90 per day for all school pupils (including post-16 students, and he asked upon what basis this fee had been calculated.

He also considered that the use of taxi's could be considered in some cases of transporting young people to/from their place of education, as this could prove less expensive than some forms of transport, particularly if the taxi was shared by pupils.

He further noted that just last week, Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC had agreed that no payment would be made by pupils in that area for school transport up to a distance of 3 miles from their point of pick-up/collection to their place of education.

He asked also if parents earning low levels of income had been considered for as part of the proposals, and if schools had been consulted upon in respect of car sharing for pupils, in order to ease traffic flow to and from schools. He was also concerned that there would be no pupils having to walk to schools along routes not considered as safe routes to schools.

The Group Manager, Business Strategy and Performance confirmed that a full Equality Impact Assessment had been carried out with regard to the changes in respect of Learner Travel provision, and that the report that was submitted to Cabinet had been an extremely comprehensive document consisting of over 400 pages long.

He advised that the proposals had been the subject of a very in-depth consultation process that involved children, parents, School governors, Head teachers (and support staff), as well as the holding of a series of public meetings, where the impact of all the changes proposed had been discussed.

As a result of this consultation process, some changes had been made to that which had been previously proposed, so the Council had both listened to and acted upon some of the concerns raised by the consultees.

As part of the consultation exercise, Officers had also looked at any likely traffic implications that would arise as part of the changes to the Learner Travel Policy including highway safety, as a result of any potential increase in school transport provision. Matters of any increased pollution through carbon monoxide emissions had also been looked into he added.

The Group Manager, Business Strategy and Performance added that discretionary powers could be used by Officers through the use of a Welfare Fund, if an application was made to support a family if they identified any risks to them as a result of the changes, including financial risk.

He confirmed that he was aware that Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC had changed its Learner Travel Policy that would benefit its clientele, however, this had been their decision as part of their budget reduction proposals. They would still have to make the required savings they had originally earmarked for Learner Travel, but this would now have to be made in a different service area.

With regard to the qualifying distance for free secondary school transport changing from 2 miles to 3 miles, the Group Manager, Business Strategy and Performance, confirmed that a considerable number of local authorities offered this, and BCBC were merely

adjusting this more in line with what these other Authorities were providing. He reminded Members that savings had to be made in the area of Learner Travel under the Council's MTFS, and particularly due to the fact that the Council had historically provided over and above the level of transport provision it was required to, (including free transport provision) under statutory legislation. Though some of the decisions in terms of changes to the Policy would disadvantage some, they quite simply had to be made he added.

A Member referred to the previous resolution of Cabinet, and that no decision had been made regarding proposal 3 above, ie to withdraw free post -16 transport to school and college students, leaving an estimated budget shortfall of £529k for 2016-17. She was of the understanding that this saving whilst having been deferred, would still have to be met in future.

The Group Manager, Business Strategy and Performance, advised that at present this required saving had been removed from the MTFS. He added however, that any future strategic evaluation review undertaken in the Education and Children's Directorate may require revisiting this element of the Policy, particularly with regard to Post 16 students. The saving would still have to be made within the Directorate in any event he added, as it was incumbent upon Directorates to make the savings earmarked against them under the MTFS, with it being the responsibility of Members and Directors in terms of in what service areas these earmarked savings will be made.

A Member raised some concern regarding any potential cases of children having to walk to and from school as a result of the proposed changes to the Learner Travel Policy.

The Group Manager, Business Strategy and Performance confirmed that no children would be expected to walk to school along a route that was not considered in the category of a "Safe Route to School" in accordance with the necessary guidance. Routes to schools were also reviewed regularly in order to ensure that they could still be classed as being safe under the relevant guidance. He added that the Education Authority did everything in its power to ensure that pupils refrained from walking to any school unless it was served by a safe route.

He added that there was a provision in the Learner Travel Policy to protect free transport in certain circumstances, that included Welsh Medium and Voluntary Aided schools, and the same applied up to 2 miles for primary schools and 3 miles for secondary schools. The Group Manager, Business Strategy and Performance further added that parents/pupils could also choose these category of schools if the closest suitable school and free transport would still be honoured to take pupils to/from these schools.

A Member asked how and when were families advised of changes affecting the Learner Travel Policy, and if there was an appeal process that could be pursued for those who wished to object to the changes to the Policy.

The Group Manager, Business Strategy and Performance confirmed that families were informed of the changes through the Schools Admissions Policy contained in the Council's 'Starting Schools' booklet, ie it was made clear in this document the criteria under which pupils qualified for school transport arrangements, including free transport.

He further added that there was no appeal process, however, families could apply for free school transport through the Council's discretionary transport policy, where each case received would be considered on its own merits.

The Chairperson concluded debate on this item, by advising that excess vehicular movements on the highway infrastructure was a problem that extended throughout the UK, rather than just being prevalent within the Bridgend County Borough, and traffic

conditions improved significantly at normal school start/finishing times during school holidays. He added that as a Member of the Cabinet that made a decision regarding the changes to the Learner Travel Policy, he was confident in saying that these changes had to be made under the terms of the MTFS, even though this decision had been difficult to make, as had others affecting key service areas in all Directorates across the Authority.

RESOLVED: That the Forum noted the contents of the report outlining the decision of Cabinet on the changes to the Local Authority's Learner Travel Policy and associated MTFS savings.

118. **REVISION TO THE TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS CHARTER**

The Head of Regulatory, Partnerships and Transformation submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to seek the views of the Town and Community Council Forum regarding the proposed revisions to the Town and Community Council Charter. Following endorsement of this by the Forum, the revised Charter would be submitted to all Town and Community Councils in the County Borough of Bridgend for approval.

The report gave some background information, following which the report confirmed that at December's meeting of the Town and Community Council Forum, it was agreed that a Town and Community Council Charter Working Group be established, to review the current Charter. The working group consisted of 6 Elected Members from Bridgend County Borough Council and 6 Elected Member representatives from the Town/Community Councils.

The Head of Regulatory, Partnerships and Transformation confirmed that the Working Group had met on a couple of occasions to undertake the review, which included the circulation of the existing Charter to all Town and Community Councils to identify any suggested ways to improve the Charter

He went on to advise, that a series of proposals were discussed, and the amendments contained in paragraph 4.3 of the report were agreed for inclusion in the revised draft Charter.

The Head of Regulatory, Partnerships and Transformation, confirmed that the Charter (attached at Appendix 1 to the report) had been revised to reflect the promise of all partners, to embrace the challenges ahead in order to achieve the required outcomes and demonstrate citizen-focused delivery of services. The Charter would also strengthen single contact points between the Authority and Town/Community Councils, as well as improving engagement between Town and Community Councils themselves.

As soon as all Town and Community Councils had agreed the revised Charter, a formal signing of this would be held before June 2016, following the election appointment of the Mayor's/Chairpersons for the 2016 -17 Civic Year.

The Charter would also be used as a toolkit within which to form the Committee's Forward Work Programme (FWP), through the FWP Action Plan.

It was also intended he added to utilise technology more proactively in order to improve engagement with Town/Community Councils.

The Head of Regulatory, Partnerships and Transformation concluded his submission, by advising that any comments in relation to the revised Charter could be forwarded either to himself or the Head of Democratic Services.

The Chairperson extended his thanks to Officers and any Members who had assisted them in driving this forward. He considered that the revised Charter would be more of a working document, and would provide increased focus on delivering key aims and objectives that would also result in more meaningful items being placed on future Committee meeting agendas.

He also felt that there would be a larger role than currently existed following local government reformation, for key stakeholders such as Town/Community Councils, including in the support of the County Borough Council.

A Member felt that Town/Community Councils, particularly the more larger ones, could increase their precept in order to support the local authority with certain projects, albeit the smaller ones, including providing financial support for these wherever possible.

The Head of Regulatory, Partnerships and Transformation agreed that this would be a useful course of action that could be pursued. He added that pressures were still increasingly growing in respect of the Council's financial status under its MTFS, and this also applied to its partners and stakeholders. However, some of these bodies were able to receive grant funding that was not available to the Authority, and this could be used to fund certain projects.

A Member was concerned, in that attendance at meetings of the Town and Community Council Forum from Town and Community Councils had dwindled over the past few years, and that better attendance at meetings would make for more meaningful debate, which should then in turn, provide for better outcomes from meetings.

The Head of Regulatory, Partnerships and Transformation, confirmed that the Town/Community Council Charter Working Group, had discussed ways of improving engagement between the two tiers of Authority, and it had been suggested that Officers visit Town and Community Councils to increase and improve engagement with them on the Charter, as opposed to representatives from these coming to a quarterly meeting of the Forum.

A Member noted from the draft Charter on page 33 of the report, that there was a Section entitled Engagement and Consultation. She felt that it would be advantageous if Town/Community Councils could be consulted upon certain key proposals of the Authority before they went to Committee for decision, particularly on matters of importance either to a particular area, or the County Borough as a whole. This applied to planning applications considered by the Development Control Committee and she felt that there was no reason why this could not be extended to other decision making bodies of the Council. She also felt that it may be useful to consider the introduction of Area Forums to assist in generating methods of engagement, and perhaps assist the local authority by taking on projects recommended by neighbouring Town/Community Councils who agree to work together to provide these.

The Head of Regulatory, Partnerships and Transformation advised that Town/Community Councils working together on projects so as to successfully achieve these and/or progress them would be something that could be looked into as part of the Action Plan moving forward, as this Plan was only a framework at present.

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RESOLVED: That the Town and Community Forum endorsed the revised Charter and recommended it to all Town/Community Councils in the Bridgend County Borough for adoption.

119. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 5.21 pm