

**Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel, 4 October 2016**

**COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL  
4 October 2016**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Michael Weinhonig - Chairman; Councillor Nigel Hedges - Vice-Chairman; Councillors Jackie Edwards, Cheryl Johnson, Andy Jones, Roger Marley, Anne Rey, Nick Rose, Allister Russell

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Jane Kelly - Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Public Health; Councillor David Smith - Cabinet Member for Planning and Environment; Councillor Lawrence Williams - Cabinet Member for Tourism, Leisure and the Arts; Councillors Stephen Bartlett, Pat Oakley, Rae Stollard, Philip Stanley-Watts

**ALSO ATTENDING:**

Gary Josey	Community O&S Panel Lead Officer, and Service Director, Housing and Communities
Carole Aspden	Service Director, Children and Young People
Lesley Spain	Principal Learning Manager, Skills and Learning Bournemouth Dorset, and Poole
Lyn Peterson	Curriculum Quality Improvement Manager, Skills and Learning Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole
Kelly Ansell	Head of Housing and Community Enforcement
Caroline Roundhill	Homelessness Strategy Manager
Tim Savill	Head of Revenues and Benefits

The meeting commenced at 6:05p.m.

To see a copy of the public reports that were considered by the Panel and to listen to the Council's audio recording of this meeting please visit:

<http://www.bournemouth.gov.uk/councildemocratic/CouncilMeetings/CommitteeMeetings/CommunityOverviewScrutinyPanel/2016/10/04/CommunityOverviewScrutinyPanel04-Oct-2016.aspx>

**SECTION I - BUSINESS RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL**

No items

**SECTION II - BUSINESS DECIDED UNDER DELEGATED POWERS**

**31. APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

There were none.

**32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

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### 33. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES AND ACTION SHEET

The Panel considered the minutes of the Panel meeting on 12 July 2016 and the actions arising.

In respect of the action sheet the Chairman reminded members of the forthcoming Panel visit to the regional mortuary on 12 October. He also explained that the question on the 101 number would be submitted to the next meeting of the Police and Crime Panel on 8 November.

#### DECISION MADE:

- a. The minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2016 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.
- b. The actions arising from the meeting on 12 July 2016 and the Chairman's updates were noted.

### 34. PUBLIC ISSUES

There were no public questions, petitions or deputations for this meeting.

### 35. QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS

The following questions were asked by the Chairman on behalf of the Panel:

- Question to Councillor David Smith, Cabinet Member for Planning and Environment, on the latest position regarding the environmental enforcement pilot being undertaken with the enforcement agency, 3GS.
- Question to Councillor Jane Kelly, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Public Health, on future plans for Operation Galaxy.

To see a copy of the full questions and replies please visit:

<http://www.bournemouth.gov.uk/councildemocratic/CouncilMeetings/CommitteeMeetings/CommunityOverviewScrutinyPanel/2016/10/04/Minutes/agenda-item-6-questions-to-cabinet-members-4-october-2016.pdf>

### 36. CULTURAL STRATEGY TASK AND FINISH GROUP - PROGRESS REPORT

The Chairman reported that the task and finish group had met on three occasions with officers and also undertaken offline work in order to significantly input into the development of this strategy. The group's input had helped identify that the draft version currently prepared still lacked a large amount of information and had led to the group questioning the real identity of Bournemouth. The members involved had therefore asked that officers taking this work forward focus on this question. As a key strategy which will guide any future Council investment in culture and the

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arts, the task and finish group's view was that the strategy should be right rather than rushed. He expected to provide a further update on progress towards the end of 2016.

Councillor Williams, Cabinet Member for Tourism, Leisure and the Arts, reported that the Council was currently recruiting a cultural development manager to oversee the development of arts and culture in Bournemouth. Part of this role would be to continue to work on the Cultural Strategy. He supported the task and finish group's view of getting it 'right, not rushed'.

### DECISION MADE:

That the update on the progress of the task and finish group and the comments of the Cabinet Member be noted.

### 37. SKILLS AND LEARNING BOURNEMOUTH, DORSET AND POOLE - JOINT ADULT LEARNING SERVICE

The Panel considered a report on the progress made against the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) drawn up following the Ofsted inspection of the Dorset wide joint adult learning service in June 2015.

Members were reminded that Ofsted had graded the overall service as 'good'. The inspection had identified areas for development and made recommendations on how to improve these. The QIP explained the actions being taken and provided evidence of how these measures were improving performance outcomes. Members had asked to review the QIP after twelve months to monitor the progress being made. The full document was circulated with the report at appendix A.

The Principal Learning Manager summarised the key points from the QIP as set out in section 4 of the report. The performance data showed that the actions taken to raise pass rates had resulted in a year on year improvement. This was a challenging area for the service as many learners had to overcome disadvantages and barriers, and some led chaotic lifestyles. Members asked about the national picture and it was explained that the qualification success rates were below the national average although they were improving. This was partly due to the challenging cohort, something which Ofsted had acknowledged, and made 'like for like' comparisons with other providers difficult. The service wished to retain and encourage this group of learners and would continue to strive for higher pass rates.

The Panel noted that there was evidence to show that opportunities for learners to improve English and maths skills across the provision had increased. This had been achieved partly through workforce development, by providing one to one support for tutors and increasing confidence levels. The Principal Learning Manager was asked to explain how these measures benefitted learners as well as satisfying Ofsted's requirements. She reported that Ofsted had highlighted some missed opportunities to develop English and maths skills in classes. These were essential

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work/life skills and as such it was important to embed them in the learning environment. Tutors were now more confident and able to identify naturally occurring opportunities in class to include elements of English and maths. The Panel was also advised of measures to encourage the more effective use of IT for learners and staff.

The Panel talked about how to get a more practical understanding of how the service was delivered and the impact it had on individual learners. This could be done by including case studies in future reports or by observing a class in action. The Service Director, Children and Young People, reported that staff would welcome members' interest. If practicable an observational visit could link in with the Council's apprenticeship scheme.

The Principal Learning Manager also responded to questions on:

- How outcomes were recorded - separate arrangements were in place to track outcomes for learners on accredited and non-accredited/community courses, with a relatively high percentage of positive outcomes for both
- Local government reorganisation - this was unlikely to have an impact as the service had recently been merged and there were no plans to amend or split the current contract.
- Potential barriers in having English as a second language - this was picked up as part of the improvements to pre course assessments, with learners being signposted to Functional Skills and ESOL courses if required

The Chairman thanked the Principal Learning Manager for her clarity in presenting the report and responding to questions at the meeting. Although the Panel was confident that the evidence pointed to the ongoing improvement of the service members felt it would be prudent to request a further report to monitor progress in twelve months.

### DECISION MADE:

- a. That the Panel endorses the actions taken and the improved performance outcomes as evidenced within the service's Quality Improvement Plan;
- b. That arrangements be made for Panel members to visit and observe a class;
- c. That a progress report be considered in twelve months to include trend data for 2013/14, 2014/15, and 2015/16 to show and explain rates of retention, achievement and pass rates.

### 38. UPDATE ON THE HOUSING AND PLANNING ACT 2016

The Service Director, Housing and Communities provided the Panel with an update on the new Housing and Planning Act 2016. He explained that the process of enacting this legislation had been lengthy and at times contentious. Regulations

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associated with the Act were yet to be published and the delay had been prolonged by recent national events, including the secondment of staff in relation to Brexit negotiations, the change in Prime Minister, and a change in Government policy on housing which now appeared to be moving closer towards the enabling approach taken in Bournemouth. However, the provision in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 to reduce social housing rents by 1% per year with effect from April 2016 was contrary to Bournemouth's policy of setting rents in accordance with the Retail Price Index. Members noted that this equated to an annual £6.4 million deficit in funding which the Council would ordinarily have invested back into new housing stock.

Nationally there was an ongoing debate around home ownership versus council housing. The Council's view was that all types of housing were needed in the Borough, and Government signals now appeared to be acknowledging this. Bournemouth had a relatively low percentage of council housing at 8% of its total housing stock (11% including housing association) compared to the national average of 20%, but the council housing it did have was extremely well-maintained. In contrast the Town had a high percentage of private rented sector housing, particularly in the Boscombe area where it formed 62% of the total housing stock.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Environment reported that the Dorset wide Strategic Planning Forum had made written representations to the Government asking for the planning system to be reviewed. He also advised that the Town and Country Planning Association was holding a seminar in November to consider a fundamental rethink of planning.

The Service Director responded to questions from members and the following points were raised in the discussion:

- There was still no timeframe for when the Regulations would be published. It was noted that a new Housing Minister was now in post.
- Bournemouth's record on housing was receiving recognition from Government Ministers and the Local Government Association. Members congratulated the Service Director and his housing team for their achievements.
- Rent levels in the private sector were high and often unaffordable for those on a low income or benefits. It was noted that the supply depended partly on the type of investor and the return they wished to make on their property.
- Some Council housing sites were very close to areas of heathland and were difficult to develop further due to heathland protection/mitigation.
- Trends in recreational activities had changed, with less people taking part in traditional sporting and leisure activities. In the future it may be acceptable in some cases to use traditional recreational land for housing and mitigate the impact by including MUGAs (multi use games areas) and community space within the design of the development

The Service Director was asked how the Council reviewed the circumstances of its housing tenants and confirmed that these were checked on a regular basis. Tenancies were now issued for a maximum five-year term and included a

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probationary introduction period. The Council felt that five years was a reasonable time bearing in mind the legislation stated between two and ten years. In certain circumstances two year tenancies could be issued but this was unusual. The Council was proactive in encouraging tenants to accept rehousing into more suitable accommodation if their circumstances changed, e.g. where properties became under-occupied when children left home. The Council had little direct influence over people living in private sector housing, but it could encourage the supply of all types of housing to provide a better choice and could in due course consider building through its own company, Seascope.

**DECISION MADE** - That the update from the Service Director on the Housing and Planning Act 2016 be noted.

### 39. WELFARE REFORM

The Panel considered a report which gave an overview of those welfare reforms most relevant to Council services and their impact on the local community. The report included reference to more recent and future planned reforms, and also outlined some of the measures the Council had introduced to minimise the impact of the reforms.

The Head of Revenue and Benefits provided a summary of the current status of the following reforms since April 2013:

- Localised support for Council tax
- Council tax technical reforms
- Business rate localisation
- Local Welfare Assistance
- Housing Benefit Local Housing Allowances up-rated by the Consumer Price Index rate
- Weekly benefit caps
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Cuts in Housing Benefit for under occupied social housing
- The single fraud investigation service
- Universal Credit

Detailed information on these reforms was set out in paragraphs 3 - 30 of the report.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits explained that the Council had worked with other agencies to minimise the impact of the local council tax reduction scheme on vulnerable groups. The new arrangements increased pressure on council tax collection because there were now more working age people on low incomes who contributed. However, the impact on levels of collection had been minimal, the overall rate of 96.9% only 0.1% down on the previous scheme. It was noted that there was a separate 'prescribed' scheme for pensioners. The Council was currently consulting on some minor changes to bring its scheme in line with the

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housing benefit scheme. These proposals were set out in the Cabinet report of 20 June 2016. Any comments the Panel wished to make would be fed into the

consultation process. The Council was also taking the opportunity to bring its scheme in line with Poole.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits also reported on the impacts of the freeze on local housing allowance rates, and the introduction of the weekly benefit cap and the change in thresholds as of November 2016. The resulting reduced incomes could lead to some households being unable to maintain rent payments, resulting in an increased risk of eviction and homelessness. Members were provided with a breakdown of households potentially affected by the new benefit cap and noted that there could be around 250 new cases, mostly families but also single households. The Council's Strategic Housing team was working on a range of measures to mitigate the potential increase in homelessness cases. Despite all the changes to the housing benefit system the Council continued to perform in the top 5%-10% nationally (and the best in Dorset) in administering new claims and making payments to ensure people were able to maintain their housing tenancies.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits responded to questions from the Panel. He explained that the Council was legally required to consult on any changes to the local council tax reduction scheme so that any impact could be properly assessed before implementation. The current consultation closed on 25 October 2016. The Chairman referred members to the specific section on changes to the scheme in the report to Cabinet on 20 June 2016 and the Panel formally supported the proposals set out within paragraphs 15 - 42 of the report.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits was asked about the consistency of benefit calculations across different local authority areas. Although not able to comment on individual cases he confirmed that some payments could differ depending on where someone lived, e.g. housing benefit was affected by the level of rents in different localities. The proposed changes to the local council tax reduction scheme and the council tax technical reforms would bring the Council in line with the Borough of Poole. If approved these changes would come into effect in April 2017. He assured members that the Council worked closely with colleagues in Poole and shared best practice. Both Councils' procedures were subject to internal and external audit.

Members were concerned at the number of households at risk of being affected by the new benefit cap, and asked what preparations the Council was making to deal with this. The Head of Housing and Community Enforcement reported that the Housing Options team was already experiencing a significant increase in requests for advice and the situation was made even more challenging by high rent levels in the private rented sector. The Homelessness Strategy Manager explained how plans to mitigate the impact of welfare reforms were embedded in the new homelessness strategy through strong partnership working and a focus on prevention. Members asked whether there was adequate funding in place to cope with these additional demands. The Head of Revenue and Benefits reported that although this year's discretionary housing payment grant had increased by around £110,000 this was offset by the overall projected reduction of up to £1million less housing benefit per year.

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The Service Director reported that the Government's new Homelessness Bill was based around prevention, but as yet no detail had been provided on how local authorities were expected to fund these measures. The Local Government Association (LGA) had made representations on this issue. The Chairman asked whether it would be expedient to set up a task and finish group to undertake some

preparatory work with officers. The Service Director explained that there was insufficient factual information available at this early stage with which to undertake any meaningful work. In light of this he would prefer to target officer resources on delivering the new homelessness strategy and responding to new challenges as they arose. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Public Health assured the Panel that executive members were pressing the LGA and central Government regarding the funding of prevention / mitigation measures.

A member commented on the possible impact of a selective licensing scheme should this be introduced. Members were advised that ultimately any decision on this scheme would be made by members in accordance with democratic procedures.

### DECISION MADE:

- a. That the Panel supports the ongoing approach of the Council in dealing with welfare reform;
- b. That as a response to the consultation on changes to the local council tax reduction scheme the Panel supports the proposals set out in sections 15 - 42 of the Cabinet report of 20 June 2016.

### 41. FORWARD PLAN 2016/17

Updates to the Forward Plan arising from agenda items at this meeting were as follows:

- Skills and Learning - progress report requested for Panel meeting in October 2017
- Retain welfare reform on the Forward Plan but agreed that no immediate action required

The Chairman proposed adding an item to the forward plan on choice based lettings. The format of this item would be discussed at the next agenda meeting, as it may be more suited to a pre panel presentation.

The Panel also discussed how members could learn more about the work of the housing team in providing advice to council tenants in respect of their financial and personal circumstances. While there was an interest in attending these meetings it was felt that this may compromise tenants' privacy and lead to a less frank discussion. As an alternative the Panel may wish to consider a pre panel session on



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the range of support and advice offered to tenants. The Service Director encouraged members to attend one of the neighbourhood inspection programmes which were very much led by local residents with the Housing Neighbourhood Inspection Officer.

**DECISION MADE:**

That the Panel approves the Forward Plan as updated

Councillor Nigel Hedges arrived at 6.35pm

The meeting closed at 8.25pm

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