

Boscombe Area Forum, Monday 7 January 2008 7.30-9pm
Avon Room, St George's Wellspring Centre, Haviland Road, Boscombe.

Apologies

Ben Prescott (Secretary)

Present

Committee: Kathie Pearce (KP), Stephen Humphrey (SH) Gary Sherbourne (GS) Mike Bunney (MB) Chris Green (CG). SH kindly agreed to take the minutes in the Secretary's absence

B. Borough Council: Cllr Steve MacLoughlin, Cllr Stanley-Watts, Cllr Northover, Cllr Wakefield, Tejinder Birk

Julie McGee, Bournemouth Echo, Jess Stevenson, student, MA Multi-media Journalism, Bournemouth Uni., Residents and traders from Bournemouth

Matters Arising

- Feedback from the Climate Change Strategy included with Minutes of 3December Area Forum
 - The Council's Planning Dept are looking at making new planning arrangements for 'Bin Spaces', spaces for bicycles and other facilities with new planning applications; enquiries made by the Forum received a 'very positive response' from the Planning Dept Mike, Treasurer has set up the Forum's new Bank Account and has received notification that the £1,000 'kitty' for use by the Forum has been deposited and should be available for our use by next meeting.
 - Members were encouraged by the feedback from the 'Bournemouth 2026' strategy group
 -
-

Introductions

KP in the Chair opened the meeting and particularly welcomed new residents and guests; she reminded everyone that tonight's meeting had an "open" agenda but we were particularly fortunate to have the leader of the council present to talk about the budget for the forthcoming financial year. The meeting was well attended with a good mix of old and new faces.

Council Budget

Cllr Stephen MacLoughlin, Leader of the Council, then gave a good, comprehensive report on the council's budget and particularly warned of budgetary pressures and issues from the 5% cap on Council Tax increases; Stephen warned that several departments were expected to overspend forcing cuts in other areas such as Adult Social Services and other cuts elsewhere; Stephen explained that about one third of the council's budget comes from Council Tax receipts, the rest comes from central government grants for Police and Emergency services provision; Income was also reported as higher for interest on capital held in reserve but that the expected overspend was due to the poor summer and lower than expected income from some sources such as car parking revenues;

Stephen also explained that demand from some services were hard to predict and, this year suffered from a bad summer and higher than expected demand from some services;

Some income, from Car Parking revenues, for example was also lower; Overall, for the next Tax Year, the council expected a £21/4 Million overspend which would have to be paid from efficiency gains and not from central government or council tax receipts, which are capped at 5%;

Stephen then explained that our council were looking to work closer with Poole Borough Council and other partners, to share benefits of closer working and other improvements to the way the council works with others; changes in providing better Adult Social Services Care Packages was one way the council is investigating to improve efficiency and other benefits;

A resident asked about the formula the government uses to calculate the 'Local Government Grant' applicable to Bournemouth and Stephen explained that the formula was basically 'unfair' and was not likely to change; he added that Bournemouth had a more elderly population and increased demand for free bus fares for the over sixty's was one problem and added pressure on the council's budget;

Gary Sherbourne asked about costs from 'expensive' and 'pointless' consultation fees; Stephen suggested that Area Forum brought issues like this to the council's attention and those present understood the need for real and meaningful community consultation particularly via the forums.'

Steve Humphrey suggested that the council look more closer at the costs of 'consultees' such as some consultees were allegedly paid £1,800 for half-an-hour's work and that amount represented six months income for the unemployed and others on benefits;

From the floor, Rob suggested that he hadn't seen anything 'on-the-ground' for all this consultation.

Peter, representing local traders, suggested that a lot of consultation was being duplicated and had already been done at other Councils such as at several London Boroughs.

Stephen said he would 'listen very carefully' to feedback from the Area Forums and suggested that the council would make more use of this kind of feedback;

Harry Cutler then passed on to the Forum that he had read something in the local newspapers that some extra money had been 'ring fenced' specifically for Boscombe and Stephen replied that 'Phase One' (such as the Honeycomb Chine and Boscombe Gardens developments) of Boscombe's regeneration was nearly finished and, that money could 'move up into Boscombe' towards the Precinct and into 'Phase Two' of Boscombe's regeneration.

Peter added that the council should be attracting new industries to Bournemouth and Boscombe, in particular from new businesses like 'Google' and other 'new media' companies; he was also not sure of the benefits of the forthcoming Artificial Surf Reef.

Mike, Treasurer then explained that he had seen the success of new businesses such as the Pier Point shops and restaurants and was much more positive about the benefits the surf reef would bring to Boscombe and Bournemouth in general; Mike also raised the issue of council taxes on 'luxury' Second Homes and Steve suggested it was worth exploring the level of Council Tax paid (currently 90%) on Second Homes and that it could be raised to 100 or even 110%; Steve also suggested that the focus should be on affordable homes in the area and that he would look into changing the council tax levels on second homes;

Peter then raised the spectre of local homelessness and reminded the Forum of the closure of Boscombe's Jobcentre a couple of years ago; He added that a clear sign Boscombe was 'on the up' would be a small Jobcentre to enable local jobseekers better access to jobs in the area; He also suggested several other towns such as Brighton were good models to use and that compared to these towns, Boscombe was failing, especially when it came to attracting new business from 'new media' companies like Google;

Chris Wakefield promised the Forum he would take this question forward;

Pat Clark, Friend of Shelley Manor, suggested that the area was split into two - one poor and one rich - and suggested that more young families were moving in and that the specific problems of Boscombe were detracting from the positives; she also suggested that we need to get the 'vision right'.

There was then a 'lively' discussion about rehabs in the area and how such 'negatives' detract from property values and a possible 'downturn' in the future; Boscombe in particular had unique issues such as the higher than normal number of rehabs and the higher level of poor health and unemployment in the area.

Gary reported that Boscombe was first 'diagnosed' as 'poor and deprived' in 1999 and that he was not optimistic that things had changed for the better in ten years; There was some suggestion that Bournemouth, in particular Boscombe was still the 'drugs, sex and violence' capital of the south; KP responded that whilst she acknowledged there were social issues for the forum to work positively to address, the area had improved dramatically and benefited from many positive aspects, not least a diverse and vibrant community and was a great place to live. Others suggested that this area was 'fantastically attractive' particularly to property developers but that local services were being 'overwhelmed' by the influx of new residents especially from abroad.

The Chair then reminded us of the high proportion of Privately Rented Accommodation, esp. in Boscombe and suggested as a way forward that the Forum should invite relevant principles such as the chair of the National Landlord's Association and Directors of local drug rehab centres to a future meeting.

The proposal was voted on and carried by a majority vote of those present.

Steve Humphrey then asked Cllr MacLoughlin if he could find out how much was spent on Housing Benefit and Stephen said he would reply by letter;

The Chair then thanked Cllr MacLoughlin and the forum for this contribution to the local debate.

Other issues

- The issue of rubbish collection over the Xmas period was raised and Steve Humphrey asked about the 'bad' state of rubbish on the Crescent; Twynham Housing, who owns property on the Crescent had replied to a letter saying they were looking into better bin storage at their properties.
- 'The Alleyway Closure' issue:
Clodie Sutcliffe, representing The Police, reported there would be a hearing in the near future to discuss the permanent closure of the alleyway between Salisbury Rd and Grosvenor Gdns; Clodie said she would keep the Forum aware of the date of the hearing and any other developments on this issue; some residents suggested that the

alleyway closure would only benefit local property developers and that local residents would have little say on the alleyway closure; Gary had collected a petition against the closure; KP noted that on balance some local residents had welcomed the alleyway closure

- It was then reported that the plan for the Aldi store development had been amended to include more garden space for the site; it was suggested that local views had been taken into account and that the relevant agencies were 'still talking to us';
- It was also reported that the Ashley Road railway bridge would close for building work soon; it was suggested that a representative from Network Rail should be invited to explain the work on the railway bridge; with a possible view to discuss the re opening of a station at Boscombe. The issue of the old coal yard (opposite Station Approach) on Ashley Rd was raised and suggestions on the future use of the site were made including using the site as a recycling depot for local residents; The Forum was reminded that there would be a full consultation on this site at the appropriate time and that the Forum would be invited to join in the process when the time comes;
- Other issues raised included a higher focus on Boscombe Precinct and that future plans would include Roumelia Lane; The Chair suggested that perhaps Boscombe needed a comprehensive five-year strategic plan for future development and that the Forum could have a crucial role in doing this; It was also suggested that the same company who re-developed The Square should re-develop Boscombe Precinct...

Date & Time of next meeting

The agenda for the next meeting on 4th Feb, 2008 was agreed to be entirely about the future of the Precinct. KP asked everyone present to publicise it as widely as possible as it promised to be a full and 'lively debate';