

# **BOROUGH OF BARROW IN FURNESS**

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Meeting: Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2021  
at 2.00 pm. (Banqueting Hall).

PRESENT:- Councillors McLeavy (Chairman), Cassidy (Vice-Chairman), Assouad, Gawne, Johnston, McClure, McEwan, Morgan and C. Thomson.

Officers Present:- Sandra Baines (Head of Visitor Economy and Culture), Chris Jones (Head of Programme Management and Climate Change), Paula Westwood (Scrutiny and Democratic Services Team Leader) and Katie Pepper (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer).

### **30 – Apologies for Absence/Attendance of Substitute Member**

An apology for absence had been submitted from Councillor M. A. Thomson.

Councillor Assouad had attended as a substitute for Councillor M. A. Thomson.

### **31 – Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2021 were taken as read and confirmed.

### **32 – Public Participation**

RESOLVED:- To note that no questions, representations, deputations or petitions had been received in respect of the meeting.

### **33 – Work Programme Update**

The Scrutiny and Democratic Services Team Leader reported that Work Groups had been established to review the topics identified in the 2021/2022 Work Programme. Her report outlined a summary of the progress made in respect of each topic as follows:-

#### Flooding on Walney Promenade

At the meeting in October 2021, representatives from United Utilities had addressed the Committee and provided an update on the plans being made for the sewer network to prevent flooding on Walney Promenade. It was anticipated that the works could be completed within a 12-18 month timeframe and United Utilities had confirmed that they would be happy to provide regular updates to the Committee as appropriate.

#### Discretionary Housing Fund and Supported Housing Payments

The Work Group had met on 9th November with the Revenues and Benefits Service Manager who had provided lots of information to the Group regarding the number of people in receipt of discretionary housing and supported housing payments, as well as the number of claims and the number of claims refused and for what reason. The Work Group had wished to undertake a 'Deep Dive' into the support available to vulnerable residents in HMOs and supported housing accommodation, looking at both the needs of the residents as well as the financial aspect to the Council. Councillor Morgan had advised that since the Work Group meeting, the Executive Committee had taken up the deep dive on their behalf and would provide feedback on progress in due course.

### Arrangements for the Management of Piel Island

The Work Group had met with the Director of People and Place on 2nd November. Information had been shared regarding activities which had taken place over the Summer season, along with lessons learned to enable planning for the future more effectively. A more detailed report from the Director of People and Place had been covered under Agenda Item No. 8 (Minute No. 34 refers). A series of regular meetings had been set up for the Work Group to meet with the Director of People and Place through to March, 2022.

A number of questions had been raised at the meeting and Councillor McClure, Chair of the Work Group, had advised that those would be taken forward to the meeting of the Work Group in January.

### Memorial Benches

The draft Policy for Memorial Benches had been reviewed at the previous meeting prior to being approved at Executive Committee. Executive Committee had agreed at their meeting on 10th November, 2021 to adopt the policy with immediate effect. This review had now concluded.

### Impact of Covid-19 Going Forward

The Work Group had met on 11th November. Information had been noted including:-

- The number of positive cases had been in slow decline at around 430 cases per 100,000 population;
- Copeland had the highest number of cases in the County;
- Cases remained high in Schools with the infection rate recorded from that cohort being twice that of the rest of the population;
- The vaccination programme including first and second doses, as well as boosters and first doses for the 12-15 year old cohort were continuing;
- There had been vaccine hesitancy amongst the 12-15 year old cohort, which had been thought to be from fake news on social media. Trained professionals would be liaising with Schools to provide re-assurance.

The Work Group had raised concerns regarding the wearing of face masks no longer being mandatory, especially as Winter was approaching and people would be gathering

for festive events in large crowds. The Work Group had agreed to approach the Council's media team to produce a news release encouraging mask wearing at large events locally to help to reduce the spread of the virus.

Councillor McEwan, Chair of the Work Group, had advised that the Covid-19 situation was rapidly changing as a result of the Omicron variant. A meeting of the Work Group had been scheduled for January.

It had been noted that the vaccination programme would be increased next week with full day long clinics being held at three sites across the Borough.

RESOLVED: To note the updates on progress in respect of each of the Work Groups.

### **34 – Future Management Arrangements of Piel Island**

Chris Jones (Head of Programme Management and Climate Change) and Sandra Baines (Head of Visitor Economy and Culture) attended the Committee and presented the report which had brought forward an update on Piel Island, incorporating work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Working Group and asked Executive Committee to consider and agree the future management arrangements for Piel Island.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been looking at the arrangements for the management of Piel Island as part of their work programme for the year. The Overview and Scrutiny Work Group had concluded that the lessons learned from the previous season had been as follows:

- Piel Island was a unique place and any operator needed to appreciate the constraints offered by power, weather, access and its location within an area of Site of Special Scientific Interest;
- Visitors to Piel Island were short stay and wanted a basic meal and drink;
- Camping and paying a small fee was popular;
- The relationship with the ferry operator and the management arrangements for Piel Island was really important;
- Alternative access arrangements off the Island besides the ferry needed to be in place;
- More outside seating was needed to facilitate visitors;
- The community ownership of Piel Island and its local appeal and natural habitat was really important;
- Contrary to perception, there had been no incidents of anti-social behaviour reported;
- Any operator needed to manage and maintain the island including maintenance of the Ship Inn, grounds maintenance of the surrounding area and management of camping and the toilet and shower block (except for external urgent repairs to the buildings and jetty maintenance) and its assets to a standard that the Council expected;
- All aspects of the Island except for external urgent repairs to the buildings and jetty maintenance would be the responsibility of the operator;

- Emergency planning for incidents with agencies would be an essential part of any future management arrangements;
- There would be potential for events and Piel Island would be an essential element of any destination marketing. Any operator would need a formal relationship with the Council to enable that;
- Communication regarding Piel Island and whether buildings would be open and food and drink would be served would be the responsibility of the operator;
- Any operator needed experience in operating a licenced premises and with access to staff, financial sustainability and be prepared to open for a short period of the year whilst retaining responsibility for the premises and the Island all year round.

Members of the Work Group had considered that an open and transparent procurement for a suitably experienced operator should take place. The lessons learned should inform the service specification and that a media campaign could run alongside the procurement process to encourage people to register to submit an interest through the appropriate channel. The emphasis would be on a long term 10 year lease with an annual review of performance and a rental charge that would be subject to review over the time period. Therefore, the preferred option had been to gain approval from Executive Committee to that approach and to advertise the opportunity in January 2022 for a start date in early March 2022.

RESOLVED:- The Committee considered the report and agreed the following recommendations to Executive Committee:

- (i) Agree to the proposed management arrangements as set out in the report and delegate authority to the Director of People and Place, in consultation with the Chair of Executive Committee, to undertake the procurement process and award the new contract;
- (ii) Note their appreciation for the work that Officers put in to getting the Ship Inn ready to be re-opened this season at very short notice;
- (iii) Note the lessons learned from the partnership approach and thank the Piel Island Pub Company for their contribution; and
- (iv) Note that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Piel Island Work Group will continue to receive progress updates.

### **35 – Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee’s Work Planning Process**

The Scrutiny and Democratic Services Team Leader reported That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had the power to review or scrutinise decisions made, or actions taken, in accordance with the discharge of any of the Council’s functions. It also had power to make recommendations to the Council or Executive Committee, and to consider any matters which affected the Council’s area or its communities. The Committee also played an important role in policy development and review.

As part of these responsibilities, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee set an annual Work Programme. The Work Programme ensured that the Committee was able to focus on those areas where it was likely to add the most value. It could do this through its formal meetings, through one-day reviews or through the work of task and finish groups.

The report provided a review to consider the development of future Work Programmes.

Current Work Programmes were formulated by Scrutiny Committee Members. The four year Work Plan was aligned to the period of the administration. The items for year one had been agreed following recommendations from the Corporate Support Manager. In year two the pandemic had taken over, with the only item from the original Work Plan being memorial benches. There had been no process around the ones put forward. It had been suggested that this could be broadened out to include consultation with all Councillors, Senior Officers within the Council, Parish and Town Council Clerks and partner organisations as well as advertising the consultation on the Council's website. A template had been drafted for consideration to aid prioritisation and selection of submissions.

A suggested Work Planning Aid had been attached as an Appendix to the report.. The Work Planning Aid would be an effective way of quickly assigning a priority to each of the submissions and it was therefore recommended that this be introduced for development of future work programmes.

Prioritisation was vital to ensure that there were sufficient resources to allow the work programme planning to take place and to ensure that the work programme was supported through the year. A Local Government Information Unit article on "making scrutiny count" suggested that "one major scrutiny and perhaps two shorter reviews in the course of a year would be realistic".

If Members agreed the new approach then it was recommended that this be implemented for the 2022/23 municipal year with a proposed timetable for development of the new work programme as follows:

- Consultation on the 2022/23 programme to begin on 17th January, 2022 and run until 11th February, 2022;
- It was proposed that a meeting between the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and members of the Council's Senior Management Team be arranged for the end of February 2022. This meeting would allow a preliminary prioritisation of submissions to be conducted;
- It was recommended that the Committee utilised a programme workshop during this process to allow discussion of the topics in a more informal setting. This was in line with the suggestions from the Centre for Public Scrutiny and was a planning tool commonly used by Scrutiny Committees. Subject to the Committee's approval, a workshop would be arranged during the two weeks prior to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled on 24th March 2022.

It was moved by Councillor McLeavy and seconded by Councillor McEwan that the Work Planning Aid be amended to reflect issues of concern to Members.

RESOLVED: To adopt the procedure as set out in the report for future work programming, subject to the amendment of the Work Planning Aid to reflect issues of concern to Members.

The Meeting Closed At: 2.52 p.m.