CHRISTCHURCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

HIGHCLIFFE BEACH HUTS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday, 17 October 2016 at 10.00 am

Present:-
Councillor Cllr Mrs L Dedman – Chairman

Present: 
Councillors Cllr P R A Hall and Cllr D C Jones

Also in attendance:
Councillor Mrs D Jones

1. Election of Chairman

Councillor Mrs Dedman was elected as Chairman of the Highcliffe Beach Huts Task and Finish Group.

2. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations received on this occasion.

3. Draft Scoping Document

The Scrutiny Officer presented the draft scoping document and asked Members to consider how they would gather information from Councillor Hallam, Ward Member, who was not able to attend the Special meeting of the Scrutiny and Policy Overview Committee (SPOC) and Councillor Phipps, as the Portfolio Holder for the Environment.

Members agreed that having just one meeting of this Group would not provide enough time to complete all they wanted to do. It was agreed that there would be two more meetings, at the first of which Councillors Hallam and Phipps would be invited. Councillor Nottage would also be asked if he would like to attend.

Due to the extra meetings of this Group, the final report would have been presented to the January 2017 meeting of the SPOC, rather than the one in November, as originally planned. Councillor Dedman would advise Councillor Jamieson of the new timetable for the Final report.

Members asked for a transcript of the Special meeting of SPOC. It was agreed that a copy of the audio recording would be sent to Members, as a transcript would cost money for an external firm to provide.

Members were advised that the Chief Executive was attending the meeting, as he was also conducting a review into the process of the Beach Hut process for the Policy and Resources Committee.
It was agreed that the Group needed to provide a conclusion to their final report, to inform any future projects.

4. Special Meeting of the Scrutiny and Policy Overview Committee - 11 October 2016

Members thought that a few areas discussed on the night, needing further examination and answers:

- Councillor Abbott’s question regarding when the beach huts changed from a traditional sort, into permanent use dwellings;
- Consultation had been conducted for traditional beach huts, but not carried out when the plans for the structures changed;
- Further investigation into how the size of the project changed;
- To give an indication of the true cost of the project, a breakdown should include officer time/costs. It was argued that if they had not been working on this project, they would have been doing other work. Therefore, there must be a cost to the Council;
- Councillor Grace’s question regarding any clause in the contract for failure to deliver the project;
- Further information regarding non-disclosure of the contract details to Members, as this may inform future projects;

Members agreed that a recommendation for the final report should be, that if there is a request for a confidentiality clause in future contracts, it should be understood why it was needed, as this may cause problems as the project progressed.

It was felt that in future, the Council should first look to its own officers for factual guidance. The sometimes conflicting information, from invited speakers, gave those opposing the project something to argue about.

It was agreed that Professor May’s report should have been shared with Members earlier, as some had only seen it for the first time, on the night of the SPOC.

There had been changes to the project, which had led to confusion. The plans should have been clear and presented along with the first reports to Members at the Policy and Resources Committee.

There should also have been clarity about the intended outcome of the project: was it for the benefit of the community or financial gain.

Although it had been confirmed that the huts could be built under permitted development, Members still had questions about this. It was explained that the Development Management Officer had advised in an officer meeting, that it was not known for planning permission to be sought, when permitted development applied.

Members questioned whether a Certificate of Lawfulness could have been applied for. This would have ensured that the matter was dealt with in public, adding transparency to the project.
It was questioned whether a Certificate of Lawfulness could be applied for a structure that did not exist. It was agreed that Councillor Jones would ask the Development Management Officer for further advice.

Members asked that they have a copy of the project timeline for the next meeting.

It was agreed that Councillor Mrs Dedman would present a verbal update to the next meeting of SPOC, where the minutes of the Special meeting of SPOC and the notes from this meeting would also be presented.

**Actions for the next meeting:**

- Councillors Hallam, Phipps and Nottage be invited to attend the next meeting;
- Councillor Mrs Dedman would advise Councillor Jamieson about the new timetable for the Group;
- Councillor Jones would ask the Development Management Officer for further advice on permitted development and whether a Certificate of Lawfulness could have been applied for; and
- A copy of the project timeline would be available for the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 11.20 am

CHAIRMAN
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