

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Wednesday, 23rd January, 2019

Present: Councillors Ms E Colling (Chair), G W Allanson, G Coulson, D C Jeffels, Mrs J Jefferson, Mrs J E Mortimer, C Pearson and T Randerson

Apologies: Councillor G Dennett

In attendance: Councillor D Cluer

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. MINUTES

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions received.

4. PROPOSED MERGER OF THE SCARBOROUGH MUSEUMS TRUST AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES CENTRE

The Chair explained that further work was required.

Resolved - That consideration of the proposed merger of the Scarborough Museums Trust and the Creative Industries Centre be deferred to the next meeting on 6 March 2019.

5. UPDATE ON PROGRESS WITH IMPLEMENTING THE COUNCIL'S MEMORIAL DECORATIONS POLICY

Jonathan Bramley, Environment and Regulation Manager presented a progress report on implementing the Council's policy on memorial decorations at the crematorium and cemeteries it owns and manages..

He explained that although a policy existed it had not been enforced previously for various reasons. However, issues had been identified (mainly at Woodlands with 400 'breaches' and, to a lesser degree, Larpool) that some people were placing inappropriate decorations on their cemetery / crematoria plots or failing to maintain them well.

This led to an Action Plan focusing on promoting educational awareness including on-site posters/leaflets (and on the web), media publicity and using social media plus any necessary enforcement of the policy. More freedom had been allowed concerning the plots of children who had passed away.

The Action Plan had been endorsed by Overview and Scrutiny then approved by Cabinet in December 2017.

Jonathan Bramley reported that an online petition had also been received which was concerned about development of a policy but only secured the support of three people and did not recognise that a policy already existed and ensuring appropriate enforcement was the operational concern.

He added that a corporate complaints process existed with service management reviewing cases individually and two cases had been to the Ombudsman. Complaints were all considered carefully and took time.

He explained that the report reviewed Action Plan progress, its effectiveness in terms of making people more aware of what was permitted and their responsibilities thereby reducing incidents. The report included a proposed Action Plan for 2019 including rolling forward any uncompleted actions.

The current approach, through the Action Plan, was to help ensure that straight-forward information was available and promoted and policy applied fairly, proportionately and sensitively so that people were aware of:

- The range of ways (decorations etc.) that they could adorn their cemetery / crematoria plots (on council managed land);
- Expectations of them to maintain/replace decorations as appropriate;
- What items were not permitted and the communications approach to alerting them of issues prior to any removal action ('enforcement').

Jonathan Bramley reported that the Action Plan provided for a staged approach focusing on the oldest areas first, where there were generally less breaches, and moving on to the newer areas where there tended to be more breaches. Work would commence at Woodlands from the current month, January through to March removing overgrown or unsightly plants, trees, shrubbery.

The previous year had seen the start of educational awareness and publicity etc. with some maintenance work but then holidays and some staff illness had impacted upon progress.

Members queried the age of plots and why the work was not starting with the newer areas where there were more breaches. They added that winter was a sparse time for gardeners, i.e. good time to tackle all breaches.

They were informed that it was appropriate to start works at a particular point and staff resources did not allow for a big sweep of work. The older areas dated back mainly to the 1940s/50s so were less likely to have relatives regularly on-site but nevertheless proportionate efforts would be made to contact them before any works. Newer sites would involve written / other communications to give relatives a chance to sort out plots as they wished first otherwise enforcement actions would be pursued.

Members welcomed the approach and sensitive management and noted that other land-owners operated similar education and light-touch' enforcement policies, e.g. churches. They sought assurance that relevant staff had received appropriate training for liaising with vulnerable people at sensitive times. They also wanted to maintain the flexible approach at children's plots. They were informed that staff had developed significant skills through experience for working with people in difficult situations. Staff also attended relevant trade association courses and good feedback had been received from the public. Assurance was given that a sensitive approach would be maintained concerning children.

Resolved - That the progress be noted and Action Plan for 2019 endorsed.

6. 'TASK AND FINISH' REVIEWS - PROGRESS REPORTS - 'SCARBOROUGH TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY' AND 'SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS'

Members received progress with the two current 'task and finish' reviews.

The Scarborough Town Centre Strategy aimed to create a sustainable, buoyant centre for all ages and to become the leading visitor / wider economy for the Yorkshire Coast by 2025. Seven strategic themes had been identified:

- Making the town a mixed use environment
- An inviting public realm we can be proud of
- Developing a University Town
- Night Time Economy
- Introduce SMART town centre infrastructure
- Build our identity, image and brand
- Establish a collaborative and Supportive Town Centre community

Cllr David Jeffels, who was chairing the Town Centre review, explained that the review was needed now given the national picture of struggling high streets especially with many retail shop closures. Scarborough was better than average but 'no action' was not really an option. Furthermore, Government had announced a national Future High Streets fund of £675million with up to £25million available for areas successful in bidding.

The review had been focusing on consultation feedback on the Strategy from commercial, community and public stakeholders as part of good engagement with a wide range of people. Two well-attended consultation events, around 150 people in all, had been held at the Royal Hotel late 2019.

The events were an opportunity to present the background to why a Strategy was needed and to get people's ideas. Attendees had been enthusiastic recognising the need for a dynamic strategy with real actions to be delivered through partnership working and numerous practical ideas were generated.

Cllr Jeffels reported that the seven themes in the Strategy were broadly supported by the consultees and the review group, especially trying to

encourage empty properties above shops back into use and in particular for residential accommodation.

He added that developing retail and leisure opportunities, as part of a wider 'mixed use' offer needed to be pursued working with other sectors.

Some specific other (delivery) suggestions were made by consultees. The main new suggestions were to have a Town Centre Manager to promote, co-ordinate and drive forward activity including investment opportunities.

Alex Richards, Regeneration Services Manager agreed that the consultation events had been highly productive with an impressive range of ideas and involvement. It had been useful to get business and public endorsement for the Strategy including the seven themes at this early stage. He added that as well as a proposed Town Centre Manager, an independent partnership of key private, public and voluntary/community sectors was proposed to lead on delivery of the Strategy and would also include the Council.

He reported that the Local Enterprise Partnership was keen on seeing Scarborough take the town centre mantle to drive development of the Yorkshire Coast potential. A meeting of regeneration leads across the sub-region would be meeting in early February 2019 to work collectively together.

In response to Members' comments, he explained that the proposed Designation Business Improvement District could complement other work/opportunities.

Members were informed that the Scarborough Chamber of Trade would also be discussing the proposed Strategy at its next meeting early February 2019.

The review group had also agreed that some 'quick wins' would be needed to demonstrate real action, e.g. safe and attractive lighting in Bar Street. Other notable consultation comments included development of a cinema and creating a town centre square ('focal' point) at the old Argos building site.

Members wanted to solve the issue of empty properties in the Town Centre. They were informed that this was not an unusual problem in any town centre and challenging with absent landlords many of whom were institutional / international investors particularly given that the Council owned few properties in the locality, i.e. limited powers.

Nevertheless, the Council / partners could assert pressure on landlords and it was noted that speculative property values might decrease / other charges increase, i.e. which could naturally 'force' landlords to be more constructive.

Regenerating empty properties was a particular concern. It was suggested that the Council could use its relatively new strategic investments approach to acquire some properties and 'start the ball rolling' to encourage other property investors to regenerate properties and offer affordable rents to businesses and residents. Regeneration provided economic, health and wellbeing and

social value opportunities. People needed to live in towns to create a more dynamic environment including the night-time economy.

Members agreed that it was important to create a dynamic and unique Scarborough brand and market itself effectively.

The Town Centre 'Task and Finish' Group's recommendations, including any changes / additions suggested for the Strategy, would be made to the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 6 March 2019 and then onto Cabinet on 12 March 2019 to consider as part of agreeing the final version of the Strategy. This would then allow officers to submit a stage one 'expression of interest' bid to Government for funding from the Future High Streets fund.

The Supporting Volunteers review had been looking at promoting volunteering to get the best support outcomes for people and communities.

Cllr Colling, as one of the review members, explained that they had recognised that volunteering was a significant area involving numerous individual volunteers and groups with themes cutting across a wide range of services. Support was offered by Council services to various volunteering activities and people. Review members had recognised the need to really refine the focus of their work so practical outcomes could be delivered.

It was important to establish a robust picture of volunteering across the Borough - who volunteered (demographics), what they did, why they took part, how much commitment was involved, what worked well, opportunities, issues and what support would be useful.

This would then allow members to refine the scope of the review with clear outcomes sought, e.g. whether the Council raised awareness of volunteering benefits & opportunities, acted as a support resource, considered the potential for its own 'pool' of volunteers and, in particular, helping ensure that volunteers were valued.

Review members had decided that the first step was to seek the views of active volunteers, people who might be interested in volunteering and people who had barriers to volunteering. Parallel to this community-facing survey, would be a similar survey for staff recognising that some staff volunteered or might want to so consideration and support needed to be given to this.

Members would review the consultation findings from both surveys early March 2019. These would help form 'key lines of enquiry' for the review.

Meetings would then take place with some key stakeholders later in March 2019, e.g. Community First and Coast & Vale Community Action (both umbrella organisations for volunteers) and public sector partners.

The review work would be in stages, i.e. work before the May 2019 elections would lead to some recommendations and/or identify what more extensive work should take place after May.

Resolved - That the progress reports be noted and planned work endorsed.

7. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME AND CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Board considered its remaining Work Programme for 2018/19 which aimed to be balanced and flexible whilst focusing on significant priorities to achieve the best value-added outcomes.

Some changes had occurred since the last meeting with some items being rolled forward or added. These were the proposed merger of Scarborough Museums Trust & Creative Industries Centre which would now be considered on 6 March 2019 along with the addition of the Homelessness Strategy 'refresh' for the same meeting.

Other additions were for autumn (dates to be confirmed) - holistic value for money review (effectiveness, outcomes) of the Council's strategic partnerships; and an update on the gulls and kittiwakes 'disruption & dispersal' programme (effectiveness, value for money) with the outcomes of further research relating to the issues. Progress/future of the North Bay area development would be considered during 2020.

The two 'task and finish' reviews on the Scarborough Town Centre Strategy and Supporting Volunteers were progressing with updates provided earlier on the meeting agenda.

Resolved - That the Work Programme be approved as presented.

Chairman