

ACRA Informal Meeting with CBC-EDDC Directorate 27th October 2014

CBC-EDDC was represented by David McIntosh, Neil Farmer and David Barnes.

CBC-EDDC officer Steve Duckett was present for Antisocial Behaviour Act and Police Presence in the Town Centre

ACRA were represented by Mike Collard (ACRA Chairman) and Jim Biggin (ACRA Secretary)

Antisocial Behaviour Act

This new legislation aims to be victim focussed and relates to the behaviour of businesses as well as any individual aged 10 or over. The legislation places an obligation upon CBC-EDDC to act and creates a statutory right of appeal that is available to any complainant who can demonstrate an apparent shortfall in the way their complaint has been administered. The effect of this is to move the responsibility for investigating claims away from the police and makes CBC-EDDC the responsible body. No extra funding has been provided to meet this new demand.

A complaint can arise from a variety of sources that include: persistent and regular noise; perpetual litter from an identifiable source such as a fast food outlet; failure to control pets; and so on. The Council must act after receiving three or more complaints within a six month period. The prime test to be applied in assessing a claim is one of "reasonableness". Thus for example to complain about the noise from one party on New Year Eve is unreasonable; to complain about noise from parties that are held every weekend is not.

The Act contains provision for the victim to participate in the determination of the punishment. Thus a creator of graffiti could well be made to clean up what they have created.

Police Presence in the Town Centre

Based upon the variety of contacts with the police and their representatives that each participant at the meeting enjoys it was not possible to detect any evidence of a master plan that is being unfolded. For the time being local officers will continue to use facilities at Christchurch Police Station (even though it is now closed to the public). The potential sharing of the Civic Offices has not progressed but remains a viable option.

Budget 2014-15

Subject to some swings and roundabout fluctuations the budget is on track

Budget 2015-16

For planning purposes a small increase in Council Tax is being assumed even though this will be an election year. Overall the budget looks healthy. The regime under which CBC-EDDC is able to retain a portion of the business rates is functioning and CBC is approaching a revenue base line which, once it has been exceeded, will allow CBC to retain 50% of further revenue increases. The effect of this is to cause CBC-EDDC to seek further business opportunities such as are present at the airport and associated Business Park.

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The Amalgamation of CBC and EDDC Administrations

This project remains on schedule and on budget and should be complete by the turn of the year.

The Potential Rationalisation of CBC and EDDC Head Offices

The project based upon using Wimborne as a hub for East Dorset continues although strictly still at the feasibility stage. It is thus a little behind schedule.

Plans have been raised to facilitate the eventual refurbishment of the Christchurch Civic Offices. This will go hand in hand with new methods of working that will particularly exploit the electronic delivery of services that will enable many functions to be performed from any appropriate workstation rather than from a small number of fixed locations. The Council recognises that not all residents are ready or able to become totally digital so will continue to provide traditional forms of contact as required.

This has all led to a comprehensive review of Council assets and an assessment of the internal rate of return (IRR) that they are each generating. There is a realisation that IRR is not the only criterion by which a public asset is judged – such factors as community value must also be taken into account.

Town Centre Planning

No timetable has yet been agreed for this project. The recent, rather brief, consultation had given some residents the feeling that decisions were far more set in stone than is in fact the case. A similar exercise associated with the Grange Road site had been better handled. It was emphasised that all plans that involve changes to the roads must be assessed by DCC using their traffic modelling software. The next step in what may be a very long process is a presentation to members on 12th November

Topics Discussed by CBC Committees in Camera

A recent proposed sale of public land by CBC to an individual resident had been discussed in camera and this had given rise to local speculation. CBC confirmed that they are legally obliged to consult on the sale of public land whilst at the same time preserving the privacy of the individual and the confidentiality of the commercial details associated with the trade. There is an obvious potential clash with the need for transparency of operation.

It was suggested that under the current system it is too difficult to ascertain exactly which piece of land is being sold. It was suggested that information on the reason for any proposal for sale of land and detail of the land under discussion could be published in a report without prejudicing any debate or divulging any information about the financial or business affairs of any particular person. Thus, in the specimen case cited the report circulated to members could have included '*The owner of 92 Stanpit has made a request to purchase from the Council an Area of Amenity Green Space on Stanpit Recreation Ground, measuring 24m x 1.2m, adjacent to their property*'. This would have informed the public without divulging anything about the financial or business affairs of any particular person.

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It was further suggested that no one case could create a precedent and that each case would always be judged on its individual merits.

Developer's Mitigation Payments

A previous Internal Audit report had highlighted problems with the reconciliation of these payments. An investigation revealed that going back over many years money paid out of the account had not always been reconciled back to the source(s) of the funds. As much of the money paid in is restricted as to the use it can be put to this potentially created a problem.

Work to resolve this issue continues and a new more robust system of working has been introduced.

Infrastructure Bill

The main potential impact of this proposed legislation affects the possible transfer of land search charges away from local authorities to The Land Registry producing a loss of revenue to the Council whilst having to continue to provide staff resources to support the delivery of this service.

CBC Achievements 2014

ACRA requested CBC to provide it with a list of the main achievements to date with an emphasis upon key contributions by staff

Jim Biggin

October 2014

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