

Minutes of the Meeting of the **BEACHES AND FORESHORE**
BEST VALUE WORKING GROUP held at the **Town Hall** on **Monday, 4th August**
2003 at 10.00am.

Present:-

Councillor A.H. Miller – Chairman.
Councillor C.R. Bright
Councillor M.W. Pratt
Councillor Mrs J.D. Wheeldon

Also in attendance:-

A.J. Leeson Town Clerk
G. Brookes Operations Manager
Miss A. Stockley Tourist Information Manager

1. **APOLOGIES**

An apology for her inability to attend the Meeting was received from Councillor Mrs. J. Farrow.

2. **REVIEW FRAMEWORK**

The Chairman gave a brief outline of the scope of the review and the application of the four C's principle, as follows:-

Compare – Consult – Challenge – Compete.

Copies of the Council's adopted Review Framework were provided for the Working Group, and it was agreed that the Working Group use the framework to ensure that the review would cover all matters relating to the beaches and foreshore that were required under best value legislation.

3. **CURRENT POSITION**

The links to the Council's corporate objectives were recognised and noted as being extremely important. The beaches and foreshore were considered to be a key factor in attracting visitors to the town, and also a key tourist attraction.

When undertaking the review, it was felt that the whole of the beach from Durlston Point to Ballard Head should be considered, not only the section of the main beach that is managed by the Town Council.

It was established that the Council did not have a legal obligation for coastal protection, but was responsible for the maintenance and operational activities on beaches/land in its ownership. The Council was covered by legislation under the Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976. Links to other public bodies were recognised, with particular mention of the jurisdiction and monitoring by Purbeck District Council over water-borne activities in the Bay. During the discussion, it was agreed that these services could be provided by another local authority or private contractor.

These systems/services currently in use covered the following matters:-

Bye-laws
Health & Safety
Beach Inspectors
Monitoring Water Quality
Seaweed Clearance
Lost Children
Tourist Information Centre
* Toilet Facilities
Litter/Rubbish Binson Beach
Safe Bathing Zone
Private Beach Hut Sites/Council-owned Beach Huts
Catering/Ice Cream Facilities

- * The Spa
- * Beach Cleaning (Crossover item)

- * These items were considered to be relevant, but may be subject to a separate best value review.

Shore Road Bungalows were not considered to be part of the Beaches and Foreshore Best Value Review at the present time, but clarification on matters for inclusion should be obtained from the Council.

It was noted that the internal audit review may be helpful when reviewing systems currently in use.

Action:
The Clerk to circulate copies of internal audit review.

During the discussion, it was noted that the Town Council did not provide life guard services or own its own safety boat, and it was agreed that these matters should be included in the Best Value Review. Other items for consideration were zoning and arm bands for children, and first aid cover. Concern was also expressed regarding references and checks undertaken when appointing staff, and it was felt that this process should be considered during the review.

No relevant issues had been discussed with staff at this stage, but would form part of the consultation process later in the review.

Beneficiaries and customers of the service were identified as being general tourists, Council taxpayers, business proprietors and franchisees, and the views from all sections of the community would be sought in due course.

Consideration was then given to the complaints procedure, and although these were acknowledged and actioned, no official procedure had been formally adopted.

The need to identify and break down the resources used in providing the services had already been recognised, in order to provide better budgetary control and monitoring. These included the costs of contracts i.e. seaweed removal, beach raking etc.

Action:
The Clerk to obtain cost of contracts.

Staff objectives and training needs were highlighted, and it was noted that an appraisal of staff would be undertaken in due course by the Joint Staffing Working Group (Minute No. 10 of the Special Meeting of the Council held on 23rd June 2003 refers). It was also noted that the revised Staff Handbook was nearing completion and this would be circulated to all staff members after the document had been officially adopted by the Council.

Action:
The Clerk to complete revised Staff Handbook.

4. **COMPARE**

Consideration was given to the use of performance indicators and trends in order to

compare performance with other town and parish Councils. It was agreed that, for comparison purposes, information be sought only from other seaside “best value” town councils.

Action:

The Clerk to arrange for comparison information to be obtained from other “best value” town councils.

5. **CONSULT**

It was generally agreed that consultations should include the community as a whole, as well as the service users. Councillors would be consulted within the scope of the review and staff representatives views would be sought through direct involvement in the review. Service users were defined as tourists and residents alike. Other relevant bodies were identified as being Purbeck District Council, Dorset County Council, RNLI, Coastguard, Pier Trust, Swanage Angling Club, Fishermen’s Association, concessionaires, boat operators, the Swanage Residents’ Association and the Chamber of Trade.

Staff representatives should include the Operations Manager, Tourist Information Manager, Beach Inspector, Beach Cleaner, and litter collectors, as required.

Action:

The Clerk to invite staff representation, as appropriate.

In considering the groups, individuals and geographic areas to be included in the consultation process, it was thought that the schedule of roads/households which had been consulted in previous best value reviews was a fair representation of the service users. The views of these users should be sought, together with random consultation of tourists using the facilities.

It was agreed that a specific survey should be carried out regarding the beach huts, beach concessions and general beach facilities.

Questionnaires could be distributed through the Tourist Information Centre, and to visitors using the beaches (before this exercise is undertaken, permission from the land/beach owners should be obtained).

Random additional surveys could be conducted by post, through the Tourist Information Centre, and the Council’s Beach Inspectors.

The parish and Mowlem slipways, and Ocean Bay Slipways should be included in the consultation document, and views regarding general beach access sought.

During the discussion, it was noted that the performance information is currently communicated through the Best Value Performance Plan, the Council’s newsletter, and the publication of water quality readings and weather reports.

6. **CHALLENGE AND COMPETE**

A preliminary discussion was held regarding the Council’s approach to “Challenge”, and the observations made by the District Auditor.

Members considered that the beach was so strategically important that it would not consider contracting out its general operations. It has already let out concessions for some of its ancillary services.

Members noted concerns regarding branding and marketing, with specific reference to the

European Blue Flag attainment, and the need to re-establish “Swanage and Isle of Purbeck” as the preferred brand identity.

The meeting concluded at 12 noon.
