

Key points - taken by Nigel Brooks

Scrutiny Policy & Overview Committee – Tuesday 14th March 2017 Highcliffe Beach Huts- Final Report of the Task and Finish Group

Councillor Lesley Dedman presented the report for Members questions and discussions (see link to the document on 'Highcliffe News' web site entry for 10 March).

- The report does not name Councillors who were involved. It was noted that Portfolio Holder Councillors had changed during the chronological order of events.
- Committee Members were considerably frustrated that the contract CBC signed with Plum Pictures/Beach Retreats remains confidential and not even available to the Scrutiny Committee.
- A Member said that an item of correspondence, received by one of his ward residents, categorically states that CBC first approached Channel 4 in respect of the Retreats project. This point is not adequately clear in the report.
- A Member felt they are being deigned the right to represent residents when Officers use 'confidentiality' to push matters through Committees, which is wholly wrong.
- A Member suggested that Contracts of a certain value should be dealt with by external expertise. Whilst acknowledged with so many Contracts being entered into by CBC this would be difficult to control and costly.
- A repeated concern was the lack of communication to Members generally when one Committee deals with a matter but then not put before another Committee thus all Members don't know what was going on.
- The use of 'Permitted Development Orders' by a Local Authority to avoid going for Planning Permission before the Planning Committee was seen as 'flawed' by a Member. A Planning Application would have made the matter open for consultation and transparent.
- A Member questioned why the scheme reservations on 'cliff stability' were not heeded early in the project process.
- One individual Member even felt CBC had done everything correctly!

The Committee approved the Recommendations below, subject to some minor amendments/insertions (my amendments in BOLD)

Recommendations: It is RECOMMENDED that:

(a) Contracts with onerous and restrictive confidentiality clauses and the fact that details are not released to Members' defeat the Councils avowed objective of transparency and prevent the consultation process being carried out. The Task and Finish Group recommend that **[such]** contracts not be signed in future unless approved by the Leader and Deputy Leader;

(b) Members must not give assurances how a project will be received by their Ward unless they have specific knowledge and consultation has been carried out on the specific plans;

(c) The likelihood of resident concerns and ways to minimise them should be an initial consideration to prevent the Council proceeding with any project which **[may]** causes reputational damage. Reputational risk should be added to the list of factors considered in generating schemes; and

(d) The report be forwarded to **[Full Council]** and the Policy and Resources Committee.

Nigel Brooks comments –

You can put what CBC need to ensure they do in future into a formula.

Consultation + Openness + Transparency = Trust + 'Reputation Intact'

This should not come as a surprise to all Members and Council Officers, it's their very own **Consultation Charter** adopted in March 1999!

The lessons of the Beach Retreats fiasco (not Huts, as often referred to!) must be learnt by CBC otherwise it's only a question of time before the same mistakes are made, all over again.