



PORTHCAWL CHAMBER OF TRADE

The Y Centre 25 John Street, Porthcawl, Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan. CF36 3AP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 21ST FEBRUARY 2019

Present: Stuart Bentley (Vice-President), Alun Edwards (Treasurer), Mark Morgan, Michelle Smith, John Berry BEM, Gareth Charnock (Porthcawl Gym), Alan Jones, Cllr Tracy Hill, Bridget Hall (Minutes)

In attendance: Caroline Jones, Assembly Member, Cllr Alex Harris

1 Welcome

Stuart chaired the meeting and conveyed apologies for absence from Robert Lee, due to having to be with his father after suddenly being taken ill. Best wishes were extended for his good recovery.

Stuart welcomed Caroline Jones AM to the meeting, who had come along to discuss serious concerns with traders and the lack of support from BCBC in regard to Council Business Rates.

2 Caroline Jones AM

Caroline thanked members for inviting her to attend the meeting. Caroline fully sympathised with this issue, particularly having once been a local trader herself and understood the difficulties. Caroline outlined her own problem with BCBC which contributed to the demise of her business.

Caroline said that she had raised the unfairness of the level of Business Rates in the Assembly and continues to do so at any opportunity, adding that, as an Independent AM, she was no longer bound to a party line. Caroline said she was passionate about wanting to keep town centres alive and would do all she could to help Porthcawl. Caroline added that the closure of local banks was further causing a decline in footfall, which was most worrying.

Caroline thought that the way business rates were calculated was an out-of-date method, being based on the rent of the property, not on the profit. Also frustrating was that businesses such as Costa were given a very low rent and incentives, causing further unfairness to small businesses. There should be a complete review of business rates. She added that, unfortunately, it is at the discretion of the Council how relief is distributed.

Mark thought that one of the big problems for High Street shops was the internet and suggested a scheme of local shops receiving a percentage of the profit from the big internet retailers. Stuart added that the Welsh Government should make a tax on internet purchases and given back to high street businesses in that way.

Michelle said she had been fighting the issue of the unfairness of Business Rates for two or three years. She said she had met with Carwyn Jones 2 years ago, when they talked at length about the issue of struggling small businesses and how there should be small business relief. Michelle said that Carwyn referred to the Welsh Government report but this was not appropriate to the small trader as it focused on attracting the large multiples.

Michelle gave the example of one of her suppliers in China not having to pay rates for their factory. Michelle said that in Wales calculation was based on business profit of up to £6k = no rates, £6-12k = tapered, whereas in England nothing is payable up to £12k.

Michelle said that last year she had been sent a letter from BCBC offering £1k discount. The letter should have been sent in April but she did not receive it until July. To claim the discount was a protracted process and should instead be automatically applied on the 1st April assessment. Michelle added that 2 years ago, some business rates were cut by 70%, whereas Porthcawl went up by 30%. Michelle continued to say that Porthcawl had a structure policy that was out of step with all other councils and we need BCBC to change their policy on how they deliver relief. Michelle said that rescue plans should be formulated to revive the towns before the downfall is irreversible.

Alun gave an example of his business, saying that his assessment was based on the valuation of £18,500. Alun appealed to the arbitrator and attended a meeting in Swansea. He said, however, that an appeal can only be made if a calculation is incorrect. Alun said that there should be a rates valuation based on turnover, but it was thought that this would give traders the chance to falsify figures to affect the calculation. He added that all should be sharing the burden and the whole system needed scrapping and revising.

John queried whether there had been any response from Cllr Huw David following his attendance at the Chamber meeting last year. Michelle said nothing substantial had come from that meeting.

Caroline mentioned that the rates in the out of town are also astronomical, ie. £27 k rent, £27k business rates. Caroline said that it was sad that businesses were closing due to the high level of rates. She said pressure must be exerted to help the situation and we would ask for the assessment report under the freedom of information act. Caroline said the tapering was not sufficient to help businesses.

Caroline said we need to meet with the Minister and give them the opportunity to redress the situation. If we do not receive a satisfactory response, then the next course of action would be to involve the Local Government Ombudsman.

Michelle another matter that should be addressed is when a business changes from sole to limited company, they are disqualified for transitional relief for the first year, which was the time when business needed help. On the other hand, the big multiples get relief when they open a business.

Gareth agreed and gave the example that with moving his gym into the old NatWest premises he would not qualify for relief in the first year, but that was when his business needed the support.

It was agreed that Caroline Jones AM would write to Cllr Huw David, Cllr Charles Smith and the Business Rates Valuation Officer, to request an urgent meeting to discuss this matter. Meanwhile, all traders would be asked to present their own complaints in writing, which would be handed to Cllr Huw David at the meeting.

Stuart thanked Caroline for attending the meeting and for her efforts on behalf of Porthcawl Chamber of Trade. Caroline left the meeting.

3 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Robert Lee, Cllr Mary Emmet-Lewis, Cllr Lorrie Desmond-Williams, Peter Fenton, Huw Jones (Finnegans), Ros Paull (Face Factor).

4 To approve the minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting were approved.

5 Matters arising

i) Speakers at meetings

It was agreed that Cllr Mike Clarke and Stuart Bentley would be invited to deliver a presentation on the Harbourside development at the April meeting of Chamber.

ii) Public Toilets

It was confirmed that the public toilets in John Street have now reopened under the control of PTC.

6 Correspondence

i) Regeneration – Porthcawl Civic Trust

Bridget said that she had emailed Don Tickner explaining that PCT would prefer a representative of Porthcawl Civic Trust to attend one of our meetings, rather than a Chamber representative attend their meeting. This would allow our members to ask questions regarding their Regeneration report.

John commented that a Business Plan was most important to express the Chamber regeneration viewpoint.

7 Financial Report

Alun presented the new format Financial Report and took members through the various items. No issues were raised.

8 Membership Report

Bridget said that there had been no new members but there were a few traders who were interested in membership which she hoped to progress.

9 Events/PR

Bridget apologised for being unable to attend the recent meeting of Promoting Porthcawl to represent PCT as she had been delayed in a meeting in mid-Wales on that day. She hoped to attend the next meeting.

Stuart said the Experience.porthcawl.com was doing well, with 5-10,000 hits per week.

Stuart said that the old fishing tackle kiosk on the seafront had now been renovated with one of the tourist screens to be installed there which was being run by volunteers. A further screen will be installed by the Museum, with a total of 6 or 7 screens eventually being installed around the town.

10 Annual General Meeting

It was confirmed that the AGM would be held on the next scheduled meeting date, i.e. **Tuesday 19th March, 2019**. It was agreed that a buffet would be arranged to follow on from the end of the meeting to which all members and their partners/spouses were invited.

Stuart announced that, due to personal and business pressures, he would be unable to take on the role of President at the forthcoming AGM. Therefore, there would be a vacancy for the role of

President and Vice-President. Nomination papers would be sent out for these and other appointments.

11 Any other business

i) Harbourside Development

Stuart reported that the Maritime Centre plans were now going well and it was hoped there would be a presence on site next month. It was agreed to invite Cllr Mike Clarke and Stuart Bentley to update members on the Harbourside Development/Maritime Centre.

ii) Date of next meeting / Annual General Meeting

The next meeting and AGM and would be held on Tuesday 19th March 2019, followed by a Buffet, to which all members and their partners/spouses were invited to attend.

The meeting was closed.