

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 25TH APRIL, 2016

REFERENCE FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT):
12TH APRIL, 2016

“ BARRY ISLAND BEACH HUTS (REF) –

Councillor G. John, Cabinet Member for Visible Services and Leisure, in presenting the report, advised that the report had been agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 11th April, 2016 and referred to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration as outlined in the recommendations within the report. He did however point out the error that was contained within the report referring to paragraph 4 and that the current concessions would continue until 31st April but should have read 30th April 2016.

The purpose of the report was to consider a new rental policy for the operation and management of the beach huts at Barry Island, with the request that the Committee consider the issues and refer any comments to Cabinet.

The Scrutiny Committee had considered a report at its meeting on 8th March, 2016 with extensive discussion taking place on the subject. The Committee recommended that Cabinet further explore Options 1, 2 and 3 as outlined within paragraphs 11, 12 and 13 of that report and further recommended that a more flexible approach be afforded to officers in dealing with matters within the Barry Island Beach Huts Rental Policy. The Committee also agreed that Option 4 – the concession proposal as outlined at paragraph 15 of that report, be not pursued at this time. Together with the minutes of the meeting, the recommendations were subsequently referred to Cabinet for their consideration in order that a further report could be prepared having regard to the suggestions of the Scrutiny Committee contained therein.

The views of the Scrutiny Committee were subsequently considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 14th March with Cabinet resolving that Option 4 (the concession proposal) be not pursued at this time, that the current concessions continue until 30th April, 2016, with new concessions scheduled to commence on 1st May, 2016 and that a further report be presented to Cabinet on 11th April 2016 to consider the management of the Barry Island beach huts.

The current report which had been approved by Cabinet on 11th April for consideration by the Committee suggested options for the introduction of a new Barry Island Beach Huts Rental Policy, taking into account the learning to date and the views previously expressed by Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Service for Visible Services and Transport, in presenting the report, commenced by advising that in terms of fees, it was being suggested that these could be reduced by 50% to help stimulate demand, with the following charges for daily use being as follows:

Peak		Off Peak	
Small Hut	£10	Small Hut	£5
Large Hut	£20	Large Hut	£10

Officers had undertaken research into the costs of beach huts across the UK and daily rates (peak) ranging from £18 - £35 / day and (off peak) £4 - £25 / day had been noted. However, what was clear was that the charge rate very much related to the demand for huts in a particular location balanced against a value that the majority of visitors to that location are able to pay. It was suggested therefore that prices be significantly lowered for the 2016/17 and possibly the 2017/18 periods to allow the users of the Council's huts to find this balance.

It was proposed that up to six of the smaller huts and six of the larger huts be offered for longer term rent on an annual basis. This it was stated would help to ensure some use of the huts out of season and would also guarantee full year bookings for 12 huts.

The suggested charges for annual bookings were as follows:

Period 1st April to 31st March
 Large Beach Hut @ £500 (inclusive of VAT)
 Small Beach Hut @ £350 (inclusive of VAT).

For this first year, the annual tickets would commence from 1st June, 2016 and end on 31st March, 2017 (ten months) with pro rata rates as follows:

Large Beach Hut @ £500 / 12 x 10 = £416
 Small Beach Hut @ £350 / 12 x 10 = £291.

Also, for this first year only, it was suggested that an "annual ticket" could be purchased at any time up until 1st March, 2017. The rates for the ticket would be calculated on a monthly pro rata basis as indicated above. From 2017 the annual tickets would go on sale on 1st February, 2017 for existing annual ticket holders before going on general sale from 1st March, 2017 for one month.

It was also suggested that in order to further promote the annual ticket option the user be given one free car parking pass for use at Barry Island for the full year. The pass would relate to a specific index number of vehicle and would be non transferrable.

At previous Scrutiny meetings concern had been expressed in relation to the absence of flexibility in the letting arrangements, the ability of schools or other organisations to book huts at a lower or no cost rate and the possible use of the huts for commercial and / or promotional purposes, with it being proposed that for the forthcoming season any unallocated beach huts could be put to use by the Council's tourism section for tourism and regeneration purposes. It was considered important that added benefit was obtained from the huts as well as providing the tourism section with the necessary flexibility to accommodate a range of complimentary alternative uses.

It was suggested that the public / domestic policy arrangements be extended to cover bookings by schools on a trial basis for the 2016/17 period. The new rates were now much more affordable and there was likely to be a demand from schools for use of the huts during term time for educational purposes. This would however need to be kept under review to ensure that any schools' use did not conflict with the general public / domestic use of the huts which remained their primary purpose.

Turning to the accessibility of bookings in future, it was proposed that subject to a consideration of the issues by the Scrutiny Committee, delegated authority could be given to the Director of Environment and Housing to appoint a local nearby business to hold the beach hut keys for the daily bookings and to take both cash and card payments. This could offer a marketing opportunity for the business concerned as their role in the booking process would be widely advertised. It was expected that there would be businesses interested in providing this service free of charge and it was therefore being further suggested that the choice of a suitable business be a matter for the Director to determine. The chosen business would however, have no role in managing the beach huts units, they would purely administer the spot booking and "take in" and "give out" keys, checking those who wished to collect keys against the records on the Council's electronic booking system.

In addition to this method of booking, bookings would be able to be made via Contact One Vale, C1V over the telephone, online via the Council's website or via an App which was shortly to be launched. For this season, the availability of beach huts would be shown via the website which would hopefully also encourage a greater number of bookings.

The new Barry Island Beach Huts Rental Policy had therefore been drafted having taken into account the proposed changes and was detailed at Appendix B to the report. The Head of Service stated that it was clearly important to note that assumptions had had to be made in devising a new policy, and that the policy had been informed by the learning to date and the views expressed by Elected Members. It was accepted that the Rental Policy was likely to take a number of years before it was fully refined and that in any event such a policy would always have to be kept under review. It was further intended that users of the huts would be consulted on all aspects of the beach huts offer, including the new policy so that when the policy was reviewed at the end of the 2016/17 summer season, there would be both quantitative and qualitative information available to better inform the management and rental processes. Appendix A to the report also provided a series of potential usage and financial projections.

Members expressed their appreciation that their views had been taken on board in drawing up the report and the rental policy. However following discussion of the documents a Member raised concern in relation to potential issues of antisocial behaviour and its enforcement. The Head of Service, in response, advised that the site had been designated as an alcohol and drug free zone and under the Council's Reshaping Services programme the question of enforcement in all aspects was to be considered. The Terms and conditions also stipulated that no bad behaviour would be tolerated under the site rules and procedures.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, with permission to speak, confirmed that the Council had a proven success record of designating alcohol free zones and the Police had been sensible in their approach in enforcement and it was important that the good working relationship with the Police force in relation to this issue continue. The Cabinet Member also took the opportunity to congratulate the officers who had listened to all the comments that had been put forward and advised that a number of issues had been discussed with traders which had included the testing out of ideas. In her view the policy was a good proposal to go forward.

Members concurred that it was a good report and that the elements that they had discussed had been considered and taken on board. It was also important to adopt a flexible approach within the policy, a Member in referring to the fact that no commercial, religious or political usage would be agreed considered that this would restrict officers' flexibility, but accepted that this statement had been carefully considered to be a sensible approach in order to protect officers and that they worked to an agreed procedure.

In response to a query as to whether traders involved in the key handling should be afforded the opportunity to have commission for the handing out and return of keys. The Head of Service stated that they had been advised by the Legal Department that in such instances it would be a procurement issue which had considerable issues attached to it. It had therefore been considered more appropriate to undertake the current approach as outlined within the report. The Chairman also advised that it was fair to say that any person who took responsibility for the keys would also receive in direct advertising themselves as a result which could also transcend via social media etc.

Councillor Hodges, (not a Member of the Committee) with permission to speak, stated that he was grateful for the speed in which the report had been presented and for the detail contained therein. His only concern was in relation to the annual bookings and the possibility that some may be sub-let or left largely empty. He was also grateful for the relaxing of the opportunities for schools. The feedback he had received from users was that it would be an advantage if the beach huts could contain some sort of furniture as there were no facilities within them. The Head of Service in response confirmed that sub-letting was not allowed within the rules and that with regard to annual tickets, only six of the small and large beach huts would be trialled in this way. Members in considering the points raised felt that as it was a trial it would be beneficial to allow the trial period to take place before any further considerations in relation to furnishings was made.

Councillor G. John, in conclusion, stated that in his view that good progress had been made in developing the draft policy at Appendix B and that a further report would be presented back in February 2017 on lessons learned in time for the season to start in April 2017.

The Chairman in recognising that the beach huts had not been fitted with an electricity supply and aware that his was likely to be a large capital investment, asked whether costing's could be obtained for future consideration following the pilot being undertaken.

Having fully considered the report, it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the operational proposals outlined in the report and the draft beach hut rental policy at Appendix B be endorsed with officers being afforded flexibility within the letting arrangements.
- (2) T H A T following the review of the policy at the end of the 2016/ 17 summer season a report be brought back to the Committee, as soon as possible thereafter.
- (3) T H A T the above recommendations be referred to Cabinet in order that the Barry Island Beach Huts Rental Policy can be considered for approval.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) To advise Cabinet.
- (2) To apprise Members.
- (3) For consideration and or approval.”

Attached as Appendix – [Report to Scrutiny Committee \(Economy and Environment\): 13th April, 2016](#)