



ADUR & WORTHING COUNCILS

Scrutiny review of the Worthing Business Improvement District (BID) and plans for renewal of the BID for 2023 - 2028

Report by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Working Group

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report reviews the Worthing Business Improvement District (BID) and offers a series of findings and recommendations to improve how the BID could work in a better way with Worthing Borough Council as the BID sets out its proposals for the next five year term 2023-2028.
- 1.2 This report includes the results of research and consultations undertaken by the Working Group to find out more about how the BID operates and views from local businesses.

2.0 Background - What is the Worthing Business Improvement District (BID) and the process for renewal of the BID?

- 2.1 The Worthing BID is a business-led initiative supported by Government legislation which gives businesses the power to raise funds locally to be spent locally on improving their trading environment. The Worthing BID is supported by the Worthing Town Centre Initiative and the BID programme is funded by the businesses themselves through a levy on non-domestic rates. BID schemes operate for a period of 5 years. For the BID to go ahead, two conditions must be met: over 50% of businesses that vote must vote in favour; those businesses voting 'yes' must represent more than 50% of the total rateable value of all votes cast. If both those conditions are fulfilled, payment of the levy becomes mandatory for all eligible businesses, regardless of how or whether they vote.
- 2.2 Worthing Borough Council is responsible for managing the ballot process, collecting the levy from businesses on behalf of the BID and is also a levy payer itself. The Borough Council has previously indicated that it did not want to seek membership of the BID Board of Directors, however, former Councillor Nicola Waight, who was previously Executive Member for Regeneration and Fiona Burn, Place and Economy Manager had attended meetings of the BID

Steering Committee and Councillors Dan Humphreys and Kevin Jenkins have previously attended these meetings.

2.3 The Worthing BID has operated since 2008 following a successful ballot and there have since been two further renewal ballots in 2012 and 2017 with the current BID operating until 31 March 2023 and is due for a further ballot in Autumn 2022 if the BID wishes to operate for a 4th term from April 2023. In order to proceed to ballot the BID must produce renewal proposals and priorities for the BID to cover the five year BID term and the proposals will need to be subject to consultation with levy payers. As part of this review, the Working Group has received information from the Worthing BID on its proposed draft Business Plan for the next term in consultation with local businesses.

2.4 At the time of writing this report the draft 5 year BID Business Plan is being finalised by the Worthing Town Centre Initiative. Details of the BID Business Plan can be viewed here:-

<https://indd.adobe.com/view/62f5eb5d-da28-4cf4-b413-f93ab60e0f68>

The Worthing BID vision is for the BID area to be 'clean, safe and vibrant, a lively heart of the community where visitors are engaged and businesses inspired and prosperous.' The BID aims to help businesses work together to ensure that the town thrives and that the voice of the Worthing town centre business community is represented so that their views are considered in key decisions being made for Worthing. The income for the BID over the 5 year term was estimated to achieve an income of £1,425,900 which was made up of levy income (£1,145,000 and income from the markets at £280,900). The draft Business Plan is subject to consultation with the local businesses and during Summer 2022 it will be discussed with local businesses to raise the profile of the Plan. The BID priorities for the 4th term are:-

- Promoting the town and its businesses;
- Improving the visual appeal of the town;
- Delivering a safer more welcoming town;
- Driving footfall with markets, events and activities; and
- Business support and advice

2.5 Worthing Borough Council must be satisfied that the BID proposal is acceptable and has the power to veto the BID if it is not satisfied. The Borough Council should satisfy itself that the BID proposal does not conflict with any existing local authority policy nor propose a disproportionate burden on particular businesses by way of an unfair levy charge on a certain 'class' of levy payers, for example by an inappropriate manipulation of the BID boundary. It is sensible to do this prior to allowing the ballot to take place so as to minimise the risk of having to veto the proposals following the ballot. An unfair charge may be a disproportionately higher rate for one sector/group of businesses that isn't reflected in the scope of the BID proposals or perhaps a disproportionately low rate for one sector/group of businesses that in effect means their services are being heavily subsidised by others. An inappropriate manipulation would involve examples such as capturing a high rateable value

property, which in geographical terms appears outside the scope of the BID.

3.0 Scope and Key Focus areas of the review

- 3.1 As part of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) Work Programme, JOSC agreed to set up the Working Group to review the Worthing BID following the receipt of a scrutiny request received from Councillor Kevin Jenkins.
- 3.2 The reason for the Scrutiny request was to establish where there was a difference between the TCI and the BID and the impact of the BID on the town centre. Councillor Jenkins was concerned that there had not been any real scrutiny of the BID Business Plans prior to when the BID was first set up in 2008 and with subsequent renewal ballots held in 2012 and 2017. It was claimed that no assessment had been made at that time to assess the impact of the BID and that it was now time for the Council to find out what the Business Plan would be going forward and how it would impact businesses and what it would provide to the communities.
- 3.3 Councillors Charles James, Richard Nowak, Jon Roser and Rosey Whorlow were appointed to the Working Group and Councillor Jon Roser was appointed as Chairman of the Working Group.
- 3.4 The Working Group met on 10 January, 10 and 24 February and 9 and 24 March 2022 in what was a very intensive review which has provided a substantial amount of evidence to assist with the review.
- 3.5 The Working Group has heard from key stakeholders, experts and businesses connected with the Worthing BID process and also others connected with other BIDs elsewhere in England.
- 3.6 The Working Group discussed and agreed Terms of Reference and project objectives for the review as follows:-
 - (a) - To review the current Worthing Business Improvement District (BID) process and its proposals for 2023-2028 to help allow the local authority to make an informed decision as to whether the BID arrangements are likely to conflict to a significant extent with an existing policy, place a financial burden on rate payers or the burden from the proposed levy is unjust; and
 - (b) To propose any recommendations and comments via the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) to the Joint Strategic Committee and Worthing Executive Members to assist with the BID process.
- 3.7 The Working Group has held evidence gathering meetings with the following Worthing BID stakeholders, experts and others connected with other BIDs.

Andy Willems - Head of Place & Economy, Adur & Worthing Councils
 Fiona Burn - Place & Economy Manager, Adur & Worthing Councils
 Judy Fox - Place Brand and Partnerships Manager, Time for Worthing, Adur & Worthing Councils
 Councillor Kevin Jenkins - Leader of Worthing Borough Council
 Councillor Dan Humphreys - Former Leader of Worthing Borough Council
 Sharon Clarke - Worthing Town Centre Manager on behalf of the Worthing Town Centre Initiative
 Sam Whittington - Chairman of the Worthing Town Centre Initiative and Worthing BID
 Neema Karia and Andre Castilho, Boston Tea Party, Montague Place, Worthing
 Richard Margaroli, Ardington Hotel, Steyne Gardens, Worthing
 Natalie Matthews, Waitrose, Worthing
 Paul O'Brien, 'I Love Candy', Bath Place, Worthing
 Paul Battel, Blue Flame Optical, Royal Arcade, Worthing
 Greg Grundy, The Egremont Public House, Brighton Road, Worthing
 Chris Turner, Chief Executive, British BIDs
 Paul Kinvig, Bournemouth Town Centre BID
 Mandy White, Altrincham BID
 Helen Marshall, Vice-Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Chichester BID
 John Bownass, Hastings BID

3.8 This report provides the detail of the discussions and findings from the Working Group and some recommendations which the Working Group considers will help improve the Worthing BID and governance arrangements.

4.0 Findings and Proposals

4.1 The Working Group has received a great deal of evidence from the witnesses that have been interviewed as part of this review. The evidence highlights very clearly that there is a good level of support for the Worthing BID and the value which it brings to the Town which is not in doubt. However, whilst support for the BID is good the Working Group has received evidence on some issues where better working could be applied to ensure the BID is more successful.

4.2 A summary of issues and concerns gathered from the witnesses

4.3 Worthing Borough Council officers and Councillors

4.4 It was claimed that:-

- The BID appeared to be offering the same things at each renewal - There was a staleness in the BID which was limiting innovation and the variety of the offer
- Some Directors of the BID had been on the Board for a long time and no longer had local businesses in the town

- There was a lack of consultation on changes to the work of the BID
- The focus of the BID has moved to core retail in the town centre and is not helping businesses outside of this part of the BID area such as the Western end of Montague Street and Brighton Road
- It was difficult to differentiate between the BID and the Town Centre Initiative
- There was a disconnect between the aims of the BID and the objectives of 'Time for Worthing' (TFW) which was leading to an overlap of the work of the BID and TFW. It was suggested that there was a need for both to work together in a better way.
- There was potentially some crossover with the work proposed in the BID Business Plan and the work of the Council - eg Marketing campaigns and Town Centre guide (overlap with the work of TFW), there was limited coordination between the christmas lighting and the trees. The trees are supplied by the Council and lighting by the BID. This is an opportunity to work together on this aspect and refresh where and how the lighting is displayed. There could be better coordination on work to deliver a safer, more welcoming town with the Councils Outreach and Community teams to find common solutions, rather than run independent initiatives. Also, with regard to markets, there might be a conflict of interest where the BID run the Wednesday Market and the Adur Markets Team are now running a monthly Farmers Market to support the town centre. Better coordination and appreciation of what these markets deliver to the town centre is needed.

4.5 Local businesses

4.6 The Working Group interviewed a number of local business representatives. A summary of their views is that:-

- There is a good community spirit in the town centre. However, one business commented that they had not been made aware of the BID when arriving in Worthing. The business also considered that there should be more events held in the town centre as part of the BID which link along the Promenade and the town centre.
- The BID has provided the means for local businesses to have a forum where they can express opinions and they can be discussed and implemented, subject to agreement with the Directors of the BID. The BID can provide a means for communication to improve the town centre and to provide flowers along the Promenade. The Town Centre Rangers also help prevent shoplifting in the retail premises. The BID also encourages people to come to the town by holding events such as the Food Festival.
- The proposals in the new BID for Busking, Street Art and proposals to set up Tourist Information Centres in empty shops to help visitors are very interesting and there are also proposals to help the night time

economy and make people feel safer at night and encouraging more night time events. The BID and TCI can complement what the Council is doing and it puts a more human perspective on the work.

- If there need to be improvements in the way the BID works then this could be with the relationship between the BID/TCI and the Council - Eg Time for Worthing - Sometimes the BID and Time for Worthing are not always working in unison. There is no business plan for Time for Worthing at the moment which is not helping the BID achieve its objectives.
- Every business is welcome to get involved with the BID and put forward ideas. The process is very open and the Council would struggle to replace this. The TCI is potentially doing more for tourism than the Council for a long time. The Council has not helped in improving the tourism sector for a long time.
- The Town Centre Rangers are good and the BID is more open to new ideas with questionnaires sent out to businesses asking for suggestions.
- The relationship is a bit fractious at the moment with the Councils seeming not to want to get involved. Perhaps it is related to Time for Worthing - Perhaps it was because the BID did not give enough sponsorship funding for this. Some businesses have seen the value of the BID whereas others haven't done so.
- It is useful to have Council officers to attend BID meetings for certain agenda items where they are experts and they can give a firm answer on what can and can't be done. It would be great to have someone from the Council on the BID Board. I think the Council don't always understand what the BID does. It would be good to have a great working relationship with the Council. The goal for the BID is to have more people coming through the doors and visiting the town which should also be the aim of the Council.
- I think that it is important to keep the BID for the Town Centre Rangers, the Christmas lights and the decorations which provide value for the town. I want to see the BID provide more entertainment on the seafront including rickshaw bikes, sea pedalos and a sea train along the Promenade. A venue like the former Peter Pans Playground would be helpful as would better lighting and a new skate park. I also think that it would be helpful to have a chewing gum bank - This is a form of recycling and is useful to prevent the gum being dropped on the street. Stealing bicycles is also a problem at the moment. Perhaps there could be some form of compound for people to leave their bicycles which is manned and perhaps a small charge could be applied. This could encourage people to cycle into the town.

- I was sceptical of the BID initially but have paid the levy now for about 5 or 6 years. It works for me and we do get coverage in Brighton Road with the christmas lights and the flowers on the lampposts. The Food Festival is really good and I would support the BID just because of that. We are in the Worthing Guide and I feel that I am included in the BID. The BID is not cheap but represents good value. The crime reduction app is also helpful and allows us to report bad behaviour. I feel that the impact of the BID is positive.
- I would like the BID to have more entertainment on the seafront in the next few years in order to keep people in the town. Warwick Street is a good eating area. We need to get the message out that Worthing is a quality area. A Bikes rally might help as well. Events in Steyne Gardens are very successful.

4.7 Evidence from other BIDs

4.8 The Working Group interviewed other BID operators from other parts of England and a representative from British BIDs, the national body representing BIDs across the UK. This evidence has provided the Working Group with some useful insights and good practice on how BIDs operate elsewhere. A summary of this evidence is:-

- That the Council should be involved on the BID Board if this satisfies a local need. The Council should ensure due diligence is being undertaken regularly and to check to see if the BID is operating cost effectively in accordance with the operating agreement.
- Good BIDs will revisit the objectives on a regular basis. The BID board should be flexible and representative of all sectors in the BID area. BIDs should not get caught up in vanity projects which will not help promote economic growth. Support from the businesses for a BID is a measure of its success.
- Engagement of businesses in the work of the BID can be very challenging.
- Councils need to believe and support in a BID for it to be successful. BIDs need to be interactive and visible.
- Day to day relationships with the Council are very important for the BID to be successful.
- It is important for a BID to stay independent and be seen as separate from the Council. BIDs need to make sure that the BID levy payers know what the BID is doing for them. BIDs will involve the businesses in the BID work. BIDs are the voice of the businesses and the BID needs to be kept unique to maintain credibility.

4.9 Evidence from Worthing Town Centre Initiative and BID

- 4.10 The Working Group interviewed Sharon Clarke, Worthing Town Centre Manager and Sam Whittington, Chairman of the Town Centre Initiative at the beginning of the review and then at the end after receiving other evidence.
- 4.11 The Working Group received detailed information which has helped to clarify some of the issues raised in evidence from others. The TCI and the BID were very much the same but that the TCI was set up before the BID. The BID supported all businesses - Those who pay the levy and those that don't. The BID is run by the TCI but only businesses that pay the levy are part of the BID. Because it had been difficult for some people to understand the difference between the BID and TCI it was decided to incorporate the BID with the TCI to make it easier to run and make it clearer that the TCI and BID are the same - It was now called the Town Centre Initiative Business Improvement District.
- 4.12 The BID has a board of Directors and a Steering Committee. The Committee meets once a month. Levy payers and non levy payers sit on the Committee for a time. Businesses can express an interest in becoming members of the Steering Committee, Directors have no term of office. It had been difficult to get interest from businesses to be members and Directors and, therefore, there was no term of office.
- 4.13 With regard to the work of TFW and the relationship with the BID, the Working Group was advised that Sam Whittington had joined the Management Board of TFW. They were aware that there were a number of crossovers with TFW and mutual objectives where the TFW is working on the same purpose and , therefore, joining the Management Board would allow the BID and TFW to work together. The Working Group was told that there was a will and commitment to work with TFW where possible. The BID were waiting to receive the details of the TFW Business Plan and would then sit down to discuss how the BID could work together with TFW, however, regular quarterly meetings were being held between the Councils and Sam Whittington to discuss issues and ensure better co-ordination etc .
- 4.14 In terms of looking to provide more variety to the BID offer, the BID had introduced a Business Crime Reduction Partnership which works well and also the Town Centre Rangers. The BID was also working with the NBCP, the National Crime Business Partnership to explain how it worked against crime. The crime reduction element was important for businesses. The Food Festival

was also very successful with a high demand - 40% of Worthing traders at the event were Worthing businesses. The BID Business Plan was considered to be flexible which would allow the BID to move on and make improvements.

- 4.15 All new businesses are given a welcome pack which gives details of the town and contacts etc. The BID will try and contact all businesses when they are new to the town and all businesses are treated in the same way.
- 4.16 There was a view that the relationship between the Council and the BID had changed over the last few years but they did not know why and there was a view that the Council was secretive and that there was a lack of Communication and understanding from the Council over the previous 2 or 3 years. It was important to be clear on what information could be shared from the Council. However, work was being done to try and heal the relationship and the Scrutiny review was helping in the process. There was also a previous decision from the Council for it not to be involved in the Board of the BID but the BID was open to any new views proposing that the Council should be a member of the Board but considered that it was important to keep the BID business led.

5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

- 5.1 The Working Group would like to thank all those involved in this review for their time, support and invaluable contributions throughout this process.
- 5.2 The Working Group offers a series of recommendations for how the Councils can work with the BID and can regularly review the BID performance in order to ensure that it is meeting its objectives. It is important for there to be an effective working relationship.

6.0 Recommendations

- 6.1 Having reviewed the Worthing BID proposals for 2023 - 2028 the Working Group considers that the Council should support the BID and vote 'Yes' in the ballot but that processes should be put in place to ensure that there is better communication and collaboration from the Council and others to help the BID be more successful.**

Reason - The Working Group has received a great amount of evidence to suggest that the BID is supported by the local businesses and they would like the BID to continue - A good BID is good for the town and valued. The businesses which the Working Group consulted were unanimous in support for the BID and the evidence provided has illustrated to the Working Group that the BID is supported by local businesses who want it to continue. Equally,

evidence has been received which suggested that for the BID to be more successful there should be a closer working relationship with the Council focusing on better communication and collaboration.

6.2 That the Worthing BID and the 'Time for Worthing' Initiative should work in closer partnership once the TFW Business Plan is produced.

Reason - This is an opportunity to help both BID and TFW brands grow and to dovetail with each other to benefit the local communities.

6.3 That the Town Centre Manager and Chairman of the Town Centre Initiative and Worthing BID Team be congratulated on the work that they are undertaking to provide the BID and offer

Reason - To recognise the valuable time and work provided in order to keep the BID running smoothly and supporting the needs of local businesses. The Working Group has received evidence recognising that the BID has a good reputation, is working well and business support for the BID has increased over the previous terms of the BID.

6.4 That an annual review report on the work of the BID be presented to the Joint Strategic Committee and Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Reason - To provide regular updates to the Council on the progress and performance of the BID and work which it is doing to meet its objectives. This will enable the Council to closely monitor the work on an annual basis and assess the value of the BID to the Worthing community. This will also enable the Council to regularly check on the relationship between the Council and the BID and action change if necessary rather than waiting until the BID is due for renewal ballot again in 2027.

6.5 That the Council should continue with having Officer and Member representation on the BID Steering Committee only.

Reason - The Working Group has considered this matter and is of the view that the Council already has an adequate and effective Officer and Council Member representation in place on the BID Steering Committee which enables the Council to express its views and influence the progress of the BID through this channel. Having additional Council representation at BID Board level compromises the important principle that the BID should remain independent from the Council and not seen as an arm of it.

Local Government Act 1972
Background Papers:

None

Contact Officer:

Councillor Jon Roser
Chairman of the JOSOC Worthing BID Working Group
Town Hall,
Worthing
jon.roser@worthing.gov.uk