Minutes of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6th December 2011

Present:
Members of the Committee
>Councillor Sarah Boad
>Councillor Richard Chattaway
>Councillor Michael Doody
>Councillor Mike Gittus
>Councillor Barry Lobbett
>Councillor Tilly May
>Councillor Ray Sweet
>Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair)
>Councillor Chris Williams

Other County Councillors
>Councillor Alan Cockburn
>Councillor Peter Butlin
>Councillor Colin Hayfield
>Councillor Richard Hobbs
>Councillor David Johnston

Officers
>David Abbott, Democratic Services Officer
>Elizabeth Abbott, Performance and Improvement Officer
>Angela Chisholm, HR and Organisational Development Support Officer
>Phil Evans, Head of Service Improvement and Change Management
>Monica Fogarty, Strategic Director for Communities
>Martyn Harris, Democratic Services Officer
>Gary Phillips, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

There were no members of the public in attendance.

1. **General**

    (1) **Apologies**
    Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Helen Walton.
    Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Chris Saint who had to attend the Local Government Information Unit Member Assembly as the representative for Warwickshire County Council.
    Councillor Richard Chattaway notified the Committee that he had to leave the meeting early (10:45am).

    (2) **Members' Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**
    None.

    (3) **Chair's Announcements**
    None.

(4)   Minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2011

Changes are in **<u>bold and underlined</u>**:

<u>4.8 Integrated Risk Management Plan Consultation</u> (Page 2 of 9)
Councillor Richard Hobbs confirmed that the revised Integrated Risk Management Plan will go to full council and will be available electronically for general public **<u>comment</u>** at that time.

Matters Arising:

<u>Libraries</u>

Councillor Colin Hayfield gave an update on the Library Service transformation:
- ●Officers have been working with community groups to turn their business cases into a reality for the 1st of April 2012 start date.
- ●A report will come to Committee in February 2012 to look at the business cases and flag up any potential issues.

Councillor Sarah Boad noted that close partnership working between Warwick District Council and Warwickshire County Council has resulted in positive changes to the proposed reductions to library opening hours.

The Chair agreed that excellent work has taken place in Warwick District but recognised that it was built on top of deep foundations. The Chair asked Councillor Hayfield if it would be possible for other Districts and Boroughs to work together retrospectively to achieve extensions to opening hours. The Portfolio Holder said that he hoped that door would always be open.

2.   Public Question Time
There were no public questions.

3.   Questions to the Portfolio Holders

Questions to Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways
<u>Community Links transport</u>

At the last budget setting Community Links transport was scheduled to be cut but a last minute Central Government grant saved the service. Councillor David Johnston asked the Portfolio Holder if the grant would continue next year, and if not what the impact would be on the service.

The Portfolio Holder hoped that the grant for Community Links would continue but if it doesn't the transport department will have to have a rethink about how the service is funded.

Transport links to new housing developments

The Borough and District Councils are currently doing their local plans for housing. Councillor Michael Doody asked the Portfolio Holder when the housing plans are finalised would efforts be made to ensure that transport is available to the large new developments.

The Portfolio Holder responded that travel plans and sustainable transport plans have to be done for any new community that is built.

Councillor Michael Doody said that now the Regional Spatial Strategy has been dropped plans are having to be pushed forward and he asked for reassurance that the County Council is taking this on board in a timely manner.

Bus service reductions

Councillor Ray Sweet asked the Portfolio Holder if an exercise had been done to monitor where services are being used and where they aren't, so that resources can be allocated to places of greatest need.

The Portfolio Holder said there had been a 6 month period of continual tweaking and review of the network following a huge amount of correspondence from members of the public.

The Chair noted that at the Communities O&S meeting to be held on April 2012 there will be a report on bus service reductions which would be useful background for members.

The Chair asked that members from the Districts and Boroughs are invited to that meeting because the bus service issue is something that impacts on the whole County.

The Chair commended the Transport team for doing a great job on the reconfiguration of the bus network. The Chair noted their flexible approach and impressive use of local knowledge to ensure the best service with limited resources.

Questions to Richard Hobbs, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety

Domestic Sprinklers

The Chair asked the Portfolio Holder what coordination there had been with other Counties to push forward the domestic sprinkler agenda.

The Portfolio Holder responded that Warwickshire Fire & Rescue service's campaign for domestic sprinklers had been featured in Local Government magazine and will be

profiled at national seminar in February. Gary Phillips, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, will be attending the event with Dave Curry, Chief Fire Officer, to raise the issue with MPs. The Portfolio Holder also promotes the work as part of his national role in the Local Government Association. The 'two houses' sprinkler demonstration, designed to show how sprinkler systems can save lives, has been featured in a number of national fire magazines.

Gary Phillips also informed the Committee that Warwickshire Fire & Rescue have over 1400 followers on Twitter and are looking to develop a Facebook page with information about fire safety.

Questions to Alan Cockburn, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities

Member Champions

The Chair asked the Portfolio Holder to clarify Helen Walton's role, referring to recent references in the press to her as Warwickshire County Council's waste champion.

The Portfolio Holder said that Helen Walton is the spokesperson for the Communities group. Her role is to support the Portfolio Holder. She had a covering role in country parks and gypsy, and traveller work, and she also helps with waste.

The Chair clarified that in the past the Council has appointed champions with a specific role, Jose Compton leads a Dementia partnership group and Gordon Collett (now retired) was the climate change champion and reported back to Full Council. Now 'champion' seems to just be a label, there's a danger of devaluing it's meaning.

The Portfolio Holder said that he felt there wasn't the need for a climate change champion anymore because climate change work is ingrained into the ethos of Warwickshire County Council.

Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Councillor Alan Cockburn updated the Committee on the work of the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership

The Government has announced a number of projects in response to disappointing economic forecasts that will be delivered through Local Enterprise Partnerships.

- A 'Growing Places fund' has been announced - this is money to be lent out to 'shovel ready' projects. Coventry and Warwickshire has been allocated £8.5 million. Monica Fogarty, Strategic Director for Communities, said that the Growing Places Fund should be up and running by Spring 2012.
- A Rural Growth Network fund of £15 million was announced - these are essentially 'mini-enterprise zones'. Warwickshire County Council are preparing a submission for the pilot.

- One of the key aims of the Local Enterprise Partnership is improving broadband coverage across the County. The lack of good Internet infrastructure is a real barrier to economic growth.
- Central Government has offered £4 million (match funded) to Coventry, Warwickshire, and Solihull - of which £3 million will go directly to Warwickshire.
- George Osbourne confirmed funding for major improvements to the Tollbar End roundabout in Coventry in his Autumn Statement.

Councillor Sarah Boad asked the Portfolio Holder if there were any plans to improve Catthorpe interchange (the M1, M6, A14 interchange) at the same time as Tollbar island.

The Portfolio Holder said that the Tollbar island upgrades could be implemented relatively quickly because the planning stage has already been completed but the Catthorpe interchange work would take a lot longer because there would need to be an inquiry and further planning. Warwickshire County Council has been actively petitioning Central Government to upgrade the Catthorpe interchange for a number of years.

4. **Update on Performance Management from Phil Evans**

Phil Evans, Head of Service Improvement and Change Management, updated the Committee on the work his service has been doing on performance reporting and how to meet the needs of overview and scrutiny:
- Performance management should be as effective as possible - adding real value, and needs to reflect the changing environment.
- At a meeting with the overview and scrutiny Chairs there was a clear message that there needs to be a dialogue with members of the Committees.

A discussion took place and the following points were noted:

- Members need the tools to properly analyse the data that is put in front of them.
- Getting the right balance of performance information for this committee is very challenging because it has such a wide and diverse remit.
- There is an overload of information, a written summary and graphic displays could make the data clearer.
- We need to know where we've come from, how we're doing, and where we are going.
- The data needs to be clearly presented and readable by someone who doesn't have in-depth knowledge of the service.
- The red, amber, green highlighting works well to flag up areas that need further work.
- Trend data and benchmarking are important. Currently it is difficult to tell the direction of travel and whether we are keeping up with equivalent Councils.
- Reports should be consistent - (are figures actual or percentages etc.).
- Targets should be challenging.
- There should be a clearer process for setting targets.

- Councillors agreed that it wouldn't be appropriate for a scrutiny committee to set targets.
- A common frustration for Members was when targets were changed without explanation.
- Members should be able to challenge the Portfolio Holder on why that change has been made. There should be a clear audit trail.

Phil Evans informed the Committee that Warwickshire is working with other Councils and partners to agree a compatible set of indicators.

Phil Evans said that in future his service would be working closer with Democratic Services to determine areas where it might be more appropriate to do more in depth analysis.

Next steps
Feedback from Members will be presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Board to agree a way forward and improvements will be made for the year ahead.

5.   Mid Year Performance Report

The report was presented by Phil Evans, Head of Service Improvement and Change Management.

The Chair asked officers to explain why the data is based on a 'year to date forecast' and not actual figures.

Phil Evans explained that because actual data is not consistently available across the whole organisation they use the forecast position (in this case to March 2012).

6.   Impact of Staffing Reductions within the Communities Group and the Library and Information Service

The report was presented by Angela Chisholm, Human Resources and Organisational Development Support Officer.

Monica Fogarty, Strategic Director for the Communities group:
This is not a situation that the organisation has been in before. We are still developing the skills for how to manage a large scale downsizing. Staff and members are having to pull together. We have lost a lot of skill and experience and there are still gaps in skills and capacity.

Councillor John Whitehouse, Chair:
There are a number of areas where specialist officers were going into schools for specialist subjects (healthy schools, safety etc.). Have services maintained presence on a more generalist basis?

<u>Monica Fogarty, Strategic Director for the Communities group:</u>
Mainstream services have been maintained. It is now a question of prioritising and choice. We can't provide the 'gold standard' but we are still continuing key services like road safety.
We have been talking closely with partners (Police, Fire & Rescue etc.) to maximise face-time for all of our services.

<u>Councillor John Whitehouse, Chair:</u>
Does cutting the EU officer roles mean that Warwickshire County Council is no longer able to access EU funding streams?

<u>Monica Fogarty, Strategic Director for the Communities group:</u>
Warwickshire County Council traditionally hasn't been very successful accessing European Union funding. We have started working closely with Coventry City Council who have done far better. The Council will continue to keep a watchful eye on funding schemes from Europe.

Councillors asked if the bulletin providing voluntary groups with information about European Union funding would continue as it was very valuable. Monica Fogarty informed the Committee that that work will now be picked up by Nick Darwen in the Localities and Partnerships team.

7.   Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority Integrated Risk Management Plan

Richard Hobbs introduced the Integrated Risk Management Plan and the following points were noted:
- Staff and senior officers have agreed a new duty system, following consultation, that will be implemented in January 2012.
- Training will be rolled out to retained firefighters. The service has committed to invest more in training.
- Building work has started at Alcester fire station.
- A fitness programme is going ahead to reduce sickness absence.

Members welcomed the move away from numerical targets on home fire safety checks towards outcome based targets.

The Chair asked how the substantial budget savings were made from management overhead.

Gary Phillips made the following points in response:
- The service has been using resources far more effectively. It now works on a County-wide basis rather than being split up into smaller areas. This allows more efficient use of resources and economies of scale.
- The service has stripped out a lot of hierarchical structure and have been making better use of fire-station resources.

- Under the old system of numerical home fire safety check targets, fire-fighters felt like they didn't have time to deal with very vulnerable people because it would take much longer to complete a full assessment. The new targeted approach allows the service to deliver better outcomes with fewer resources.

The Fire & Rescue Service had also been working in the community to achieve better outcomes:
- The service has been working with student landlords to carry out home fire safety checks in their properties.
- Children in schools are being taught how to carry out safety checks in their own homes, encouraging them to 'own' their fire safety. This has also proven to be a very effective way to reach ethnic minority families with safety advice - where older members of the family might not speak or read English.

5. **Communities Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2011-12**

The Committee agreed the following additions to the work programme:

<u>February 2012</u>
- A preliminary report on street-lighting to give background for a possible task and finish review later in the year.
- An update report on the library service transformation.
- The Local Enterprise Partnership - The Chair will have a discussion with the Portfolio Holder at the next agenda planning meeting to see if any issues have come up.

<u>To be timetabled</u>
- Members suggested that it would be useful to have a Portfolio Holders briefing session on Police Commissioners.

It was also agreed that the following two items would be deferred to 13 June 2012:
- Fire and Rescue Service Improvement Plan
- Community Fire Safety

6. **Any Other Items**
There were no urgent items.

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Chair

The Committee rose at 11:57am