

Minutes of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 April 2012

Present:

Members of the Committee

Councillors Sarah Boad, Richard Chattaway, Michael Doody, Clare Hopkinson, Barry Lobbett, Chris Saint, John Whitehouse, and Chris Williams

Portfolio Holders

Councillors Peter Butlin, Alan Cockburn, Colin Hayfield, and Richard Hobbs

Other Warwickshire County Councillors (Non-voting)

David Johnston, Barry Longden, and Helen Walton

District and Borough Councillors

Tony Gillias, Rugby Borough Council

David Humphreys, North Warwickshire Borough Council

Noreen New, Rugby Borough Council

Derek Pickard, North Warwickshire Borough Council

Neil Sanderson, Rugby Borough Council

Officers

David Abbott, Democratic Services Officer

Dan Green, Localities and Partnerships Manager (Rugby Area)

John Linnane, Director of Public Health

Kevin McGovern, Transport Operations Group Manager

Jim Onions, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Gary Phillips, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Andy Stokes, Passenger Transport Manager

Louise Wall, Head of Sustainable Communities

6 members of the public attended the meeting.

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillors Ray Sweet and Claire Watson

(2) Members' disclosures of personal and prejudicial interests

Councillor Richard Hobbs declared a personal interest in Item 6 because a family member is affected by the planned route.

Councillor Michael Doody declared a personal interest in Item 6 because he is an Executive Member of 51M.

(3) Chair's announcements

The Chair informed the Committee that public questions relating to 'Item 4. The Community Impact of Bus Service Reductions' would be taken under that item.

(4) Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

Webcasting of public meetings (P3 of 10)

On the 29 March there was a demonstration of various webcasting and audio/visual technologies in the Council Chamber. Warwickshire County Council (WCC) is looking to upgrade the technology used in the Council Chamber and Committee rooms but no final decisions have been taken yet.

Alan Farnell, Leader of WCC, and Steve Smith, Head of Property Services, are leading the project.

Grit bins (P4 of 10)

Peter Butlin said that there is no change to the current policy; if a District or Parish Council buys a grit bin, WCC will fill it - but in times of increased need it may take longer than usual.

Police Authority budget (P6 of 10)

After the meeting of the Committee it was confirmed by the Chief Executive of the Police Authority that the views of the Committee had been received and considered during the budget debate.

Speed Watch (P7 of 10)

Superintendent Martin McNevin had 'unblocked' the problem raised by the Chair and now a Community Speed Watch volunteer will be trained.

Member involvement in the planning process (P8 of 10)

Members had been sent a proposal for enhanced member involvement in the planning application process. The key change is an 'early warning' email that members would receive at the beginning of the process. This was agreed by the Committee.

2. Public question time

All public questions related to 'Item 4. The Community Impact of Bus Service Reductions' and were taken under that item.

3. Questions to the Portfolio Holders

**Questions to Councillor Colin Hayfield,
Portfolio Holder for Customers, Access and Physical Assets**

Warwickshire PRU - flood alleviation

Councillor Boad asked the Portfolio Holder what was being done about the problem of flood alleviation at the bottom of the Warwickshire PRU's playing fields.

Councillor Hayfield responded that the PRU is still under the control of the People Group at the moment. The future use of the site is still uncertain. If WCC sells the land, the flood alleviation measures, such as embanking and drains under the ground, would affect the value of the land.

The Portfolio Holder agreed to follow up on the issue outside of the meeting.

The new Warwick library

Councillor Saint asked the Portfolio Holder if the size of the book stock in the new, smaller, Warwick library was of a similar size to that of the old library, and where the large collections of historical documents were being stored.

Councillor Hayfield responded that the majority of books are still available at the new library, and that the collections have been relocated to Nuneaton Library.

The official public launch of the new Warwick library will be held on Monday, 23 April.

Questions to Councillor Alan Cockburn, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities

Update on the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership

There are 3 major projects that affect the Council:

1. The Growing Places fund, which was launched on 26 March and has a deadline for bids of 31 April. The total pot is £12.8m. So far there haven't been any formal responses but there have been a number of enquiries.
2. Rural Growth Network - The pilot has a shared pot of £15m - The main centre at Stoneleigh Park is being supported by 2 enterprise hubs in Shipston-on-Stour and Atherstone which will offer 'rural-friendly' enterprise support.
3. Rural Broadband - Warwickshire has successfully bid for £4m to improve rural internet speed and access. That money has been match-funded by WCC to the tune of £3m.

While the key area of work for the CWLEP is still about removing barriers to economic growth, the LEP board have decided to refocus their strategy on the following 4 areas:

1. Low carbon vehicles
2. Advanced engineering (Motorsports)
3. IT and digital media (Game development)
4. Intelligent mobility (Sat-nav and vehicle tracking systems)

The LEP will be supporting these areas through strategic infrastructure projects, access to skills and training, access to finance, and inward investment.

The board are looking at creating a limited liability partnership.

Councillors discussed the CWLEP and the following points were noted:

1. The CWLEP holds a considerable amount of public money - who is accountable?
2. Councillor Cockburn responded that WCC is the accountable body for the Growing Places fund and there is a panel of members and officers who can make recommendations to the CWLEP Board.
3. The performance of the CWLEP should be benchmarked against other areas of the country.

4. A recurring issue that employers raise is a lack of skills in the workforce.
5. Regarding the skills issue - young people are getting mixed messages. There should be clarity and consistency about what employers want and what the Government is encouraging young people to do.

Martin Yardley, the Chief Executive of CWLEP will be invited to the next meeting of the Committee to talk about the progress made so far and plans for the future. Committee members are encouraged to feedback potential areas for discussion to the party spokespeople.

Daw Mill Colliery

With reference to recent news stories about UK Coal reviewing the future of Daw Mill, Councillor Whitehouse asked what contingency planning is taking place. Daw Mill is a major economic driver in Warwickshire.

Louise Wall responded that WCC is in close contact with the chamber of commerce and agreed to keep the Committee up to date with any developments.

Questions to Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways

Pavement parking

Councillor Whitehouse asked, with reference to the Guide Dogs for the Blind pavement parking campaign, what wider powers Local Authorities had been given to deal with pavement parking.

Councillor Butlin responded that a recent change in legislation meant that Local Authorities no longer have to apply to the Department for Transport to put up parking signs.

Councillor Chattaway asked if it would be possible to implementing a process whereby a Councillor could request enforcement in a particular area and receive feedback on what enforcement had taken place.

Councillor Longden said that there are significant problems with parking in urban areas. Enforcement could just lead to displacement.

Councillor Lobbett asked for clarity over whether it was legal to park on the pavement in certain areas – in some parts of Bedworth it is difficult not to.

The Chair said that there would be a more in-depth discussion about this issue at a future meeting.

'The role of a member to have influence over parking in their patch' should be a future work programme item.

New parking charges in Leamington Spa

Councillor Boad alerted the Portfolio Holder to concerns that were expressed at Warwick Area Committee over the new minimum parking charge of 50p. Councillor Boad requested that the minimum charge be lowered.

Councillor Butlin responded that there is a lower minimum charge for *off-street* parking but the recommendation is to keep the 50p charge for on-street parking to encourage people to stay in the area for longer and use the shops and local facilities.

4. The Community Impact of Bus Service Reductions

Before the meeting Councillors were given a collection of emails from members of the public who wanted to contribute their views but couldn't attend the meeting in person. The emails were also sent to the Transport team who will be replying to the respondents about the issues they have raised.

Dan Green - Localities and Partnerships Manager for the Rugby Area, presented the report:

1. A huge number of petitions and representations from Councillors, MPs, and residents have been received.
2. The key issue is access to services – both public and private sector.
3. The reductions *appear* to be felt more greatly in rural areas. However this could be due to the engagement networks in rural areas (Parish Councils etc.)
4. The reductions disproportionately affect younger people and older people – both groups tend to have less money and no car.
5. The process of listening is ongoing. Officers from the transport team have been to numerous Community Forums to hear peoples concerns firsthand.
6. Feedback has led to a great number of revisions to the network.
7. Stratford LSP has set up a task and finish group to look at developing sustainable options for community transport.
8. We need to be aware of the cumulative impact. We can't look at services in isolation – especially in areas of multiple deprivation. These are areas where people typically aren't as familiar with engagement and support systems.
9. WCC is aware of the impacts, and wherever possible the transport team have worked collaboratively with communities to find solutions.

Kevin McGovern - Transport Operations Group Manager, addressed the Committee and made the following points:

1. In 2011, 15.2m passenger journeys were made on buses in Warwickshire – 3.2m of those journeys were subsidised by WCC.
2. We have ensured that every community retains some level of transport provision. The level of service provision is linked to the population.
3. We worked closely with bus operators to introduce services - parts of the county are now serviced with buses on a Friday and Saturday night that operate on a commercial basis.
4. Communication has been very comprehensive.
5. Changes are fast-moving and there is no end date – there are several examples of revisions that have been made since the report was written.

Peter Butlin - Portfolio Holder Community Transport, addressed the Committee and made the following points:

1. While this is mainly a rural issue, there are pockets of deprivation in all areas of Warwickshire.
2. We have to consider how to support people living in the countryside.
3. Funding disappeared overnight – to have done a 6 month consultation would have led to deeper cuts to the network.
4. We will continue to listen and alter the network as we go along.
5. We are plugging the gaps with community transport who have secured funding for the next 3 years.

Councillor Doody asked if bus companies could have improved services without the need for WCC grants.

Councillor Butlin responded that private bus operators will only keep routes that are commercially viable. WCC subsidises services if there is considered to be a social need. It is about finding the right balance between the two.

Kevin McGovern said there was a rigorous tendering process for bus subsidies to ensure WCC is getting value for money.

Area - Stratford

Councillor Saint – the geographic area of Stratford is almost equal to all other areas put together but it has a similar population to Warwick District. It has a unique profile and presents a unique set of problems for public transport.

Members asked to be brought in earlier on decisions to cut individual bus services. In the past, services (the number 23 for example) have been cut without prior discussion.

Depending on where they live, people can't get to Community Forums by bus and therefore aren't represented.

The ability for people to get themselves to hospital is a key concern. Community Links can't always be relied on because the service stops at 3pm.

Stephen Law raised concerns about the withdrawal of the evening 29 service. The bus route covered a large number of villages and towns between Stratford and Evesham - a lot of people have been affected.

Kevin McGovern responded:

1. The transport team oversees the entire home-to-school network. Some services cross-subsidise between schools and day time provision.
2. We recognise that the rural nature of Stratford District creates transport needs which cannot always be met by conventional buses. That is why there are more community transport schemes operating in Stratford than anywhere else in the County; including Community Links, Shipston Link, and the Volunteer Car Scheme.
3. Regarding the 23 Service – Johnsons Coaches made changes on a commercial basis. WCC doesn't have the same input as it would for a subsidised service – but we are working to address the liaison problem.

4. Regarding the 29 service – Members made a decision to cut all subsidies to evening bus services as part of the 2011/12 budget. A meeting was held with Stagecoach about them running a Friday and Saturday evening service on a purely commercial basis but they didn't feel it was economically viable.

Councillors asked to be kept informed of the work of the Stratford LSP task and finish group and the Rural Community Council.

Area - Rugby

Councillor Gillias, Rugby Borough Council, addressed the Committee:

Monks Kirby lost the 8.45am bus to Coventry which many people used to get to their doctors practice. It is now very difficult to get to both the doctors and the nearby hospital. We have also lost the service to Leicester, which services the Leicester Royal Infirmary.

Councillor Sanderson, Rugby Borough Councillor and Chairman of Sustainable Rugby, addressed the Committee:

1. There has been a 'double-whammy' with cuts from both Warwickshire and neighbouring Northamptonshire. Services in both directions have stopped.
2. We have lost inter-urban services which has had an economic impact on the town centre. Bus users tend to spend more time in town centres than car users.
3. Why was there so little communication between Local Authorities?
4. Can there not be more joint working to mitigate the impacts?

Andy Stokes, Passenger Transport Manager, responded:

1. In the case of Monks Kirby, the route was linked to a school run in the area. When the network was reviewed that link was cut. We will look at the network through Monks Kirby to see if anything can be done.
2. In Leicester the network had to be carved back to basics which meant taking out the alternative shopping trips - it was quite an expensive provision.
3. Travel de Courcey run an hourly Coventry service - we will see if we can market it better.
4. The transport team have been in contact with Northamptonshire and we are trying to mitigate problem areas.
5. There have been no changes to inter-urban services in Rugby.

Concerns were raised about people being able to get to hospitals. Kevin McGovern said that WCC didn't liaise directly with the ambulance service but they did work with community transport to provide alternatives.

Area - North Warwickshire

Councillor Derek Pickard, North Warwickshire Borough Council, addressed the Committee:

1. In our rural communities people are suffering.

2. To what extent is this Committee looking at known trends for the future of the service?
3. There have been reductions to a number of community services.
4. Access to services, particularly health services, needs to be thought about ahead of time.

Councillor David Humphreys, North Warwickshire Borough Council, addressed the Committee:

1. Officers on the transport team should be congratulated for their responsiveness.
2. Birch Coppice is seeing a lot of economic growth at the moment - particularly with the Occado distribution centre there.
3. Workers are needed from 6am – 7pm and many people just cannot get to work without walking miles every day.
4. Can services be introduced from major areas to get people to work?

Kevin McGovern responded that he had been at a meeting with Councillors to look at ways in which that issue could be addressed.

A timetable is being worked on - but that is not with new money – we are having to shuffle existing provision around.

There is some Section 106 money to use for transport and there is an on-demand service to work and back but it is very under-utilised. Either people don't know about it or it is too expensive.

Area – Warwick and Nuneaton & Bedworth

Councillors recognised that Warwick District and Nuneaton & Bedworth, being mainly urban areas, hadn't experienced the same problems that were being reported from other areas of the County.

Councillor Boad raised the issue of some buses not being accessible for people in wheelchairs due the height of the floors.

Kevin McGovern responded that all subsidised services are accessible – it is a requirement of the WCC subsidy agreement. It is a Central Government requirement that all buses have to be accessible by 2015.

Councillor Alan Cockburn thanked Kevin McGovern and the Transport Operations team for their continued dedication and hard work, supporting the bus network despite a very challenging budget reduction.

Resolved:

That the Committee undertakes further scrutiny work to identify those areas where the worst impacts are being felt, and to identify the cost of rectifying those problems, with the aim of providing an informed input into the budget setting process.

5. Improving Fire Control

Richard Hobbs presented the report and the following points were noted:

1. The bid into Central Government was submitted jointly with Northamptonshire.
2. A 'memorandum of understanding' for strategic alliance is going to Cabinet a week today. Northamptonshire Cabinet passed the memorandum last week.
3. Any major strategic decisions would have to be agreed by both authorities.
4. We will not progress any further until the full business case is presented.

Jim Onions addressed the Committee and the following points were noted:

1. The collapse of the national Fire Control project left the service with ageing infrastructure.
2. Warwickshire successfully bid for £1.8m of government funding to support project work.
3. The procurement process for an ICC system has started.
4. Fire station systems will be upgraded and the county-wide radio systems will be replaced.
5. The new control room would be installed in the existing Leamington fire station and would then be relocated to the new building when it was operational.
6. The work will enable both Warwickshire and Northamptonshire to remove the secondary control rooms.
7. A remote control room will also be identified in case of a wide scale problem (e.g. flooding) that affects the control rooms in both Warwickshire and Northamptonshire.

John Whitehouse asked if strategic alliance with Northamptonshire was compromising choices about Warwickshire's future requirements. For example – was the decision to go with Fortek solely because that is the system that Northamptonshire uses?

Gary Phillips responded that many other Fire Authorities are linking with other services. Regarding Fortek, their technology is well embedded in UK fire services – it is not a compromise.

Councillor Longden said it was important that the people working in the control rooms need to know the local area. Local knowledge is vital for emergency services.

Richard Hobbs responded that it is important that fire fighters on the ground have local knowledge – but control services employees could be from Coventry or North Warwickshire and they are directing engines to Shipston, an area they might never have been to. The technology is there to allow that to happen already.

Michael Doody expressed concerns that moving to the new Leamington fire station could take up to 4 years. Members voted for the proposals on the basis that the new station would be in a more advantageous position for the people of Warwick.

Gary Phillips responded that the service is meeting its standard response times to Warwick. The residents of Warwick are safe.

Richard Chattaway said there had been endless delays and reviews. The Fire and Rescue Service needs a clear strategic direction as soon as possible.

Richard Hobbs said that he understood the frustrations over the length of time the process has taken.

Jim Onions said that a new Leamington Spa station would be a great opportunity for improved equipment and a bespoke training centre – it shouldn't be rushed.

Resolved:

That the Committee supports moving ahead with Option 2 but only on the provision that it doesn't pre-judge the decision on Option 3.

The Committee would also like to urge Cabinet and the Corporate Board to bring the other major issues (the new Leamington station, strategic alliance, the strategic commissioning review) in to resolution as rapidly as possible.

As a Fire and Rescue Authority we need to give the Fire and Rescue Service both certainty and a clear direction for the future.

6. High Speed Rail 2 – Update

Sara Board presented the report and the following points were noted:

1. 51M (the alliance of local authorities opposed to HS2) has launched a judicial review.
2. The expected court date is late autumn. We should have an outcome from the review before Christmas.
3. WCC are being pragmatic and engaging with HS2 Ltd. We have a good, professional, working relationship with them. WCC also has a dedicated, if limited, resource to ensure the best possible outcomes for Warwickshire.

Councillor Stevens said that there will be significant costs to the County Council due to officer time spent on the project, road closures etc. WCC are hoping to claim those costs back from HS2 Ltd.

Councillor Doody informed the Committee that 51M now have 3 extra members – Coventry City, Cheshire, and Staffordshire.

Sara Board informed the Committee that HS2 Ltd. has said that the line is only partially designed – they want to include mitigation measures from the beginning. There will be an engineer assigned exclusively to Warwickshire.

Councillor Whitehouse noted that Miranda Carter from HS2 Ltd. has made it clear that the Planning Forums are not more influential than the Community Forums – all messages are going straight to HS2 Ltd and are equally weighted.

The Chair requested a more formal relationship between the members working group and the project board. For example - minutes of meetings should be shared between the two to keep everyone informed.

7. Work Programme 2012 (standing item)

Martin Yardley, Chief Executive of the Coventry and Warwickshire LEP will be invited to the next meeting of the Committee to talk about their progress and plans for the future.

The Committee rose at 1:40pm

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Chair