

Minutes of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14 November 2012

Present:

Members of the Committee

Councillors Richard Chattaway, Michael Doody, Robin Hazelton, David Johnston, Barry Lobbett, Chris Saint, John Whitehouse (Chair), and Chris Williams

Portfolio Holders

Councillor Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways

Councillor Alan Cockburn, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities

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

Councillor Richard Hobbs, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety

Officers

Kushal Birla, Head of Customer Services

Jo Cooper, Concessionary Travel Manager

Graeme Fitton, Head of Transport & Highways

Monica Fogarty, Strategic Director for Communities

Ayub Khan, Head of Libraries – Strategy

Kevin McGovern, Transport Operations Group Manager

Gary Phillips, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Greg Pace, Fire & Rescue Area Commander

Andy Stokes, Passenger Transport Manager

Sian Stroud, Corporate & Employment Senior Solicitor

Louise Wall, Head of Sustainable Communities

Two members of the public attended the meeting.

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillor Clare Hopkinson who was replaced by Councillor Robin Hazelton

Councillor Sarah Boad who was replaced by Councillor David Johnston

Councillor Ray Sweet

Councillor Claire Watson

(2) Members' Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Chair's Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements:

- There will be a Special Meeting of the Committee on 11 December at 12.30pm to discuss the Long Term Waste Disposal report before Cabinet. The report is exempt and the meeting will be closed to the public.
- The next Chair and party spokespersons meeting was scheduled for 4 December at 2pm.

(4) Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2012 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

2. Public Question Time

Portfolio Holder Decision Making Session Regarding Speed Limits

Alice Hardman, a local resident, addressed the Portfolio Holder about a Portfolio Holder Decision making session regarding changes to speed limits. Mrs Hardman attended the decision making session at Shire Hall, made representations, and believed that the Portfolio Holder was going to undertake a site visit with residents then make a final decision following further consultation with the public. The Portfolio Holder did go on a site visit but was accompanied only by officers of the County Council and the final decision was taken in private. Mrs Hardman felt that the process wasn't clear and asked that the Council considered working in partnership with the public in future.

Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways, responded that he had invited the local member, Councillor Les Caborn, to attend the site visit and represent residents' views but he was unable to attend. The Portfolio Holder agreed with the officer recommendations and made the decision in accordance with the constitution of Warwickshire County Council (WCC). The Portfolio Holder reiterated that there is an opportunity for engagement with members of the public at the decision making session meeting.

3. Questions to the Portfolio Holders

Questions to Councillor Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways

The Chair asked the Portfolio Holder if Community Forums would be informed of Traffic Regulation Orders at same time as Parish Councils. The Chair also asked the Portfolio Holder if he had considered holding public engagement meetings at Community Forums to allow easier access for local people. The Portfolio Holder responded that all Community Forum members could be informed about Traffic Order Regulations via email and said he would revisit the protocol regarding where the meetings would be held.

The Chair asked that informing Community Forum members via email be formalised in the engagement protocol. It was agreed that a revised protocol would be circulated to members prior to the Communities OSC Chair and party spokespersons meeting on 4 December 2012.

Questions to Councillor Richard Hobbs, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety

Councillor Richard Chattaway asked the Portfolio Holder what the timetable was for recruiting a new Fire and Rescue Service Chief Officer. The Portfolio Holder responded that Service will be recruiting a replacement in January 2013 to start in May 2013.

Councillor Richard Chattaway asked the Portfolio Holder to supply members with statistics showing how many times the appliance at Atherstone Fire Station (formerly at Bedworth Station) was called out and what the response times were in each case. The Portfolio Holder agreed to supply the requested information and said he was fully confident that the service had met its standard response times.

Councillor Richard Chattaway asked the Portfolio Holder where Warwickshire Fire Fighters would undertake 'hot fire training' after the current contract with the West Midlands Fire Service finished in March 2013. The Portfolio Holder responded that the service was planning to retender with the West Midlands in the short term; negotiations are on-going.

The Chair asked the Portfolio Holder for a reassurance that Warwickshire County Council was not considering switching off all fixed speed cameras, as was planning in the West Midlands. The Portfolio Holder responded that there were no plans to do so.

Questions to Councillor Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways

Councillor Richard Chattaway asked the Portfolio Holder if WCC had consulted with the Police before taking the decision to implement part-night lighting in Warwickshire. The Police website recommends parking in a well-lit area to avoid car crime. The Portfolio Holder responded that WCC did consult the Police and they were not aware of that advice and said there was no evidence that part-night lighting leads to increased crime.

The Chair asked the Portfolio Holder if WCC took further advice from the Police and community safety partners on the decision to bring forward the switch-off. The Portfolio Holder responded that further advice was not taken.

Councillor Michael Doody asked the Portfolio Holder if the process of getting new yellow lines approved could be sped up. The Portfolio Holder responded that behind every yellow line and sign there were a lot of regulations. WCC are trying to make the process as streamlined as possible.

Councillor Robin Hazelton asked the Portfolio Holder how quickly temporary seals on potholes are filled with permanent seals. Graeme Fitton responded that temporary seals were always followed up but the permanent repair has to be programmed so that the work is carried out in an efficient and cost effective manner meaning there will be a period of time between the temporary and permanent repair. The Portfolio Holder noted that the new highways contract had been highly successful and had led to the lowest level of insurance claims against the Local Authority for a decade.

4. Bus Services Task and Finish Group Report

Councillor David Johnston presented the report of the Task and Finish Group and informed the Committee that, as part of the 2011/12 budget, Warwickshire County Council reduced the Transport Operations budget by 45%. Following such a significant budget reduction, the level of financially supported services in the County was substantially affected.

Due to concerns from Councillors and representations from members of the public about changes to local bus services, a Task and Finish Group was set up to scrutinise the impact of the service changes on users and propose solutions that could be considered as part of the budget setting for 2013/14.

The Task and Finish Group identified three recommendations which aimed to maintain the current level of bus services across the County and reinstate a reduced level of evening bus subsidy to provide brand new rural and inter-urban bus routes on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Councillors believed the proposals for new bus services would increase access to services and amenities for thousands of people and help to improve the night time economy in Warwickshire.

Councillors asked the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways if there were plans to make further cuts to the transport budget and he responded that there were no plans to further reduce the budget.

Chair said that the recommendations of the task and finish group provided an opportunity to ameliorate the blanket decision to cut evening services and thanked officers from the Transport Operations team for their valuable input and hard work on the proposals.

Resolved

The Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the recommendations in the report and referred it to Cabinet for executive approval.

5. Concessionary Travel Scheme 2013-14

Jo Cooper, Concessionary Travel Manager, presented the report which presented recommendations for the discretionary elements of the 2013 Concessionary Travel Scheme. The proposal was to retain the discretionary times of 9.00am to 9.30am and 11.00pm to midnight, for a period of five years then undertake a further review in 2017.

The Chair asked why companion passes were considered to be unsustainable in Warwickshire when a number of neighbouring authorities still provided them. Jo Cooper responded that introducing companion passes County-wide would cost around £160,000 of additional funding and wasn't sustainable. It was also noted that WCC was not the only authority to remove companion passes.

Councillor Michael Doody asked if there was any support available to people in small Communities without good transport links. Jo Cooper responded that North Warwickshire Borough Council and Warwick District Council offered travel tokens to pay for taxi journeys but WCC had not considered a County-wide scheme due to the significant additional cost.

Councillors commented that the scheme was highly popular and successful and endorsed the recommendations in the report.

Resolved

The Committee endorsed the recommendations in the report scheduled for Cabinet on 22 November 2012.

6. CWLEP – Constitution and Governance

Louise Wall, Head of Sustainable Communities, introduced the report and informed the Committee that the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP) had formed a company limited by guarantee. This allows the LEP to hold its own funding and limits the liabilities of its Directors to one pound each. Any debts that the LEP incurs would be repaid from the company's balance sheet.

The Chair asked how the new governance arrangements change the relationship between WCC and the CWLEP. Louise Wall responded that the key change is that the CWLEP can now hold funding, hire its own staff, and rent property without relying on Coventry City Council and WCC.

Councillors asked what the legal difference between A Directors and B Directors was. Sian Shroud responded that all directors have the same voting rights but a distinction was made in the constitution between A private (A Directors) – (B Directors) public. Currently there are six private sector members and six public sector members. The quorum rules in the constitution state that there is no requirement for public sector members to attend meetings and vote.

Resolved

The Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed the decision on the constitution and governance arrangements of the CWLEP.

9. Communities OSC Work Programme

The Chair introduced work programme and requested the following addition:

Flood Risk Management (13 March 2012) - Officers were requested to provide background information for members that focussed on WCC's duties under the flood risk act and covered the relationship between the Local Authority and the Environment Agency. The Chair also requested that a representative from the Environment Agency attended the meeting.

Resolved

The Committee approved the draft work programme for 2012-13.

8. IRMP Consultation

Councillor Richard Hobbs, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, presented the report and informed members that a cross-party working group had been set up to work on the IRMP and they recognised that performance was excellent.

Gary Phillips, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, informed members that the IRMP was a statutory document that sets out the priorities and challenges for the service for a three year period. Fire officers have provided technical advice and guidance.

The Chair noted that the documents contained clear recommendations about changes to response time standards and asked at what stage those recommendations would be turned into an actionable plan. Gary Phillips responded that it was likely to be considered as part of the budget setting process.

Councillor Richard Chattaway stated the importance of using appropriate benchmarks when measuring efficiency.

The Chair informed the Committee that members would have a further opportunity to give their formal comments about the IRMP at the meeting in December. The Chair also requested an update on the progress of the consultation for members for the December meeting.

7. Mobile Library Service Reconfiguration

Councillor Colin Hayfield, Portfolio Holder for Customers, Access and Governance, introduced the report and informed the Committee that the mobile library fleet was to be reduced from five vehicles to three. The number and length of stops they make being consulted on and reviewed. The consultation would include all Parish Councillors and County Councillors in the affected areas.

Kushal Birla, Head of Customer Services, said that stops where very low numbers of people are using the service could be removed. When the draft routes are proposed, impact assessments will be done on all of them.

Chris Williams asked if the service had considered weekend or evening stops to encourage greater use. People who work during the day currently can't access the service. The Portfolio Holder responded that opening hours would be considered as part of the consultation.

Councillor Richard Chattaway asked if the service should be delivered by another provider for a lower cost. Kushal Birla informed members that all options were being considered as part of the Strategic Commissioning process.

Councillors expressed concerns that the definition of 'deprivation' that was being used was obfuscating true deprivation. The deprivation indices contained a number of factors that don't apply to most library users (e.g. if there isn't a school in the local area it is considered to be more deprived – which gives high deprivation scores to otherwise affluent communities). Councillors asked that more weight be put on rural isolation and lack of access to services.

Councillors felt that they couldn't endorse the second recommendation in the Cabinet report. The outcome of the consultation could significantly affect the service proposals and it wouldn't be appropriate to allow a senior officer to take those decisions without the input of Executive members.

The Chair requested that Communities OSC members be sent the final consultation documents prior to their distribution.

Resolved

The Communities strongly endorsed the full consultation approach following its success with community libraries.

Recommendation to Cabinet

That recommendation 2 of the Cabinet report should not adopted. Cabinet should consider the outcome of the consultation and make a final decision on the proposals.

The Committee rose at 2:30pm

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Chair