

Minutes of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 September 2012

Present:

Members of the Committee

Councillors Sarah Boad, Richard Chattaway, Barry Lobbett, Carolyn Robbins, Chris Saint, Ray Sweet, John Whitehouse (Chair), and Chris Williams

Portfolio Holders

Councillor Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways

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

Councillor Richard Hobbs, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety

Officers

David Abbott, Democratic Services Officer

Jo Cooper, Concessionary Travel Manager

Graeme Fitton, Head of Transport & Highways

Monica Fogarty, Communities Strategic Director

Kevin McGovern, Transport Operations Group Manager

Gary Phillips, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Andrew Savage, County Highways Contract & Policy Manager

Lesley Tregear, Warwickshire Youth Justice Manager

Invitees

David Pearce, Balfour Beatty Operations Manager

Other Councillors

Councillors Martyn Ashford, Jim Foster, and David Johnston

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillor Clare Hopkinson who was replaced by Councillor Robbins

Councillor Clare Watson

Councillor Alan Cockburn, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities

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

None.

(3) Chair's Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements:

- The Community Impact of Bus Service Reductions Task and Finish Group will report to the 14 November Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- A work programming session on 3 October was organised for the Committee to consider their priorities for the next three meetings.
- The Fire & Rescue Service organised a briefing session for new members at their headquarters on the 4 October between 2pm and 4pm.

(4) Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

Matters Arising

Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP)
The Chair requested that the draft CWLEP Constitution report was circulated to the Committee so they could consider it and attend the relevant Portfolio Holder decision making session if necessary. Monica Fogarty agreed to circulate the report to members outside of the meeting.

2. Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

3. Questions to the Portfolio Holders

Questions to Councillor Richard Hobbs, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety

Retained Fire Fighters

The Chair asked the Portfolio Holder to update the Committee on Warwickshire County Council's (WCC) position on retained fire fighters, particularly in relation their involvement in complex incidents (e.g. chemical fires).

The Portfolio Holder responded that last year's budget allocated more funding for the training of retained fire fighters and that had yielded benefits. However, retained fire fighters for complex incidents do not always have the experience necessary and therefore wouldn't be used.

Councillor Richard Chattaway requested the following information:

- How many retained fire fighters are there in Warwickshire
- How many times have retained fire fighters been called out in the past 12 months
- How many retained fire fighters are Breathing Apparatus trained

The Chair requested that the issues raised by members were addressed in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) working group.

Strategic Commissioning

Sarah Boad asked the Portfolio Holder if the Strategic Commissioning process had been worthwhile, or if the resources could have been spent better elsewhere.

Gary Phillips, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, informed the Committee that the service had used the Strategic Commissioning process to prepare for future challenges and that it had ultimately had a positive impact. The Fire Service had completed the options appraisal stage and a report was going before Corporate Board on 25 October 2012.

The Chair requested a review of the Fire and Rescue Service's Strategic Commissioning process following its conclusion.

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

Community Libraries

Sarah Boad asked the Portfolio Holder for an update on Community Libraries, and if he felt they were sustainable.

The Portfolio Holder responded that the community run libraries were progressing well so far and while it was early in to their operation, the signs were promising. A Portfolio Holders briefing session was held on 27 September to discuss this area in more detail.

The Chair requested an update on the Library Transformation project for the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 14 November.

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

Local Speed Limits

The Chair asked the Portfolio Holder if he was sending a formal response to the Department for Transportation consultation 'Setting Local Speed Limits'.

The Portfolio Holder responded that officers would be sending a response and agreed to circulate it to the Committee after the meeting.

4. Highways Maintenance Contract Review

Andrew Savage, County Highways Contract & Policy Manager presented the report that detailed the performance measures related to the highways maintenance contract awarded to Balfour Beatty. The new contract, worth around £20m per year, started on 5 May 2011 and involved the transfer of 105 staff from the previous contractor.

David Pearce, Balfour Beatty Operations Director addressed the Committee and informed members that the new contract presented some big challenges, such as the transfer of staff and a major change to the style of contract which aimed to deliver more value for money, and encourage new and better ways of working.

The level of member involvement was far greater in Warwickshire than other Local Authority partners and that had been a benefit to the service; positive member support helped WCC to form links with Solihull Council and Coventry City Council.

Councillor Chris Saint asked how regularly works were maintained.

Andrew Savage responded that maintenance issues were dealt with by Area teams and were ranked by risk. If there was flooding across a road then that would go to the top of the list. Due to extreme weather and flooding the demand was high in year one and sometimes exceeded the resources available.

The Chair asked how Balfour Beatty dealt with poor performance from sub-contractors.

David Pearce responded that all sub-contractors performance was monitored very closely and in most cases they do a good job. Balfour Beatty also monitored their own internal processes and procedures for dealing with sub-contractors. Sometimes the procedures and process have to change; sometimes the contractor has to be changed.

The Chair asked if officers thought there was a sufficient level of member involvement and visibility. At the transport seminars, schemes come forward that aren't a priority.

Graeme Fitton responded that if schemes come forward that aren't a priority, members should contact the relevant officers and they will re-assess.

Members felt that they lacked the information about how officers arrive at the prioritised lists of schemes. Members need a better understanding of that process to ensure WCC makes the right decisions.

Councillor Peter Butlin said that information could be provided to the Committee. Currently is just a ranked list of schemes.

Councillor Richard Chattaway asked what action was being taken where there had been KPI failures.

Andrew Savage responded that WCC was working together with Balfour Beatty on ensuring the KPIs matched the outcomes that WCC wanted to achieve.

Resolved

1. That the Committee receive a briefing note on the position of the contract 6 months into year 2, with particular reference to modified or rebased KPIs.
2. That a review of the contract after one year be added to the work programme.

The Chair thanked all of those involved in delivering the Highways Maintenance contract and thanked David Pearce for attending and answering member's questions.

5. Street Lighting Energy Savings Task and Finish Group Final Report

Councillor Jim Foster presented the report and thanked the Street Lighting Engineers for their diligent work on the part-night lighting project. Councillor Foster also thanked Democratic Services for the support provided during the review.

The Councillors on the Task and Finish Group believed that there were good reasons for moving to part-night lighting but felt it was important to keep the scheme under review to ensure the safety of residents. Councillors also encouraged the use of energy efficient LED lighting going forward where appropriate.

The Chair asked what percentage of WCC's lights would be switched off. A recent freedom of information request put the figure at between 61% and 71%, while the WCC website had a figure of 80%.

Officers responded that it would be around 70%. In some of the public engagement documents a figure of 80% was given but that was based on an early estimate done in 2009/10. Working with the Police and Community Safety partners has meant that the figure had reduced since that time but the savings of £500,000 would still be made.

Councillor Richard Chattaway, seconded by Councillor Ray Sweet proposed an alternative recommendation to that of the main report. The Committee voted on the alternative recommendation and it was defeated.

Councillor Barry Lobbett, seconded by Councillor Chris Saint, moved the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group report. The Chair proposed adding a recommendation to the main report of the Task and Finish Group requesting that Cabinet endorse the part-night lighting decision made as part of the budget process in 2011.

Resolved

That the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, with the additional recommendation as set out below.

Additional Recommendation:

The Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend that Cabinet endorse the decision to operate part-night lighting in Warwickshire.

The Chair asked for the minutes of the meeting and the minority report to be sent to Cabinet with the amended report of the Task and Finish Group.

6. Concessionary Travel Scheme

Jo Cooper, Concessionary Travel Manager, presented the report and informed the Committee that the response to the public consultation was very good, with over 900 people saying they were happy with the scheme as it was.

Councillors believed that bus passes had substantial social benefits for older people and the 9am start time was very popular. The report showed that moving the time back to 9.30am wouldn't necessarily save money because people would make their journeys at a later time.

The Chair highlighted two main issues of concern for the Committee; the 9am start time and companion passes.

Kevin McGovern informed the Committee that bus-pass holders weren't informed by the District and Borough Councils that companion passes would be discontinued so there was a significant response from the consultation. The service didn't anticipate any extra funding to provide companion passes going forward.

Resolved

That the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the final Concessionary Travel scheme prior to approval by Cabinet.

7. Warwickshire Youth Justice Plan 2012/13

Lesley Tregear, Youth Justice and Family Intervention Service Manager, presented the report. The report showed the service to have been performing well against national indicators - Warwickshire is currently one of the top performing local authorities in the Country.

Warwickshire had recently been chosen as the first local authority to undergo a multi-disciplinary Youth Justice inspection that included inspectors from the probation service, the constabulary, the care quality commission and Ofsted.

Education, training and employment were highlighted as areas of concern - the tough economic environment makes fulfilling those targets very challenging. The reform of the PRU has led to improvements in this area; following the reforms 100% of young people are now in education, but very not for the requisite 25 hours per week. The 25 hour education target often isn't achievable because the number of hours provided depends on the school that purchases the provision. The Chair asked that the issue be referred to the Children and Young People OSC.

Substance misuse was also highlighted as another area of concern due to an increase in some areas. Currently the Home Office funds substance misuse workers but that could be affected by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The impact of the Police Commissioner was discussed - the Commissioner will have significant budget responsibilities and it will be important for Warwickshire County Council and partner organisations to show the value that services such as substance misuse workers have on the outcomes for communities in Warwickshire and that ultimately it is in the Police's best interest to continue funding these types of services.

Councillor Richard Hobbs, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, informed the Committee that a paper was being written to present the benefits of various areas of community safety funding to the Police Commissioner and the Police and Crime Panels.

Resolved

1. That a benchmarking note comparing Warwickshire's Youth Justice Service to similar Local Authorities be presented to members at Full Council.
2. That the Committee receive a briefing note following the inspection of the Youth Justice Service covering performance and areas for improvement.
3. That the issue of 25 hours of education provision be referred to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

8. Work Programme 2012/13

The Committee approved the latest version of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny work programme.

9. Any Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

The Committee rose at 15.05pm

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Chair