

The Corporate Services and Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee met at the Shire Hall, Warwick on the 16 September 2009.

Present:

Members of the Committee:

Councillors	John Appleton (Chair)
	Martin Barry
	Peter Butlin
	Chris Davis
	Jim Foster
	Mike Gittus (Vice Chair)
	Bob Hicks
	Brian Moss
	Martin Shaw
	Dave Shilton
	David Wright

Other Councillors

Councillor Martin Heatley, Cabinet Member for Resources
Councillor Richard Hobbs, Cabinet Member for Community Safety
Councillor Heather Timms, Cabinet Member for Customers, Workforce and Partnership.
Councillor Chris Williams

Officers:

Customers, Workforce and Governance

Jean Hardwick, Democratic Services

Fire and Rescue Service

Glen Ranger, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Resources Directorate

Dave Clarke, Strategic Director of Resources
Virginia Rennie, Group Manager, Budget and Technical
Phil Triggs, Treasury and Pensions Group

1. General

(1) Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Martyn Ashford and Richard Chattaway and DCC Andy Parker, Warwickshire Police.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

Members declared interests as follows –

- (1) Councillor Martin Barry – personal interest in relation to agenda item 8, Fire and Rescue Service Improvement Plan, because of his friendship with a number of Fire Fighters;
- (2) Councillor David Wright – personal interest in relation to all items as an Executive Member of Rugby Borough Council.

(3) Remit of Corporate Services and Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee's remit, as agreed by Council on 23 June 2009, was noted.

(4) Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2009 be approved and signed by the Chair.

There were no matters arising.

(5) Feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Board

The Chair reported on the key messages from the Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB) meetings as follows -

July 2009

1. The OSB would have a strategic role in co-ordinating the work of the County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSC) and partnership scrutiny in Warwickshire;
2. The OSB was a partnership body and all partners had been asked to nominate a representative to join the Board;
3. The OSB would be seeking to promote joint scrutiny among all public sector partners in Warwickshire, in order to maximise resources and avoid duplication;
4. The OSB would scrutinise LAA performance, outcome of CAA, Sustainable Communities Strategy – to identify issues of concern and commission joint scrutiny exercises as appropriate;
5. There would be a standing item on the agenda of each OSC meeting entitled "Feedback from O&S Board" to enable members to be kept informed of the work of the Board.

September 2009

1. The OSB now had representation from all its partners, who were all present at the meeting, with the exception of the Police Authority;

2. The draft work programmes that were produced by OSC's through their July workshops were discussed, providing a critical friend challenge to ensure work programmes were focussed on high priority areas – relevant work programme for each OSC were circulated;
3. An in-depth review work programme was agreed based on the suggested in-depth reviews arising from work programming workshops. Only those issues identified as high priority had been progressed. The review into Alcohol Abuse had been flagged up as a potential joint review with partners;
4. Budget scrutiny would be carried out as per previous years with Chair, Vice Chairs and Party Spokespersons from each OSC meeting to scrutinise SDLT budget report and Cabinet budget proposals;
5. Each OSC meeting will have a Portfolio Holder update session as part of the process of holding the executive to account.

The Chair reported that the Leader of the Council had offered to attend a future meeting to report on the Public Service Board action plan.

2. Public Question Time (Standing Order 34)

Question from Bidford-on-Avon Parish Council – Presented by Mrs Keeley, member of the Parish Council and Elisabeth Uggerlose, Clerk to the Parish Council (revised question following launch of the Improvement Plan consultation)

Following the decision at the Council Cabinet meeting of 30th July 2009 to “support the Chief Fire Officer in developing proposals for widespread consultation, designed to ensure that Warwickshire has a fire service that fully meets the needs of the 21st century”, Bidford-on-Avon Parish Council and the local community are extremely concerned about the closure of its local fire station – a fire station that has served its community faithfully for some 40 years; a dedicated crew that has an attendance record to be envied; a local crew that came to the assistance of the many residents of Bidford, Broom and Marlcliff during the July 2007 floods.

However, the Parish Council feels very strongly that it wants unequivocal assurances from Warwickshire County Council and the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service that

- It will be a proper full and meaningful consultation, which includes the question “do you wish to see fire stations closed”?
- The consultation includes details of the closure of specific stations with full and detailed reasons given for the closures and the benefits that will be forthcoming from them
- The consultation includes a detailed risk assessment that clearly shows the level of service that will be provided to every household and business now and in the future, bearing in mind the proposed increase in population in the county
- That the Full Council (not just the members of the Cabinet) will make its decision **AFTER** the consultation has been made, and the comments made

by the people of Warwickshire has been properly considered and assessed and not **BEFORE**. The people of Warwickshire **DO NOT WANT A RUBBER STAMP CONSULTATION**.

In response DCFO Glen Ranger said that –

1. The consultation had already started and would be full and meaningful. The consultation did not, however, include the question “do you wish to see fire stations closed?” The questionnaire had been designed to draw out meaningful and useful responses, as opposed to one word answers;
2. In the area where a station was no longer required specific details of the reasons would be provided;

Councillor Richard Hobbs responded that the Council would not make its decision until the consultation had taken place, bearing in mind the increase in population in the county and the fire risks in specific areas. He hoped that where objections had been made to particular proposals the reasons for improvements had been taken on board and understood before comments were made.

Councillor Hobbs added that he had made contact with Bidford-on-Avon Parish Council and had concerns about the change of resources in that area . He had offered to attend individual meetings of parish councils and partners to ensure that the reasons for the improvement plan were fully understood. The public consultation dates had been arranged and circulated. He would ensure that these dates were widely publicised and he would endeavour to attend all of these meetings subject to his availability.

In reply to a question he said he anticipated that the decision would be made at full Council but he would need to seek legal advice on this issue.

The Chair thanked Mrs. Keeley and Mrs. Uggerlose for attending the meeting and said he would ensure that the response to their revised question would be forwarded to them.

3. Update on Debt Recovery incorporating the 2008/09 Annual Report

The Strategic Director of Resources presented his report which updated Members on the large over 42 days debts outstanding including a look at the debt recovery performance during 2008/09. He highlighted that –

1. With regard to the debts outstanding from the PCT the situation had improved but would be monitored to ensure that the improvement was maintained;
2. A new problem had arisen relating to Section 106 and 278 agreements, which reflected the impact of the economic recession and which required a cautious approach.
3. He would be bringing a further monitoring report to the Committee in 6 months time but considered it unlikely that there would be a significant improvement in the economic climate during that time. He would, however, continue to work with the district and borough councils to endeavour to secure developer contribution up front.

In reply to questions and comments he -

1. Explained that the Council's approach to debt recovery was considered harder than other councils and operated within recognised best practice guidance and with a formal and standardized approach;
2. Undertook to consider further the initiative undertaken by Rugby Borough Council in connection with securing Section 106 and 278 agreements on a self-financing basis and would arrange for this to be placed on the agenda of the joint district/ borough and county council regular meetings;
3. Said that any initiatives undertaken to recover debt needed to take account the impact that action might have on the reputation of the council because of the possibility of making people unemployed;

The Chair thanked the Strategic Director for Resources for his presentation and confirmed that the Committee shared his view that outstanding debts should be pursued energetically.

4. Treasury Management Monitoring Report 2009/10

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Resources, which set out the latest position with regard to the Council's treasury management process during 2009/10.

Virginia Rennie and Phil Trigg (with the aid of power point presentations, copies of which were circulated at the meeting) provided background information and highlighted issues around treasury and capital management across the authority to assist members in developing an understanding in relation to both these issues and as part of developing the Committee's work programme and as potential areas for future scrutiny.

The Chair thanked the officers for their interesting and thought provoking presentations and asked that the Committee receive regular treasury management reports. The officers undertook to bring a report to the 8 December 2009 meeting on how Members can be involved in the capital programme.

5. Provisional Items for Future Meetings and Forward Plan Items Relevant to the work of this Committee

(a) Provisional Items for Future Meetings

The Committee noted the provisional items for future meetings. In reply to a proposal for a special meeting of the Committee to discuss the Fire and Rescue Service Improvement Plan, the Chair said he would bear this suggestion in mind should a situation arise that warranted a meeting.

(b) Forward Plan Items Relevant to the work of this Committee (Cabinet only)

The Committee noted the future Cabinet items relevant to the work of this Committee.

6. Any Other Items

None

7. Report Containing Confidential or Exempt Information

There were no items of a confidential or exempt nature.

8. Fire and Rescue Service – Improvement Plan – Verbal Report (Deputy Chief)

Councillor Richard Hobbs reported that the Improvement Plan had been launched on Monday with a press conference and that he had already given presentations to 15 parish councils including one in the catchment area of one of the stations identified for closure, where a positive reception had been received. He had also offered to attend Bidford on Avon Parish Council meeting. Concern had been expressed about the consultation dates and requests received for them to be changed had had to be resisted because of the many other competing meetings.

DCFO Glen Ranger reported that following Cabinet's decision in July the 12-week consultation period had started the previous Monday following extensive staff briefing particularly in the areas that would be affected by the proposals. A series of public consultation meetings would be held between the 28 September and 19 November which would be attended by both the Chief Fire Officer and him, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer. Council in December and Cabinet would then consider the matter in January 2010, but this might be subject to change.

DCFO Ranger added that the newly appointed Chief Fire Officer, Graham Smith would be taking up his position at the beginning of October and would be tackling some of the major issues.

He further reported on the –

1. Excellent full scenario training being provided at the Fire Service College and the installation of mobile data terminals for all front line appliances. In response to a suggestion from Members he said that a visit to the Fire Service College could be arranged if requested;
2. Target to double the amount of fire smoke detectors installed in residential property that would be undertaken with the involvement and help of Age Concern. However, the Service would want to further increase the number of detectors fitted significantly.

In reply to a question DCFO Ranger said that the Fire Service had a strong commitment to enable retained fire fighters who were affected by the proposals to become full time fire-fighters, those who could not be absorbed within the service would be offered redundancy. Councillor Hobbs added that in the future the 48 hours working time directive would impact on the ability of retained fire fighters, who undertook this duty as secondary employment, to fulfil their role.

The Chair thanked Councillor Hobbs and DCFO Ranger for their presentation and referred to the challenging time ahead.

SCFO Ranger concluded by saying that the Audit Committee and the IDeA had both

recently commented on the willingness of people within the Service, and that this was pleasing, given the proposed programme of change.

The Committee rose at 4.35 p.m.

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Chair of Committee