

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee County Council

Date of Committee 20 March 2007

Report Title Annual Report of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Summary The annual report summarises the work undertaken by the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the last 12 months

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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? No.

Background papers None

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-

Details to be specified

- Other Committees Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Local Member(s)
- Other Elected Members
- Cabinet Member Councillor Martin Heatley for Info.
- Chief Executive
- Legal Sarah Duxbury
- Finance
- Other Chief Officers David Carter, John Deegan for Info.
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police

Other Bodies/Individuals

FINAL DECISION YES

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

Further consideration by this Committee

To Council

To Cabinet

To an O & S Committee

To an Area Committee

Further Consultation

County Council - 20th March 2007.

**Annual Report of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**

**Report of the Chair of Environment Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**

Recommendation

The Council is recommended to:

- 1) Comment on the work undertaken by the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the last 12 months
- 2) Suggest items for consideration by the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2007.

All Overview and Scrutiny Committees are required to present an Annual Report to the County Council, on a rolling programme. At its meeting on the 1st March 2007 the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the contents of our Annual report for 2006. Enclosed with this agenda, is the Annual Report, summarising the work that we have undertaken during 2006 and highlighting future areas of work for 2007.

COUNCILLOR KEN BROWNE
Chair of Environment
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee

Shire Hall
Warwick

1st March 2007

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 2006

Foreword by Cllr Ken Browne Chair of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Welcome to the annual report of Warwickshire County Council's Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The last twelve months have witnessed a significant level of change both with the County Council and with the external factors that influence our work. The Council underwent a major restructuring that resulted in nine departments being transformed into a leaner organisation comprising just six directorates. Throughout all of these changes the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee has continued to undertake its key role, contributing to the democratic process and striving to ensure greater transparency and accountability.

The Council's commitment to the Overview and Scrutiny function was demonstrated when it undertook a major review of the service, which concluded in October 2006. During 2007 and into 2008 the committee will aspire to implement the recommendations of that review. The profile of the committee's work programme is to be enhanced with much more input from elected Members and our partners and we will also seek to increase public engagement by holding meetings in community locations and scrutinising issues that really matter to the people of Warwickshire. The members of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee are keen to develop their knowledge and understanding both of the issues covered by their remit and what is needed to ensure effective scrutiny.

There is a series of new and exciting issues for the committee to turn its attention to next year. "Strong and Prosperous Communities", the Local Government White Paper published last year set out a series of new innovations concerning Overview and Scrutiny. These include extending scrutiny's remit to other service providers, encouraging more use of "area" overview and scrutiny committees with extended use of co-option, the right to recommend an independent inspection if a service has failed to adequately address local concerns and the encouragement of a focus for committees on outcomes agreed as part of Sustainable Community Strategies, Children and Young People's Plans, Local Area Agreements and other key plans.

One of the biggest challenges facing us in the coming months and years is how we address climate change. In recent months the committee's attention has become more focused on this major issue with much of our business being influenced by the overwhelming need to confront it.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that it would not be possible for the committee to operate alone. I would like, therefore, to take this opportunity to thank the many officers of the council that have worked for and supported the committee during 2006, and to other authorities and organisations that have helped with information and advice.

Did you know?

- That Warwickshire County Council maintains a network that includes 3,802km of roads, 2,638km of footways and 46,000 street lights that have an asset value in excess of £2 billion.
- Almost twelve million bus passenger journeys are made every year in Warwickshire
- In 1994, 764 people were killed or seriously injured on Warwickshire roads. By last year this was down to 406. Close to a reduction of 50%
- Warwickshire County Council uses approximately 21.5 GigaWatt hours of electricity each year and which is presently supplied as 100% Green electricity. As the electricity is produced via Green sources this saves approximately 9,245 Tonnes of Carbon Dioxide being pumped into the atmosphere for supplying electricity to the lights.
- In 2006 a customer satisfaction survey indicated that the County Council's highway maintenance contract with Carillion is working well.

Remit and Membership of the Committee

To advise on the development of policies and scrutinise performance in relation to environment, transport and rural affairs including highways, public transport, waste management, environmental services, sustainability, smallholdings and rural estates.

Membership of the committee from 9th May 2006 is as follows:



Cllr John Appleton



Cllr George Atkinson



Cllr Ken Browne (Chair)



Cllr Jose Compton



Cllr Gordon Collett



Cllr Eithne Goode



Cllr Mick Jones



Cllr Katherine King



Cllr Joan Lea



Cllr Brian Levy



Cllr Ray Sweet (Vice Chair)



Cllr John Whitehouse

Summary of Work 2006

We have considered and advised on a number of issues throughout the year.

Performance Monitoring

- Full year and half year performance
- Corporate Business Plan targets

Policy Development

- Trees in the highway – Recording of condition and proposed future programme
- Consultation on the Warwickshire Transport Plan
- Review of Speed Management Strategy
- Street lighting hours of operation
- Highway liabilities
- Climate Change Strategy

Detailed Scrutiny

On some occasions issues have been brought to us that have required more than the usual amount of examination by the committee. Three such examples are listed below.

Carillion – At the end of 2005 we had a select committee meeting to scrutinise the management of the highways maintenance contract held and operated by Carillion. The final report from that event was presented to us early in 2006. From that report a series of actions was agreed by the (then) Department of Planning, Transport and Economic Strategy to address any outstanding shortcomings in the management of the contract. Having received the report, the committee recognised that it would not be sufficient for it to simply move on and forget the issue so a further (update) report was requested for the September 2006 meeting. That report informed us that significant progress had been made with Carillion and that many of the early “teething” problems that had been encountered had now been addressed. Clearly, as with any partnership in business it is essential that we continue to monitor its evolution and this we intend to do so through further updates from officers.

Leamington Urban Management Programme (LUMP) - On 12th January 2006 Cabinet approved the outline Capital Programme for Transport for 2006/2007 and this included an increased allocation for the Leamington Urban Mixed Priority (LUMP) scheme. As there was a large increase in costs, £1.28m, Cabinet requested that Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the funding issues relating to this scheme. On the 8th June 2006 we considered a joint report from the Strategic Directors of Environment and Economy and Resources detailing how the costs of the scheme had been estimated, why they had increased so dramatically, what measures had been taken to mitigate the escalating costs in Phase 1 and what steps were being taken to ensure that there was no overspend in Phase 2. During the ensuing consideration of the matter the committee heard of the unforeseen problems encountered during the execution of the project. These included shallow cellars, unmapped services (electrical cables, pipes etc) and buried concrete obstructions. Equipped with a greater understanding of the issues the committee was able to undertake an ongoing monitoring role and is awaiting a final report from the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy on the final cost of the project.

National Free Concessionary Travel Scheme - In April 2006 the County Council considered the announcement made by the Chancellor in March regarding the proposed extension of the concessionary fares scheme from 2008. This committee looked into the issue of concessionary bus travel and acknowledged not only the benefits that such a scheme would bring to many people but also the good work that was being done by our officers to increase bus patronage. However, we were concerned that people who do not live on bus routes do not benefit from this scheme. In addition we were concerned that all five of the district and borough councils in Warwickshire administer different schemes. It was agreed that a letter should be sent to the Warwickshire MPs calling for our concerns to be relayed to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee and the Local Government Association with a request that adequate funding be secured for the scheme.

Issues for Current and Future Consideration

As part of the review of Overview and Scrutiny, consideration has been given to the development of a core work programme ensuring that key issues are tackled in a timely way and allocated appropriately. Work on developing the programme is ongoing and will take a while longer as we are keen to be as inclusive as possible, working closely with our partners. In the meantime, we are keen to identify, through a robust selection procedure, a number of important issues for in-depth consideration.

In response to concerns we raised when looking at performance, we have invited representatives from Central Networks to join us at our April 2007 meeting to explore ways in which street light serviceability can be recorded more accurately. We are also examining our targets around the amount of domestic waste being sent to landfill sites and will be looking for the concerns that we raised around those targets to have been addressed in the 2007 Corporate Business Plan.

In terms of our overview or policy development function we will be engaged in the development of

1. the County Council's new rural strategy for Warwickshire
2. Consideration of the formation of a Waste Management Company for Warwickshire
3. the County's Speed Management Strategy
4. the proposal to reduce the hours of operation of street lighting
5. Issues around flooding and waste water treatment

We are also aware that we must not lose sight of the issues we have considered previously and will revisit those issues where we consider there is a need to do so.

As well as examining these important issues ourselves we are particularly keen to ensure that our partners and communities have the opportunity to have an input into the Overview and Scrutiny process. As part of the preliminary work on both the Speed Management Strategy and the proposal to reduce the hours of operation of our street lights we have emphasised the need to ensure that people are thoroughly consulted. Once that consultation is complete we will wish to have a very close look at the messages that have come from it. We are also aware of the benefits of public involvement in our meetings and whilst such involvement has been limited to date we will be working with our officers to explore ways in which this can be increased.

Conclusion

The reconfiguration of Warwickshire County Council along with the review of the Overview and Scrutiny function has given a new impetus to our work. Whilst 2006 was a good year for this committee I look forward to 2007 when I am confident that our work will add considerably to the quality of the services that we provide.