

**Minutes of a Meeting of the North Warwickshire Area Committee held on 1 February 2006 at the Magistrate's Court Building, Sheepy Road, Atherstone**

**Present:** -

**Members of the Committee**

**Councillors** Peter Fowler  
Richard Grant (Vice Chair)  
Colin Hayfield  
Joan Lea  
Brian Moss  
Mick Stanley  
Ray Sweet (Chair)

**Officers** David Clarke, Strategic Director of Resources  
Stuart Ikeringill, Group Manager  
Adrian Litvinoff, Area Manager, Library & Information Service  
Ann Mawdsley, Senior Committee Administrator  
Alwin McGibbon, Health Scrutiny Officer  
Roger Newham, Acting Head of Transport Planning Unit  
Jo Roberts, Area Administrative Office  
Martin Stott, Deputy Director  
Kate Wilding, Participation Worker  
Alison Williams, Area Manager North Warwickshire (from 1/12/05)  
Catherine Witham, Senior Solicitor

**Also in Attendance** Jacque Aucott, North Warwickshire CVS  
Cheryl Bridges, North Warwickshire Borough Council  
Davina Key, North Warwickshire CVS  
16 Members of the Public attended.

**1. General**

The Chair paid tribute to PC Alan Spittles who had been a well known and hard working member of the community and that his death was a sad loss of a dedicated North Warwickshire Police Officer. Councillor Joan Lea highlighted the thanks and appreciation of the North Warwickshire community and in particular Water Orton for his work within the community and the police force and the continuity he provided. Councillor Peter Fowler added that he was grateful to Alan for all he had done and in particular for the work to bring the Skate Park in Coleshill to fruition.

The Chair paid tribute to John Taylor who had worked for many years at Baddesley pit and had been a hardworking and good friend both in the pit and in the community, where he would be remembered for giving people encouragement. He added that North Warwickshire would be a weaker place without him and noted the appreciation of all the work he had done for different groups, particularly in Piccadilly. Councillor Brian Moss said that he had had the pleasure and honour of writing an obituary for John and that the large numbers of people lined up to attend his funeral had been a tribute to him.

Davina Key said that she had worked with both these men and it made such a difference to work with people like both Alan and John in a community, without whom communities would not be able to thrive.

**(1) Apologies**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Anne Forwood.

**(2) Members' Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

Councillor Colin Hayfield declared a personal interest in Item 4 as an Executive Director of North Warwickshire Primary Care Trust.

Councillor Ray Sweet declared a personal interest in Item 5, as his son is a volunteer footpath officer for Baddesley Ensor.

**(3) Minutes of the Meeting held on the 16 November 2005**

The minutes of the North Warwickshire Area Committee meeting held on 16 November 2005 were agreed as a correct record.

**Matters Arising**

**Page 4. – 5.4. North Warwickshire Area Community Education Annual Report – October 2005**

Councillor Joan Lea thanked Alison Williams and Alistair Rigby for the information they had provided on the activities of the WEA and added that she hoped that the programme of lifelong learning would be widened.

**Page 6. - 7.4.iii. North Warwickshire Area Business Plan 2005/06 – Half-year Update**

Adrian Litvinoff reported that the decrease in reading rates was due to the following:

- The "Book Crawl" project had been introduced for 0-5 year-olds and these figures were included.
- The reading challenge was a national scheme and anecdotal evidence showed that some children did not like the theme chosen by Government for the year.
- An adult reading challenge had been introduced and it had been decided that in the future this should take place at a different time to the children to allow staff to focus their attention on one group.

**Page 6. - 7.4.iv. North Warwickshire Area Business Plan 2005/06 – Half-year Update**

It was reported that officers from the Economy and Environment Directorate had been approached for a response regarding the

progress on environmental traffic calming measures at Manor Road, Mancetter and Harpers Lane/Nuneaton Road, Mancetter.

## **2. Public Question Time**

### **(1) Question from Nether Whitacre Parish Council**

"When will measures be taken to improve the current problems with traffic volume and excessive speeds, particularly at commuter times, in 30 and 40 mph restricted zones in Whitacre Heath? Nether Whitacre PC's requests for a review of measures, implemented in 2001, have been refused as have requests for mobile speed camera monitoring from time to time."

*Martin Stott indicated that this was a difficult issue and related to police enforcement and while there were some possible options in theory there were no areas in the village suitable for the location of a van or motorcycle to accurately measure speeding. Any measures taken by the County Council would be very expensive and Nether Whitacre was not an accident black spot.*

*Following discussion Members agreed that the problems should be revisited with Highways Agency and Police to agree the best way forward.*

### **(2) Questions raised at the Area Forum South**

Councillor Hayfield put forward the following questions that had been raised at the Area Forum South meeting held on 31 January 2006:

"A request had been received from Astley Parish Council for speed trigger signs to be installed on Nuthurst Lane."

"A letter had been received from Mr A E Mathews requesting that speed reducing measures be put in place on the road from Fillongley Crossroads towards Nuneaton."

*The Chair requested that both requests be investigated.*

### **(3) Question from Howard Vero, Tel.: 01827 714261**

"I wish to enquire about the structural condition of the Library in Atherstone. You may be aware that NWBC, with the help of a grant from the Arts Council, has appointed architects to produce a structural condition survey of the Atherstone Memorial Hall and then to produce a feasibility study for improving the building's facilities. I understand that due to the building's poor condition and high costs of remedial work that they are likely to recommend a replacement building. The Library is a building of the same age and likely to suffer from concrete cancer, and similarly may need premature replacement. Can you let us know what contact there

has been between the Borough and the County with a view to looking at the whole area comprehensively?

Can you also confirm that the building housing the Clinic (behind the Library) occupied by the Primary Care Trust is still owned by WCC, and if so what is the structural condition of this building.”

*The Chair responded that the question would be passed to Property Services for response to Mr Vero.*

**Part A Non-Executive Functions**

None.

**Part B Executive Functions**

**3. 2006/07 Budget Prospects**

David Clarke explained that as part of the budget consultation process for 2006/2007, presentations were being given to the County Council's Area Committees where members of the public would have the opportunity to ask questions in a political environment. He outlined the following points:

- Council Tax charges were made up of charges from the County Council, District/Borough Councils, Parish/Town Councils and the Policy Authority. The County Council was the largest of these with a gross budget of around £637m (£500m net) in the current year.
- Council tax made up 29% of the County Council's funding, the largest portion of which came from Government Grants.
- Final settlement details had been received from Government on 31 January announcing the grant for the next two years and stipulating a capping of council tax increases for this year at 5%.
- For the first time Government was funding schools directly through the Dedicated Schools Grant. This would be in the sum of £255.843m, representing a 6.3% increase for schools. The amount could not be reduced by the County Council, but could be topped up.
- As a result of the Children Act, the County Council had split the Social Services Department with Children's Services joining Education Services to form a Children, Young People and Families Directorate. Adult Social Services would become part of the Adult, Health & Community Services. The split of services exposed the disparity on spend between children and adults and Members would have to decide how best to address the resulting issues.
- The four main pressure drivers on the budget were inflation, demography, loss of funding and statutory requirements.
- The County Council had a three-pronged approach to achieving efficiency savings, which were-
  - Top slicing from all departments.
  - A programme of modernisation service reviews.
  - Value for money reviews.

The Chair opened the discussion to members of the public.

**Mr Howard Vero**

Mr Vero noted that in the private sector when a company was under pressure to cut costs, they looked at making cuts within the organisation and then looked at whether outsourcing of services would be cheaper.

*David Clarke replied that while there were some services that were kept in-house on principle such as quasi-regulatory and legal services, more specialist services were often outsourced, for example Highways Maintenance and Pension Fund Investments.*

**Mr John Collins**

Mr Collins noted that some years ago road patching gangs were located around the county. The service was now outsourced resulting in three gangs looking after the entire county with three managers and he felt the roads had deteriorated.

*David Clarke responded that the County Council was subject to extensive external assessment by the Audit Commission and the 2005 CPA inspection had shown that the County Council continued to improve in terms of value for money and while footpaths were in need of attention, Warwickshire roads were good. He added that the County Council tendered for services in order to get the work they needed to be done at a cheaper cost.*

*Roger Newham added that increased risk assessment was part of the business world now and that the County Council contracts were competitively tendered for. The nature of the Carillion contract for Highways Maintenance was that over time the real price paid for services decreased for the same level of provision resulting in more value for the pound paid. He noted that there were some services the private sector could do more efficiently than the public service.*

**Mr Whitmore**

Mr Whitmore said that roadworks were neglected in Dordon and the footpaths and gutters in the area of Churchill Lane were neglected.

*David Clarke responded that the County Council had to balance the level of service the public wanted against the level of council tax they were prepared to pay and there would always be areas where the public wanted more services.*

**Miss Michelle Bullimore**

Miss Bullimore said that she was worried that money for young people would be cut and asked what would happen if this happened.

*David Clarke replied that spending on young people and increased each year and recent history of the Authority had seen services for young people as a priority. While this was not expected to change for 2006/07, it would be down to each political group to decide how funding would be allocated.*

### **Mr Gerald Bartlam**

Mr Bartlam asked what percentage of council tax went into pensions?

*David Clarke responded that contrary to recent reports in the press, only about 7% or 8% of County Council expenditure went on pensions. This would be included in the information published on the website as part of the budget process.*

The Chair thanked the members of the public for their attendance and David Clarke for his presentation.

#### **4. Consultation & Appraisal of Proposed Reconfiguration of Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance NHS Trust.**

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development which outlined the appraisal produced by Malcolm Hazel, Chief Executive of Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance NHS Trust on the proposed reconfiguration of the Ambulance Trusts in the West Midlands, which was going through public consultation.

During the ensuing discussion Members made the following comments:

- The appraisal only presented one side of the argument, did not give other options and did not provide a sufficiently balanced picture to make a decision on.
- Members were disappointed that Malcolm Hazel had not attended the meeting to present the report.
- Members felt that while there were advantages within modernisation of strategic management structures, they would not support any decrease in the delivery of local service. Members agreed that there was a need to ensure that services were right for local people and remained at a high standard with accessibility for all, regardless of where they lived.
- The Proposed Reconfiguration of Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance NHS Trust would be considered at full Council on 21 February. Malcolm Hazel would be present at that meeting and Members would have the opportunity to debate the issues at that meeting.

#### **5. Draft Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Warwickshire**

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy presenting the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan following authorisation by the Cabinet on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005. The report included responses already received to the ongoing consultation exercise and outlined the proposed amendments to the Plan.

Stuart Ikeringill added the following points:

- i. The Statutory Plan had a timescale of 10 years but would be reviewed after five years in line with the Local Transport Plans.
- ii. The Definitive Map for North Warwickshire had been substantially completed and had highlighted the shortage of bridleways. The

- Plan had been altered to include a new target to address this shortage subject to available resources.
- iii. Once the Plan had been approved by the Cabinet, bidding would begin to fund as much work as possible from external sources.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

1. The intention of the Department was to continue to improve Warwickshire's Rights of Way but this would be an incremental and slow process.
2. Officers were aware of anomalies such as the Dosthill Water Ski Lakes and work was ongoing to divert pathways around developments where necessary.
3. Members noted the compliments received from the public and thanked the officers for the good report and work that had been done.
4. The problem of scooter bikes being used on public paths was being successfully dealt with by the police publicity offensive on crushing bikes.
5. There were changes to the law in terms of people's rights to bridle and pathways and changes to rights were expected which would impact on the use of the paths by quad bike and scooter riders.
6. Members requested that compliments be passed to the staff for their work on the Plan and the consultation and to the volunteer footpath officers for their contribution.

Resolved

That the North Warwickshire Area Committee endorse the Draft Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan; the results of the consultation exercise for the Plan and the proposed changes to the Plan.

## **6. Pooley Country Park and Heritage Centre**

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy updating Members on progress with the ongoing development of the site and facilities at Pooley Country Park and Heritage Centre.

Stuart Ikeringill added the following points:

- i. Contrary to recent negative press coverage, the County was continuing to invest in the Pooley Country Park and Heritage Centre considerably.
- ii. Investments had been made towards improvement of the site through the creation of canal moorings, installation of a high quality children's play area and an external toilet block.
- iii. A response was awaited to a bid made to English Partnerships for a range of development totalling over £1m.
- iv. The opening times had been scaled back so that the centre would only be opened during the week if there was a booking. This would be monitored and opening hours increased with an increase in the number of visitors.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

1. Members agreed that Pooley Fields was an asset to Polesworth and Warwickshire and welcomed the report.
2. The play equipment was checked at least once daily and was inspected annually by the insurers to ensure health and safety risks were minimised.
3. The Centre had been integrated into the Country Parks Portfolio and was publicised on the web and through widely distributed leaflets.
4. While it was acknowledged that the visitor area and general facilities could be improved, this would require major resources and large numbers of regular visitors.
5. The Committee agreed that a visit to the centre should be arranged in March/April.

Resolved

That Members continue to support the ongoing development of the Country Park and Heritage Centre.

## **7. Village Traffic Plans Officer**

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy discussing the creation of a new officer post to develop Village Traffic Plans in North Warwickshire.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

1. Members all agreed that having a post in place to deal with the traffic problems in all areas would be invaluable to the residents of North Warwickshire and were unanimous in their determination that a mechanism be found to ensure that the post be developed.
2. Members recorded their frustration at the lack of response to increasing traffic issues within North Warwickshire.
3. It was agreed that the criteria set by Government for traffic calming needed to be changed.

Martin Stott noted that the Strategic Director had attended the meeting on traffic issues held by the Area Committee and supported the recommendation of the Committee subject to available resources. He undertook to brief Members of the Committee as a matter of urgency, where the post was included within the budget.

Resolved by unanimous agreement

That resources should be identified within Planning, Transport and Economic Strategy (PTES) for 2006/07, to fund a new 3-year fixed term post to develop Village Traffic Plans in North Warwickshire.

## **8. Community Development Worker – Social Inclusion Funding**

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development seeking continued financial support for a



further three years from April 2006 for the Community Development Worker funded by North Warwickshire Area Committee since April 2003.

Davina Keys made the following points:

- i. Over the past three years the project had:
  - worked with more than 200 groups
  - brought £400,000 funding into North Warwickshire
  - had over 200 volunteers take training courses
  - introduced a Youth Support Worker.
- ii. More evening events were being held to cater for a larger number of people, covering a broader range of topics.
- iii. There were plans to start a reminiscence project in three villages.
- iv. Alistair Rigby's assistance and support was recognised.

During the ensuing discussions the following points were noted:

1. Members thanked Davina for the very important work she had done.
2. It was agreed that the post needed to continue but there was a need initially to look at all options to ensure that the post was kept sustainable in the long term.
3. There was a bid from the Library Service on reminiscence work and if this was successful, would provide an ideal base for partnership working.
4. The County Council were finalising their Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy. The CVS were also in the process of looking at the structure of their services and the changes brought about were expected to impact on the area of social inclusion.

It was agreed that in order to allow for the development of a more comprehensive three year project plan and options for delivering the Community Development Worker post, subject to the continuation of Social Inclusion Funding at an appropriate level, a decision on the Community Development Worker post was expected to be taken on the 22 March 2006, with revised arrangements to be in place for 1 June 2006.

With all Members voting in favour, it was resolved -

To extend the existing Agreement between Warwickshire County Council and the North Warwickshire Council for Voluntary Service Limited by a period of two months, to 31 May 2006.

## **9. North Warwickshire Well-being Fund – New Commissions & Proposal for Public Realm projects**

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development:

- detailing three new commissions for approval – Wellbeing Fund 2005/06  
Community Life Theme Group:  
'Increasing Community Involvement'  
'Cultural Diversity Event'

### 'Community Activity Audit'

- seeking an amendment to 'Provision of Learning Events' from Education & Life Long Learning Theme Group – new project value of £14,000
- detailing two new commissions for approval – Well-being Fund 2004/05  
Safer Communities Theme Group:  
'Community Mural'  
'Positive Diversionary Activities'
- proposing criteria for supporting Public Realm projects from Well-being Fund 2004 /05 and seeks approval for supporting a scheme in No Mans Heath.

Resolved that members:

1. Approve new commissions to the Well-being Fund (2005/06) from Community Life Theme group of the North Warwickshire Community Partnership for 'Increasing Community Involvement'; 'Cultural Diversity Event'; 'Community Activity Audit'
1. Approve new commissions to the Well-being Fund (2004/05) from Safer Communities Theme Group for 'Community Mural' and 'Positive Diversionary Activities'.
- 2.
3. Approve amendment to the commission to the Well-being Fund (2005/06) from Education & Life Long Learning Theme Group for 'Provision of Learning Events'.
4. Approve the proposal to allocate Wellbeing Funding (2004/05) to Public Realm initiatives and support the project in No Mans Heath.

### **10. Provisional Items for Future Meetings**

The Committee agreed the provisional items identified for future meetings.

### **11. Any Other Items**

None.

### **Date of next meeting**

The Committee noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Wednesday 22 March 2006 at the Magistrate's Court, Sheepy Road, Atherstone.

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Chair of Committee

The Committee rose at 8.15 p.m.