

Minutes of a Meeting of the North Warwickshire Area Committee held on 29 November 2006 at the Magistrate's Court Building, Sheepy Road, Atherstone

Present: -

Members of the Committee

Councillors Ray Sweet (Chair)
Richard Grant (Vice Chair)
Anne Forwood
Peter Fowler
Colin Hayfield
Joan Lea
Brian Moss

Officers Emma Andrews, Head of Arts Service
Kushal Birla, Head of Customer Service and Access
Julia Brook, Head of Rural and Management Services
Dave Clarke, Strategic Director of Resources
Martin Gibbins, Area Manager (SOA)
Mohammed Jamil, North Area Youth and Community Officer
Ann Mawdsley, Senior Committee Administrator
Alistair Rigby, Community Partnership Officer North Warwickshire
Joanne Roberts, Administrative Assistant North Warwickshire
Sian Stroud, Senior Solicitor
Kate Wilding, Participation Youth Worker

Also in Attendance Bob Trahern, North Warwickshire Borough Council
Debbie Horton, Voice 4m
8 Members of the Public attended.

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mick Stanley.

(2) Members' Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Members declared personal interests as set out below:

(1) by virtue of them serving as North Warwickshire Borough Councillors as follows:-

Councillors Peter Fowler, Colin Hayfield, Joan Lea, Brian Moss, Mick Stanley and Ray Sweet.

(3) Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 September 2006 and Matters Arising

The minutes of the North Warwickshire Area Committee meeting held on 13 September 2006 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

Page 2 - 2. Public Question Time - (1) Question from Sue Healy, Ansley Parish Council

Councillor Richard Grant reported that he had made a site visit with Joan Pritchard to Trentham Road and although they had not been able to meet with the contacts supplied by Sue Healy, an officer had made a follow-up visit and spoken to residents about their desired route for a dropped curb. He added that plans were now being prepared for the work to begin and this was a good example of successful working between Members, officers and the public.

2. Public Question Time

(1) Question from Mr Paul Reader, resident of New Arley and member of New Arley Parish Council

“Following the recent OFSTED Inspection, Herbert Fowler School in Arley has been placed in special measures. Could I ask what WCC as the LEA has offered by way of additional assistance to the school to resolve this issue?”

The Chair replied that as the question had been received late that a written reply would be sent to Mr Reader from the appropriate Directorate.

(2) Question from Mr Paul Reader, resident of New Arley and member of New Arley Parish Council

“Arley Parish Council recently write to Warwickshire County Council seeking improvement to the pavement outside the Methodist Chapel in Old Arley without success. Could the Area Committee investigate a possible solution to this matter?”

The Chair replied that as the question had been received late that a written reply would be sent to Mr Reader from the appropriate Directorate.

(3) Question from Debbie Horton, Voice4m

“As a member of Voice4m and a pupil at Queen Elizabeth School, I would like to raise the issue of traffic calming/speed reduction on Witherley Road, Atherstone.

The current speed limit is 40 miles per hour, the school have written to Mike O'Brien and Area Forum East has listed the issue as a priority.

Could the committee please look into the options of speed reduction or traffic calming on Witherley Road please?

Thank you"

The Chair replied that the matter would be investigated and a written response sent to Ms Horton. Councillor Richard Grant requested that he be given an opportunity to contribute towards the reply and added that it was useful to get the views of young people on issues as part of the evidence required to determine a plan of action.

3. 2007/08 Budget Prospects

Dave Clarke presented the budget prospects for Warwickshire County Council for 2007/08 which formed part of the overall consultation taking place at Area Committees. He added that this was in addition to a mori poll was being conducted to gather public opinion.

He made the following points:-

- In 2006/07, total spending £672m, with the Children, Young People & Families Directorate (£398m) and the Adult, Health & Community Directorate (£152m) accounted for 82%.
- The money making up the budget in 2006/07 originated from:
 - Business Rates £62m (9%) (collected by District Councils on behalf of the government and redistributed to local authorities).
 - Specific Grants £348m (52%) – grants which have to be spend for a specific purpose, the largest of which is the Dedicated Schools Grant (£ 256m) and is paid over to schools.
 - Revenue Support Grant £12m (2%).
 - Charges and Services £57m (8%).
 - Council Tax £193m (29%) – represents less than a third of the Council's income.
- Context of the Budget 2007/08 onwards
 - Internal:
 - Modernisation Agenda and new ways of working for the County Council, mainly:
 - Greater customer focus
 - Joining up with stakeholders through Local Area Agreements for delivery of all public services within Warwickshire.
 - Departmental restructure reducing nine departments to six directorates, which achieved an initial saving of £700,000, which was expected to increase in future years.

- No overall political control, requiring the agreement of at least two political groups to agree a budget.

External:

- White Paper on the structure of Local Government., requiring authorities to work together better and to improve services and save money and the empower communities.
- Lyons Report, commissioned by the Treasury for Sir Michael Lyons, a former Chief Executive of Birmingham City Council, to look at functions and funding of Local Government. The report was expected to be published in the near future with recommendations for changes.
- Capping – Council Tax increases would be capped at a maximum of 5%.

- 2007/08 + Budget Drivers

- Inflation
- Demographic pressures such as the increase in the number of older people which increased the demand on services.
- Loss of grant funding.
- Service improvement.
- Legislation requirements.

- Government Funding

The Dedicated Schools Grant was expected to rise by 5.6%, which was welcomed. The Revenue Support Grant and Business Rates were expected to rise 2.7% which was equivalent to 1.9% in real terms and therefore below the rate of inflation.

- Medium Term Financial Planning Strategy

The strategy was for (1) Inflation and capital financing costs and standstill pressures to be generally funded from Government Grants, Council Tax and Disinvestment. Developing the Authority (2) would be funded from cash efficiency savings and disinvestment funds. While (2) could be used to fund (1), development could not be funded through (1), meaning there would be no development without cash efficiency savings.

The Council were in a position where the funding available was approximately £8,995,000 to fund pressures of approximately £33,746,000 and would have to look at options such as:

- alternative sources of funding
- alternative charges for services
- reducing funding pressures.

The Chair thanked Dave Clarke for his presentation.

In response to public questions, the following points were made:

1. The County Council were in the process of changing their Intranet which would give greater capacity to integrate different programmes and would be implemented over the next three years.

2. The modernisation of the Council and the move to six Directorates had involved a rationalisation of posts and fewer jobs.
3. The new Local Government Pension Scheme was currently out to consultation and if agreed would not bring about much change in terms of cost or overall benefits but would increase employee contributions.

4. Progress of the Customer Service and Access Agenda

Kushal Birla, Head of Customer Service and Access and Bob Trahern (Assistant Director (Revenues and Benefits), North Warwickshire Borough Council) gave a verbal presentation on the progress in terms of Customer Service and the Access Agenda focussing on Atherstone and North Warwickshire in general.

Kushal Birla made the following points:

1. The Customer Service and Access Strategy had been approved by the Cabinet in June, outlining Warwickshire County Council's vision for customer service over the next three years.
2. It was clear that service users wanted greater choice in the ways they contacted councils, face-to-face, via telephone or the web, and there was a need to meet these choices in a sustainable way.
3. The County and the North Warwickshire Borough Council had agreed to set up a joint One Stop Shop facility in the Borough Council House in Atherstone and plans for this facility were tabled.
4. The concept for the One Stop Shop had been developed since June; building was expected to start in February culminating in the facility opening on 10 April 2007.

Bob Trahern added:

- i. The Borough Council had, together with all the District/Borough Councils and the County Council, invested in a Customer Relation Management System which now provided the platform to work in a more joined up way, and would facilitate responses to all queries in terms of management information.
- ii. 70% of queries to the Borough Council were received telephonically by the Contact Centre and the One Stop Shop would provide the face-to-face facility dealing with:
 - County and Borough issues
 - a PCT presence through surgeries, clinics and health and wellbeing events
 - IT and literacy training and sessions
 - Births/Deaths/Registrars services
 - PHILLIS (low level social care support)
 - Possible community facility.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were highlighted:

1. The One Stop Shop at Kenilworth had been evaluated after its first year and the feedback had been very positive. Lessons would be learnt from the Kenilworth One Stop Shop and Atherstone would offer a greater range of services.
2. It was acknowledged that North Warwickshire covered a large geographical area and it would be a challenge to make similar

- services available elsewhere. Mobile services were being considered to provide advice, guidance and information as well as improved signposting in current locations.
3. The extended schools agenda needed to be explored for further partnership working and opportunities.
 4. With greater technical sophistication and the availability of systems such as video conferencing, there was an opportunity for the provision of services from divisions such as Trading Services at a more local level.
 5. Members supported the bringing together of services but were concerned about the confidentiality of service users and how the mix of different groups of people wanting very different support would be managed. It was highlighted that the One Stop Shop would be a more controlled facility with a fast track reception, different waiting areas available as well as four interview rooms and partitions segregating areas of the customer service areas and providing a high level of privacy.
 6. Robust training would be provided to ensure that officers were multi-skilled, with systems in place to support officers through the process and the presence of specialised officers where necessary, particularly for Births, Deaths and Registration.

The Chair thanked Kushal Birla and Bob Trahern for their presentation.

5. Arts Provision in North Warwickshire

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Adult, Health & Community Services detailing the current provision for the arts in North Warwickshire, including services and support from the County Arts Service.

Emma Andrews added that the County Arts Service (CAS) was a small team offering a range of advice, support and resources to develop arts across the County and worked closely with the Arts Development Officer in the North Warwickshire Borough Council. She added the following:

- i. While amateur dramatics in North Warwickshire was flourishing, the general arts infrastructure was poor, with an imbalance in terms of art forms.
- ii. The CAS worked with a broad range of partners to support provision of arts services already established and to introduce new activities.
- iii. The report outlined a number of key challenges for the area, largely tied in to the Memorial Hall.
- iv. The service was looking at how best to combine the agendas of the Borough and County Council.
- v. The CAS were concentrating on the following three strands of activity:
 - agendas of young people
 - community arts
 - public art.

The Chair invited June Maidens of the Atherstone Theatre Workshop to speak. She stated that the short term arrangement put in place by the

Borough Council for the Group to use the facilities available at the QE Upper School was not a solution to the problem as the area needed to be cleared, involving the shifting, boxing, carrying and storing of costumes and property up a flight of stairs to a storage area and then a need to sweep the school hall.

During the following discussion, the following points were raised:

1. The lack of a decent venue made it more difficult to attract arts into the area.
2. In the past the CAS had concentrated in the out of school sector but talks had begun on bringing the two council agendas together taking into account the opportunities raised through services such as extended schools in order to meet the needs of young people across all areas.
3. There were a number of activities going on in village halls, church halls, community halls and schools and the CAS needed to explore these opportunities.
4. Members recognised the problems faced by the Theatre Workshop and the need for a more flexible venue.
5. The Borough Council were in the process of reviewing all the public buildings in Atherstone and different options to move forward.

Resolved:

That the Area Committee recognises the current achievements and challenges for the Arts in North Warwickshire, and:

1. commission a further report which engages all partners (statutory and voluntary) to contain an Action Plan (with options) for taking forward the arts agenda in the North Warwickshire Borough Area and to address area specific problems and issues
2. request a progress report in six months time.

6. Youth and Community Service - North Warwickshire Area Annual Report - November 2006

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families outlining progress upon the work of the North Warwickshire Area Youth and Community Service that includes the Area Community Education Council (ACEC) and the Youth Service.

Mohammed Jamil noted that the decrease in grant due to the fact that the Adult Service had become a separate Adult and Community Learning Service in March 2005. He added that current allocation was through population percentage, uptake of free school meals, rural isolation and deprivation but the full year report in April 2007 would be linked to the 'Every Child Matters' criteria and would provide a more complete picture.

He added that there would be a report to the Cabinet on 7 December on "Area Community Education Councils – future funding arrangements", where there would be an opportunity for Members to discuss the way forward.

Members felt that the new Youth Service and introduction of Rural Youth Workers was already having a positive impact on young people, and while nationally and locally there was a feeling that young people were disengaged with not enough to do, it was felt that things were beginning to move forward positively in this area and that schemes should be encouraged to keep the agenda moving forward.

Resolved:

That the North Warwickshire Area Committee endorse the progress report of the Youth and Community Service in the North Warwickshire area.

7. Review of North Warwickshire Area Business Plan 2005/06

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development outlining the performance of County Council services in North Warwickshire, measured by the progress against milestone targets and actions.

During the ensuing discussion that following points were highlighted:

1. In terms of excluded and young people who were disengaged, there was a Managed Moves programme in place and a Behaviour Strategy being prepared. There was an opportunity for Area Committees to support these to ensure that young people experiencing difficulties could be supported. Members acknowledged the good work being done at Coleshill School and Kingsbury School and agreed this should be built on to move forward.
2. The attendance at Youth Centres varied from centre to centre, with an average attendance of 12-15 young people.
3. The residential visit in the summer to Marle Hall had been very successful with positive feedback. A further visit was planned for the next half term.
4. Three workshops for young people to address the Youth Work Curriculum and national agenda had been delivered with another two to take place before the end of the year.

Resolved:

That the Area Committee endorses the Area Business Plan 2006/07 Half-year Report.

8. North Warwickshire Community Development Fund 2006/07

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development giving details of the applications received for this year's Community Development Fund (2006/07), describing the process followed in evaluating the applications and making recommendations as to which applications should receive a grant.

Alistair Rigby noted that all groups would receive a letter, and those that had not been successful would receive an explanation and suggestions of alternative sources of funding and an offer of assistance in applying. He

added that for 2006/07 North Warwickshire had received more applications than any other area in the County and that for 2005/06 all 11 of the projects selected had been completed successfully.

The Chair thanked Alistair Rigby and his team for the work they had put into the process.

Resolved:

Area Committee:

- (1) were pleased to note the success of last year's applications
- (2) confirm the eligibility of this year's applications
- (3) approve the list of proposed applicants as set out in Appendix A to the report
- (4) approve the level of funding to be received by each successful application as set out in Appendix A to the report.

9. Social Inclusion Fund 2006/07

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Performance and Development giving details of an existing post within North Warwickshire Police requiring additional financial support to sustain the post in the short term whilst longer term funding is sought.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

1. The Nuisance Co-ordinator was responsible for updating the intelligence database which would track all antisocial behaviour in the Borough, showing patterns of activity and identifying hotspots.
2. The wider partnership responsibility within the Safer Neighbourhoods agenda was acknowledged.
3. It was noted that progress would be reported to the Funding Sub-Group at their meeting every six weeks as well as to the Area Forums. Members requested a progress report to the Area Committee in eight months as a measure of what had been achieved.

Resolved:

- 1) That the North Warwickshire Area Committee endorse the view of the Funding sub group to support the post of Nuisance Co-ordinator to the value of £7,065 for the remainder of the financial year 2006/07 and review the outcomes of the post before giving further commitment in year 2007/08.
- 2) That North Warwickshire Area Committee provides match funding to the value of £1,000 for a 'Building Respect' event to be held in December 2006 in support of the post.

10. Provisional Items for Future Meetings

The Committee agreed the provisional items identified for future meetings.

11. Any Other Items

There were no other items.

Date of next meeting

The Committee noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Wednesday 24 January 2007 at the Michael Drayton Junior School, The Woodlands, Hartshill.

The Committee rose at 8.30 p.m.

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Chair of Committee