

The Stratford-on-Avon Area Committee met at the Town Hall, Stratford-upon-Avon on the 18th January 2006.

Present:-

Councillors George Atkinson (Chair)
“ Richard Hyde (Vice Chair)
“ John Appleton
“ Peter Barnes
“ David Booth
“ Jill Dill-Russell
“ Richard Hobbs
“ Nina Knapman
“ Helen McCarthy
“ Anita Macaulay
“ Mike Perry
“ Izzi Seccombe
“ Bob Stevens

Officers:-

Community Protection Directorate

William Brown, County Fire Officer
John Dixon

Environment and Economy Directorate

Don Foster, Head of Community Services.
Martin Fry, Countryside Recreation Officer.
Julie Crawshaw

Performance and Development Directorate.

Peter Endall, Principal Solicitor.
Martin Gibbins, Area Manager.
Doug Henderson, Community Partnership Officer.
Pete Keeley, Principal Committee Administrator.
Patrick Lee, Area Community Safety Manager
(South).
Alwin McGibbon, Health Scrutiny Officer.
Amanda Wilson-Patterson – Area Administrative
Officer.

Resources Directorate

Oliver Winters, Head of Financial Planning and
Pensions.

24 members of the public attended.

1. Apologies

None

2. Members' Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

(1) Agenda Item 7 – Crime Statistics and Crime Hot Spots Stratford

Councillors Richard Hobbs and Izzi Seccombe declared personal interests as members of the Police Authority.

(2) Agenda Item 9 - Draft Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Warwickshire.

Councillors Peter Barnes and Richard Hobbs declared personal interests as farmers.

3. Budget 2006/07

The Committee received a presentation from Oliver Winters, Head of Financial Planning & Pensions in the Resources Directorate about the issues surrounding the preparation of the Council's budget for 2006/07.

The presentation included information on the following matters:-

- Local Authority Services
- Spending on services, funding services in 2005/06
- Key features of the settlement, aspects of the dedicated schools grant
- Funding aspects of the Children Act in as available resources
- Pressure Drivers
- Revenue Pressures (un-excluded schools) off aspects of efficiency savings
- The choices to be made by the Council.

[A copy of the presentation may be viewed with these minutes on the Warwickshire Web.]

Oliver Winters responded to questions from members of the public as follows:-

(1) Questions from Pat Homer

“What is the source of the contributions from the Council to the employees pension fund? Does any come from the Business Rate or is all of it from the Domestic Rate? How does your proposed employer contribution increase from 10% to 11.5% in 2006/2007 impact on council

tax payers? Could you please clarify what percentage this increase represents as far as a 'D' band property is concerned?"

The Pensions Scheme is administered by the County Council under rules set by the Government. There were several public employers participating in the fund and the rate of increased contribution differed for each employer, based on information provided to the actuary such as the make-up of the scheme membership.

The increase of 1.5% increase in the employer's rate does not relate to the County Council where the increase is 0.5%. This equates to approximately £350,000 costs which could be funded in a number of ways including making Departments absorb the costs and by efficiency savings.

The Warwickshire fund was one of the healthiest county council pension fund. The pensions fund was administered under a central fund and it was not possible to identify the costs as being met by either business or domestic rates.

If the whole amount £350,000 were to be funded by council tax the affect on a D Band property would be £1.27 per year.

"Has there been any reduction in the amount of sick days taken by the workforce since last year? If so what savings does this represent?"

The reduction in average sick leave for 2004/05 was from 12.5 to 10.1. This, based on the workforce of approximately 17,000, is equivalent to £2.5 million although not all of this was in cash. This improvement is expected to be maintained in 2005/2006 and further improved to increase the benefit by a further £0.5 million.

(2) Question from Mr D. Chamberlaine

"How much is outstanding in uncollected Council Tax and for what reason? "

Oliver Winters explained the process under which the District Council were precepted by the County Council for the County Council's council tax requirement. It is then the District Council who is responsible for the collection of council tax. He explained that the sharing of any surplus or deficit in the collection fund was dealt with at the end of the year.

Mr Winters also explained that there was no overall political control in the Council and at the main parties were each considering their budgetary proposals with the assistance of officers. The final budget would be discussed at the Council meeting on the 7 February 2006.

He also explained the relationship between the County Council and District Councils in the Stratford District and the importance of partnership working.

The Chair advised the members of the public that if they had any questions outside the meeting these could be raised with the Area Manager.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on the 23rd November 2005 and Matters Arising

(1) Minutes

Resolved:-

That the minutes of the Stratford-on-Avon Area Committee's 23rd November 2005 meeting be approved and be signed by the Chair.

(2) Matters Arising

(a) Minute 1(4)(i) – Cyclepath Connecting Clifford Chambers to Stratford.

Councillor Peter Barnes reported that the condition of the footpath between the B4362 and the Tramway was in poor condition and requested that this be attended to.

(b) Minute 1(3)(ii)(b) – Double Yellow Lines in Saxon Close.

Don Foster, Head of Community Services, reported that this was being examined during the current phase of legal orders.

(c) Minutes 1 (4)(vii) - Thompson Buildings Contractor - Annual Parking Permits.

Don Foster reported that this was also being examined during the current second phase of legal orders.

5. Public Questions and Answers

(1) Question from Mr Chamberlaine

“Why is money being spent on renewing pedestrian crossing lights in Stratford when the existing ones are doing a perfectly efficient job?”

Don Foster indicated that the lights concerned needed to be replaced because of changing standards associated with the Disability Discrimination Act, and the increasing maintenance

costs of aging equipment. The traffic light scheme was changing from a Puffin to a Pelican scheme which would result in a more efficient traffic flow and enhanced pedestrian safety.

“Why is it proposed to extend parking restrictions from 6pm until 10pm in many small, quiet, residential streets? Is it to try to force more residents to purchase residents permits to supplement the short fall in income from parking tickets? How much is this going to cost in new signage and wages to police it?”

Don Foster reported that the amendment to the residents parking scheme was the result of requests from residents. It took into account previous difficulties with enforcement having regard to visitors to the theatre and local hotels. This would encourage off street parking where there was surplus capacity.

(2) Question from Pat Homer – Park and Ride.

“The Park & Ride scheme which has only recently been introduced appears to be attracting few people. If this situation remains the same will W.C.C. be introducing measures to force people to use the facility and if so what measures might these be?”

Will the success or failure of this Park & Ride scheme affect your decision concerning the Southern side of Stratford or is that going ahead regardless?”

Don Foster advised that the public understood that the Park and Ride Scheme was not yet fully utilised. The Oxford scheme took 25 years to build to its present level of operation and, with regard to the Stratford scheme, it was expected that it would be fully operational within 4/5 years. If the increased use did not materialise issues such as town centre parking policies and prices and a park and ride scheme on the southern edge of the town would need to be examined. Optimum level of use was expected in the fourth or fifth year. World class Stratford would have an impact on the scheme and consideration would be given to incentives rather than penalties.

(3) Question from Mr Hoyle – Speed Limit Banbury Road, Kineton.

Mr Hoyle gave a presentation to Members relating to the need for a 30 mph speed limit along Banbury Road in Kineton. The request came from 95 residents.

Kineton High School was adjacent to the road and the road was also used by vulnerable pedestrians. The Governors of Kineton High School supported the requested 30 mph speed limit rather than a 40 mph limit.

In conclusion Mr Hoyle requested the following:-

- A scheme based on common sense, local wishes and a meaningful speed reduction – this equates to better road safety.
- The 40 mph scheme modified to 30mph, supplemented with additional white lining, vertical measures and minimal additional street lighting
- The residents acknowledged that a 30mph mean speed may not be achieved with this proposal and urged that there should be local determination by the Area Committee based on local circumstances and not on a one size fits all policy or guidance.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe advised that rumble strips had been used in traffic calming schemes in her division and many constituents were opposed to them because of the noise generated.

Don Foster indicated that the information provided by Mr Hoyle would be considered in the report to be submitted to the next Area Committee. He confirmed that traffic engineers were well aware of the benefits of different types of traffic calming measures and that 30 mph speed limits without traffic calming measures would not achieve the desired results.

(4) Question from Mr Howe relating to the replacement of footbridge on footpath SD61 between Alderminster and Whichford.

Mr Howe expressed concern that the footbridge had not yet been constructed despite promises on behalf of the County Council. He requested that action be taken to ensure that the bridge was in place by the end of August this year.

Martin Fry, the Countryside Access Officer, confirmed the intention to complete the works involved by August subject to conditions such as the height of the river, being favourable.

The Chair indicated that the Committee must be advised of any slippage.

(5) Question from Mr Cooper of Stratford Town Partnership - Decriminalisation

“(i) Please could the committee confirm the date when retailers, businesses and residents can expect these changes to take place? We would advocate the earliest practical opportunity to allow businesses and customers to adjust to the changes before the spring tourist season starts.

(ii) The committee fully supported the Town Partnership's parking brochure at the meeting in the Autumn. This will be an essential tool in communicating these changes. The detail to question 1 is essential in ensuring the brochure accuracy and the timing of the brochure's publication. Again can the council provide a steer of timings and content to assist in the publication of this essential leaflet."

Don Foster reported that collaboration with the Partnership would continue and advised members that any objections to the proposed amendments would influence the overall timing of the implementation of the revisions to the scheme. He added that a further report following the completion of the objection period would be submitted to the Area Committee on the 15 March and if the proposals were uncontested he expected the revisions would be in place by the end of March. Any objections would result in those aspects not coming into force possibly until April or May. Mr Foster would ensure that the appropriate officers continue to liaise direct with the Partnership.

(6) Questions from Mr Oldfield

- (i) How much do Warwickshire County Council spend on sports sponsorship in the area and who else do they sponsor?
- (ii) With regards to Stratford-on-Avon High School and the Community Sports Centre, how much did it cost to install the football/astro pitches initially? How much to demolish them?, and how much to reinstall them for the new development.
- (iii) How much has it cost so far out Park & Ride scheme? What is the final bill likely to be? If it continues to lose a lot of money will you scrap it?
- (iv) Parking – How much is this scheme costing tax payers 'cos I cannot believe it is self financing? We don't want the recently advertised alterations. The people of SOA have voted to have 30mins free parking on all main shopping roads such as Bridge Street, High Street & Sheep Street. We don't want Labour Cllrs from the North of the County telling us what we can & can't do. Leave it as it is.
- (v) General Why is it that a member of the public cannot obtain information from John Deegan and his department, even after the involvement of Portfolio Holder Martin Heatley? I have been asking questions relating to the area of S-O-A where I live for over 3 years & have yet to receive any response. This is quite disgraceful & somebody needs to take this on board re traffic/roads/traffic lights.

Mr. Oldfield indicated that he was unhappy that answers to these queries were not available as he had lodged the questions within the requisite timelimit. He was advised that the detailed nature of the questions had required them to be circulated to officers for clarification and a written response would be made as soon as possible.

6. Consultation & Appraisal of Proposed Reconfiguration of Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance NHS Trust

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance & Development.

Malcolm Hazel, Chief Executive of Coventry & Warwickshire Ambulance NHS Trust had produced an appraisal on the proposed reconfiguration of the Ambulance Trusts in the West Midlands, which is going through public consultation. The Committee was asked to consider the benefits and drawbacks outlined in the appraisal document.

During her introduction of the item, Alwin McGibbon, Health Scrutiny Officer, reported that the issues would be considered by the Council on the 21 February and the Area Committee's views would be fed into that meeting.

Councillor David Booth moved:-

- (1) That this Committee does not support the creation West Midlands Ambulance Service. The evidence from the creation of large Ambulance Trusts such areas as East Anglia and the East Midlands shows that the purported benefits from creating a large Ambulance Trust are unlikely to be achieved in practice and the anticipated saving of £3m per year is small when measured against risks of re-organisation that are required to achieve it.

John Appleton stressed that any response should urge the retention of the Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance Trust. He moved, as an amendment (with Councillor Booth's agreement) :-

- (1) *As moved by Councillor Booth*
- (2) That this Committee wishes to see the Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance Trust retain its identity and continue to provide ambulance services in Warwickshire.

During the following discussion the following points were made:-

- It was likely that only marginal savings would be achieved by the revised hierarchy of ambulance stations.

- The Warwickshire Ambulance Service was one of the top performing services in the country and made efficient use of its resources.
- No business case has been presented.
- The Councils response should be robust in its opposition to the proposals.

On being put to a vote the motion as amended was CARRIED.

7. Crime Statistics and Crime Hot Spots Stratford

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance & Development which provided an overview of crime statistics in Stratford and provided performance information for 2004/5.

During his introduction of this item Patrick Lee, Area Community Safety Manager (South) drew attention to revised figures which would be incorporated into a report to be circulated to Members. He mentioned that the statistics relating to all recorded crime, criminal damage as mentioned in paragraph 2.7 were incorrect because, in the last 12 months there had been 1, 392 reported incidents which represented a +4.5% increase on the base line figure of 2003/04.

During the discussion the following points were raised:-

- Police beats in the south of the county were to be reconfigured to be more reflective of local and rural needs. This would overcome some of the concern about the level of policing in rural areas.
- There was concern amongst members that certain large communities such as Quinton where there were some problems had not been mentioned in the report.
- There was some doubt about the accuracy of the statistics shown in the printed report relating to nuisance youths and violent crime in the District. Different information had provided at different meetings which showed an increase in Stratford and not a decrease.
- More meaningful comparisons were to be made of the statistics and there would be changes in the manner in which details were collected.
- Greater clarity was needed in the presentation of figures for Members including the identification of hot spots so as to enable the Committee to identify areas where County Council could assist.
- Certain crimes such as shoplifting were not always reported.

- There were difficulties in evaluating information relating to the perception and fear of crime and in future reports it might be better to include only those statistics relating to actual crime.
- There was a need to know what active steps were being taken relating to particular problems, in particular drug taking in Shottery Fields, Stratford on Avon.
- Liaising between Police and Schools needed to be improved.
- Prosecution and meaningful penalties were needed.

Resolved:-

That the Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee be advised of the Committee's comments.

8. World Class Stratford

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy which informed Members of the progress of World Class Stratford, an Advantage West Midlands backed initiative, aimed at bringing about physical improvements to the infrastructure of Stratford-upon-Avon for the benefit of residents and visitors.

Following introductory comments from Julie Crawshaw, Regeneration Projects Officer, Members discussed several aspects of the report and made the following comments:-

- The possibility of improving pedestrian access to the recreation ground from the town car parks, possibly using the archway under the canal bridge, had been examined and Phase 1 of a revised pedestrian crossing was now in operation.
- British Waterways were committed to the scheme.
- The proposed bridge in its new location further downstream had been adopted as a proposal by the District Council. The bridge would be for both pedestrians and cyclists.
- With regard to future traffic arrangements, an examination of the layout of new buildings should be undertaken before any permanent traffic management scheme was brought into operation.

Resolved:-

That Members note the contents.

9. Draft Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Warwickshire

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy.

The Cabinet on 30th June 2005 authorised the then Director of Planning, Transport and Economic Strategy to prepare and publish a Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The report advised Members on the responses already received to the ongoing consultation exercise and how it was proposed to amend the Plan.

Martin Fry, Countryside Access Officer, introduced the main points of the report.

The following points were made during the discussion:-

- With regard to the possibility of Parish Councils having a greater say in diversion proposals, particularly regarding diversions requested for privacy and crime reduction reasons members noted that Parish Councils were always consulted on proposals and where their support was given the priority of an application was raised.
- Action was being taken regarding the condition of certain rights of way reported at the meeting.
- With regard to the provision of gates/stiles, legal criteria had to be followed relating to the use of either gates or stiles. It was not possible to replace every stile with a gate and the circumstances were examined when a stile needed to be replaced.
- With regard to the re-instatement of ploughed paths, land owners/farmers had a right to plough rights of way following which the route had to be re-instated to enable public use.
- The legal aspects of rights of way were often confusing to lay people and other organisations.

Resolution:-

That the Cabinet be advised of the Committee's comments relating to the Draft Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan, when considering the formal adoption of the Plan.

10. Provisional Items for Future Meetings

15th March 2006

- (1) Affordable Housing
- (2) Area Community Learning Plan
- (3) Proposal to change the IAN at Thomas Jolyffe Primary School
- (4) Draft 2006-07 capital programme for integrated transport for Stratford on Avon District Council area
- (5) Proposed 30mph and 40mph speed limits on the B4086 Banbury Road, Kineton

- (6) Adult Social Care Performance Report – Help to Live at Home and Associated Indicators

Future Meeting

- (1) Speed Limits on non A roads
- (2) Education – pupil numbers

The Committee noted the proposed items.

11. Any Other Business

There were no urgent items to consider.

The Committee rose at 7.15 p.m.

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Chair