

Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 17 June 2020

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Alan Cockburn (Chair)
Councillor Dave Shilton (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Jenny Fradgley
Councillor John Holland
Councillor Andy Jenns
Councillor Keith Kondakor
Councillor Caroline Phillips
Councillor Andrew Wright

Portfolio Holders

Councillor Peter Butlin (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property)
Councillor Jeff Clarke (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning)
Councillor Andy Crump (Portfolio Holder for Fire & Community Safety)
Councillor Kam Kaur (Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation)
Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Leader of the Council)
Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Heritage & Culture)

Officers

David Ayton-Hill, Assistant Director - Communities
Isabelle Moorhouse, Trainee Democratic Services Officer
Mark Ryder, Strategic Director for Communities
Scott Tompkins, Assistant Director for Environment Services
Louise Richardson, Policy Lead
Sushma Soni, Corporate Policy Lead
Gereint Stoneman, Strategy and Commissioning Manager (Corporate Policy)

Other Members Present

Councillor Mark Cargill
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group)

External Speakers

Malcolm Holmes (Executive Director, West Midlands Railway Executive)
Francis Thomas (Head of Corporate Affairs, West Midlands Trains)
Jonny Wiseman (Customer Experience Director, West Midlands Trains)

1. General

(1) Apologies

None.

(2) Member's Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Chair's Announcements

None.

(4) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the 12 February 2020 were approved as a true record, subject to the following amendments; Councillor Keith Kondakor raised whether streetlights being left on in windy weather conditions was what was stated in the meeting.

2. Public Speaking

There were none.

3. Questions to Portfolio Holder

Following concerns raised by Councillor Keith Kondakor regarding the lack of road allocation in Nuneaton and Bedworth and the effects of Covid-19, Councillor Jeff Clarke (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) stated that Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council had been consulted with and temporary measures have been implemented. Councillor Clarke continued that if more permanent measures were requested, then these requests could be made or the delegated councillor budget could be used. He concluded that £6 million will be spent by Warwickshire County Council on highway and cycling safety schemes. Following a supplementary from Councillor Kondakor, Councillor Clarke stated measures will be implemented on the ring road in Bedworth and temporary schemes are being utilised to ensure the correct schemes are enforced.

Councillors Jenny Fradgley and Dave Shilton expressed gratitude to the Highways and Engineering Teams for their work in Stratford Upon Avon and Kenilworth respectively. Councillor Fradgley added that she requested an update on how the LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership) are working on smaller projects and asked how government funding is being used in Warwickshire. Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Leader of the Council) clarified that the government asked the council to provide short-term safe spaces in town centres, but some town centres are more pedestrianised than others. All the district and borough councils have been involved but the systems implemented were short-term solutions to improve the economy.

Mark Ryder (Strategic Director for Communities) added that his team and the LEP are looking at projects that could obtain extra government funding, like the cycling schemes but it is nationally competitive. Warwickshire County Council had demonstrated to the DfT (Department for

Transport) that the allocated money was spent appropriately but the allocated money is less than the cycle schemes so this will negatively affect the council budget. Mark Ryder concluded that they are still finalising permanent cycle schemes, but city centres are more likely to be prioritised by the government than smaller town centres; it was agreed that updates will be provided on the cycle scheme bids.

In response to Councillor Caroline Phillips, Councillor Clarke reiterated that the schemes implemented in Nuneaton are government led temporary schemes and different measures would need to be implemented for a cycling scheme.

Councillor Kondakor asked for updates on the electric bus scheme.

4. West Midlands Railway Executive and West Midlands Trains

Malcom Holmes (Executive Director, West Midlands Railway Executive) explained that the West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) are a partnership of local authorities across the West Midlands, including Warwickshire County Council, and the De Facto rail authority for the region. The WMRE works with the DfT and they manage the contract for rail services and undertake rail strategy work in the West Midlands.

Since March 2020, passenger numbers have plummeted on trains which have been consistent with government guidance to avoid public transport. This had risen slightly when shops reopened, and they are currently operating 70% of the timetables to maximise social distancing with an aim to increase this to 80% in July 2020. Malcom Holmes continued that they had established a coordination group with Network Rail in the region which led the rail response to Covid-19. The rail industry have calculated their capacity in order to enforce social distancing and have slightly reduced trains on the Coventry line in Warwickshire; they have been in contact with Chiltern regarding the lack of trains through Warwick. The West Midlands Railway services are running as normal on the Leamington Spa to Coventry and Nuneaton line. Social distancing measures have been administered across West Midland stations, when passengers are at a higher capacity there could be delays due to social distancing.

The WMRE have been working with Midlands Connect on a project called Birmingham Airport Connectivity which will connect the Thames Valley, Oxford and Leamington Spa to Newcastle via Coventry and Birmingham Airport. Midlands Connect are working on a business case to double some of the existing single line section on the route between Leamington and Coventry, but this will not allow an improvement to the local service for Kenilworth without full doubling of the route. Therefore, further work had been commissioned between Midlands Connect, the DfT and Network Rail to assess the benefits of running a second local rail service which supports the full doubling of the route.

Malcom Holmes stated that phase one of HS2 (High Speed Railway) has recently been given the formal 'notice to proceed' by government, and that a revised HS2 business case had been published which showed in most scenarios, it will have a positive value for money. Malcom Holmes expressed the WMRE concerns about the business case as it did not refer to northbound services in Phase 2A after the initial route going northwards. He continued that there will be huge benefits for the West Midlands being connected to the north and Scotland, but there is a risk that this service will not be provided through HS2 infrastructure until the completion of Phase 2B. The

National Infrastructure Commission is undertaking a review into HS2 Phase 2B and WMRE had stressed the importance of an early direct service introduction northbound in its response.

Malcom Holmes concluded that the West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy was published in January 2019; however, due to the long term economic and commuting impact of Covid-19, this had led to a need to undertake a review, and this work is underway.

Following a question from Councillor Kondakor, Malcom Holmes agreed to query about the work progress on 'KNUCKLE 3.1', which will provide direct services again between Coventry and Nuneaton. The WMRE are in discussion with the DfT in regard to having more responsibility for the cross-country services that operate in Birmingham, Nuneaton, Leicester and Stanstead rail corridors. Since these services are run by Cross-Country and run outside the area WMRE cover, they have insufficient capacity and higher fares; therefore, WMRE are proposing that this route is operated by the local train operator. He concluded that train timetables post-HS2 are still being reviewed and finalised. Councillor Kondakor and Malcom Holmes discussed the line north of Coventry being electrified.

In response to Councillor Shilton, Malcom Holmes reiterated that Covid-19 had impacted West Midlands Trains' efforts to increase the number of train crew to avoid cancellations and disruption that was experienced during autumn 2019, they have a contractually committal remedial plan with the DfT to improve performance. He added that providing extra carriages depends on route demand and would be unlikely in the short term.

Malcolm Holmes concurred with Councillor John Holland, that Warwickshire should maximise local rail services to benefit the region but the line needs expanding and improving. The WMRE are working on rail schemes that would benefit Warwickshire and the Warwickshire's Rail Strategy influences the West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy review. Councillor Peter Butlin (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property) informed the committee that the West Midlands Economic Development Board are developing plans for economic regeneration post-Covid-19 and the new railway strategies should aid this.

In response to Councillor Clarke, Malcom Holmes stated that Warwickshire is one of the most rail proactive West Midland authorities and agreed to support where possible with longer-term aspirations for northbound services from Nuneaton and other developments.

Following a question raised by the Chair, Malcom Holmes stated that it is anticipated that the line through Kenilworth station would still be fully doubled track in the future.

Jonny Wiseman (Customer Experience Director, West Midlands Trains) introduced himself to the committee. He stated that the Covid-19 crisis allowed West Midlands Trains (WMT) to run an effective timetable, enabling them to see what can be achieved in future. WMT negotiated with their stakeholders and WMRE to ensure timetables meet demand and capacity. Since opening, Kenilworth station's footfall and ticket sales increased annually but Covid-19 halted this; social distancing measures and protective screens have been implemented. Regionally, a reduced timetable was implemented in April 2020, but this had been expanded since. A significant number of WMT colleagues were self-isolating but this has reduced, allowing WMT to implement their timetables. Jonny Wiseman continued that cleaning and the cleaning staff have been increased; face mask posters, social distancing measures and floor markings have been implemented in

stations. Jonny Wiseman concluded that they will be providing face masks from the 6th July when their timetables are increased.

Francis Thomas (Head of Corporate Affairs, West Midlands Trains) informed the committee that WMT have worked with West Midland based authorities and transport operators to raise public awareness of what WMT are doing and provide consistency; this included 220 media appearances. WMT stakeholders have been updated with newsletters which is available to the public. Francis Thomas continued that they had attended other council meetings and provided virtual briefings to spread awareness and extend their messages reach. Commuters have been encouraged to travel at quieter periods and only when necessary; testimonials from frontline staff have been used too. Francis Thomas concluded that social distancing would be a problem at 20% of the normal capacity and WMT are encouraging commuters to buy and obtain refunds for their tickets online.

The Chair thanked all the speakers for attending the meeting.

5. WCC Covid Recovery Approach

Mark Ryder introduced the item. The paper built onto the Covid-19 recovery report that was presented at June's Cabinet meeting and set out the direction for recovery. Mark Ryder continued that recovery is at various spatial levels and everything is interlinked; for example, public transport being affected and effecting the wider economy. The recovery phase was split into three stages: a foundation stage which included improving council services and helping local businesses, a consolidation and acceleration phase. Mark Ryder concluded that Cabinet agreed four themes of the recovery approach: Place, Economy & Climate, Community and Voluntary Sector, Health, wellbeing and social care and the Organisation, including the reinstating of services.

It was clarified that the four working groups will produce a report for Cabinet in September. Councillor Holland suggested setting targets for performance indicators.

In response to Councillor Kondakor, David Ayton-Hill (Assistant Director – Communities) stated that tourism was flagged as a key sector of work in order to help local businesses, whose trade relies on tourism, to continue. Local businesses are being informed on how to market to and accommodate for domestic tourists, especially in rural areas which are likely to have more tourists. Coventry have altered their City of Culture plans so their programme will run from April 2021 until March 2022. This change is being reviewed to it could feedback into Warwickshire's tourism sector.

Resolved:

That the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Receives the County Council's approach to Covid-19 Recovery, as set out in the attached Cabinet report.
2. Commented on the specific issues relevant to the remit of this Committee that should be considered in the development of the Recovery Plan which is due to be submitted to Cabinet in September.

(1) Economic Development Update

In response to the Chair, David Ayton-Hill stated that Warwickshire County Council are set to receive £800 million in government economic recovery grant payments, but this will be withdrawn in future when businesses return to normal. The Council will help businesses to return to normal before funding is withdrawn.

The update was noted by the committee.

6. School Safety Zones and Routes Concluding Report

Councillor Fradgely introduced the item and thanked all the officers involved on the TFG. In the last School Safety Zones meeting, members agreed there was more work to do in regard to educating children and parents on walking to school rather than being driven. Councillor Fradgley concluded that due to the Council's climate change agenda and the Covid-19 crisis, the new TFG as recommended in the report, would be beneficial now.

Councillors Kondakor and Holland stated that a slower speed limit needs to be implemented around all schools. Councillor Philips informed the committee that if enough 20mph signs are erected in an area then PCSO's (Police Community Support Officers) will enforce them. Councillor Kondakor added that economic and housing growth in Warwickshire have made roads a barrier for cyclists and pedestrians.

Councillor Andy Crump (Portfolio Holder for Fire and Community Safety) stated that the Road Safety team were reminding parents to slow down around schools and there have been a list of programmes carried out, but peer pressure is also needed. He concluded that there is a need to carry out programmes that encourage walking.

Resolved:

That the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1) Notes the developments carried out by officers as part of the School Safety Zones Task Force since April 2015
- 2) Agrees that a Task and Finish Group be established to explore education-based ways of encouraging more children to walk / scooter / cycle in safety to their schools and report on costed options to inform the refreshed MTFS (Medium Term Finance Strategy).

7. Communities OSC Work Programme

Councillor Kondakor queried if electric buses could be incorporated into the bus provision item coming to September's committee.

Resolved

That the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the work programme

8. Urgent Items

None.

9. Reports Containing Confidential or Exempt Information

Resolved

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of confidential or exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended.

10. Exempt Minutes for 12 February 2020

Resolved

The exempt minutes of the 12 February 2020 meeting were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.