

# Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 10 April 2024

## Minutes

### Attendance

#### Committee Members

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Jenny Fradgley  
Councillor Peter Gilbert  
Councillor Daren Pemberton  
Councillor Mejar Singh  
Councillor Andrew Wright  
Councillor Jackie D'Arcy

#### Other Members

Councillor Martin Watson (Portfolio Holder for Economy)  
Councillor Andy Crump (Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Communities)  
Councillor Jan Matecki (Portfolio Holder Transport and Planning)  
Councillor Tim Sinclair

#### Officers

Mark Ryder, Executive Director of Communities  
Steve Smith, Director for Strategic Infrastructure and Climate Change  
Scott Tompkins, Environment, Planning and Transport  
Dave Ayton-Hill, Director of Economy and Place  
Isobel Woods, Head of Economy and Skills  
Jon Rollinson, Service Manager, Strategy and Place  
Sebastian Burch, Strategy and Policy Officer  
Graham Palmer, Infrastructure Strategy and Commissioning Lead  
Nicole Conway, Democratic Services Officer

#### Others Present

Andy Mitchell - Press

## **1. General**

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers sat in as Chair with apologies from Councillor Jeff Clarke.

### **(1) Apologies**

Councillor Jackie D'Arcy substituted for Councillor Sarah Feeney  
Councillor Jeff Clarke (Chair)  
Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher  
Councillor Dave Humphries

### **(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests**

None disclosed.

### **(3) Chair's Announcements.**

The Chair read out a pre-election notification to the committee and welcomed Andy Mitchell from the press and notified all present that the meeting was being webcast.

### **(4) Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record by the Committee.

No matters arising.

## **2. Public Speaking**

None.

## **3. Questions to Portfolio Holder**

Councillor Fradgley raised a question regarding St Andrews Primary school. Mark Ryder (Executive Director for Communities) advised it was not a matter for the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss however, he would take the question away and respond to the Councillor.

### **(1) Economic Development Update**

Isobel Woods (Head of Economy and Skills) presented the Economic Development Update. Highlighting the following key headlines since the last update.

- Coventry and Warwickshire Investment Zone was given support to proceed.

- Warwickshire County Council acknowledged the announcement that Warwickshire County Council was one of four Councils approved for a Devolution deal.
- Unemployment remained at 3.3%, below the West Midlands at 4.5%
- The Interactive Futures event would take place in Leamington Spa in May 2024.
- The Council had investor interest at the site of Coventry Airport.

### Economic Overview

There had been a slight increase in the service output with a small decrease in the productivity in construction. A link in the paper was highlighted, providing access to a live dashboard showing the latest figures on the Warwickshire economy.

Isobel Woods introduced a new section of the paper, Key Decisions, which covered the two recent announcements.

1. West Midlands Investment Zone which is a partnership with Coventry City Council, Warwick District Council and Warwickshire County Council on the Giga Park site at the former Coventry Airport.
2. Devolution deal following the Government statement in 2023. Work would begin this year before the commencement of the deal in April 2025.

### Business and Economy

As of quarter three, current investment and access to funding had leveraged £2.8m of private sector funds into Warwickshire which safeguarded and supported new jobs including apprenticeships of 313 new roles.

### Business support

The Warwickshire Business Energy Advice Service, part of the wider West Midlands Scheme was funded by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ). This scheme will support businesses in Warwickshire to receive free energy audits and give them the opportunity to receive a grant to support the costs of low carbon adoption.

### Employment and Skills

The Fair Chance scheme continued in the county with 63 businesses signed up and supporting seven individuals into work.

The County Council along with Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council delivered £100,000 worth of funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to work with and support businesses and residents in upskilling and reskilling. The programme ended in March 2024 and during the five weeks of operation, it put in place four programmes which supported 75 employees, 13 young people at risk, secured employment for one individual with specific learning needs, and three individuals completed a green skills bootcamp.

Isobel Wood discussed the Warwickshire Supported Employment Service, which was in its second year of operation. In total, there were 58 customers supported into paid work, with ten working independently.

The Business Skills Support Service supported 281 Warwickshire businesses in the first quarter between January and March 2024, with members directed to the paper for a short synopsis for other schemes, all of which were going well.

Isobel Woods discussed the Careers Hub which had continued to progress in budding on engagements with schools and sixth forms delivering career fairs, supporting schools and teachers building curriculums and engaging with employers who had been invited into schools under a new campaign called Give an Hour.

#### Sector Development and Inward Investment.

Isobel Woods advised of a press release that announced £1.8m of investment funding through the first round of the Creative and Immersive Launchpad, which enabled 13 businesses across Warwickshire and Coventry to access the funds.

A roundtable, held in February 2024 looked at supercharging investment in the gaming sector, working with 15 industry partners. It was announced that the Interactive Futures which showcased the local video gaming industry, would be held in May 2024.

Warwickshire County Council hosted a delegation from Canada and the United States showcasing the Aero and Auto sectors. Delegates visited the University of Warwick and MIRA Technology Park in Nuneaton as part of the visit.

Coventry and Warwickshire were awarded second place in “FDI Strategy” from FDI Intelligence, a Financial Times Group award. This was an increase on the previous year and the award reflected the hard work that had been done to attract and secure new investments in the region.

#### Warwickshire Place and Partnerships

Warwickshire County Council had been working with Shipston Town Council to promote tourism. The Love Shipton campaign was launched in March 2024 and had garnered local and regional news coverage.

Nuneaton Business Improvement District (Nuneaton BID) received the go ahead after it was voted on in February 2024 by local Nuneaton businesses.

Isobel Woods discussed news headlines from around Warwickshire, including the announcement of a Chinese manufacture company looking to invest £1b into a new electric battery factory at Coventry airport and Austin Martin are actively recruiting 400 new staff across two sites in Gaydon and St Athan.

In response to Councillor Fradgley, Isobel Woods advised that there had been significant activity throughout Warwickshire, collaborating with District and Borough Councils with some work being initiated by those local councils. The figures were analysed, and the impact was assessed across the county and reported back to the committee focusing on those areas. Councillor Pemberton added that he was satisfied that the report covered the whole of the county.

In response to the Chair’s question, Isobel Woods advised that a return on investment of public funds was important, and all jobs listed had benchmarks and indicators. The markers and indicators would be dependent on the level and type of job and potential employee. An analysis of the data representing investment returns could be conducted.

Councillor Watson drew members attention to the state of Warwickshire Power BI, which had

more data and compared the County Council to District and Borough Councils, demonstrating how well the County Council's economy had been performing.

The Chair asked a supplementary question about the UK shared prosperity fund (UKSPF) and the Devolution Deal. David Ayton-Hill (Director of Economy and Place) advised that general discussions with borough and district councils had taken place, and the UKSPF would continue subject to funding going forward. Mark Ryder (Executive Director for Communities) commented that relationships with the districts and borough councils regarding the UKSPF were well developed and would continue going forward with the Devolution Deal.

Councillor Gilbert praised the report and asked how businesses in Nuneaton and Bedworth were able to access the Nuneaton BID funds granted. Isobel Woods discussed the strict criteria that needed to be met to access the fund and advised that the list of businesses was continually updated in collaboration with local partners, hubs, Chamber of Commerce, residents, media, and communications.

#### **4. An Update on the Vehicle Activated Sign Policy**

Presented by Jon Rollinson (Lead Commissioner, Strategy and Place) covering the following points.

- The original policy had been approved and adopted by Cabinet in September 2022.
- This was intended to provide an evidence-led road safety risk-based assessment that offered a clear, robust set of criteria, which had not existed previously.
- Target resources, check for redundant signs and organise the removal of those deemed necessary while recognising that the Council should not be removing signs from areas that had an ongoing collision concern. Allow local community groups to provide funding to maintain signs in their areas, if desired.
- The policy been in place for 18 months. This has been in consultation with other departments within the council and they are content with how it was working. No disadvantage to other areas such as Street Lighting or Safety Engineering on the road network.

Councillor Sinclair disclosed that he was an observer in the meeting and was not a member of the committee and therefore sought approval from the Chair to comment. Councillor Sinclair had been on the Committee when the original policy was passed. He asked for the cost on the Community for taking on an activated sign and wondered if councillors could use their delegated highways budget on the signs. Jon Rollinson replied, stating the exact cost will be different per sign however an assessment of potential costs would be disclosed to any town or parish councils who would be deciding on taking over an activated sign. Regarding delegated budgets, there might be some circumstances where councillors were able to use their budgets for providing maintenance however, delegated budgets usually were for assets only. Jon Rollinson would take the question away and confirm outside of the meeting. Scott Tompkins (Environment, Planning and Transport) stated that the preference was to spend delegated budgets on assets items rather than maintenance however he expressed that he would be willing to have a conversation about this. Councillor Matecki (Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport) added that delegated budget did not include revenue-based items.

The Chair asked for clarification on delegated budgets to be circulated to the committee.

Discussion took place between members about the need for the policy and the need for clarification on delegated budgets.

Councillor Gilbert added that if a councillor used their delegated budget to keep up maintenance of an activated sign, what would happen when that councillor is no longer in position, who then takes on the costs going forward.

The Chair questioned if the maintenance budget set out in the report had been met. Jon Rollinson stated that this was not something that could be answered now but would bring an answer back to the committee.

The Chair mentioned the eighteen requests for new signs highlighted in the report that had been rejected and asked for a picture of why this had been the case. Jon Rollinson replied that these requests did not meet one or more of the criteria set out in the policy.

In response to Councillor Singh, Jon Rollinson advised that the personal injury collision criterion was a score of five or more. He went on to explain that it is not five actual injuries or collisions. Each type of injury and collision had a score allocated to it, and this is what the criteria is based on. He went on to explain that this gave a better outcome rather than basing a decision on per collision and/or injury. Jon Rollinson clarified that the score is made from actual recorded incidents not near misses nor non-injury collisions.

Councillor Sinclair highlighted the advanced criteria and stated that all four had to be met. He raised the concern that the bar had been set too high, adding that this was also outlined when the policy was originally brought to the Committee in 2022. Jon Rollinson advised that the policy would be regularly monitored, analysed and updated based on identified needs, with consultation as necessary.

The Chair added his shared concern and suggested that this policy be reassessed again at a future date to see if criteria was working. He clarified, not the whole report just the criteria section.

Councillor Pemberton agreed with the Chair on an annual update of the policy and commented on his personal experiences working in insurance industry.

In response to the Chair, Councillor Pemberton highlighted the concern of the committee, ensuring that the Council was being appropriate and transparent in its deployment of the policy. As members this information could be used to address concerns raised by residents, that the bar is set artificially high for financial reasons. This update will allow ongoing visibility and continued tweaks to the policy should they be identified.

Mark Ryder (Executive Director of Communities) suggested that this be addressed in the Chair and Spokes meeting as to what detail would be requested in the update and added to the forward plan.

### **Agreed**

That Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee acknowledges the update on the vehicle activated sign policy and considers whether it is fulfilling its aim to take an evidence-based approach to vehicle activated sign management, allowing a more effective targeting of

highways resources while continuing to support road safety. With an update to the Committee in twelve months' time.

## **5. An update on EV charging infrastructure progress**

Presented by Sebastian Burch (Strategy and Policy Officer) who covered the following points.

- Identified that there was a need to support residents with the increase of EV cars on the roads and therefore reduce emission in the County.
- Delivered 79 charging points across the County during the period 20/21 when funding was received.
- It was identified that there was a disparity of areas that were provided EV charging points.
- Funding of £3.3m from Central Government had been allocated to Warwickshire and in partnership with 14 other councils across the Midlands, under Midlands Connect this would be put towards the installation of more charging points.
- To ensure that these installations were distributed evenly over the county, in identifying the correct locations for installation rather than installing in areas that were easier.
- Potential opportunities in EV charging have been identified. A Lamp Column Trial was to take place in Leamington Spa and Stratford upon Avon. A pop-up style charger was to be trialled in areas across the county but had been delayed.
- The EV Strategy Infrastructure was in the process of being reviewed. This was produced in 2017 and the deadline runs till 2026 and therefore it needed to be reviewed and updated.

In response to Councillor Fradgley, Sebastian Burch advised that the Council had always looked at new products as they came up and there was continued discussions about innovations currently in the market. In answering Councillor Fradgley's supplementary question, Sebastian Burch stated that the cost of any infrastructure installed would need to be thoroughly explored.

There was a general discussion around providing infrastructure to residents and the need to ensure that any scheme put in place was future proofed.

In response to Councillor Pemberton, Sebastian Burch advised that this was something he was monitoring closely. There were groups and forums for officers in all authorities who are engaged in the EV industry with a number of best practice discussions happening. The Chair made a comparison between the costs of installing a gully charging option at a resident's property to installing a dropped curb. Councillor Matecki agreed that this is an option that was being investigated.

In response to Councillor Pemberton's supplementary question, Sebastian Burch advised that the policy which had come into effect on March 2024 would give the ability to change the traffic regulation order (TRO) for charging points. However, as this could only be changed once per year, the decision was being made as to when this would be done. The disparity of charger infrastructure (as per table 4.2) does not fully capture the full infrastructure network, as Warwickshire County Council (WCC) isn't the only group installing chargers. WCC should have a role but not be leaders in this, this should be up to the private sector.

In response to Councillor Pemberton supplementary question, Sebastian Burch agreed that it would be beneficial to show the whole picture including private charging points and he would include this and circulated to members.

Councillor Gilbert commented on other avenues of technology, and asked if they were being investigated as well as electric vehicles. Sebastian Burch advised that the team were watching the market and the industry to see what lead they would take, as they would produce the vehicles of the futures.

There was a general discussion about the cost of an EV cars and accessibility and affordability to residents. Councillor Watson added that there was an assumption that local authorities would provide EV charges when there was no expectation of local authorities to install petrol stations in local areas. Councillor Matecki advised that the Council should react to the market and acknowledged that the future of vehicles could be in a different direction however, there was a need to go in the direction of the current market, which is EV's.

David Ayton-Hill (Director of Economy and Place) commented that Warwickshire closely monitored the EV market and ensured the infrastructure being installed matched that growth. Part of the council's objective was to stimulate private investment and for private investors to drive the infrastructure installations. He also added the WCC had been commissioning studies of future technologies.

Scott Tompkins discussed the progress of the County Fleet Strategy and the move towards decarbonisation. This had included looking at all technology not just EV's as this sort of technology would not be suitable for larger fleet vehicles (gritters, fire trucks, and refuse lorries). It looked like a solution would be a mix of renewable energies. However, for smaller vehicles, EV technology had been leading the way in the industry.

There was a general discussion about hybrid and electric cars and what the future might hold. However, the direction of technology would be dependent on what the public decided.

The Chair commented on the report from the Task and Finish (T&F) Group and the reflection of that was evident in this report. He added that it was important to keep the focus on what we, as a council were doing and why we were doing it. Councillor Sinclair added that there was one part of the original T&F report that was not covered in this report and that was the quality and reliability of the infrastructure. He also added that this report does not mention any monitoring or indication if the council was meeting, exceeding or below expectations. Sebastian Burch commented on the report, expended on funding, and stated that the report was always evolving.

### **Agreed**

That the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes and comments on progress to date in respect of the Council's plans to deliver publicly accessible electric vehicle (EV) charge points.

In closing, The Chair thanked Sebastian for the report and requested that the Chair and Spokes discuss and decide when a review would be brought to the Committee but suggested this be reviewed in twelve months' time.



## 6. Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement Narrative Report 2022/23

Introduced by Graham Palmer (Infrastructure Strategy and Commissioning Lead) who discussed the narrative report which outlined information on developer funds which had been secured, allocated, received, and spent within the County Council and broke down the numbers to show real project development.

In response to the Chair, Graham Palmer advised that the report did not cover time scales on delivery of projects due to the complexity of each but was able to explain to members how project timing worked generically. He advised Councillors that he would welcome any questions outside of the meeting on specific projects. Mark Ryder added that it would be difficult to add all delivery timeframes to all projects in the report; however, specific areas of interest could be requested outside of this. He went on to explain developer funding, infrastructure, and trigger points of projects.

Councillor Pemberton commented on development visibility at a division level. He continued, stating that a case study on a large-scale development for members to understand the process would be beneficial to the committee as they would have a better understanding and be able to ask relevant questions next time they were faced with a big build in their area.

Graham Palmer agreed with the comments and would take the suggestions on when building the next report.

In response to Councillor Fradgley, Graham Palmer advised that each Section 106 funding had an expiry date which was tracked by the Council. This was to ensure that the funding was spent or allocated to a project as not to lose it. He added that no money was returned to developments in 22/23 due to funding expiry. Answering Councillor Fradgley's supplementary question, Graham Palmer confirmed that the unallocated funding displayed in the table was in various stages of being allocated to the project it was collected for.

In response to the Chair, Graham Palmer advised that when a section 106 is signed, indexation is added to each amount from when it was signed till the funds are received.

In reply to the Chair's question, Graham Palmer advised that no funds he was aware of were returned in 23/24 but close monitoring and checks were in place to ensure that these risks are captured.

Mark Ryder added that this report provided examples on projects that were delivered and said for the next report. it would include a site-specific project containing a timeline on a particular development.

### **Agreed**

The Committee noted and commented on the Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement (AIFS) 2022/23 at Appendix 1 and this accompanying narrative report.

## **7. Communities OSC Work Programme**

The committee discussed upcoming reports for June 2024 and September 2024 and noted its work programme, with the Chair requesting any additional items either at this meeting, or the subsequent Chair and Spokes meeting.

## **8. Urgent Items**

None.

The meeting rose at 15.41.