

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 27 November 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Jeff Clarke (Chair)
Councillor Jonathan Chilvers (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Sarah Feeney
Councillor Jenny Fradgley
Councillor Peter Gilbert
Councillor Dave Humphreys
Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Daren Pemberton
Councillor Mejar Singh
Councillor Andrew Wright

Other Members

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

Officers

Mark Ryder, Executive Director for Communities
Steve Smith, Director for Strategic Infrastructure and Climate Change
Isobel Woods, Head of Economy and Skills
Fay Winterburn, Strategy and Commissioning Service Manager
Charlotte Smith, Warwickshire Supported Employment Service – Team Manager
Chloe Millage, Careers Service – Team Manager
Ruth Rollings, Service Manager – Customer Relations (Complaints Manager)
Corrin Harding, Quality Standards and Business Improvement Officer
Richard Harkin, Communication and Marketing
Nicole Conway, Democratic Services Officer

Others Present

Kelly Doherty, Project Manager for the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disabilities and Autism. Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust (CWPT).
Bebeanna Woo, Head of Careers and Partnerships. Thrive Education Partnership

1. General

The Chair noted a change to the agenda, advising that item six was to be presented before item four and welcomed guest speakers, Kelly Doherty from Employment Pathway in Warwickshire, and Bebeanna Woo from Thrive Education Partnership. He also welcomed Warwickshire County Council Graduates, Liv and Milly to the meeting.

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher who was substituted by Councillor Marian Humphreys and from Councillor Heather Timms, the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate and Culture.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None disclosed.

(3) Chair's Announcements.

The Chair notified all present that the meeting was being webcast.

(4) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record by the Committee.

There were no other matters arising.

2. Public Speaking

None.

3. Questions to Portfolio Holder

In response to Councillor Feeney, Councillor Matecki, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning advised that a report on Safer School Streets would be presented to the committee in the future.

(1) Economic Development Update

The Economic Development update was presented by Isobel Woods, Head of Economy and Skills and the following points were addressed.

Headlines

- A reduction in employment this year, July 2023 to July 2024, from 3.3% to 1.7%.
- Business Growth Service had continued to engage with several Warwickshire businesses.
- Levy programme had achieved a milestone £1.5m of support provided.
- Sector development with another round of innovate launch pad investment worth £4.5m.

Economic overview

- Productivity and service levels across the county had remained static compared to previous quarters.

Business and Economy.

- Energy grants continued to be well received. Warwickshire County Council had awarded £0.5m to 14 businesses across the county with North Warwickshire seeing a higher uptake due to its industrial uses but applications had been received from all boroughs and districts.

Business Support

- 676 business had been supported year to date, focusing on skills development and business growth.

Business Growth

- To date, the programmes had engaged with 1300 businesses of which 267 had received targeted support. This equates to 93% of the annual target. 212 businesses had reported improvements to productivity, which was 259% achievement of target.
- Officers had been at events around the county and engaging with business to promote and support the new innovate UK Launchpad.

Employment and Skills.

- The Warwickshire Careers Employment Skills Strategy had commenced, identified as a key theme of the Warwickshire Economic Growth Strategy. This would also assist the Council prepare for the Devolution Deal with the Adult Education Budget.

Skills Hub

- Provided in depth supported for 726 business and minimal support for an additional 100. This increase was due to new programmes that were recently launched as part of the year three UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Fund).

Multiplier Programme

- Supported 2000 people in numeracy skills throughout the county. This programme would be ending in March 2025. Local authorities would have the opportunity to continue to support with a decision regarding the UKSPF requiring further consideration.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

- Allocation for skills funding was permitted to be spent in year three and a number of new programmes supporting young people had been launched.

Sector and Inward Investments

- Second round of the Coventry and Warwickshire Launchpad, funded by Innovate UK with a value of £3.45m. The scheme opened in early November 2024 and would run till 11 December 2024. Due to the short window, officers had been actively promoting the scheme.
- Defence vehicle maker, NMS Ltd have taken over the 100,000sqft, former Parker Hannifin site at Tachbrook Park, Leamington Spa.

Isobel Woods concluded the update and invited questions from members.

In response to Councillor Gilbert, Councillor Watson (Portfolio Holder for Economy) agreed with the statement about the needs of small businesses and supporting them in the future and encouraged members to sign post small businesses to the team if they are in need. Isobel Woods reminded members of the Economic Growth Strategy which included plans that could support small businesses and Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) in a range of areas.

Councillor Pemberton commended David Ayton-Hill, Isobel Woods, and the team on the work that they do in supporting business, especially in the Bidford area where business had valued the support and outreach.

Members raised concerns about challenges faced by businesses, noting that local authorities appear unsupportive by implementing barriers such as road closures and parking restrictions, often without prior notice, resulting in loss of income. Additionally, it was observed that the County Council was not informed of emergency works and there were some questions on the legitimacy of these works being classified as emergencies.

The Chair added that utilities do not need to inform the council of any emergency works that need to take place however for any planned works signage should be visible and if it is not to contact the localities officers for information and to have this rectified.

The Economic Development Update was noted by members.

6. Employment Pathways In Warwickshire

Fay Winterburn, Strategy and Commissioning Service Manager delivered a presentation that highlighting the following points, positives changes and future opportunities.

Fay Winterburn introduced colleagues, Charlotte Smith and Cloe Milage and visitors, Bebe Woo from Thrive Education Partnership and Kelly Doherty from Employment Pathway in Warwickshire. Fay gave an overview of the team, known externally as Warwickshire Skills Hub and internally as Employment and Skills. The Warwickshire Skills Hub was launched in 2020 with up to 200 business supported and in 2024 this number had grown to over 900 business supported. Fay outlined how the service worked and the forms of funding accessed, and programmes delivered.

Highlighting two teams within the service, Fay Winterburn outlined the Warwickshire Careers Hub and Warwickshire Supported Employment Service.

Warwickshire Careers Hub supported 51 of 54 secondary schools and sixth form and was in discussions to work with the remaining three. The Hub ensures secondary schools, sixth form and colleges deliver careers advice and guidance that was reflective of current and future needs of the economy and businesses. It encouraged these schools to apply for £2000 per year from the Future Careers Fund. Businesses have the opportunity to engage with schools as part of the Industry Spotlight to discuss future needs. Teachers are encouraged to upskill themselves to bring careers into class lead learning. Over the last 18 months the hub has impacted 89,390 students, directly or indirectly, with the age range of those impacted between 13 and 16. It was thought this was due to career decisions while in education.

Guest speaker, Bebe Woo, Head of Careers and Partnerships, Thrive Education Partnership was invited to speak on her experiences with the Warwickshire Careers Hub. She explained the positive impact the Warwickshire Careers Hub had on her setting, working in partnership to increase the number of students who have additional needs into employment after education. Adding that it would be helpful if there could be research into toolkits, partnership collaboration and scope work on post-18 models for SEND learners to raise aspirations and reduce societal impacts.

Fay concluded the Warwickshire Careers Hub service by discussing the economic efficiency of the service adding that the investment is £7411 per school per year.

Fay Winterburn introduced the Warwickshire Supported Employment Service explaining that this service was brought under the umbrella of Employment and Skills two years prior. The service assists individuals over 18 with learning disabilities and/or Autism into employment. This is achieved by assessing each individual's needs and discussing their career aspirations. Based on this information, suitable job opportunities are identified and matched to their skills and preference. The service also worked with businesses interested in offering inclusive job opportunities and assists them in making the necessary adjustments to support young individuals. The service also looked at alternative ways of getting young people into work such as industry tours which bypasses the traditional interview process. The service initially supported 22 individuals, two years later supported 577 individuals. 471 people have commenced their employment journey with continuous training to support them while employed. Customer satisfaction rate was 97% with employer satisfaction rate at 98.5%.

Fay invited guest speaker, Kelly Doherty, Project Manager for the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disabilities and Autism from the Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust (CWPT). Kelly outlined her role and the role of the Trust. The service had significantly contributed to recruitment campaigns by making minimal adjustments to support individuals with additional needs in securing employment. A dedicated team member provided ongoing support, fostering a safe and comfortable environment for individuals to ask questions. The Supported Employment team offered advice and guidance, enhanced job retention, and upskilled existing staff. They had successfully supported four trainers into employment and developed career progression routes. By addressing various aspects such as transportation and workplace norms, the service removes barriers to employment. They also provided communication support and signposting outside of Warwickshire. Kelly Doherty commended the team and suggested that similar programmes should be implemented in other counties. It would also be beneficial for tool kits to support employers making reasonable adjustments.

Fay concluded the update on the Warwickshire Supported Employment Service by highlighting its economic efficiency, noting that the cost per person for the required level of support needed was £600. It was noted that additional funding from Connect to Work was anticipated in the future and the aspirations of the service were not to just support those with learning difficulties and autism but to open the service to provide support for those with additional needs in the future.

Fay welcomed questions from members.

In response to Councillor Gilbert, Fay Winterburn advised that figures for those not in education or training were available and could be shared. In reply to Councillor Gilbert's second question, Fay advised that the service works with schools to create work experiences however it is not compulsory for schools to participate. Some schools offer time for employers attend the school and

bring work experience into the classroom. Warwickshire County Council had developed a work experience programme for those coming into the council for their work experience and planned to use the programme as best practice for businesses throughout Warwickshire.

In reply to Councillor Fradgley, Fay Winterburn advised that local universities in and around Warwickshire have strong post graduate schemes to support for those leaving as well as support from employers who had been involved in job marketplaces.

In reply to Councillor Chilvers, Bebe Woo stated that schools should be responsible for organising work experience and the Department of Education have a framework in place called Gatsby benchmarks which should help all schools have a clear framework for career provisions. However, it should be collaborative between schools, parents, and the Hub. Fay Winterburn added that an optimal scenario would be to have officers and employers dedicated to this. This would require commitments from businesses and schools and would require additional resources which were currently unavailable. In response to Councillor Chilvers supplementary question, Fay advised that the Supported Employment Service does have a bank of employers who work with schools, there was a need to have more employers join the programme and acknowledged a challenge with investments.

Responding to Councillor Pemberton's questions, Fay Winterburn advised that there was data available, and this would be included in future reports. Mark Ryder, Executive Director for Communities added that as an employer, Warwickshire County Council had a huge role to play in this space and should lead by example. A new programme for work experience had been developed in the Communities Directorate to streamline the offer to more balanced and complete programme with opportunities offered across all services of the directorate. This programme will be reported back to the committee with figures on its success. It was noted that the programme could be expanded to encourage experienced individuals into harder to fill positions within the council. Mark Ryder responded to Councillor Pemberton's supplementary question, stating that there is data on apprenticeships and work was being undertaken on making work experience into permanent places. Fay Winterburn explained the Fair Chance Employer programme within Warwickshire County Council and Charlotte Smith, Warwickshire Supported Employment Service (Team Manager) added that 90 individuals had been placed in employment with 92% staying in the role.

In response to Councillor Feeney, Fay Winterburn reassured members that while the support did not fall under Supported Employment, there were funding streams and programmes in place to support care leavers and other priority groups.

The Chair thanked the team for the report and request report in 12 months' time containing up to date data.

4. Communities OSC Integrated Performance Report Quarter 2 2024-25

The report, presented by Steve Smith, Director for Strategic Infrastructure and Climate Change highlighted the following points, and directed members attention to the live performance portal containing up to date information.

- 84% of performance measures on track.

- Section 3.3 of the report highlighted notable aspects of positive performance.
- Appendix 3 indicated Management of Finance Risk breakdown.
- Appendix 4 highlights Risk Management information.

It was noted that the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (the Committee) considers and comments on Quarter 2 2024/25 organisational performance, progress against the Council Delivery Plan, management of finances and risk.

5. Communities OSC feedback report

Presented by Ruth Rollings, Service Manager – Customer Relations (Complaints Manager), the following points were highlighted.

- Community directorate complaints had reduced from 634 in 21/22 to 565 in 23/24, a decrease of 11%,
- Compliments reduced from 121 to 45 2023/24.
- The Communities directorate feedback was received mostly by phone rather than online.
- The most significant increase was received during the month of August 2023, which correlated with the introduction of the digital parking permits.
- The top complaints categories for Communities were 'Outside Complaints Progress' (services outside the control or operation of the Council), 42%. 'Communication', 23% and 'Physical Environment Issues', 18%.
- Complaints by team, highest was County Highways, 37%, followed by County Highways Network, 15%.
- Over 80% of complaints were closed within timescale. Those outside of the timescale were closed on average in 40 days or over.
- Some of the lessons learned and actions taken over the past twelve months include better communication with those making complaints, managers to provide customer service training with staff, proper reading of instructions and apologies given.

Ruth Rollings welcomed questions from members.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Ruth Rollings advised that benchmarking would be looked at going forward. Regionally, Warwickshire County Council compare well with complaints escalated to the Ombudsman. Data relating to Ombudsman complaints could be included in future reports.

In reply to Councillor Feeney, Ruth Rollings advised that the complaints system did not allow the capture geographically of where complaints were originating.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Ruth Rollings advised that the full report was shared with corporate board and each directorate disseminates the findings and lessons learnt to each service. Mark Ryder added that the report was scrutinised at a directorate and service level. This gives the directorate areas to look at and work on.

In response to Councillor Dave Humphreys, Ruth Rollings advised that partial upheld complaints were ones with multiple facets where some of the elements were upheld while others were not.

It was noted that the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and commented on the contents of the report.

7. Communities OSC Work Programme

The committee discussed reports for upcoming meetings and noted its work programme. The Chair requested any additional items either be raised at this meeting, or the subsequent Chair and Spokes meeting.

8. Urgent Items

None.

The meeting rose at 15:35