

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 18 November 2020

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Clare Golby (Chair)
Councillor Jenny Fradgley
Councillor John Holland
Councillor Andy Jenns
Councillor Keith Kondakor
Councillor Andy Sargeant
Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher
Councillor Andrew Wright

Portfolio Holders

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

Officers

Keiran Amos, Chief Fire Officer
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

Others Present

Councillor Judy Falp
Councillor Pan Williams

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillor Dave Shilton

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

None.

(3) Chair's Announcements

The Chair reminded the committee that there is a special Joint Communities and Adults Social Care & Health OSC on the 25th November following a passed motion at Full Council in September 2020.

(4) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes were approved as an accurate record.

2. Public Speaking

None.

3. Questions to Portfolio Holder

Councillor John Holland noted the delays with highway projects and queried the viability of a monitoring system to check the progress of schemes. Scott Tompkins (Assistant Director – Environmental Services) responded that updates on schemes are provided through the major schemes' boards, but due to the number of ongoing schemes it remained difficult to monitor schemes individually. Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Leader of the Council) suggested flow charts to monitor the progress for each scheme based in which area they were in.

In response to Councillor Keith Kondakor's concerns with delegated budgets, Mark Ryder (Strategic Director – Communities) agreed that tracking schemes could be improved, and Scott Tompkins had worked on improving the management of capital schemes. Tracking the flow and spend of the money and the flow of projects against what was promised will need improvement and to be made more accessible.

Scott Tompkins added that delegated budgets will change, and the new process was presented to Cabinet earlier in 2020. In order to provide more transparency, a website will be developed for members which will provide an individual report for each member showing what schemes will be delivered for them in that year, along with their status' and which locality officer will deal with the scheme; this is planned for summer 2021. Councillor Jenny Fradgley commended this idea.

In response to Councillor Kondakor's points regarding the West Midlands Railway Executive (WMRE) governance arrangements, Councillor Peter Butlin (Portfolio Holder – Finance & Property) informed the committee that he will be Chair of the executive until May 2021 and it is a consultee to major projects, not a rail operator. The bay platform at Coventry train station will be done through the 'Knuckle' project and Network Rail; the WMRE is a consultee for the station, not the capital project itself. He continued that the bay platform was delayed because Coventry are focusing on upgrading and improving their station and existing routes for their tenure of the City of Culture in 2021; work with Network Rail and applying for extra government funds for this had been undertaken.

Following a supplementary from Councillor Kondakor, Councillor Butlin replied that the WMRE and Warwickshire County Council cannot control what Coventry City Council want to focus on.

(1) Economic Development Update

David Ayton-Hill (Assistant Director – Communities) provided the update stating that due to enhanced government restrictions, there were new national government schemes to support businesses like emergency grants for businesses which were forced to close. The grants

were optional to businesses operating a click and collect service. A more discretionary grant scheme called 'additional restrictions grant' was also set up, which awarded Warwickshire £11 million to support businesses ineligible for emergency grants. The county council is working with the district councils to coordinate a standard approach and help businesses on how to adapt for the future. The county council has a selection of economic recovery packages and projects which work with the council's partners and stakeholders. These include digital training for retailers which helped businesses get online, a growth program to help businesses adapt their business, as well as the loan and grant schemes. There was also a 'Tech Challenge' for technological and creative businesses to think innovatively about new solutions that they could put in place to help town centre businesses.

David Ayton-Hill continued that there was a difficulty responding to redundancies due to the high level of businesses laying off workers. Therefore, a redundancy support programme was set up with the council's external partners to support businesses who made/may have to make redundancies and see if any measures could be implemented to prevent this or support those affected. The support could be help with job searching, development, financial support or advice around financial management from the Citizens Advice Bureau and business start-up support. He concluded that a redundancy tracker was in place to track what was happening in local areas and adjust to this. However, new businesses have started up in Warwickshire or came to Warwickshire during the pandemic period and central government were consulted with to keep businesses in the area.

The committee praised the report and commended the support provided to businesses and redundant workers.

The Chair informed the committee that any workers made redundant during the furlough scheme can be re-employed and re-furloughed by the workplace that made them redundant for the remainder of furlough. She also praised that the grants were made available to supply chain contractors.

In response to Councillor Holland's comments regarding the 1980's economic crash and how Warwickshire County Council coped and provided skilling opportunities with it, Mark Ryder added that the council contacted Warwickshire College about opportunities and the recruiting firm for the new Covid-19 Mega Lab in Leamington Spa, in order to support local employment, businesses and the surrounding ecosystem.

In response to Councillor Kondakor, Mark Ryder responded that the council did not have a choice on where the Mega Lab would be, but they will utilise the opportunity.

Councillors Fradgley and Seccombe noted that jobs and opportunities need to be accessible to both North and South Warwickshire.

Councillor Andy Crump (Portfolio Holder – Fire & Rescue and Community Safety) stated that areas of deprivation exist cross-county and the Mega Lab will provide spin-off benefits. It was noted that a green transport policy will be developed to link all of Warwickshire to the Mega-Lab.

Following Councillor Kondakor's query about the BMW plant and smaller theatre venues, David Ayton-Hill stated that the BMW plant in Hams Hall will be where the BMW electric engines are developed in the UK and the Arts Challenge Fund worked with the cultural based industries to persuade visitors into town centres; however due to current restrictions this was delayed.

Following Councillor Kondakor's concerns regarding the agriculture industry without EU funding, Councillor Seccombe replied that the council has a working relationship with the NFU (National Farmers' Union) and these concerns were raised by the NFU at a recent meeting. Therefore, she had written to MP's on behalf of the NFU. She added that they are important for green technology, Warwickshire's biodiversity, and there are tenant farmers on council land who are members of the NFU.

4. School Road Safety Education TFG Report

Councillor Fradgley thanked the officers involved in the TFG and informed the committee that the TFG were previously not aware of the current school road safety programmes being provided by the Road Safety team within the council. Briefings were set up for members in all five districts for the Road Safety Team to share their work and explain their broad safety remit. The current project will help deal with climate change and improve green travel by teaching children how to cycle, walk safely to school and provide information when needed. She proposed that the report recommendations be approved and sent to Cabinet for their consideration.

The Chair thanked Councillor Fradgley for presenting the report and commended the council for having the team in place pre-TFG.

Councillor Kondakor expressed his surprise with how aggressive residents can be outside school gates and the proposed additional officer roles would help make it a safe area. He noted that the council had reminded residents to turn their car engines off when waiting for their children in order to improve the poor air quality around schools. The Chair added that work with errant parking at schools had been undertaken by the council too.

Councillor Crump praised the SAFER project for tailoring to the schools they are implemented in. Councillors Crump and Holland noted that improvements would not happen immediately, and cultural change would be the main cause of improvement. Councillor Crump informed the committee that in 2019 33 people were killed and 300 injured on Warwickshire roads.

Members of the committee discussed 20mph zones around schools and accidents that happened outside schools in their divisions because of speeding cars.

Councillor Fradgley added that children need to feel confident cycling on roads.

Resolved:

The Road Safety Education Task & Finish Group recommends that Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

1. I) Support the internal bids for two School Travel Plan Officer roles for a two-year period.
AND
II) If the internal bids are not successful, Communities OSC asks Cabinet to consider adding funding for the roles to the budget proposals to be recommended to Council in February 2021.
2. All County Councillors actively aid the School Safety Team with their liaisons with schools in their respective divisions, including promoting the SAFER project and any school champion work.

3. All school champions receive support from the School Safety Team and County Councillors when needed.

5. Mid-Year Performance Progress Report

Mark Ryder introduced the report stating it covered April to September 2020 and contains financial and performance elements which were both affected by Covid-19. Recycling had increased but waste overall reduced along with KSI's (killed or seriously injured) and vehicles on the road. The economy was negatively affected too but crime reduced in this period. There was budgetary overspending in this period due to a reduced economic income and the need to spend more in other areas.

In response to Councillor Kondakor regarding biodiversity and tree loss, Mark Ryder stated that the ecology team had been reviewing this for years and an update can be provided. Scott Tompkins added that the only trees that are removed were deemed unsafe and any trees that are removed for highway schemes are replaced; all this work is carried out by the forestry team with the help of tree warden volunteers to plant additional trees. The Chair thanked the forestry team on behalf of residents in her division for dealing with an emergency situation with a tree.

Councillor Seccombe added that it is essential to maintain green corridors to retain Warwickshire's biodiversity; work with the NFU continues to be carried out to ensure this. Regarding community woods, Councillor Seccombe clarified that they should be considered with development plans and it would need to be brought up to planning authorities.

Councillor Fradgley informed the committee that Stratford Town Council received a tree mapping update for green corridors in urban areas as part of their neighbourhood plan. She continued that smaller communities around Stratford asked for trees on common land and praised Scott Tompkins, Councillor Jeff Clarke (Portfolio Holder – Transport & Planning) and David Lowe for their support with this.

Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder – Environment, Heritage & Culture) added that the consultation for the community scheme around climate change projects included tree planting. To ensure the consultation is used she suggested that members raise it with their town and parish councils so they could contribute to the consultation and more climate change schemes cross-county.

Following a query from Councillor Kondakor, Councillor Timms stated that they had publicised the free packs from the Woodland Trust to schools regarding tree planting. With the tree map, they were aware which areas needed more trees planting as well as information on trees for green corridors.

6. Communities OSC Work Programme

The Chair informed the committee that items on the work programme and future committee meetings may be subject to purdah which starts on the 19th March 2021.

In response to Councillor Kondakor's query regarding the national waste strategy, Dave Ayton-Hill stated that an update will be available after the government second consultation document is released early next year.

Scott Tompkins added that they are planning on publishing a list on highways schemes that cost £250,000 and over, what stage they are at and the expected completion date. He continued that the OSC could review the draft before it goes on the member intranet.

Councillor Kondakor asked for all transport projects to go onto the website, like train and cycling projects.

7. Urgent Items

None.

The meeting rose at 15:10

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Chair