

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 17 November 2021

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Jeff Clarke (Chair)
Councillor Jonathan Chilvers (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Richard Baxter-Payne
Councillor Jackie D'Arcy
Councillor Jenny Fradgley
Councillor Dave Humphreys
Councillor Tim Sinclair

Portfolio Holders

Councillor Peter Butlin, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance & Property
Councillor Andy Crump, Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety
Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Economy & Place
Councillor Wallace Redford, Portfolio Holder for Transport & Planning

Officers

John Findlay, Service Manager (Business & Customer Support People)
Isabelle Moorhouse, Democratic Services Officer
Graham Palmer, Infrastructure Strategy Commissioning Lead
Mark Ryder, Strategic Director for Communities
Scott Tompkins, Assistant Director for Environment Services

Others Present

Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Mandy Tromans

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher
Councillor Heather Timms, Portfolio Holder – Environment, Climate & Culture
Councillor Andrew Wright
David Ayton-Hill, Assistant Director - Communities

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Chair's Announcements

The Chair thanked Councillor Jonathon Chilvers for chairing September's meeting and provided an update following one of the public speakers in that meeting.

The public speaker on village greens and how Warwickshire County Council dealt with a situation wanted to speak at November's meeting on the same issue but was turned down as he had already spoken on this same issue after members and officers investigated it. The Chair informed the committee that if they wanted to re-investigate it, they would. Officers created maps and overlay maps which showed the various positions in relation to village greens, and this was available to all members and the public as well. The Chair stated that a lot of officer time had been spent providing information to this public speaker and he had gone to the Information Commissioner's Office with a complaint which was not upheld; the actions of the Council were not deemed wrong and all requested information had been provided. The Chair concluded that any information requested by committee members would be provided if they requested it.

Councillor Tim Sinclair noted that all members of the committee received information from the public speaker; the Chair added that members of the committee were told that they could contact the public speaker if they wanted to. In response to Councillor Sinclair, Mark Ryder (Strategic Director – Communities) stated that they had full confidence in Warwickshire's legal team including their ability to deal with niche areas, some legal issues were outsourced to other local authorities for an external view.

The Chair informed the committee that the public speaker had already been told to seek his own legal advice.

(4) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

2. Public Speaking

The Chair stated that as the public speakers were discussing item six, the agenda would be rearranged to put this item first for the members of the public attending.

Mr John Dinnie read out the following statement on a 20mph limit for Shipston:

Thank you Mr Chair and thank you members for allowing me to speak on behalf of Shipston. Shipston has had enough of speeding traffic residence along the A3400 corridor and on the Camden Road are now saying enough's enough something has to be done about this speeding madness.

Our petition has now got 666 signatures so more than those in the there (the submitted statement). Shipston is asking Warwickshire County Council to implement a 20mph speed restriction and such calming measures as highways officers might advise. Across the country and in many surrounding towns and villages 20mph is being set as the new normal for residential areas as is recommended by the United Nations. Just for of many comments that we've received on the doorstep:

Just 4 of many comments received on the doorstep:

- Caudlewell Drive – "Coming out from our drive you take your life in your hands – they fly round the bend like lunatics!"

- Hornsby Close – “I’m terrified walking my children to school with vehicles rushing past.”
- New St - “It is so narrow here, but they still go far too fast”
- Stratford Rd. – “When my daughter yelled out, I rushed up to her bedroom, expecting to see a spider. Part of her ceiling was on the floor – brought down by the vibration of HGVs!”

Overwhelmingly the response to the petition has been in favour; those who haven't wanted to sign would prefer to see other measures put in place: yellow box cameras, better light up signs, chicane entry points like in Ettington. Very few people are content with the 30mph status quo, unlike the Task and Finish Group, Shipston clearly believes that implementing a 20mph restriction would be an inexpensive and effective measure. It would send a clear message to drivers and that residents views and lives matter.

The local police are supportive of this initiative, 20mph roads are safer for everyone to use. Shipston needs an integrated approach to traffic and roads management now. The one 20mph zone we have on the Callagh Estate at the top of Camden Road is great but every development every residential area needs the same protection. With Cop26, climate change, biodiversity issues on the agenda now is the time to make a brave decision to put the needs of police and planet before the racetrack mentality. Shipston do not believe that the Task and Finish Group's recommendations are strong enough to achieve the outcomes required and because of that the 20mph group in Shipston intend to press for Shipston to be a 20mph town.

3. Questions to Portfolio Holder

Councillor Chilvers raised the following question, “If funding were to become available would you be in favour, in principle, of a cycle superhighway near the line of HS2 from Birmingham to Southam? If so, will you contact appropriate portfolio holders in Birmingham and Solihull to see if a joint statement of support might be possible”.

Councillor Wallace Redford (Portfolio Holder – Transport & Planning) stated that the question was not relevant at the time as the County Council already successfully got permission from central government to improve the cycling connectivity. There were ongoing discussions with the DfT (Department for Transport) and HS2 about the possible interface of cycle ways using haul roads, but this was dependant on funding available and time constraints. Councillor Redford concluded that they could not progress with improving their cycle routes until they heard back from central government and HS2, but officers were engaging with this issue.

The Chair informed the committee that central government were proposing a cycle route alongside the Longshoot scheme in his division.

In response to Councillor Sinclair, Councillor Redford stated that a report on the original remit for the on-street parking TFG was not reported back to Communities OSC. The Chair confirmed that it went to Cabinet and the impact of Covid-19 forced things to be changed, delayed, and differed.

Following a supplementary from Councillor Sinclair, it was confirmed that a report from a TFG set up by an OSC does not have to come back to that OSC unless the report they approved said so. The Chair added that it would be up to the OSC to decide whether they were happy for a report to continue onto Cabinet.

(1) Economic Development Update

Councillor Kam Kaur (Portfolio Holder – Economy & Place) stated that it was a thorough economic update and noted the amount of grants to support businesses and the economy in Warwickshire.

In response to Councillor Jackie D'Arcy, Mark Ryder agreed to get information on the Special Schools who had not yet applied to the Build Back Fund.

In response to Councillor Sinclair, Councillor Kaur stated that there was a Business Advisory Team who had a website to support businesses and direct them to the right place or fund that they need for support. Mark Ryder added that there was the Growth Hub at the LEP (local enterprise partnership) who would tell them what schemes they were eligible for. In terms of simplification, a lot of opportunities are to seize government funding and direct it into the area for the benefit of Warwickshire's business; bids are made to try and match the criteria and get appropriate funding. Businesses were worked with to meet their needs, get green infrastructure opportunities, and building skills in deprived areas. Mark Ryder concluded that the council was using its own funding to fill in some gaps for business funding.

In response to Councillor Jenny Fradgley, Mark Ryder stated that they were working towards a green business economy and the council already had the Greenshoots scheme. Councillor Fradgley stated that every opportunity should be sought for to fund businesses that will reduce their carbon footprint.

(2) EDS Project Dashboard

Scott Tompkins (Assistant Director – Environmental Services) reminded the committee that they requested regular updates on the position of the capital program, especially the delivery of schemes in it. Therefore, the quarterly update given to the Major Schemes Board will be shared with the committee. The report showed the top 10 schemes in the North and South of the county and their statuses i.e. in the design stages, delivery stages, current issues, progress made etc. Members asked about progress with delegated budget schemes and it was confirmed that an online report is being produced for members and this will be launched in Spring 2022 during a member seminar.

Councillors Sinclair and Chilvers thanked officers for the report and praised its contents.

In response to the Chair, Scott Tompkins stated that there was a communication plan around the Bermuda Connectivity scheme and press releases were sent out whenever there was a new development with it. Local members were made aware of road restrictions/traffic management being implemented, the hospital and local businesses were being engaged and a meeting with Nuneaton members will be set up to provide updates on restrictions and the bridge being jacked. Due to the bridge work, there will be a 30-week period where the dual carriageway is restricted but members and residents will be updated on everything.

Mark Ryder and Councillor Fradgley agreed to discuss the South West Relief Road offline.

In response to Councillor Dave Humphreys, the Chair stated that the A5 was managed by Highways England so it would not have been included in the report, but it was important that all information the council had on the A5 was shared with members. Councillor Peter Butlin (Portfolio Holder – Finance & Property) added that the council always tried to get what it could for the A5 as it was a source of economic development and Midlands Connect were being worked with to try and get central government to revert its decision on developing the A5.

Mark Ryder clarified that the schemes in the report were not specifically priority schemes and were more the largest, or schemes with the greatest interest.

4. Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement 2020/21

Graham Palmer (Infrastructure Strategy Commissioning Lead) informed the committee that this statement was required following an amendment to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Legislation which was amended in 2019. This amendment required that any local authority that receives developer contributions (S106) to publish the details of that for the previous financial year. The statement will be considered by Cabinet in December and published on the County Council website prior to 2022.

In response to Councillor Humphreys, Graham Palmer clarified that all S106 money is provided for a specific purpose. For example, where there is a development in North Warwickshire, the council will assess the local capacity in schools and may make a request for the S106 money to go towards education capacity. This money provided could only go towards education capacity in North Warwickshire. They may be instances where they get S106 funding from several developments to go towards one large issue. Following a supplementary from Councillor Humphreys, Graham Palmer said that the council charge indexation for any of their contributions received using the national index which looks at the inflation in terms of the cost of delivering infrastructure. When the S106 is signed, there is a base amount of the contribution plus the indexation up to the point of that the contributions are paid by the developer. Therefore, they account for inflation with the indexation that the council charges developers.

Mark Ryder added that with extreme price pressures, availability, materials, workforce issues, and driver issues, cost can go up beyond indexation in specific sectors.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Graham Palmer stated that the 2019 amendment strengthened the case for county councils to ask for monitoring fees; the amount secured for monitoring depends on what S106 agreements were signed so the amount received monitoring depends on the estimated officer time spent on monitoring that agreement. Variance of the amount would be expected over the years, the amount that should be secured is done by a formula. Following a supplementary from Councillor Chilvers, Graham Palmer stated there it was disputed where some of their projects sat (highways or transport) but more clarification would be done with the transport section for future reports.

In response to the Chair, Graham Palmer stated that no S106 money was returned in the previous financial year and any fund returns would be included in the report.

Resolved:

That the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement attached as Appendix 2 and provide suggestions for improvement for future Statements.

5. Customer Feedback Overview report 2019/21

John Findlay (Service Manager (Business & Customer Support People) informed the committee that report covered the last three years of feedback following structure and staff changes. The report's purpose was to summarise the volume of feedback that was received across the organisation and the reason for the complaints, trends, volume of the cases that had been forwarded to the Local Government Ombudsman and provide information captured on the systems. During the 2020/21 financial year, the volume of feedback (complaints, questions, and compliments) increased by 20%. There were 1322 complaints, which was an increase of 16% from 19/20 and over 25% more than 18/19. 73.1% were managed internally with 70% being resolved

within the allocated timescales. 77% of comments were submitted digitally which was up from 70% in the previous two years, the communities directorate received 89% of it's feedback digitally. 69% of complaints received were because of communication issues, other complaints were about the physical environment and service standards. A new complaints manager was appointed in January 2021 who was working with the directorates and the reason why a complaint was received; all the directorates were engaging well.

Councillor Sinclair expressed his mixed views of the report's contents. He queried how much of the feedback was complaints and how many individuals provided feedback in Warwickshire. He noted that all feedback was useful to improve services but the report did not provide details of the complaint causes which meant it was not known what the issue was. The cost caused by council errors was not included and neither was an explanation to the complaint increase or the 'financial remedy'. He concluded that digital complaints may not be good for people who do not have a computer and there was no detail on the policies that had been changed.

John Findlay noted that a lot of these issues were caused by their current feedback system which will be amended when the separate complaints system is fully implemented in 12-18 months. They could report on data, not insight and there was a national trend of complaints increasing, there were some repeat complainers. It was confirmed that a report would be brought back to the committee after the new systems were implemented.

Councillor Chilvers supported Councillor Sinclair's comments and added that residents get frustrated when information is withheld from them or the department they are consulting with, get too defensive. He stated that there had been historical issues when the complaints team supported the complainer but the department who had the complaint made against them were not engaging with them.

John Findlay concurred with this issue of defensiveness and they were working on making sure all departments engaged better with the complaints team.

In response to Councillor Humphreys, John Findlay stated that more complaints were received nationally because people were more fraught and aware on how to complain. He concluded this was good so they would know what the issues were.

Councillor Butlin concurred with this as it was the only way to improve the council.

The Chair noted that the report will evolve and the OSC will engage when needed.

Resolved:

That the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the content of the WCC Corporate Customer Feedback overview report.

6. 20mph Limits TFG - Progress so far

Councillor Redford informed the committee that the recommendations in the note were in draft form and the TFG were having a further meeting in January, and asked for Mr Dinnie's statement to be circulated to the group.

The Chair stated that this was an appropriate way forward.

Councillor Fragley informed the committee that Stratford had a 20mph limit in their old town following Covid-19 alterations. She added that 20mph limits were not enough to slow down traffic if

drivers already were not abiding by the 30mph speed limit; physical engineering work would need to be implemented too.

Councillor Sinclair stated that the TFG investigated blanket approaches in different areas of Warwickshire which were expensive and may not have the desired outcomes with safety and environmentally. The draft recommendations aimed for a balance with this.

Councillor Chilvers added that there was a wide spectrum of views on the TFG, so the additional meeting was needed. A blanket approach was investigated for Kenilworth which showed an average reduction of accidents by 18%. The recommendations will be developed in the next meeting.

Councillor Sinclair added that the officers supporting the group said the funding would be better used in accident 'black spots'.

Councillor Andy Crump (Portfolio Holder – Fire & Rescue and Community Safety) informed the committee that all decisions made, need to be evidence based and the Warwickshire Road Safety Partnership worked with the Police, 'Brake' and the OPCC (office of the police and crime commissioner). Funding is applied to areas where the biggest impact will be and the partnership were trying to reduce road deaths and serious injuries by 50%, at the time of the meeting there were between 16-18 deaths on Warwickshire's roads and 100 serious injuries. Councillor Crump concluded that as they were spending public money, everything needed to be best value for money and save the most lives.

Councillor Humphreys noted that enforcement was needed as well as limits, therefore, people needed to be educated on speed too as well as speeding enforcement.

Councillor Chilvers added that evidence cross-country implied that 20mph limits were most successful in areas where there had been a widespread education campaign about why 20mph was good in that area. The police said that enforcing these limits was the last stage after public information and seeing if people would slow down. He concluded that future cars should have built in speed limiters which could change people's attitudes.

Councillor Sinclair said that TFG officers mentioned that drivers would go faster in speed limit areas if the driver believes it is too low. The TFG noted that there were roads that were suitable for 20mph and others that were not.

In response to the Chair, Councillor Redford confirmed that the Police sat on the TFG, but they expressed doubts whether they could enforce 20mph limits.

The Chair noted that the TFG's work was ongoing, and he hoped the public speakers would note that they would go for the safest option.

7. Communities OSC Work Programme

Councillor Sinclair reiterated that an annual report for schemes of the previous year, including successes and failing should be on the work programme.

8. Urgent Items

None.

The meeting rose at 15:40

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Chair