

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 8 February 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Jeff Clarke (Chair)
Councillor Jonathan Chilvers (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Richard Baxter-Payne
Councillor Jenny Fradgley
Councillor Dave Humphreys
Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher
Councillor Tim Sinclair
Councillor Andrew Wright

Portfolio Holders

Councillor Andy Crump, Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety
Councillor Heather Timms, Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate and Culture

Officers

David Ayton-Hill, Assistant Director – Communities
Kimberley Fraser-Bell, Strategy and Commissioning Manager (Economy & Skills)
Tristan Hall, Section Manager (Delivery Lead) Project & Programme Management
Isabelle Moorhouse, Democratic Services Officer
Margaret Smith, Lead Commissioner - Transport Planning
Scott Tompkins, Assistant Director for Environment Services

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillor Mejar Singh was substituted by Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Jackie D'Arcy
Councillor Martin Watson (Portfolio Holder – Economy)

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Chair's Announcements

The Chair noted that Severn Trent Water and the Environmental Agency will be attending

April's meeting to answer questions. Please can all questions to them be submitted by the **5th April at the latest**

The Chair introduced Kim Fraser-Bell as the new Economy and Skills Manager.

(4) Minutes of Previous Meeting

It was noted that two items in the previous minutes needed to be added to the work programme.

The minutes were approved as an accurate record.

2. Public Speaking

None.

3. Questions to Portfolio Holder

None.

(1) Economic Development Update

David Ayton-Hill (Assistant Director – Communities) summarised the following points:

- Milestones had been achieved in several projects
- The Small Capital Grant programme for businesses had provided a grant to its 100th business. This grant was to help small businesses grow. £2.3 million had been invested and this unlocked £4.5 million in private investment and 210 jobs in Warwickshire
- Businesses must match funds with their own contributions for the programme
- The Business Support programmes which helps businesses to start, grow and scale up businesses had helped its 1000th businesses since its inception in 2016
- Performance metrics will be available in April's report
- Two new programmes were being launched: the Digital Creative Co-Investment Fund and Green Recovery Grant scheme. These were funded by leftover Covid-19 grants.
- The Digital Creative scheme helped small gaming industries access finance and get them marketing opportunities
- The Green Recovery scheme will help businesses who struggled during the pandemic with energy bills. This will include green energy grants e.g. solar panels to make them more energy sufficient
- Part of the WRIF includes the Business Investment Growth pilot, which provides large loans to businesses
- There is the Local Communities and Enterprise pillar, which is for small businesses and start-up enterprises
- The Property and Infrastructure Fund is the third element of the WRIF, and this provides loans to enable new employment on sites that could help investors provide infrastructure. This will be launched at the UK Real Estate Investment & Infrastructure (UKREIIF) event in May 2023

In response to Councillor Jenny Fradgley, David Ayton-Hill stated that the companies who were awarded grants were worked with closely to help them succeed. Only a few businesses

had to return their grants and only one business to date has failed and closed.

Councillor Tim Sinclair informed the committee that there was a small digital exhibition at the Leamington Pump Rooms. In response to Councillor Sinclair, David Ayton-Hill stated that they were working on a new economic growth plan because the previous one was approved in February 2020. The finding of the peer review said that the new strategy should be for Warwickshire and not just WCC. Drafting around priorities and objectives was done and they focused on three core elements (inclusive growth and levelling up, prosperous growth, and sustainable growth). These themes will be populated and sent out for consultation with businesses. A draft will be ready in late March-early April 2023.

In response to Councillor Marian Humphreys, David Ayton-Hill confirmed that the borough and district councils were worked with and were part of the different programmes, including the Business Support ones. Numbers may not look proportionate because there were more businesses in Stratford District than North Warwickshire. Work was done proactively to raise these numbers. Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough businesses were engaging least with WCC (although still good numbers) and WCC, the Growth Hub, the Chamber of Commerce, and the FSB (Federal of Small Businesses) were looking at different ways to reach out and engage businesses there, including a successful business 'open day' at Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council recently.

David Ayton-Hill agreed to provide details on sessions held in North Warwickshire.

In response to Councillor Dave Humphreys, David Ayton-Hill stated that there, WCC focused on small/micro enterprises up to medium-sized enterprises. Work was done with larger ones if there were inward investment opportunities. Business Support programmes focus on small/micro start-up businesses, and they were reached indirectly and directly e.g. directly would be a marketing advert via social media or holding events. Indirectly would be through the Chamber of Commerce, FSB, or any other intermediary. There is a deficiency of smaller units for smaller businesses to use in North Warwickshire, so WCC were looking at opportunities to build smaller units to enable this.

David Ayton-Hill noted it would be useful for committee members to push the message out that WCC would support smaller businesses cross-county.

In response to Councillor Richard Baxter-Payne, David Ayton-Hill said that there were business advisors at WCC who could speak to businesses if there was not enough security for a loan. Any business who wanted a loan but who were not sure they could get one should contact WCC.

The Chair suggested using the Communication Team to try and communicate with businesses in Nuneaton and Bedworth and North Warwickshire boroughs.

(2) EDS Dashboard

In response to Councillor Baxter-Payne, Margaret Smith (Lead Commissioner - Transport Planning) stated that they were looking at different bus routes with operators to ensure that they matched WCC's longer term plan for Nuneaton town centre's regeneration. There were issues with traffic flow in Nuneaton because there was gyratory that needed to be fixed on Bond Street. They were planning to link this with a bus route via Abbey Street.

In response to Councillor Sinclair, Scott Tompkins (Assistant Director – Environmental Services) informed the committee that Clopton Bridge was meant to have a set of traffic

signals that were going to be funded by S278 money. The cost of the scheme ended up costing a lot more than the S106 money provided. Traffic surveys will now be done regarding traffic in/around Stratford; this will be used to inform WCC of the options available for a scheme at the site. However, two previous studies were done that said that the only option for any mitigation in a future with high levels of traffic was to signalise the bridge. The scheme may be delivered in two phases (pedestrian and cycling improvements first to encourage a modal shift). It was important not to lose any S106 funding so a scheme must be developed this year; timescales for the project were unavailable but construction will not happen until 2024 because of the other works happening in Stratford.

Following a supplementary from Councillor Sinclair, Scott Tompkins confirmed that Stratford's transport group will be involved in the scheme with local members so options could be looked at. The impact of HGVs using alternative roads to the Clopton Bridge would need to be looked at.

Following a question from Councillor Jonathan Chilvers, Margaret Smith stated that schemes two and three were likely differently rated because of road space allocation and how much space workers had to do the work as this affected timing. This was not design related.

Scott Tompkins added that there was a difficulty with road space due to different contractors wanting to start their scheme on the network. Road closures cause a lot of problems and there were several S278 schemes competing for road space.

Mark Ryder (Strategic Director – Communities) said that future EDS Dashboard's will say why a scheme is coloured the way it is.

The Chair noted that utilities needed to get onto the network and close roads to resolve issues e.g. a burst pipe and this could disrupt the network. They also will take priority over work contractors will do.

Scott Tompkins agreed to get information regarding the scheme is Councillor Fradgley's area after the meeting.

4. Joining up 'trunk' bus routes with demand response bus services

David Ayton-Hill stated the following points:

- Trunk bus routes were main bus routes that were operated by private companies who could make a profit running those routes
- Demand response transport will pick up residents who book it in rural areas and who were more dispersed
- On WCC's bus service improvement plan, it set out how it was looking to improve its bus services
- There is the enhanced partnership in place to push this forward, but WCC was unsuccessful in securing any funding in the Service Improvement Plan in 2022
- However, work will continue but there will be funding constraints

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Margaret Smith said that there were known reliability issues and Stagecoach had attended a meeting with the Bus Services working group discussing this. A lot of bus drivers were leaving to become HGV drivers because the pay was better. Stagecoach was undertaking driver training and recruitment and if the recruit left soon after training left then they would have to pay some of the money back invested on them.

David Ayton-Hill added that this was a similar problem with train drivers too. WCC were looking at promoting train and bus driving at job fairs.

Following a supplementary from Councillor Chilvers, Margaret Smith stated that via the BSIP (bus services improvement plan), they need to say what they want to see in an ideal world. Table 1 in the paper is part of the core network with high frequency services but reality does not always match aspiration. This is primarily a commercial network, WCC has limited funds, so they must try to put these in places where they would have the maximum impact. It would be better for a new trunk route to be implemented to connect urban areas who do not have one yet as there would be more people using and wanting to go to the same destination.

Councillor Sinclair noted that the lack of reliability with drivers being available to drive buses was a main issue. It was agreed that WCC officers in contact with Stagecoach would provide a summary of the performance and the issues that were being faced.

In response to Councillor M Humphreys, Margaret Smith noted that it was a priority of the BSIP for there to be one ticket for a whole journey on the bus, even if it was with different companies. This would start with internal journeys around Warwickshire before seeing if this could be branched into the West Midlands.

Mark Ryder added that meetings were held with Transport for West Midlands who were for this idea. This should help reduce ticket prices for commuters too.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Scott Tompkins said that currently WCC subsidises services where passenger numbers are low making this commercially non-viable. In some cases, WCC are subsidising near empty bus services and in these areas replacing the service with DRT can be very successful. As DRT proves successful, WCC would look to invest more into DRT and potentially reduce subsidies.

Following a supplementary from Councillor Chilvers, Scott Tompkins stated that they would need to collect passenger data in the future to move this forward but were not doing it now.

5. NUCKLE Line update

In response to Councillor Baxter-Payne, Margaret Smith noted that there was already an hourly service between Coventry and Nuneaton, and it had been planned to be every 30 minutes for a long time. However, this would only be possible with another platform. Several reviews had been done and the costs of the scheme increased. Coventry City Council are the scheme lead and they were looking at bringing it forward as part of the wider master plan proposal for the City Centre. This was not done because of the cost increases. Another problem was the commitment for that second train per hour came as part of the West Midlands trains franchise. Post-Covid, it was unknown what support rail operators would get from central government. They needed to make savings which included cutting existing services; therefore, they were unable to commit to a new train service. WCC is very limited by what it could do as it was in Coventry and due to the state of train services at present, nothing would happen in the short term.

Midlands Connect were leading a piece of work, looking at a new direct connection between Coventry and Leicester. This would be twice an hour so WCC were looking at how they could work with partners across the wider rail industry to keep this on the agenda and move it forward.

In response to Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher, Margaret Smith said that they had not actively looked at reopening a train station in Exhall in the train strategy plan, but this will be looked at to see if it is possible. There may be constraints though as there were already two new stations at Coventry Arena and Bermuda in Nuneaton.

Following a question from Councillor Chilvers, Margaret Smith stated that when there were franchises, they would be able to speak to prospective bidders and they would be able to barter for two trains per hour. This system of franchising will not continue, and Great British Rail would come in. WCC is part of the West Midlands Railway Executive who speak to the DfT on behalf of local authorities.

In response to the Chair, Margaret Smith stated that WCC works with Coventry but as Coventry are the lead authority, they, and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) oversee contractual arrangements and funding. WCC officers attend the Project Board meetings and WMCA financed it with some private investors for a car park. There was an outstanding residual amount which it was agreed that this would be put towards a bay platform. However, there was now not enough money for a bay platform. It was clarified that this project would not go ahead anytime soon.

In response to Councillor Baxter-Payne, Margaret Smith stated that conversation would be needed with Coventry to see if this money could be used to increase the current line to two trains per hour. However, this was limited by a lack of driver availability.

Margaret Smith clarified that the contracts would be renewed in 2026.

6. Transport Scheme Evaluation

David Ayton-Hill stated the following points:

- This report came from a request by the committee to see how schemes were looked at lesson learnt from them for future schemes
- The review showed that there was not a consistent approach to monitoring and evaluating all WCCs schemes. It depended on the scheme, funding source, and level of funding
- Monitoring and evaluation were done for road safety schemes by using evidence to identify priority sites based on the number of injury/personal injury collisions. Schemes were installed and monitored to see if it had a positive impact on reducing/eliminating collisions
- For big capital schemes (e.g. through the DfT), WCC will have a significant evaluation programme that meets the needs of the funding body and respond to requests that they make on how WCC delivers the schemes
- There was not a consistent approach to this either so in the future WCC plans to make evaluations for these kinds of schemes consistent
- Recent technological advances and investment in technology within WCC has improved transport monitoring equipment so it has sensors and can monitor the most travelled directions. This has also helped a more consistent approach happen with monitoring schemes

Councillor Sinclair praised the report. In response to Councillor Sinclair, David Ayton-Hill agreed to show more how lessons learnt helped improve future schemes. If the committee wanted to see the specifics on one particular scheme, then this could be brought to the committee.

Mark Ryder added that WCC's funded schemes will have the same evaluation process as the big capital funded schemes.

Councillor Sinclair suggested that a smaller version of this be provided to the committee in the same way as the EDS Dashboard is presented.

Councillor Chilvers noted that it would be good if for these reports it said whether a scheme was in progress or had not started yet. It was important to know how lessons could be learnt constructively, especially in a consistent approach.

Councillor D Humphreys concurred with this and noted it was important to get this right first time.

The Chair noted that this needed to be incorporated into the committee, but it was important that it did not disrupt/delay planned schemes. Officers agreed that this should not disrupt any schemes as this was the planned formal approach.

In response to Councillor Baxter-Payne, Margaret Smith stated that with, for example cycle schemes, they will plan to see if any new cyclists use that route. For road schemes, they will see what directions people go. Scott Tompkins added that, the teams actively looked for lessons learnt already and applied this to future schemes. For example, with dealing with contractors and making desired changes.

7. 20mph Limits Update

Paul Taylor (Delivery Lead – Forestry & Minorworks) summarised the following points:

- Nine councillors will implement 20mph with their delegated budgets since April 2021
- These schemes were all different geographically and design wise as they needed to be bespoke
- A pilot scheme for the Highways Community Action Fund (HCAF) will be implemented in Henley in Arden and was due to go out for consultation
- Bridge End in Warwick was in the consultation stage of the 20mph scheme
- Signs and road markings were a cheaper alternative to getting 20mph limits installed
- The costs for all the planned schemes still needed to be determined

In response to Councillor Sinclair, Paul Taylor agreed to provide the cost estimates for each scheme and that its impact should be monitored too. They try to determine costs before consultation to see if they are affordable; there was no set criteria to see how lessons were learnt from the scheme.

Scott Tompkins noted that these were very different schemes to the ones reported in the Transport Evaluation item.

Paul Taylor clarified that speed surveys were done before a 20mph was planned to see if they were needed; they had to look at scheme viability versus the statistics of the scheme's need.

Paul Taylor concurred with Councillor Chilvers that speed surveys needed to be done before a traffic calming scheme was implemented so ensure that a scheme was worth implementing.

In response to Councillor D Humphreys, Paul Taylor clarified that the New Arbury blanket approach for a 20mph scheme was an example provided to the 20mph Limits TFG to show the cost and not something planned for installation.

Councillor D Humphreys said that he would like to know what could be done instead for residents in the area.

Following a question from Councillor Sinclair, Paul Taylor said that parameters like speed could be measured. The purpose of a speed reduction scheme would need to be measured by the relevant survey e.g. a speed reduction one or pedestrian count one.

Following a point from Councillor Fradgley, Paul Taylor stated that a popular 20mph limit at the consultation would be quicker to implement.

In response to Councillor Baxter-Payne, Paul Taylor stated that signs alone rarely reduced car speeds so physical traffic calming measures would be needed. In response to Councillor Chilvers, Scott Tompkins confirmed that the Henley in Arden HCAF 20mph limit was in its development stage and more may be trialled after. A report will be brought to Cabinet which will set up a fund for the HCAF to enable easier rollout for this year.

Councillor Sinclair suggested that this item come back to the committee in 12 months to show the successes/failings of the implemented schemes. Paul Taylor said that full surveys normally take three to five years so they would need to do a short traffic survey for this. Scott Tompkins added that implementing these schemes took between 12-18 months due to construction and legalities.

In response to the Chair, Paul Taylor said that in the informal consultation, local residents and businesses were contacted for feedback to the design could be finalised before a TRO is sent out with a formal consultation.

Following a supplementary from the Chair, Paul Taylor confirmed that local sat nav data was available, but it was always sent to the Council out of date, so speed surveys were always done before 20mph limits were implemented.

8. Council Plan 2022-2027 - Quarter 2 Performance Progress Report

Scott Tompkins informed the committee that at a future meeting he would look to provide more detail on the capital programme measure confirming how it is measured. Currently it measures budget annually against forecast which is probably not a good measure of scheme delivery given that many capital schemes are delivered over longer timescales. For example, for a scheme that would take four years to complete, the in-year measurement of performance should be measured against the planned in-year spend and not the entire budget.

In response to Councillor D Humphreys, Scott Tompkins concurred that a scheme's inception could be years before delivery and the cost could be different then the funding obtained for it, so contingency was always put in. Commonly, at an early stage of a scheme, there will be something like 40% contingency and when it gets closer to the delivery date the contingency could be reduced as there are less surprises. An example of when contingency was needed recently was when a high-pressure gas main was in a place builders were told it would not be. Due to inflation in the construction industry and issues with the steel industry, this had become more of a focus for WCC. The Design Services Team will do work on getting better at the feasibility stage and ensuring WCC has the best predictions they can meet before agreeing a budget for a scheme to be delivered.

Mark Ryder added that the uncertainties made it a challenge to predict costs over the next few years.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Scott Tompkins said that the higher number for domestic abuse instances meant that more people were reporting it and it helped ensure they had the right measures in place to deal with it. Mark Ryder added that domestic abuses reporting was high in 2021 because of Covid-19 and the European Football competition. The 900 figure was domestic abuse cases reported monthly.

9. Communities OSC Work Programme

- NUCKLE line update (when appropriate)
- 20mph limit update (2024)
- Transport Scheme Evaluation Table (quarterly)
- Delegated Budgets Schemes

10. Urgent Items

None.

The meeting rose at 16:07

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Chair