

Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 7 June 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Adrian Warwick (Chair)
Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Sarah Boad
Councillor Piers Daniell
Councillor Sarah Feeney
Councillor Will Roberts
Councillor Ian Shenton
Councillor Richard Spencer
Councillor Robert Tromans
Councillor Tim Sinclair

Officers

Rob Powell, Strategic Director for Resources
Charles Barlow, Delivery Lead - Localities
Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Ben Brook, Chief Fire Officer
Andy Carswell, Democratic Services Officer
Craig Cusack, Assistant Director - Enabling Services
Sarah Duxbury, Assistant Director - Governance & Policy
Steve Smith, Assistant Director - Commissioning Support Unit
Paul Aitken, Customer Relations Officer
Sue Parks, Quality Standards and Business Improvement Officer

Others Present

Councillor Andy Crump, Portfolio Holder (Fire & Rescue and Community Safety)
Councillor Yousef Dahmash, Portfolio Holder (Customer and Transformation)
Councillor Heather Timms, Portfolio Holder (Environment, Climate and Culture)
Councillor Martin Watson, Portfolio Holder (Economy)

1. General

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly the new Committee members who were attending for the first time.

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Wallace Redford. Councillor Tim Sinclair was attending as a substitute.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Chair's Announcements

There were no announcements from the Chair.

(4) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on 22 February 2023 and 16 May 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

2. Public Question Time

There were no questions from members of the public.

3. Questions to Portfolio Holders relevant to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

There were no questions to portfolio holders.

4. OSC Customer Feedback 22/23

The Chair reminded members that a revised report had been circulated with the most up to date information, and thanked officers for providing the latest version.

Craig Cusack (Assistant Director, Enabling Services) introduced the item and stated the report indicated services were making positive progress. The number of complaints for service areas of relevance to the Committee had decreased and the overall volume of cases had gone down. The proportion of complaints being made to these service areas had increased, which was attributed partly to some people making multiple complaints. Craig Cusack drew members' attention to the fact that, annually, more cases were being handled solely by the Customer Relations Team, and this was helping to speed up resolution times for residents and improve the data held on the type of correspondence received and how they were responded to.

Councillor Tim Sinclair said he would have liked to have seen more detail on the CRM Dynamics. He said he had requested this at the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Sinclair asked if more detail and realistic timescales could be provided, and the benefits it would bring. Craig Cusack said the specific requirements of the CRM were being looked into, with the aim of being able to provide greater flexibility than the current system. He said the new Dynamics system would be able to be used to serve by the public in the autumn. This would include the system of submitting complaints and comments, the likes of which were summarised in the report to members. Members of the public would be able to log into a portal and see direct feedback from officers, and get responses much more quickly and easily. Responding to Councillor Sinclair, Craig

Cusack said an update on the scheduling of subsequent Dynamics modules would be made available to members at the relevant Committee. Rob Powell (Strategic Director, Resources) said the information was already available to members through the quarterly the Integrated Delivery Plan reporting and data on Power BI. It had been necessary to delay implementation until assurance work had been completed to show that the plans would support changes introduced through the now delayed Government adult social care reforms.

Councillor Sarah Boad asked if there was a breakdown of statistics on how residents had contacted the Council to make a comment, complaint or compliment. She said more services were being provided online and there was a possibility residents who did not have internet access were being disadvantaged. Paul Aitken (Customer Relations Officer) said no breakdown was available, but said there were still a number of ways residents could get in touch. For example they were still able to send in letters, and services could be accessed in libraries. Rob Powell said it was now possible for residents to borrow electronic devices from libraries, and the Council wanted to cater for everyone's individual preference. The Chair asked if a breakdown could be made available to members if this was not too onerous a task.

Councillor Sarah Feeney said she welcomed the section of the report on lessons learned, particularly as they were circulated back to the wider service area. Councillor Feeney said there could be some disputes that a resident would not have said qualified as a complaint, and asked how these were recorded. Craig Cusack said the complaints policy was being reviewed by Legal and any proposed changes were expected to be considered by Cabinet in October. He said officers were encouraged to resolve issues on the spot, as it was possible for a formal complaint to arise out of an issue not being dealt with in a timely manner. He said he hoped to be able to provide an update at a future meeting on how different complaints arose from different situations.

Members noted the contents of the report. The Chair thanked officers for bringing it to the Committee.

5. Q4 Integrated Performance Report

The item was introduced by Steve Smith (Assistant Director, Commissioning Support Unit), who stated the report had been compiled by the Business Intelligence Team. He said there continued to be a consistent strong performance in areas of relevance to the Committee, which was particularly encouraging in light of the current volatile economic climate and challenges relating to staff capacity and workforce retention. Steve Smith said around three quarters of the performance measures under the Committee's remit were either on track or had already been met. He said there were significant challenges caused by an increased demand and funding levels for Special Educational Needs provision, which then had an impact on the High Needs Block on the Dedicated Schools Grant. The Fire and Rescue Service had challenges relating to incident response times, which had led to a re-evaluation of risk and resource management across the county. Significant risks included slowing in economic growth, high interest rates and high rates of inflation. Steve Smith said the emerging Government policy regarding adult social care reforms would also continue to be monitored.

Members' attention was drawn to the appendices of the main report, which outlined the key business measures and how Warwickshire County Council's performance compared against other local authorities. Performance against the Integrated Delivery Plan, management of the financial risk associated with the Fire and Rescue Service, and the key services' risks summary were all

also included in the appendices. Members were reminded they had access to this data through Power BI.

The Chair said members should thank officers for the work they were doing in light of challenging global circumstances.

Responding to a question from Councillor Sarah Boad, Steve Smith said 74 per cent of the items on the Integrated Delivery Plan were either on track or completed. This figure was 54 per cent for the key business measures. Steve Smith reminded members that the Integrated Delivery Plan covered a two-year cycle. It had incorporated Levelling Up and Community Powered Warwickshire, and had been formally adopted by Cabinet at its May meeting.

Councillor Sarah Feeney noted the Fire and Rescue Service's target relating to road traffic collisions, and asked if this could be met, was an area of concern, or an arbitrary figure. Ben Brook (Chief Fire Officer) said that the police would attend incidents that the Fire and Rescue Service were unable to get to. He said the figure had been produced as an average of the figures over the past three years; however, incidents were now rising and their severity was also increasing.

Councillor Tim Sinclair noted the percentage of respondents to the Your Say survey who had said they felt safe to be their authentic self, and said he felt this ought to be higher. He also noted high sickness absence rates in some service areas. On the first point Rob Powell said this had been an area of particular focus by the EDI team and stated his belief the figure of 79 per cent was in line with sector benchmarks, but should be seen alongside a number of other measures of the Council's inclusive culture. Several staff network groups had been involved as part of this, which looked at broader issues and the importance of creating the right culture to enable all colleagues to share their experiences and characteristics. Following a recent campaign there had been a significant increase in rates of staff disclosure of their protected characteristics. Regarding absence rates, Rob Powell said there was significant variation between services, with most services having lower sickness rates. Sickness levels in social care and business support were higher, which may reflect specific aspects of the work in these areas, particularly emotional or mental health-related reasons.

Responding to a question from Councillor Sarah Feeney regarding adverse Ombudsman determinations and why it was reported under the data and digital solutions section, Sarah Duxbury (Assistant Director, Governance and Policy) said there was a link between digitisation of the customer journey work, improvements being sought, and complaints – some of which ended up being investigated by the Ombudsman. Regarding performance, the cases were quite fact specific and any learning points that could be shared more generally across service areas would be considered in respect of adverse findings. In addition to these, learning points identified from Ombudsman reports relating to other local authorities were also circulated. This process sat with Legal Services, who maintain an overview of the Council's performance and would follow up with specific service areas as necessary.

In response to a query from Councillor Tim Sinclair about value for money green ratings, Rob Powell said external auditors had given green ratings to two of the three criteria used. These related to financial sustainability and governance. The third criterion, value for money, was amber as a result of the outcomes of the Ofsted local area inspection of SEND provision and the HMICFRS inspection of the Fire and Rescue Service.

Responding to a question from Councillor Ian Shenton about fire response times, Ben Brook said the current situation was crews were expected to attend an incident within ten minutes 75 per cent of the time. However there were parts of the county that had a higher risk of an incident occurring. A review was taking place to reconfigure the service, and consider how resources could be assigned to places that had a higher associated level of risk. This could help to reduce emergency response times by up to 30 seconds, which Ben Brook said could be crucial in a life or death situation. Councillor Andy Crump said a vast amount of evidence had been analysed and considered by members of the Community Risk Management Plan Assurance Panel. A consultation on reconfiguration of resources would follow with members. Councillor Crump said this formed an important part of the prevention and protection strategy. He said response times did not always lead to a positive outcome, recalling an incident where crews were able to attend within less than five minutes but by then it was already too late.

Councillor Ian Shenton asked about the performance at outturn against the budgets for Governance and Policy. Sarah Duxbury said the revenue position was mainly as a result of higher than budgeted external legal trading income, with services being provided to the Council but also to other public sector bodies. This was a positive outcome. This included other local authorities asking for help with legal services in areas such as child protection where there was a shortfall in available provision.

Responding to a question from Councillor Tim Sinclair about the information from the Warwickshire Outcome Measures, Steve Smith said this was used to identify priority areas, particularly in relation to Levelling Up and Community Powered Warwickshire, and inform the future work programme. It had the additional benefit of allowing officers to compare performance against other parts of the country. Rob Powell said the information had helped officers to create an evidence base that helped to support partnership working. He gave the example of the ongoing work with district and borough councils, and other public sector partners, to develop local levelling up plans, as these had been drawn extensively from the shared evidence base.

Regarding tackling climate change, Councillor Heather Timms said the goals were ambitious but the Council needed to be pragmatic in its approach to trying to meet them. Responding to a question from Councillor Ian Shenton, Sarah Duxbury said an element of the Sustainable Futures Strategy was aimed at shifting residents' behaviours and that consideration would be given to that and how the Council, residents and businesses, could be enabled to make more sustainable decisions around energy consumption. Steve Smith said an update report on the 2030 net zero plan and the Sustainable Futures Strategy would be going to Cabinet later in the month.

Members noted the contents of the report.

6. Social Impact Fund Progress Report

The report was introduced by Charles Barlow (Delivery Lead, Communities and Partnerships Service). He reminded members the Social Impact Fund had been agreed by Cabinet in October 2021 to help build stronger communities. It had targeted geographical areas that had experienced higher than average instances of Covid and groups that had experienced increased rates of isolation, such as financial, social or health-related issues. Projects applying for funding needed to align to at least one of the Council Plan outcomes, one of the core themes of the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy, and the Community Powered Warwickshire approach. Additional projects needed to help reduce climate change and support local biodiversity. The Fund had been

launched prior to the approach to Levelling Up being implemented. Revenue and capital funding was used on a 60:40 split.

Charles Barlow said 21 projects received funding; of those, 16 received capital funding which was required to be spent within 15 months of approval, and the remaining five received revenue funding that needed to be spent within 18 months. Most of the projects were on track to be completed on time. Two projects had been delayed but it was likely both would proceed soon. Charles Barlow said operation of the Fund was commissioned to the Heart of England Community Foundation, who had been able to signpost applicants to up to 50 different funding streams.

Members were told the Social Fabric Fund was due to be launched later in the month. Learning from the implementation of the Social Impact Fund had helped to inform the thinking of how it would work and improve embedding of the Community Powered approach to prioritise delivery of levelling up outcomes, primarily in the 22 Lower Super Output Areas as these were in the 20 per cent most deprived nationally. A further update report would be provided in early 2024.

Responding to a question from Councillor Sarah Boad, Charles Barlow said there had been 52 applications for funding. In response to Councillor Boad noting a large proportion of projects which were successful in their application were from Leamington Brunswick, Charles Barlow said this would be because there were higher Covid rates there at the time and the applications were stronger. Covid rates had been provided by Public Health. Charles Barlow said there had been a good geographical spread of applications.

Councillor Tim Sinclair noted some dummy text had been included in the summary of awards and asked if this could be updated. He also suggested the report could outline in more detail how the different projects were chosen, to pre-empt queries from members who noted that no projects in their ward had been successful in their application for funding.

Responding to a question from Councillor Sarah Feeney, Charles Barlow said fuller details of the impact the funding had had for the successful applicants would be provided in the next update report.

Members noted the contents of the report.

7. Work Programme

Members noted the contents of the forthcoming work programme.

8. Any Urgent Matters

There were no urgent matters for discussion.

9. Reports Containing Exempt or Confidential Information

Resolved unanimously

That the motion to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting be approved.

10. Exempt Minutes of Previous Meeting

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

The meeting rose at xxx

.....
Chair