

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 15 November 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Jeff Clarke (Chair)
Councillor Jenny Fradgley
Councillor Peter Gilbert
Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher
Councillor Daren Pemberton
Councillor Andrew Wright
Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Jackie D'Arcy

Other Members

Councillor Martin Watson (Portfolio Holder for Economy)
Councillor Jan Matecki (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning)
Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate and Culture)
Councillor Andy Crump (Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Communities)
Councillor Tim Sinclair

Officers

Mark Ryder, Executive Director for Communities
Steve Smith, Director for Strategic Infrastructure and Climate Change
Shail Chohan, Head of County Highways
Isobel Woods, Head of Economy and Skills
Tristan Hall, Delivery Lead - Projects and Programme Management
Claire Naidoo, Performance Analysis
Nicole Conway, Democratic Services Officer
Paul Spencer, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Others Present

Andy Mitchell (Press)

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dave Humphreys and Councillor Sarah Feeney; Councillor Marian Humphreys and Councillor Jackie D'Arcy were present as substitutes.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Jonathan Chilvers, Councillor Pete Gilbert, and Councillor Mejar Singh

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None disclosed.

(3) Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed Andy Mitchell from the press and notified all present that the meeting was being webcast.

(4) Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record by the Committee.

2. Public Speaking

None.

3. Questions to Portfolio Holder

The Chair asked Councillor Matecki (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) to hold a meeting with the Chair and residents of Long Shoot in relation to the proposed Hinkley to Nuneaton cycle route. Councillor Matecki agreed to this meeting and advised that they will need to work out a way to have all residents included. The Chair agreed to this.

(1) Economic Development Update

Isobel Woods (Head of Economy and Skills) highlighted the following points from the Economic Update Report:

- The latest round of digital and creative funding had closed, having attracted interest from around the county, it had now progressed to the award stage with funds being allocated to businesses.
- Performance had been good across the three pillars of the Warwickshire Recovery and Investment Fund (WRIF), including improved traction for the Business Investment and Growth (BIG) Fund.
- A range of new Business Support packages had been launched following collaboration

with district and borough councils on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). These programmes were launched on the week that commenced 27 November 2023, providing total funding of £2.8m. The aim is to support 500 businesses and create and protect 400 jobs. The programmes were projected to save approximately 12,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas. This was linked to a new inclusive sustainable programme funded by the Department for Energy, Science and Net Zero (DESNZ) in conjunction with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) enabling better access for businesses to grants and energy audits.

- The Fair Chance Programme had been launched in September 2023, providing practical advice to businesses on approaches to support workforce inclusivity and diversity. To date, the scheme had identified 27 live vacancies. The Council will continue to work with businesses to promote the service.
- The Warwickshire Careers Hub launched in September 2023 having been transferred to the Council following the closure of the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP). Three advisors support schools and Further Education colleges with career advice.
- Since its launch in early 2023, the Supported Employment Service had supported 26 individuals into paid work and will continue.
- The Future Skills Fund had recently been established to provide dedicated support to businesses in emerging sectors.
- Investment into the Warwickshire Business Centres is underway with the refurbishment of communal areas for tenants and reception areas to attract new tenants. A recent 10% uplift in rents was noted with expected rental income to be c.£500,000 from the centres.
- Innovation Launchpad funding had been awarded to both Warwickshire and Coventry to support the provision of immersive and creative technology to generate funds to drive innovation and technological development. The initiative was launched in October 2023 and is set to run until March 2024 (although it is expected that the project would continue to be supported independently for a further two years beyond the original funding).
- Warwickshire Place and Partnership - partnership discussions have taken place between Warwick District Council and Warwick Town Council to look at a future master plan for Warwick town centre. The Coventry and Warwickshire Foodie Awards 2023 had been held with 60% nominations from Warwickshire covering all areas of the food industry with three Warwickshire winners on the night.

Members discussed the following points:

- Councillor M Humphreys asked if there were a list of schools the advisors would attend or did schools need to request a visit? Isobel Woods (Head of Economy and Skills) replied that the Hub was launched in September 2023 with three advisers looking at how to outreach across the county. Isobel Woods advised that the question would be investigated, and she would come back with a reply. The Chair requested that the reply be sent to all members. Mark Ryder (Executive Director for Communities) added that being an Academy was not a barrier to accessing this programme.
- In response to the Chair, Isobel Woods replied that Warwickshire County Council would like to support local businesses across the centres and work with those who identify concerns. However, there is a need to ensure that there is a balance. Reviews have been underway to bring rents in line with commercial rent rates. The

Council is committed to working closely with businesses to ensure they are resilient and sustainable, keeping in mind that it is a public resource that has been provided. Business tenants are also provided support via Business Support advisors and other services.

In response to Councillor Fradgley, Mark Ryder (Executive Director for Communities) reassured members that any businesses who were under pressure due to any of the changes or reviews have been encouraged and welcomed to contact the Council for discussions and there have been some businesses who have already engaged the Council. If any members are approached by businesses who are in difficulty, they should be referred to the Economy & Skills team.

Mark Ryder continued discussing business' movement at the Hub stating that the Council was seeing a higher proportion of businesses staying longer than originally planned.

Councillor Watson (Portfolio Holder for Economy) added that the business centres had been set up for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) and some rental agreements originally set up were unfavourable for the Council and a poor return on public finances therefore a review needed to be completed, and for some of those there was a higher increase. However, it was important that the centres had turned over as it is fostering development and progression of these businesses.

Councillor Pemberton made comment and requested that officers look at an offer to support both businesses that were wanting to grow and move on in addition to one for those businesses who were stable and content to stay the way they are, with the understanding that the Council is in a unique position to support these businesses and assist the local economy. The Chair agreed and advised that was a point well-made and the Council needs to find a way of accommodating those businesses. Mark Ryder (Executive Director for Communities) also commented stating that the Council needed to do more to recognise the balance that not all businesses are on the same growth trajectory. Much of the support that the Council offers with its programmes is around growth and diversity. The Growth Hub is there to offer support to these businesses.

The Chair added that he welcomed investments to stimulate growth and development of these new centres but would like to remind officers to keep existing buildings maintained.

(2) EDS Update

Tristan Hall (Delivery Lead - Project and Programme Management) made the following points on the EDS Dashboard:

- Avon Mill. This project had progressed well. The Department of Transport (DfT) had previously agreed to fund a large portion of this, and a recent funding announcement means that an even greater proportion of the Council's anticipated capital costs will now be DfT funded. The development of a public engagement plan prior to the planning application has moved forward. The planning application has continued to progress. Flood modelling was submitted to the Environment Agency (EA) for review and comment. The conclusion of the flood modelling and agreement with the EA remains the largest current risk to commencing the construction work on programme. Warwickshire County Council continues to engage with the EA around this.

- A47 Hinckley Road Scheme (Long Shoot). This scheme had made progress however it had been recognised that further engagement with members and other stakeholders is required.
- St Johns Road. Due to the high number of works in progress in the Warwick and Leamington Spa area further negotiation on road space to get onto the network needs to be undertaken and this is impacting our ability to commence construction works. The design has progressed well and a budget redevelopment plan to include inflation has been recommended.
- Bermuda Connectivity. Positive news was reported with the new bridge open to pedestrians and cyclists, with vehicular traffic to be introduced by early next calendar year.
- Greenman Crossroads. This scheme had been in development for a long period of time. This project was in the final stages of completion however there were some concerns around the signage aspects. This last part of the project needs to be pushed through as quickly as possible to bring it to conclusion.

The following questions and comments were submitted, with responses provided as indicated:

In response to Councillor M Humphreys, who asked a question regarding Greenman crossroads, Councillor Matecki (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) agreed that signage had been an issue. However more signage had been put in place not only at the junction but also in the lead up to the junction giving motorists advanced warning. Councillor Watson (Portfolio Holder for Economy) added that this had been a great scheme however it had not been completed fully with remedial works required. The Chair agreed that signage needed to be updated and fixed as soon as possible.

In response to Councillor D'Arcy, who asked about when a public inquiry in Shall Hall 2024 would be advertised. Tristan Hall advised that he would take the question away and report back to the Committee at a later date with a response.

Councillor M Humphreys commented on the Eastboro Way pedestrian crossing. The Chair asked for clarification and questioned if there were any planned light installation on the Eastboro Way/Crow Hill junction rather than just a pedestrian crossing. Tristan Hall advised he would investigate this and would report back to the Committee.

Councillor Fradgley commented that Phase 2 of Birmingham Road was due to start soon and requested that Phase 3 commenced right after Phase 2's completion without a long gap in between the two. The road was unsafe and dangerous to cyclists. Councillor Tim Sinclair endorsed Councillor Fradgley's comment and remarked that this work was essential and needed to be implemented quickly and/or impressive roadworks needed to be undertaken. Tristan Hall acknowledged the points. The ultimate decision maker was the network management team with input from the various project sponsors. He was making the case to those who made the decision bearing in mind that there were lots of different areas that needed consulting for this to be done. Mark Ryder (Executive director for Communities) also commented, adding that he was happy to engage with network management.

4. Delegated Budget Schemes

Shail Chohan (Head of County Highways) introduced this item, drawing out key aspects of the report.:

Updates to members

- A monthly spreadsheet has been sent to all members including scheme details. A new, member specific spreadsheet, has now been created to allow members to see details specific to schemes, making it clearer to understand. Improvement on the information around finance has made it clearer about what funds have been used and what remains available.
- Appendix 2 details a draft of a “shopping list” which contains the estimated costs of common, delegated budget items. This should assist members in the early estimations of what scheme costs.
- Progression had been made on the Highways Communities Action Fund. This is a website in the build phase and has not been launched yet. It is a match funding scheme allowing Parishes and other groups to bid for up to 50% of funding for repairs to Highways improvement works locally.
- County Highways have worked with Balfour Beatty to identify a dedicated resource to deal solely with Delegated Budgets to improve communication, planning and programme dates.

Shail Chohan confirmed that the County Highways team produced a shopping list (shown at appendix 2 of the report) with recommendations that members work with their highway area surveyors in the final quarter of each financial year to confirm what they would like delivered the following year. In May 2024 a list of the requests will be sent to the contractor allowing them to pre-plan and programme works, allowing them to start the works much earlier.

Shail Chohan referred members to Appendix 1 of the report which details the increase in delivery of schemes over the last four years and the forecast to continue that increasing trend.

Councillor Jan Matecki stated that members needed to be more focused on what they could and could not have. There had been complaints and issues with some members not engaging enough and others over engaging which had impacted on officer time. Hopefully the shopping list will free up officer time and give an idea of funding requirements. Funds have to be allocated in the year they were requested. There would be some changes which would help these projects to be delivered within the required time frame.

Councillor Pemberton referred to the shopping list, requesting that his comments be noted in the minutes. He stated that there needed to be more coherence between officers and members, and better communication. There needed to be a clearer outline of what was going to be delivered, when and how it was going to be delivered to the taxpayers, who were the customers. He asked how the Council was going to be smarter at doing this and be more integrated? Councillor Pemberton considered he could not be the only member experiencing this and the officers were being hindered in doing a better job by this system.

In response to Councillor Pemberton, Councillor Matecki (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) stated that the shopping list would assist with managing delivery and expectations. The shopping list would outline the costs involved before it was sent to officers. Not every scheme

would be approved however a reason would be sent back if this is the case. The Council was looking at a more can-do approach with members.

Mark Ryder (Executive Director for Communities) acknowledged that there had been issues with the scheme and that these had been listened to. He acknowledged that the Council was the end user and had to be looking across the whole service. Changes had been implemented since 2020 and the delivery of schemes had increase immensely. With the implementation being led by the Portfolio Holder of Transport and Planning. Mark Ryder reiterated that concerns had being listened to and there would be areas to improve on.

Councillor Fradgley commented on the shopping list saying it would be very useful. Shail Chohan (Head of County Highways) added that he would take the information back to his team for investigation and would come back with further information. Councillor Matecki (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) offered his support to members experiencing any delays with projects and would liaise with the relevant officers.

In response to Councillor Wright, Shail Chohan advised that much of the work taken on by Balfour Beatty had been sub-contracted out. The price of the work would remain the same regardless of what Balfour Beatty paid their sub-contractor. Only a small minority of jobs would have price changes. Councillor Wright was not convinced the pricing was competitive. Shail Chohan replied stating that the tender had been completed in 2016 following standard procurement rules. He offered to speak with the councillor directly on the matter.

Councillor M Humphreys commented that the crossing at Birchwood school was still on hold. Mark Ryder (Executive Director for Communities) would investigate and reply directly to the councillor.

Councillor Watson (Portfolio Holder for Economy) agreed that the shopping list was very useful. He noted that VAS (vehicle activate signs) had been listed and sought clarification on whether such schemes were still provided. Shail Chohan advised that the Council could install vehicle activated signs however they had to be aligned with policy and meet certain criteria.

Councillor Sinclair asked about the differences in costs between patching and resurfacing a roadway, Shail Chohan advised that it was the technique used. Patching roads was a higher labour and resource cost than that used to resurface.

Councillor Fradgley questioned that the cost of a sign was on the shopping list but not the cost of a post. Shail Chohan replied that he would take the question away and investigate and have the extra detail added to the shopping list. A cost of a signage post would depend on where it is located as highspeed areas needed to meet certain criteria.

Councillor Matecki (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) added that this was not the final draft of the shopping list, and it would be refined.

The Chair asked for clarification on the variance of costs for the same item, Councillor Matecki stated that as part of the refinement of the shopping list, some aspects would be modified to make them easier to understand. Shail Chohan added that the final shopping list would include a more detailed description with photos of each scheme type, making it easier to understand the works involved.

The Chair questioned the timeline of getting projects delivered. Being able to advise residents on the time frame was important. Councillor Matecki agreed with the comment made. A solution was being investigated which would offer members notification of where projects were up to. Councillor Matecki advised that the shopping list might also include an indication of timeframes to help manage expectations.

The Chair closed the discussion saying that this would be appreciated by Members and the public.

The Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted:

- 1) The progress made against agreed proposals set out in the June 2020 Cabinet paper on the new Delegated Budget Scheme Process.
- 2) The current process for delivery of Delegated Budget Schemes.
- 3) The proposed new guidelines for Delegated Budget Schemes and next steps.

5. Quarter 2 Integrated Performance Report

Mark Ryder (Executive Director for Communities) introduced this item highlighting key sections of the report and performance against the 28 key business measures which were detailed in appendices to the report.

In Appendix 1, Mark Ryder highlighted the positive improvement of adult survivors of domestic abuse leaving the support service. A notable concern was the fall in Customer Satisfaction with Trading Standards.

Delivery of major infrastructure and connectivity schemes was raised. Discussions continued on home to school transport, the cost per SEND student journey and cost of mainstream student journey which had an increase since the last quarter. With an increase of students needing that service and an increase in provider and contractor cost.

Mark Ryder noted good progress in the local economy, with the Warwickshire economy remaining strong which was reflected in the percentage of employers in the key sectors and several successful foreign direct investment projects in Warwickshire. One specific item that was pointed out was climate change in household waste and recycling which was over the 50% target which had increased since the last quarter.

Mark Ryder referred to Finance with revenue forecasting showing significant challenges. The home to school transport budget had moved to the Communities directorate from Education and had a considerable influence on the in-year overspend.

In response to Councillor M Humphreys who requested clarification on the figures, Mark Ryder stated that it was clustering all indicators into one number. It was a glimpse of the Council's overall performance. In response to Councillor Humphreys supplementary question, he reminded of the duty to present a balanced budget.

In response to Councillor Watson, Mark Ryder advised that having Home to School Transport moved into the Communities remit did not create the overspend, that was already present. In response to Councillor Watson's further question, Mark Ryder advised that the Council needed to gain clarity on what information it was being compared to against other authorities. Further

investigation was needed in this area and further detail would be reported back to the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In response to Councillor Singh Pandher, Steve Smith (Director for Strategic Infrastructure and Climate Change) stated that tree planting made up a large part of the Climate Change Plan. The Council would need to source land for the trees to be planted. It owned a nursery which was progressing well, and many more trees would need to be planted to meet the target. Steve Smith advised that updates would be reported to future Committee meetings.

In response to Councillor D'Arcy, Steve Smith advised that the Council was working very closely with Warwick District Council on the Tree Planting schemes.

The Committee noted the Quarter 2 Integrated Performance Report.

6. Communities OSC Work Programme

The Committee noted its work programme, with the Chair requesting any additional items either at this meeting, or the subsequent Chair and Spokes meeting.

7. Urgent Items

None.

The meeting rose at 15:19

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Chair