

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 18 September 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Jeff Clarke (Chair)
Councillor Jonathan Chilvers (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Sarah Feeney
Councillor Jenny Fradgley
Councillor Peter Gilbert
Councillor Dave Humphreys
Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher
Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Andrew Wright

Officers

Steve Smith, Director for Strategic Infrastructure and Climate Change
Dave Ayton-Hill, Director of Economy and Place
Isobel Woods, Head of Economy and Skills
Shail Chohan, Head of County Highways
Nicola van der Hoven, Head of Engineering Design Services
Pam Neal, Head of Planning and Environment
Joel Enston, Transport Planner
Chris Whatcott, Data Manager
Richard Harkin, Communication and Marketing
Nicole Conway, Democratic Services Officer

Others Present

Councillor Andy Crump (Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety)
Councillor Tim Sinclair
Andy Mitchell - Press

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Pemberton and Councillor Mejar Singh who was substituted by Councillor Marian Humphreys and from the following Portfolio Holders: Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder Environment, Climate and Culture), Councillor Jan Matecki (Portfolio Holder Transport and Planning) and Councillor Martin Watson (Portfolio Holder for Economy)

(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 19 June 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record by the Committee.

Councillor Dave Humphreys reminded officers that a response was still pending regarding schools being part of the 20mph speed limit scheme. David Ayton-Hill (Director of Economy and Place) would investigate and report back to members.

There were no other matters arising.

2. Public Speaking

None.

3. Questions to Portfolio Holder

Councillor Fradgley commented on the amount of roadwork being undertaken in Stratford and was seeking some reassurances that these would be completed as soon as possible. David Ayton-Hill advised that Network Management try to apply effective and pragmatic efforts to keep traffic flowing including continual monitoring. There may be emergency works may need to be dealt with.

Councillor Crump (Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety) added that road safety falls under this as well, with the aim to reduce road traffic accidents (RTAs) by 50% in 2030.

Councillor Sinclair observed that a majority of the Stratford roadworks were in his division, and wanted to reassure Councillor Fradgley that he was actively involved in trying to keep them on track along with Warwickshire County Council officers and partners.

In response to Councillor Feeney, Shail Chohan (Head of County Highways) advised that the Network Management team and the internal team collaborate to minimise the frequency of road excavations. However, on occasion, emergency works may occur creating unavoidable disruptions.

(1) Economic Development Update

The economic development update was presented by Isobel Woods, and the following points were covered.

Economic Overview:

- The County experienced a modest GDP growth of 0.9% compared to the same quarter last year.
- Growth was primarily driven by the services sector, with professional, scientific, and technical activities being the main contributors. Consumer-facing services, including retail, wholesale, and motor trade, saw a 1.4% decline.
- Productivity fell by 0.1%, likely due to temporary supply chain issues and the transition of factories to electric vehicle production.
- The construction sector saw its eleventh consecutive quarter of growth in repair and maintenance. New construction work declined for the sixth straight quarter, although the overall rate of decline was easing.
- The State of Warwickshire dashboard, available to the public, provides further insights into the local economy.

Business and Economy Support:

Access to Finance

- Energy Grants: The Access to Finance programme saw a significant uptake of the energy grant, which supported energy audits. Warwickshire had around £1m in grants to award, with a strong pool of applicants. This initiative supported energy efficiency and helped the council meet its commitment to be carbon neutral by 2050. The funding was due to expire in December 2024 and members were encouraged to direct businesses to the link in the pack or directly to Isobel Woods if they thought they could benefit from the scheme.
- The Local Community Enterprise (LCE) Funds: A small loans scheme, delivered through the Coventry and Warwickshire Reinvestment Trust, had lent almost £4 million to 68 businesses, with expectations for it to rise to £5.5 million by March 2025. This scheme had secured £3.3 million in private sector funding, safeguarded 323 jobs, and created 13 new jobs.

Business Support Programmes

Business Growth:

The Warwickshire Business Growth programme had engaged with over 1,000 businesses in its first six months. Developed in collaboration with District and Borough Councils and funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), the programme offered six specific business support services. One-to-one support had been provided to 180 businesses, safeguarded 203 jobs and helped 137 businesses improve productivity, achieving 258% of the target.

Employability and Skills Support:

Warwickshire Careers and Employment and Skills strategy

A commission is underway to establish the Warwickshire Careers and Employment and Skills strategy, a key area in the Economic Growth Strategy. This would inform the council

as it prepared for tier 2 of the devolution deal.

The Warwickshire Supported Employment Service,

Relaunched in February 2023, had reached significant milestones, including accreditation from the British Association of Supported Employment (BASE). The service underwent its first audit in August 2024, receiving high praise for its quality support and positive outcomes.

Members are asked to note other achievements, such as referrals from partners, support for those at risk of redundancy, and a 90% job sustainment rate.

Warwickshire Skills Hub:

The Warwickshire Skills Hub had supported 639 businesses this year, with almost 150 businesses approaching the service during summer 2024. Members are asked to note the achievements of the Apprenticeship Levy programme, which offered apprenticeships up to Level 6 (Masters) and Bachelor of Science (BSc). Early years remain the most popular path, with digital skills being a key need for businesses. The hub continued to engage with industry to understand current and future opportunities and challenges.

Careers Hub:

The Careers Hub was working with 50 secondary schools, colleges, and sixth forms. Future papers will provide a deeper dive into employment programmes and the careers service, offering more detailed data.

Sector Development and Inward Investment:

Warwickshire has been recognised as the fourth top Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) location in the country. Coventry and Warwickshire attracted 53 FDIs in 2023/24, an increase of three from the previous year. The automotive sector remained predominant, accounting for 20% of the total UK FDI in this sector. The region reported almost 3,000 new and safeguarded jobs last year, ranking fifth overall in the UK.

Warwickshire Place and Partnership

Innovate UK had awarded £1.3 million to 21 new projects under the Creative and Immersive Launchpad. A new cluster management organization, CWX (Coventry and Warwickshire Exchange), would be launched in October 2024, with a new round of funding expected before Christmas 2024. Officers attended the CENEX show in September, focusing on auto tech and presenting the Giga Park and Green Power Park. Warwickshire also participated in the Farm Shop and Deli show at the NEC, promoting the Taste of Warwickshire, a food and drink body created by the council.

Business News

Members were asked to note the appendices with recent business news, including updates on companies and investments.

Isobel Woods invited questions and the following was discussed.

In response to Councillor Dave Humphreys, Isobel Woods advised that the construction figures were based on Warwickshire data. She also suggested a more in depth look at that

the relationships with commercial building and residential construction figures.

Isobel Woods replied to Councillor Feeney's questions as follows.

The average weekly earnings figure was an average over the whole county however would look at the spread of earnings across the county.

The employment rate as a County was 3.3%, which is below the UK average with the borough and district councils also being below the UK average.

The Employment and Skills team work closely with employers and the existing workforce on discriminatory behaviour, explaining the opportunities that come from employing people and utilising their skill sets. As well as being proactive in acting on any reports that come to light.

The investment zone would potentially bring 10,000 jobs directly to Warwickshire and the surrounding subregion. This initiative was expected to enhance economic opportunities and skill development within the supply chain. Ongoing efforts were focused on defining the necessary skill sets and identifying support mechanisms to facilitate this growth. Additionally, the employment and career skills strategy would play a crucial role in shaping the devolution deal, promoting the diversification of sectors and the development of relevant skills.

In response to Councillor Dave Humphreys' inquiry regarding electric vehicles, Isobel Woods highlighted the anticipated growth in the sector, particularly focusing on advancements in battery technology, including improvements in battery life and duration. She noted that these innovations were expected to extend from domestic to commercial vehicles. The council remains vigilant in monitoring the market and understanding emerging trends.

4. Transport Schemes – Monitoring and Evaluation

Joel Enston (Transport Planner, Highways) introduced himself and made the following points from the presented report.

- In 2020, £2 million from the Capital Investment Fund was secured to enhance the Council's monitoring and evaluation capabilities, enabling the creation of AI-equipped monitoring sites across major towns. This funding supported the Council's long-term vision to monitor all major transport schemes within the County.
- Previously, monitoring larger capital projects was costly and resource intensive. With the new AI framework and Design Guide, it is now recommended to monitor capital schemes one year and five years post-completion. Installing semi-permanent AI monitoring infrastructure was the most efficient and cost-effective method to ensure continuous data collection.
- Monitoring devices had been installed at key locations, including B4100 Gaydon and A429 Coventry Road. The Design Guide also mandates monitoring for major developer-funded schemes, enabling long-term assessment of their effectiveness.
- The £2 million funding had allowed the Council to establish a mobile traffic survey team, which began conducting various traffic surveys in 2022, including Automatic Traffic Count, Active Travel, and Classified Turning Count surveys.
- The Council's monitoring data needs were met by collecting and storing data from various surveys, which aids future planning and comparison. The team conducted surveys for third parties, generating revenue to support ongoing operations and equipment maintenance.

- To handle the high volume of survey requests, the Council was procuring a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for traffic surveys. This system would enable the Council to conduct various surveys more cost-effectively by allowing multiple companies to participate, ensuring ongoing quality and competitive pricing.
- Having an in-house survey team reduces survey costs and provides better value for the Council's budget, while also generating revenue by offering services to other authorities and developers.
- An in-house survey team reduced site visits by using semi-permanent monitoring devices, which lowers vehicle trips and benefits the environment. Additionally, NOW Wireless AI equipment allowed the Council to monitor carbon impacts and evaluate emissions data to improve air quality.
- Objectives from the April 2023 report have been actioned or are in progress, including the management of capital scheme monitoring and budgeting for pre- and post-scheme monitoring as per the Design Guide.

In response to the Chair, Joel Enston advised that GDPR was followed at all times, no details were collected just numbers of vehicles and low megapixel cameras were used to capture modes of transport. It was confirmed that any inadvertently collected personal details were obscured.

In reply to Councillor Feeney's question on A46 Stanks Island, Joel Enston advised that work with project managers was ongoing and phase two needed to be completed before monitoring could commence. Chris Whatcott (Data Manager, Highways), added in regard to Rugby that the cordons were positioned on the outskirts of town, monitoring the entry and exit of vehicles and enabling the determination of their approximate routes. These cordons are linked to other areas around Warwickshire and allow vehicular monitoring from one location to another. It was advised that cordons at Nuneaton and Bedworth would be added shortly. Additional sites and cordons could be added but that would be dependent on funding.

In answer to Councillor Chilvers, Joel Enston advised that the active travel surveys recorded data on walking, cycling, and wheeling. Joel gave the example of the K2L scheme which had small cameras added to street furniture to capture data. The video is then fed through AI software to count and classified the data and the route they take. Cordons also had the AI ability to capture data on pedestrians and cyclists' movements. It was confirmed that the cordons were continuously collecting data of the area.

Chris Whatcott replied to Councillor Fradgley advising that access to the data could be shared within the Council however there was a processing fee for requests outside of the council. In reply to Councillor Fradgley's supplementary question Chris Whatcott advised he would welcome members to contact him for information to share with an external group.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Joel Enston advised that objectives are set at the start of a scheme and were reviewed after five years. This would include targets on cycle, walking and wheeling as well as vehicular. These schemes would be monitored with evaluation reports. However, if cycling, walking, and wheeling was not an original objective of the scheme the team could only comment on activity. Steve Smith (Director for Strategic Infrastructure and Climate Change) advised Councillor Chilvers that many developer or council-led schemes included built-in measures for comprehensive monitoring and evaluation. This continuous assessment should create a learning loop that informs and improves future project designs.

Councillor Sinclair commented that previously major schemes would be evaluated and brought back to the Committee for scrutiny, he questioned if this had been done? There was a general discussion about the spread of schemes over the county with emphasis on the north.

It was advised that schemes since the design guide update should have funding built in for monitoring. Those schemes created before the update would be checked to that there was available budget for monitoring and working with project managers decide on the best course of action. Joel Enston confirmed that schemes are reported on after one year and five years post completion.

Chris Whatcott replied to Councillor Dave Humphreys advising that the Council can only monitor the local network and not national highways, however monitoring of traffic feeding to and from national highways was included.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Joel Enston advised that all capital schemes would have monitoring built into it however would seek clarification on developer funded and 278 schemes. Steve Smith added his assurances that this would be sent to all members.

Joel Enston confirmed to Councillor Fradgley that previously collected data would be compatible with current collections.

Chris Whatcott advised the Chair that currently any permits needed for surveys were sourced through Leicestershire County Council (LCC). This scheme was in the process of being returned to in-house and once done, LCC would not be part of the process. It was advised that data was sent to Warwickshire County Council by LCC on a regular basis and was not stored with them.

Councillor Dave Humphreys commented on the Greenman Crossroads scheme and thanked officers.

It was noted that the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and commented on the proposed future approach to transport scheme monitoring and evaluation.

5. Communities OSC Integrated Performance Report Quarter 1 2024-25

The report was introduced by Steve Smith, with the following points covered.

- A consistent level of performance of activity from the council plan with 86% delivered on track.
- Communities set of services were performing at 84% on track, with a few measures not on track.
- There were several difficult overspend areas in the directorate, these were well known and outlined in appendix three.
- There had been large demands on the service area however it was a very good performance considering the current climate.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Steve Smith advised that strategic influence to planning decisions was an area that needed continual work. The consultation period for the new planning policy framework, soon to be released by the new government, was due to end. This framework will grant Warwickshire County Council (WCC) influence over future housing numbers and land

use, and collaboration with local planning authorities. WCC aims to promote economic and housing growth and manage activities like highways development. While the framework will be beneficial, it will need continuous management and face challenges. Steve also discussed the Sustainable Futures Strategy, focusing on the carbon reduction plan. Multiple bids have been applied for to assist in decarbonising the estate however they are highly oversubscribed. Various strategies are at different stages, including a new fleet strategy, biodiversity initiatives, and tree planting. Moving away from natural gas in all WCC properties will be costly and remains a long-term risk, with future funding being a significant challenge.

In response to Councillor Feeney, Steve Smith noted that some promoted schemes in the county were set aside in favour of other travel modes. This decision is based on viability and affordability, with various transport and infrastructure options, including active travel, competing for priority.

David Ayton-hill added that cycle schemes remained a key priority, and the council was trying to push those forward on multiple fronts. Some schemes had been held up by engineering challenges and some by public consultations.

Steve Smith responded to Councillor Feeney’s flood risk management duties question by advising that flooding is a prominent concern during this time of year and there could be several aspects concerning this. It was suggested that a more detailed briefing note be produced and shared with the committee.

In reply to Councillor Marian Humphreys, Shail Chohan advised that the item was a monthly measure of how much capital funding had been spent with the contractor, Belfour Beatty compared to the total budget for highways maintenance which included delegated budgets.

In response to Councillor Dave Humphreys, Steve Smith explained the overspend and underspend relating to item 4, management of finance on pages 56 and 57. In the absence of portfolio holder members, Steve Smith advised that Home to Scholl transport counted for a majority of the overspend. The council was working within the current national policy however it would be up to portfolio holders on how it would be mitigated.

It was noted that the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and commented on Quarter 1 2024/25 organisational performance, progress against the Council Delivery Plan, management of finances and risk.

6. Communities OSC Work Programme

The committee discussed reports for upcoming meetings and noted its work programme. The Chair requested any additional items either be raised at this meeting, or the subsequent Chair and Spokes meeting.

7. Urgent Items

None.

The meeting rose at **15:17**

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Chair.