

# MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITTLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 SEPTEMBER 2017

## PRESENT:

### Members of the Committee:

Councillors Sandison (Chair), Brader, Butlin, Douglas, Gillias, Lowe, Mrs O'Rourke and Roberts

### Also present:

Councillor Lewis  
Nick Andrews (Rugby Youth Council)

### Officers:

Adam Norburn (Executive Director), Mannie Ketley (Head of Corporate Resources and Chief Financial Officer), David Burrows (Regulatory Services Manager) and Linn Ashmore (Democratic Services Officer)

## 10. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 12 June 2017 were approved and signed by the Chair.

## 11. APOLOGIES

There were none.

## 12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

## 13. RUGBY YOUTH COUNCIL

The committee received a verbal report from Nick Andrews on current projects. The following points were made:

- Make Your Mark was a national campaign giving young people the opportunity to put their views forward by voting for key issues of concern and decide what members of the Youth Parliament should debate and vote on for their campaign next year.
- The debate would be held on 10 November 2017 in the House of Commons.
- The current Make Your Mark campaign topic for 2017 was Curriculum for Life.

- Councillors were invited to attend the annual school debating competition being held on 12<sup>th</sup> October, either to spectate or as a member of the judging panel.
- Four schools would be taking part this year and the competition will take the form of a league system. Topics for debates included:
  - There should be a second Scottish referendum
  - There should be monitoring of social media by Government
  - Dating techniques should be taught in schools
  - The national curriculum focuses too heavily on exam preparation
  - Support for heritage tax
  - Belief in the legalisation of the drugs industry
- The Mental Health Conference would be held on 15 March 2018 at the Rugby Indian Association.
- Invitations will be sent to all local secondary schools and it was hoped that one or two members of staff would attend.
- Schools have limited awareness of mental health issues in children and one aim was to broaden the knowledge of teachers and target different staff than usually attend to widen the level of understanding across each school.
- Young people need support that is not judgemental. A good student/teacher relationship should allow teachers to become a single point of contact with the knowledge and expertise to help rather than simply signposting them to other service providers.
- The aim of the conference was to create an ambassador style approach and provide attendees with access to higher level training.
- Other invitees will include councillors, MP's, service providers and charities.
- Networking would create opportunities for shared learning and form links for future working relationships.

During further discussion the following points were made:

- Attracting teachers by faculty would allow advice to be more tailored.
- Teacher training establishments could be targeted to include student teachers. Training for teachers should include a range of skills such as listening and relationship building.
- Public Health Warwickshire may be able to assist with mental health training. Paula Mawson and Andrew Sjurseth could be useful contacts.

The committee thanked Nick Andrews for his briefing.

#### **14. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2017/18 QUARTER 1**

The committee had previously been requested to bring copies of the relevant Cabinet report from 4 September 2017 to the meeting.

The Head of Corporate Resources and Chief Financial Officer attended the meeting to answer questions. During discussion the following points were made:

### *World Rugby Hall of Fame*

The council continued to work closely with World Rugby on any opportunities that may arise. It was noted that the World Rugby Hall of Fame Scrutiny Group was due to meet again this week.

Concerns were raised on the underachievement of ticket sales. The decision by Council in December to commence charging meant that opportunities for tour operators to promote the attraction over the summer were lost because their promotional material and literature had already gone to print.

Officers were working hard with partners such as WASPS and Leicester Tigers to promote the Hall of Fame and explore ways of increasing visitor numbers. A clearer picture of progress should emerge by the end of the year.

### *The Benn Hall*

Following the work of the scrutiny sub group last year, members asked for an update on the current performance. The service area had undergone a previous internal restructure and was currently in the process of another. A new marketing officer had been appointed and the focus was on a new strategy for the Benn Hall and the Art Gallery and Museum. As shown in the finance and performance report to Cabinet bar sales had performed well and improvement had been consistent over the past months.

### *Green Waste*

Income had exceeded initial expectations with a significant overachievement to budget. The original budget was set at £400,000 with an anticipated customer take-up of 10,000, and nearly 21,000 customers signed up for the service resulting in an income in excess of £850,000, which exceeded the three-year target.

This success helped put the council in a good financial position for the current year, but the position beyond the third year was uncertain. The excess funds generated would be put into reserve, but it was anticipated this would be needed in the near future.

### *Business Rates*

There was some uncertainty around the future of business rates. The Government scheme to move to 100% retention or to reset the baseline at 2020 meant the council was at risk of losing the benefit of the town's growth over the past few years. Government has previously calculated the level of business rate income the council needs to support its residents to be just above £2m and it was possible £3m in business rates could be lost.

At the current time there was a lack of clarity around timing and the actual figures. Further information would be presented to members leading up to budget setting but it was clear there was a lot of uncertainty moving forward.

### *Commercialisation*

Members asked about any future income generation ideas that would balance the shortfall and were informed that work is currently ongoing. A lot of work was taking place behind the scenes and there were a number of ideas around commercialisation being mooted, including the expansion of trade waste and provision of a number of manual services to residents such as handyman or gardening etc. The Senior Management Team are looking at a short list of suggestions. Some of these ideas could provide thousands or tens of thousands of pounds but the really large sums of money are only likely to be generated from the sale or renting out of existing or purchased assets.

### *Public Sector Pay Rise Cap*

The medium term financial plan was based on pay rises not going above the 1 per cent public sector pay rise cap. Any changes to pay would be decided nationally.

It would be difficult for local authorities to find the additional funds needed for an increase in salary bills without reimbursement from Government. Each 1 per cent rise would require an additional c£100,000 and the effect on the council's finances would be compounded each year.

### *Garage Sites*

These sites have been under review for a long time. The Asset Management Group were producing a list of assets that would include some garage sites with proposals for alternative uses. An up to date Asset Management Strategy was key to moving forward. There were a number of factors to consider and ideas would be reported to members at a future date.

### *Temporary Housing*

Members asked whether there had been a rise in demand for temporary housing and whether this was linked to the changeover to Universal Credit. The shortfall created by the transition to Universal Credit by the DWP cannot be recovered as housing benefit. The council has seen an ongoing increase in the cost of providing temporary accommodation. Action had been taken to re-designate Housing Revenue Account (HRA) housing stock from general needs to temporary accommodation which costs less than providing bed and breakfast accommodation. Under the Private Sector Leasing Scheme there were twelve properties leased from private landlords for use as temporary accommodation. This was also more cost effective than bed and breakfast accommodation. If the council cannot match the demand for temporary accommodation there would still be a need to use bed and breakfast accommodation.

### *Bell House*

At a previous meeting of Council, it was agreed that Bell House should be purchased. An options appraisal would be carried out and officers would continue to maintain an overview of bed and breakfast receipts. There may be opportunities in the near future linked to the private leasing scheme, which would be brought to members.

### *Right to Buy*

Members asked about the number of properties sold through the right to buy scheme and how many replacements were being provided.

Under Right to Buy the Government intends for houses to be replaced on a one-for-one basis. However, the council can only use one third of right to buy receipts to provide replacement housing and local authorities were only permitted to hold sums for a period of three years. Any monies not utilised must be paid back.

Restrictions in place make it difficult to avoid returning the funds. Having an up to date Asset Management Strategy would add clarity around how to use that money most effectively.

The officer undertook to provide a more detailed response for the amount lost to Right to Buy and the increase to housing stock from that pot.

**RESOLVED THAT** – the Head of Corporate Resources and Chief Finance Officer be thanked for attending the meeting.

## 15. AIR QUALITY MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT – ANNUAL UPDATE

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 5) concerning an update on air quality monitoring by the Council.

The Regulatory Services Manager gave the committee an overview of the council's latest statutory Air Quality Annual Status Report, progress made on the Local Air Quality Management Action Plan Annual Status Report and implications of new residential and infrastructure developments planned in the borough.

The council has a statutory duty to monitor and control air quality. There were seven key pollutants and focused on nitrogen dioxide NO<sub>2</sub> and particulate matter with an aerodynamic diameter of 10 µm (PM<sub>10</sub>) and 2.5 µm or less (PM<sub>2.5</sub>).

Members considered the Annual Status Report appended to the report and noted that officers were working with partners from Warwickshire County Council on a co-ordinated approach to develop strategies to address the persistent levels of exceedances. One piece of work could be the location of bus routes and bus stands.

During discussion the following points were made:

- There was little that could be achieved until Government introduces the change to hybrid and electric vehicles.
- One option would be to stop or limit traffic travelling through the town centre but this would be difficult due to the layout of the town.
- The main issue was diesel engines and in particular cars.
- Government wants councils to encourage businesses to change their vehicles but this was driven by cost and taxes, not councils.
- One key challenge was planning applications. It would be necessary to demonstrate a significant impact on air quality to mount an objection and each application was considered on an individual basis whereas several developments would have a cumulative impact.
- National Planning Policy guidance places the responsibility on local authorities to balance the impact of development on the environment. However, they will not issue specific guidance when policies are non-compatible.
- There was a clash between the desire to meet Government targets, support growth, encourage visitors, and the control of air quality. Free parking was one way the government think will attract shoppers but this type of initiative was not ideal when there was an air quality issue.
- There were many taxi firms moving towards hybrid vehicles. Focus should move towards electric charging strategies. There was a view that car parks and retail parks were the best locations but it was more likely these would be used in work places or motorway service stations. Electric sub stations would be required for super-fast stations.
- A number of locally based taxi, bus and vehicle manufacturers were working to produce hybrid or electric vehicles. It was anticipated that a major change would be seen within a short space of time.
- The Warwickshire wide strategy to introduce charging points and generating stations was lagging behind and ambitious plans were needed.

- There was a big difference between the cost to purchase a vehicle with an electric engine compared to a combustion engine. Some form of subsidy or contribution from the Exchequer may be necessary.
- Hydrogen cell technology was also coming on at a fast pace and one benefit was that no charging points were required.
- NO2 may not directly cause poor health but it aggravated existing conditions.
- It was clear long term solutions were required. Members acknowledged the current softer programmes and approaches detailed in the report that were taking place to address air quality.
- A shift in culture was needed. More could be done locally such as develop a cycling culture and introduce more cycle lanes, particularly on school routes.
- There was evidence to suggest that economic factors such as the cost of petrol or car tax would force people to adopt different means of travel.
- Buses standing with idling engines was an issue. It would be preferable to work with bus companies rather than use legislation or enforcement style approaches. Officers were planning to look at working with bus and coach companies and possibly using legislation to fine vehicles idling.
- There was no drive from Government to find solutions. Often civil servants lacked technical skills and operational knowledge.
- DEFRA and the Department for Transport were beginning to work together.
- The current draft Local Plan would not be affected by the Government target to introduce electric vehicles by 2040. As part of the Local Plan process members received a presentation from WCC Highways which identified the key traffic hotspots.
- It was important for members to keep an overview as the Local Plan progresses, particularly as Section 106 funds become available, and open dialogue with WCC Highways and Public Health, and invite them to a future meeting.
- Officers would work with Warwickshire County Council and our planners to look at ways to reduce air pollution. It was likely the next report would not find ways to control the pollution so Defra may challenge the council, and it may be necessary to challenge Defra about their lack of strategic actions to control pollution.

It was agreed an item should be placed on the agenda for the meeting in March 2018 to review progress, and an invitation should be extended to officers from WCC and Public Health to attend.

**RESOLVED THAT –**

- (1) an item to review progress be added to the work programme as minuted above; and
- (2) the Regulatory Services Manager be thanked for attending the meeting.

**16. REVIEW OF PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDERS – REVISED ONE-PAGE STRATEGY.**

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 6) concerning the revised one-page strategy for the review.

Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO's) could have a wide ranging use. The review would explore how efficient the current PSPO's were and whether any additional ones should be introduced.

Some of the points the review group may consider included:

- Newbold Quarry had been reported as a site of concern for local residents. Issues included anti-social alcohol consumption, barbeques and swimming.
- Illegal encampments.
- Should drones be permitted over public land?
- Control of dogs in open spaces. Should areas be zoned to keep dogs away from play areas? Could a list of dog friendly areas be produced?
- It was noted that litter and dog fouling were the most problematic issues.
- The issues surrounding how to deal with travellers. This could include how to stop them causing criminal damage and breaking into open spaces, fly tipping and other environmental hazards.
- WCC had carried out some work on transition sites which might be useful.
- Illegal motorbikes and mobile trespass.
- Dog owners who were elderly or disabled may need special consideration.

The committee considered the revised one-page strategy and made the following change:

*Ambition of the review?*

Creation of an environment for the enjoyment of open spaces by all and enhanced community wellbeing.

**RESOLVED THAT** – the revised one-page strategy, subject to the amendment minuted above, be approved.

## **17. JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MEETING**

The Chair informed the committee that the meeting due to be held on 6 November was an opportunity to examine the work of the portfolio holders within their specific areas and challenge whether they were meeting their objectives.

Members were asked to submit questions to Democratic Services by 25 September.

## **18. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18**

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 5) concerning the progress of scrutiny reviews and the overview and scrutiny forward work programme for 2017/18.

The committee noted the position regarding reviews and the work programme for the next municipal year.

**RESOLVED THAT** – the report be noted.

**CHAIR**