

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 9 July 2019 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00pm.

Present: Councillor Davison (Chairman); Councillors; Boad, Cullinan, A Dearing, K Dickson, Kohler, Margrave, Redford and Sanghera.

Also Present: Councillor Falp – Portfolio Holder, Health & Community Protection, Councillor Matecki – Portfolio Holder, Housing & Property, and Councillor Grainger – Portfolio Holder, Culture.

9. Apologies and Substitutes

- (a) Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Murphy and Noone.
- (b) Councillor K Dickson substituted for Councillor Milton.

10. Declarations of Interest

Minute Number 17 – Review of Council’s Sustainability and Climate Change Approach

Councillor Boad declared an interest because he was a Trustee and Director of Act on Energy. The Deputy Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer had advised him to mention this at the meeting but that no further action was required.

11. Public and Press

Resolved that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following three items by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, as set out below.

12. Confidential appendix to Minute 21 – Comments from the Executive

Resolved that the confidential Comments from the Executive be noted.

13. Minutes

The confidential minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Finance & Audit and Overview & Scrutiny Committees held on 6 June 2019 were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

14. **Executive Agenda (Confidential items and reports) – Wednesday 10 July 2019**

The Committee considered the following confidential item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 10 July 2019.

Item 19 – Affordable housing purchase – Montague Road, Warwick

The Committee welcomed the report for a number of reasons but primarily because it was a way of achieving a reduction in the Council's waiting list.

(The meeting resumed open session.)

15. **Affordable Housing Delivery**

The Committee considered a report from the Business Manager, Policy & Delivery, which detailed the delivery of Affordable Housing in the District.

The Local Plan established the housing need of the District, and within that, the percentage of Affordable Housing that was required to address the affordability gap. This was calculated at 40% of the total housing required.

However, affordable housing could only be made a requirement on sites of 11 dwellings or more (this was the case when the Local Plan was adopted, subsequently revised by Government legislation to 10 or more).

Furthermore, the level of affordable housing required should not make sites unviable, thereby risking the delivery of housing needed. It was found that 40% was the maximum tolerable requirement, and policy H2 of the Local Plan set this out.

There were two targets to consider:

- (1) 40% affordable housing on H2 applicable sites; and
- (2) 40% affordable housing of total dwellings.

Appendix 1 to the report detailed performance against both targets. Members were pleased to note that the Council was tracking well against its targets.

In response to questions from Members, the Business Manager, Policy & Delivery and Councillor Matecki, Portfolio Holder – Housing & Property explained that:

- CIL was not applied to Social Housing.
- Figures on numbers of private housing developments achieving 40% affordable housing could be provided if required, but it was Council policy to seek the 40% figure in all applicable developments when viable.
- Updates on affordable housing figures would be produced annually as a matter of routine if the Committee wished to keep track.

(Councillor Matecki left the meeting.)

16. **Executive Agenda (Non-Confidential items and reports) – Wednesday 10 July 2019**

The Committee considered the following items which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 10 July 2019.

Item 10 – WDC Discretionary Housing Payment Policy Review

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

Item 9 – Plastic Free Resolution for Leamington & Warwick and Plastics Policy Update

The Committee welcomed the report and supported the recommendation and urged that speedy progress be made to go further. The Committee also recommended that the words “plastic free” were replaced with “single-use plastic free”.

The Committee noted that another update was scheduled on its Work Programme on the Plastic Policy and it was

Resolved that the Plastic Policy update be moved back from 1 October 2019 to July 2020.

17. **Review of Council’s Sustainability and Climate Change Approach**

The Committee considered a report from Health & Community Protection which summarised the Council’s latest position in relation to Sustainability and Climate Change including a refresh of the Sustainability Approach document and the Council’s achievements in the last year.

In 2016, an annual review of the Council’s Strategic Approach to Sustainability, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, was undertaken to ensure that the emphasis was in the right areas and actions were being delivered.

In 2018, after the appointment of a Sustainability Officer, the Sustainability Officer Group (SOG) became properly active, with meetings being held on a regular basis, with representation from across the Authority. The Group was responsible for reviewing progress against the Sustainability Approach, raising any issues of concern and identifying new opportunities for improvement.

The report detailed the three strategic aims of the Sustainability Approach, each with specific objectives based around priorities detailed at Appendix 2 to the report. An Action Plan for achieving these Strategic Aims and the priorities was detailed at Appendix 3 to the report.

In response to Members’ questions, the Sustainability Officer, the Head of Health & Community Protection and Councillor Falp, Portfolio Holder Health & Community Protection explained that:

- A bid had been submitted to install 16 public electric charge points for vehicles around the District. Locations where it was hoped these would be installed was detailed in Appendix 3, page 25, reference number 8.2. The Council had a policy of insisting that electric

charge points for vehicles were installed on new housing developments as part of the Council's Supplementary Planning Document on omissions.

- New homes with their own car parking space on their land would have an electric charge point for vehicles. Where properties did not have their own on-site car parking space, such as blocks of flats, then it was policy that enough electric charge points had to be provided around the new development to equal 10% of the number of properties.
- There were issues providing electric charge points around the District. Currently the Government only provided grants of up to 75% for installing these charge points and additionally there were capacity limits within existing public car parks on how many of these could be installed because of the grid.
- Students from Warwick University would be joining the Council in the summer and would be looking at on-street vehicle charging as a project. It was a complex area to investigate.
- People would be expected to pay for the electricity they used in shared charging points, but the Council would look at the pay structure for this and whether it wished to incentivise people to use these charging points to begin with by providing the electricity free or other methods to encourage use.
- The Council had chosen to work with Stagecoach to make a bid to provide electric buses on the number 67 route to Cubbington because Stagecoach had been willing to spend a lot of its own money to provide the electric buses. This bid had failed but the Council was still pursuing the objective for more electric bus routes and it was hoped that other grants could be pursued as part of the Commonwealth Games hosting. Councillors suggested that the Council consider other companies to work with for electrified bus routes as well as other options such as electric taxis. It was noted that hydrogen powered vehicle technology was progressing but currently fuelling points for this in the country was extremely limited.
- Other options were being investigated such as retro-fitting vehicles, and trying to influence bus companies to upgrade their vehicles. Bus companies in the District did operate relatively new vehicles.
- Before the Council could insist on particular fuel types for taxis, it would need to ensure it had the infrastructure available for re-fuelling. It therefore needed to be a phased approach and trying to influence the trade in what type of vehicles it used.
- In terms of housing, there had been discussions between the Private Sector Housing Team and Trading Standards on energy rating. The Sustainability Officer would provide Councillor Davison with an update on what energy ratings were still permissible.
- In terms of Council properties, an energy strategy was being developed looking at cost savings and sustainable technologies.

(Councillor Falp left the meeting and Councillor Grainger arrived.)

18. **Executive Agenda (Non-Confidential items and reports) – Wednesday 10 July 2019**

The Committee considered the following item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 10 July 2019.

Item 5 – Commonwealth Games 2022 (CG 2022) – CWLEP funding bid

The Committee welcomed the report and supported the recommendations.

(Councillor Grainger left the meeting.)

19. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2019 and the Joint Meeting of the Finance & Audit and Overview & Scrutiny Committees meeting held on 6 June 2019 were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

20. **Finance – Service Area Update**

In Councillor Hales' (Portfolio Holder – Finance) unavoidable absence, the Head of Finance was asked to answer the Committee's questions.

The Committee considered a report from Finance which provided details of the Finance service performance for 2018/19.

In response to questions from Members, the Head of Finance explained that:

- For the last two years the Council had charged the maximum increase on Council Tax allowed by the Government. However, of the total Council Tax charged, less than 9.5% of the charge came to Warwick District Council.
- A review of municipal assets suggested that the costs of maintaining these over the course of the next 10-20 years was a lot more than had been factored into the Council's budgets. On average over the next 10-30 years, the Council should be putting away £1m to cover these maintenance costs. A review of the Asset Management Strategy was therefore being done to see what choices there were to cover costs of maintenance. There was a buffer of funds available at the moment in the Corporate Asset Reserve and the Council had not had to use as much of this in the last couple of years as had been expected.
- The diagram on page 10 in the report showed that the Council was reducing the number of transactions it processed by introducing efficiencies in its systems. Some of these efficiencies were listed under the diagram. The Head of Finance gave other examples such as using fewer suppliers which reduced the number of invoices. Suppliers that regularly invoiced the Councils had also been approached and where possible, e-billing had been introduced. In some instances, the costs of processing an invoice could almost be as much as the cost of the service, hence why procurement cards had been introduced for smaller purchases.
- The Council had to stick with strict procurement rules, so it was not always possible to use smaller local suppliers. But at times, if the

market conditions were right, then the Council would use smaller contractors and suppliers.

- When the Council failed to submit its accounts on time for the 2017/18 accounts, the Council did incur costs as a result of additional audit fees. On a positive note, things were on track for the next set of accounts. The Head of Finance warned Councillors that there was still an issue which was a national issue relating to pensions which could affect all councils and could delay the signing off of accounts. Having spoken to the Council's external auditor, the Head of Finance had been told that adjusting the Council's accounts might not be necessary and we could still hit the deadline date.
- Staffing in the department was more stable but a vacancy was expected later in the year and a planned hand-over was being planned. Over the years, different areas of the Service had incurred shortages of staff; in previous years it had been the Procurement area where shortage of staff had been felt.

21. **Review of the Work Programme, Forward Plan and Comments from the Executive**

The Committee considered its work programme for 2019-2020 and the Forward Plan.

The Committee Services Officer was asked to ensure that the Committee remembered to raise the issue of the Affordable Housing Business Plan with the Portfolio Holder – Housing & Property at the next meeting. At the Committee's 29 May 2019 meeting, it had resolved to add the Affordable Housing Business Plan to its Work Programme at a date to be determined following consultation with the Portfolio Holder – Housing & Property and the Head of Housing.

Councillor Boad provided more details of what he meant by this item for discussion with the Portfolio Holder at the next meeting. He talked about the various methods to build housing such as system build and that the new methods were sustainable. The Deputy Chief Executive (BH) suggested that this could be tied into the work being done on the Climate Change Emergency and retrofitting existing housing stock to comply with sustainability. The Committee could also consider setting up a Task & Finish Group looking at non-traditional build and how this compared with costs on traditional build.

Councillor Boad stated that for the moment, the Committee could refer to the item to be discussed at the August meeting as the Affordable Housing Business Plan, but that was not a fully accurate description.

The Committee Services Officer was asked to circulate the briefing note that had been provided to previous Committee Members in March 2019 on the Policy on Regulating the Private Rented Sector. Councillors were asked to read this briefing note and let the Committee Services Officer know after one week if they still required a report for the August 2020 meeting.

Councillor Margrave had made a suggestion via email to the Chairman that the Committee might like to scrutinise the Planning Applications and the time taken to process them. The Deputy Chief Executive (BH) had approached the Head of Development Services who had reminded him that this information had been provided to the previous Committee in

November 2018. The Chairman asked the Committee Services Officer to circulate this information to the current Committee Members and he asked them to inform her whether they would like another report from Development Services ahead of the annual Service Area update scheduled for November 2019.

The Task & Finish Group, HMOs considered night noise as part of its remit. The Head of Health & Community Protection had now written a report about night noise and that would be presented to the Committee at its August meeting.

Resolved that

- (1) after reading the briefing note on the Policy on Regulating the Private Rented Sector, Members will inform the Committee Services Officer if an update on this is required at the next meeting within seven days of receipt of the briefing note;
- (2) after reading the Service Area report from Development Services provided to the Committee in November 2018, Members will inform the Committee Services Officer if an update on planning applications and timescales is required ahead of the next scheduled Service Area update scheduled for November 2019;
- (3) a report from Health & Community Protection on night noise will be considered at the August 2019 meeting; and
- (4) the Committee Services Officer will ensure that the resolution made at the 29 May 2019 meeting in respect of the Affordable Housing Business Plan is raised with the Portfolio Holder, Housing & Property at the August 2019 meeting.

(The meeting ended at 8.35 pm)

CHAIRMAN
20 August 2019