

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the remote meeting held on Tuesday 20 April 2021 at 6.00pm, which was broadcast live via the Council's YouTube Channel.

**Present:** Councillor Milton (Chair); Councillors; Cullinan, Davison, A Dearing, Grainger, Jacques, Kohler, Margrave, Norris, Redford and Russell.

**Also Present:** Councillor Matecki.

## 53. **Apologies and Substitutes**

Councillor Grainger substituted for Councillor Noone.

## 54. **Declarations of Interest**

Minute Number 54 – Review of the Work Programme, Forward Plan and Comments from the Executive

Councillor Kohler declared he was a member of the Climate Change Programme Advisory Board during discussions of this item.

## 55. **Minutes**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 16 March 2021 and 7 April 2021 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record, subject to a correction at minute number 49 in the minutes of 16 March which twice incorrectly stated that there was a requirement that a planning licence be in place within two years; this should have stated two months.

## 56. **HEART Shared Service Briefing Paper**

The Committee considered a report from Housing Services which gave an update on the HEART service review and its extraordinary HEART Partnership Board meeting. This was in response to a request from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee following a report on the service back in February 2021.

Appendix A to the report, "Improvement Plan", summarised in a table, the main concerns raised and the causes and progress taken to address these. This was following an independent review of the service after it had been in operation for two years.

Appendix B to the report, "Activity Levels", showed in graph form, that the number of enquiries and therefore, demand for the service, had grown significantly each year from 2016, with a slight seasonal reduction every December. Covid-19 had caused a fall in demand during 2020 similar to that of 2017 levels. Another graph showed the types of enquiries received and their respective numbers during the period 2019/20.

The Committee welcomed Philip Richardson, the Director – Democracy, Planning & Public Protection, Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council to its meeting.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of Housing Services and Councillor Matecki, Portfolio Holder – Housing & Culture and Philip Richardson explained that:

- The service had changed the way it processed the data it received. Previously it had, at the request of the County Council, done a full-strength care act assessment on every case that came to the service. This had proven to be very inefficient because each case required sign-off from a single senior occupational therapist, so there was a bottleneck. As an interim measure, they were now trying to simplify the process with only the complex cases going to the senior occupational therapist and the rest being dealt with by the Disabilities Facilities Grant staff. It was hoped that an IT solution would automate a lot of the process in the future.
- The before and after data demonstrating the success in the change in the way cases were assessed would be circulated.
- A survey circulated to staff asked them to identify three things that were done well and three things they would like to change. IT was an obstacle and having to key the data into Rugby & Bedworth Council's Flare system and then into Warwickshire County Council's Mosaic system. These were identified as the two key irritants to staff. The upgrade to the IT system would address these issues.
- Staff retention was not a problem; recruiting staff was because each Council in the scheme employed its own staff so this meant obtaining consent from the relevant Council to recruit and following that Council's recruitment protocols. This caused delays.
- It was hoped to harmonise the differing terms and conditions of employment so that the additional burden on the service this presented in terms of time lost or having to follow several processes for very little practical gain could be eliminated. An example was given where even though the staff all worked at the same location, they were still being required to attend training courses solely specific to their employer.
- The staff employment arrangements were frustrating but the management arrangements for the staff was all being done by the HEART service. Whilst there were issues because of the differing employment terms, this was not the main issue faced by the service.

The Committee was assured that the HEART Service Board was fully aware of the issues it faced, and the Improvement Plan was there to ensure that the necessary improvements would be pursued. An update was requested in six months' time, which was also when the new IT system was scheduled to go live. Members asked to be notified if there were problems with the implementation of the new IT system.

**Resolved** that:

- (1) the consensus of the HEART service partners that future work is required to assist in making a long-term decision about the future of the partnership be noted;

- (2) the partnership consensus that a further independent review, initially scheduled for March/April 2021 should be undertaken instead in the summer to enable Key Lines of Enquiry to be established be noted;
- (3) the updated improvement plan for the service (Appendix A), be noted;
- (4) the temporary extension of the HEART Service Agreement to enable work to be undertaken and decisions about the longer-term partnership by March 2022 be noted; and
- (5) a further update be given to the Committee in six months' time.

The Chairman thanked Philip Richardson, the Head of Housing Services and the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Matecki for attending the meeting on behalf of the Committee.

(Councillor Matecki left the meeting.)

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

The Committee considered its work programme for 2021/2022 (Appendix 1) the Forward Plan and the response from the Executive to its comments in March (Appendix 2).

The Chair drew Members' attention to Appendix 2 to the report, specifically the information about the Step Back Review Task and Finish Group. All recommendations in the report had been approved and he thanked all members of the Task & Finish Group and the officers involved.

In respect of the Task & Finish Group – Race and Equality, the Chair informed Members that Councillor Mangat had expressed to him a small measure of frustration over the speed of progress. Internal interviews had been completed and a report was expected to be presented to the committee in July. The Chair had spoken to the Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer about whether additional support could be found for the Group. The Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that the resources issue was part of a wider discussion to support Scrutiny in the future and was being reviewed currently, especially in relation to the merger between Stratford-upon-Avon District Council (SDC) and Warwick District Council (WDC).

Appendix 3 to the report set out the proposed protocol for embedding within Scrutiny Procedure Rules which were, if approved, to be recommended to Council for these rules to be amended, so that the deadline to request Executive items to be considered by Scrutiny was 9.00am on the morning after Group meetings. This proposed amendment had been brought forward by Councillors Milton and Nicholls following several months of informal testing which had worked well.

It was proposed by Councillor Norris and seconded by Councillor Kohler and

**Recommended** to Council that the addition of the protocol set out at Appendix 3 to the report, be embedded within the Scrutiny Procedure Rules and that these Rules be amended so that the deadline to request Executive items to be considered by Scrutiny is 9.00am on the morning after Group meetings.

The Chair thanked Members who had responded to his email on suggestions going forward to scrutinise the Climate Change programme. The comments received indicated that in terms of policy change, the Programme Advisory Board covered this work and Overview & Scrutiny Committee should have a more focussed role in scrutiny, and therefore discussions with the Programme Director for Climate Change should focus on scrutinising progress/performance against the Climate Change Action Plan (CEAP), in particular the target for carbon reduction. Suggestions were made that reports to the Committee should be made on a quarterly basis and should be data led with what the targets were and whether they had been met.

In response to comments made by Councillor Davison about scrutinising energy efficiency in Council owned buildings, the Deputy Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer informed Members that the Programme Director for Climate Change was collating information from the "People's Enquiry", with the aim to report to the July Executive meeting. It was suggested that the Chair liaise with Councillor Rhead and the Programme Director for Climate Change on the most effective way to pull together a reporting method and ensuring that it was not overly bureaucratic. This information should then be discussed at a future meeting to determine the most effective reporting mechanism for scrutinising Climate Change.

The Chair thanked Members who had contributed to suggestions made about scrutinising the proposed merger between SDC and WDC. Following discussions with the Chair of Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee, five themes to be scrutinised had been identified as follows:

- The impact of services to residents.
- The impact on our strategic priorities as a Council, e.g. climate emergency action plan.
- The impact on democratic representation.
- Finance and Council Tax.
- Communication and consultation communication with residents.

Following receipt of comments from Members, the five themes had been supported, but also suggestions had been made for scrutinising areas of specific concern, such as Neighbourhood Services and Green Spaces and the interrelation between Parish and Town Councils.

Views were also sought about joint scrutiny with SDC and also between Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee and Overview & Scrutiny Committee and some felt that this might be unwieldy because the meetings would involve a large number of Councillors to ensure constructive debate and

matching this against the requirement to represent the needs of this Council's residents.

Following Councillor Milton's discussions with Councillor Nicholls, the following proposals were put before Overview & Scrutiny Committee Members:

- Scrutiny for the merger should continue to be done separately by F&A and O&S Committees.
- The Chairs of both Scrutiny Committees should continue to liaise and consult frequently to ensure synergy between the work of both committees.
- Scrutiny should be conducted in line with the five themes identified, with specific areas identified as of concern being covered within the impact of services to residents' theme. The impact on Town and Parish Councils would straddle all five themes. The Chair had asked Committee Services to arrange a briefing session for Members on the differing roles of Town and Parish Councils across the District, the powers they hold and what further powers could be delegated/devolved to them within the legal framework.
- Committee Services would be asked to prepare a Scrutiny Plan, giving a timetable for these themes to be handled, and giving enough time for the Committee to influence the development of policy.
- Additional Council officer and expert resource (from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny) should be sought to support the scrutiny of the programme.

In terms of the Local Plan, joint scrutiny with SDC was considered appropriate because it was a joint initiative, but the Chairs of Scrutiny Committees would meet with officers in the new municipal year to agree an approach.

The Chair advised that Members' Annual Feedback on Outside Bodies would be emailed out to all District Councillors shortly.

**Resolved that**

- (1) Appendix 1 to the Work Programme report be noted;
- (2) the Chair will liaise with Councillor Rhead and the Programme Director for Climate Change to discuss an effective reporting method to Scrutiny;
- (3) Committee Services will arrange a briefing session and a Scrutiny Plan in respect of the proposed merger between SDC and WDC, using the services of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). This will include the roles of parish and town councils;
- (4) additional officer resource and expert advice and help from the CfGS will be sought; and

- (5) the five main themes to scrutinise for the merger of the two Councils have been identified together with specific areas of concern and where they will be covered.

58. **End of Term Report**

The Committee considered an annual report to Council on the work the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had undertaken during the municipal year 2020/21.

**Recommended** to Council that the list of matters considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee during the municipal year 2020/21, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, be noted.

(The meeting ended at 7.32pm)

CHAIR  
6 July 2021