

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 3 September 2024 at Shire Hall, Warwick at 6.00pm.

**Present:** Councillor Milton (Chair); Councillors Armstrong, Barton, Collins, Day, Dray, D Harrison, Luckhurst, Payne, Redford, Russell and C Wightman.

**Also Present:** Councillor Chilvers – Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor J Harrison – Portfolio Holder for Transformation, and Councillor King – Portfolio Holder for Place.

## 32. Apologies and Substitutes

- (a) There were no apologies for absence; and
- (b) Councillor Dray substituted for the Labour Vacancy.

## 33. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

## 34. Minutes

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 30 July 2024 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

## 35. Cabinet Agenda (Non-Confidential items and reports) – Wednesday 4 September 2024

The Committee considered the following item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Joint Cabinet on Wednesday 4 September 2024.

### Item 7 - Q1 Budget Update 2024/25

The Committee was concerned about the financial performance of the Housing Portfolio as a whole, and in particular, that the Council did not seem to have a complete explanation for the variances within the Housing Finance area. The Committee requests a Finance update to be brought forward at its next meeting on 24 September 2024, to help Members understand why the figures were so far adverse at this stage of the year.

The Committee thanked officers for the detailed updates on reserves, including the appendix, and felt that whilst this had been greatly improved from previous reporting, Members would like a more detailed explanation to draw out the use of the reserves, and for those no longer needed to be marked accordingly in the future.

Members also considered the Royal Spa Centre and Parking.

In relation to the Materials Recycling Facility, the Committee asked the Deputy Chief Executive to provide a briefing as a member of the Board, being aware that this might need to be done in confidential session.

In consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive, the Committee would like to open up an invitation to the Managing Director, to come and brief the Committee at an appropriate time. Members also asked if independent scrutiny might be needed, given that insufficient scrutiny was identified by officers.

(During this item, the meeting was moved into confidential session to consider aspects to do with the Materials Recycling Facility. The meeting then resumed in public session.)

### **36. Change Programme update: April 2024 – July 2024**

The Committee considered a report from the Deputy Chief Executive providing an update on the Change programme. This was a key programme of work set out in the Council's Corporate Strategy 2030 and referenced in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The Change Programme had started positively, with several initiatives underway that would help to build momentum. A wider pipeline of initiatives was also starting to form.

In February 2023, a report was taken to Cabinet, which identified that the Council would need to change how it operated to ensure it could continue to respond to the external operating environment and financial challenges the local government sector continued to face.

The Change Programme was born from the recognition that if the Council was to remain sustainable, it had to alter how it did things. Given the significance of the change that was required, it was important that this was done with purpose and at all times, supported and enriched the Council's priorities and its vision to make Warwick District a great place to live, work and visit by improving lives and the environment.

In July 2023, Warwick District Council undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) through the Local Government Association (LGA), as part of its commitment to sector-led continuous improvement. This review highlighted two areas relating to the Change Programme.

In November 2023, the Council's new Corporate Strategy was approved, and the Change Programme fell under Strategic Priority 1, Goals 1.2 and 1.3, which were detailed in section 1.5 in the report.

The Council's Change Programme – Case for Change (attached at Appendix 1 to the report) was approved by Cabinet in March 2024 and then internally launched to the organisation, setting out the case and approach for improvement and transformation, the benefits brought and how success would be monitored and measured.

In terms of its governance, the Change Programme had a programme board, which consisted of the Cabinet Member for Transformation (Chair), Cabinet Member for Finance, Head of People & Communications, Head of Finance, Head of Customer Service & Transformation and the Deputy Chief Executive. The purpose and remit of the board was defined by its terms of reference and met every two months.

The programme had three main workstreams:

- Independent Fees and Charges Review – led by the Head of Finance and supported by specialist consultants at CommercialGov. The 10 items for initial focus were: Building Control, Land Charges, Cem & Crem, Car Parking, Waste, Spa Centre/Town Hall, Lifeline, Pre-apps, Licensing and Enterprise Team. The draft report had recently been received and would soon be reviewed. As part of this work, WDC also benefitted from access to CommercialGov’s local government fees and charges toolkit and sector benchmarking data. This work would feed into the MTFS planning and fees and charges setting process.
- Customer Service Redesign – led by the Head of Customer Service & Transformation. The Corporate Strategy set out an ambition to improve customer service delivery by making it easier for customers to contact the Council 24/7, 365 days a year, and enable the customer services team to help more customers at the first point of contact through different communication channels.
- This workstream had commenced with the procurement of a new Customer Relationship Management System (JADU CRM) which would provide the basis to help transform customer service delivery, process and procedures. The introduction of low code technology would enable the Council to develop and deploy new digital services at pace and at low cost. The first service go through redesign and business process re-engineering was the waste service. This service was prioritised following agreement for the waste customer contact function to be brought back in-house from Stratford-on-Avon District Council (SDC). This was expected to go live in December 2024. This change would bring customer service and financial benefits. Once this was completed, other services would go through redesign and business process re-engineering reviews. This work would build upon the successful relocation of front facing customer services to the Pump Rooms. Whilst there would be an increase in digital services, customers would still be able to telephone or visit WDC customer services.
- Reinvent and reimagine how services are delivered – led by the Deputy Chief Executive, the purpose of this workstream was for service areas to think about how they could do things differently, which could either reduce costs, invest to save and increase income.
- Since launching, progress had been quick off the mark with several initiatives progressing to increase income or reduce costs. Initiatives in the pipeline included returning waste calls from SDC, website advertising, general fund service charge review, Local land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) review, reviewing the CIL administration charge, National Parking Platform, roundabout advertising, review of software budgets and a mini service review. Each initiative had an outline business case.

The Change Programme had a dedicated efficiency tracker which recorded and monitored the cash and non-cash benefits of the programme. In terms of the 2024/2025 general fund efficiency target of £300,000, confirmed efficiencies so far amounted to £162,000. The wider pipeline had a financial efficiency estimate of up to £386,000 (subject to successful implementation and full benefits realisation being

achieved). The MTFFS efficiency profile was included in section 4.14 in the report.

In terms of communications, the Change Programme was launched March/April with briefings at Cabinet SLT, Manager's Forum, Group Leaders, a dedicated intranet page created, case for change booklet, manager cascade slide deck and other briefings.

The recent employee pulse survey results indicated that 70% of staff confirmed their manager had briefed them on the Change Programme and of those briefed, the level of understanding was at 6.49/10 (0 = no understanding, 10 = full understanding). This was solid initial progress.

In answer to questions from Members, the Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Head of Finance advised Members that:

- in relation to 4.7 in the report, low code technology was quick and could be built in-house;
- the intention was to understand customers' journeys using Council services to make their experiences better;
- the £162,000 efficiencies had been made by reviewing usage of agency staff, correcting some errors on the accounts, reviewing staffing resources and making services more efficient;
- the queries regarding waste management would be brought back in-house from December from Stratford-on-Avon District Council. Once this took place, the focus would be on other service areas where most efficiencies could be achieved;
- by having the service in-house, the Council had more control over residents' experience;
- AI should be seen as a tool aimed at freeing up officers' time, so that more resources could be put into, for example, analysing data as opposed to producing it;
- each Service Area had a business continuity plan which would be implemented if needed; and
- in terms of the customer service redesign, officers were looking at processes in place, aiming to use automation to provide assistance 24/7, 365 days a year.

Councillor Milton thanked officers for the detailed report and the Committee would continue to monitor progress.

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

### **37. Work Programme, Forward Plan & Comments from Cabinet**

The Committee considered its Work Programme for 2024/25 as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Committee had previously struggled to find nominees as Children's and Adults' Safeguarding Champions. At its previous meeting, the Committee agreed that both Champions should not be from the same political group as the Portfolio Holder. Following discussions with the Head of Safer Communities, Leisure and Environment it was proposed that Councillor

Yellapragada should take this role as she already had knowledge of this area as part of the briefings received in her Shadow Portfolio Holder role.

Councillor Day was keen to further explore the Council's response to the Peer Review, more specifically, which recommendations were being adopted, which not, and the progress.

Councillor Milton reminded Members of the upcoming Finance training and urged them to attend. He also informed the Committee that the data tracking report on Climate Change had been moved to November upon officers' request. Consultants were going to attend the Committee's next meeting, which would be focussed on Housing.

It was proposed by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Collins and

**Resolved** that Councillor Yellapragada be appointed as Children's and Adults' Safeguarding Champion.

**Resolved** that

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) a Peer Review update report be added to the Work Programme, for a suitable date to be agreed with the Deputy Chief Executive;
- (3) a report on Tachbrook Country Park be added to the November meeting;
- (4) the Climate Change Data Tracking report be moved to November; and
- (5) an additional report on Housing finances, that were detailed in the Quarter 1 budget report, be brought forward to the 24 September 2024 meeting.

(The meeting ended at 7.29pm)

CHAIR  
24 September 2024