

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 2 November 2021 in the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00 pm.

Present: Councillor Milton (Chair); Councillors Cullinan, J Dearing, Jacques, Kohler, Leigh-Hunt, Morris, Redford and Russell.

Also Present: Councillors Cooke – Portfolio Holder, Place & Economy, Day – Leader of the Council, Hales – Portfolio Holder, Transformation & Resources and Rhead – Portfolio Holder, Climate Change.

30. **Apologies and Substitutes**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Dearing and Margrave.

31. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

32. **Minutes**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21 September 2021 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

33. **Update on Joint Work with SDC**

The Committee considered a report from the Chief Executive which set out the progress of the work being done to enable effective scrutiny of the proposals to achieve joint working with Stratford-on-Avon District Council.

Both Warwick District Council (WDC) and Stratford-on-Avon District Council (SDC) had agreed a vision to create a single statutory South Warwickshire Council covering all of the activities currently carried out by SDC and WDC by 1 April 2024.

Appendix 1 to the report set out the Programme Risk Register.

A request was made that the expected benefits section of the report, point 1.6, should be updated to include climate change.

In response to questions from Members, the Chief Executive explained that:

- In respect of CO₂ emissions, a figure was unavailable at this stage to quote in the expected benefits section of the report (point 1.6), but asset rationalisation would clearly have a benefit in terms of improving CO₂ emission figures. If possible, this information would be supplied for the report in December.
- Statistical representation had been achieved in the number of responses received during the consultation phase. The aim had been to receive at least 600 responses and the figure was running

at circa 1,500 responses, but there was no data analysis as yet on where geographically these responses had originated from. Focus Groups had been completed. Parish & Town Councils had also been included in the consultation. An initial statistical evaluation of responses should be provided by the end of the week. The programme was running to the timescales set.

- Programme Risk Register reference PR010 - A draft digital strategy had been prepared and would be discussed by the Joint Management Team (JMT) later in the week. As part of this, work would be done to ensure that there would be alignment with a customer access strategy plan that had yet to be written. The hope was that the digital strategy plan would be ready to be considered by Councillors in the December round of meetings.
- Programme Risk Register reference PR004 (concerns raised that the overall risk rating was not high enough) – The Warwickshire Association of Local Councils (WALC) had arranged information sessions for all parish and town councils, not just for those in its membership. If individual town councils wished to have their own sessions, then WDC would provide these upon receipt of a request.
- There was scope to delegate certain functions to parish and town councils, but care would be required to ensure in so doing, the specific town and parish councils had sufficient governance arrangements in place and resources to undertake the functions. This required careful consideration on a case-by-case basis and consideration of the local community requirements.
- As a matter of principle, WDC and SDC would look to sharing a HQ. Work had been commissioned to explore options.
- Whether the merger resulted in a democratic deficit simply because there might be fewer Councillors was open to question because by merging, there would be more Councillors in total than each individual Council currently had. The opportunity was that this would allow more Councillors to have more time for their pastoral role within the community because membership of committees and Cabinet would require the same number of Councillors, not double, so freeing up time Councillors currently spent in meetings. (The Leader of the Council also added that other considerations would need to be considered on how the Council would operate if a political merger took place; for example, whether wards would become single or multi-member, and more efficient ways of working such as more use of Programme Advisory Boards (PABS) that had been introduced at WDC.) The risk rating under PR002 on the Programme Risk Register would be reviewed prior to the vote 13 December.

The Chair raised the issue that how the Council communicated with its residents on the merger and any matter that concerned them, such as changes to the refuse collection, should be reviewed. He asked for this to be entered into the minutes. He pointed out that in the Programme Risk Register, communication was often mentioned as a method to mitigate a risk.

34. Cabinet Agenda (Non-Confidential items and reports) – Thursday 4 November 2021

The Committee considered the following item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Cabinet on Thursday 4 November 2021.

Item 9 – Riverside House Development Brief

The Committee welcomed and supported the report and asked that information on the sample size should be added to give context to the statistics provided in the report.

The Committee recommended that in the brief, the Council's wish for the developer to find carbon savings in the build/construction process and to investigate the reuse of materials, be made clear.

35. Progress Update – Merger of ICT Systems

The Committee considered a report from ICT which gave an update on the progress towards merging of ICT systems and data, including plans if the authorisation for full political merger between WDC and SDC was denied.

The Head of ICT Services reassured Members that both WDC and SDC had independent IT systems and platforms currently so there was no risk that both Councils' IT systems would fail.

The process to bring both Councils' systems together would begin with examination of infrastructure, for example, telephony, email systems, file storage, servers. This would require consideration of how this would be sourced to work for the South Warwickshire Council rather than for WDC and SDC. Much of the infrastructure in question had already been scheduled for replacement in the next few years which was fortunate because some budget allowance had already been planned.

In response to questions from Members, the Head of ICT Services and Councillor Hales, Portfolio Holder – Transformation & Resources, explained that:

- The spend on ICT at both SDC and WDC was almost the same at each authority in terms of the line of business applications. Differences in expenditure centred on software licenses for core components such as Microsoft Office because WDC had more staff.
- Savings could be achieved depending on staff numbers following the merger of service provision and maintenance costs would decrease as services moved to one system rather than separate systems. Core component expenditure would be unlikely to change much unless there was change in staff numbers. Future costs would be calculated to form part of the budget setting process.
- Work to identify and present infrastructure changes was required, and costs and timings could be done to replicate the work already in progress for business applications.
- Currently there was no member of staff within ICT wholly dedicated to programme management and this had been raised with the Joint Management Team. As an interim measure, one of the programme managers from SDC was helping. Project Management staff resourcing was something that was being considered to address the risk identified at 5.3 in the report.
- Architecture of the platforms in use at both authorities (allowing systems to "speak to each other") would be discussed on 24 November with ICT teams from both authorities meeting. They would discuss ideas for bring systems together.

- Implementation of the new Finance System – process lessons learnt – this work was planned once it was known how well the system was working.

In response to a question about how Members could help the process, the Deputy Chief Executive explained that if on 13 December, the decision was made not to go forward with the political merger, then it had already been agreed that a shared service approach would still proceed. The risk would then continue to remain if the Councils then, at some point in the future, decided to resume full autonomy over service provision. The work that had been done to allow shared service provision would have to be undone and this would be very costly. He therefore urged Members to consider their decision on 13 December in light of this inherent risk and the fact that it would be no small matter to reverse the process in the future.

The Committee requested that a report giving an update be provided every six months.

(Councillor Cooke left the meeting during discussions on this report. Councillor Hales left the meeting at the end of discussions on this report.)

36. **Cabinet Agenda (Non-Confidential items and reports) – Thursday 4 November 2021**

The Committee considered the following item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Cabinet on Thursday 4 November 2021.

Item 11 – Climate Change Action Programme

The Committee welcomed the report and the request for additional resource.

The Committee recommended the following:

- That a carbon descent plan was created for use as a target and tracker for use to measure progress on the programme.
- The Council should promote good news stories, e.g., the divestment of fossil fuel investments, so that residents were aware about the progress being made.
- A consolidated view of the different standards in Housing that were in use across the District should be produced to give more clarity on which standards would apply and where they might apply, e.g., in or near the Conservation Area.

(Councillor Rhead left the meeting.)

37. **Task & Finish Group – Equality & Diversity (Phase 2)**

An update on progress with the second phase of the work had been circulated to all Members during the week via email. The Chair asked that the information contained within the email be posted on the Council's website so that the public could view it. The email set out how the Group would get to a point of presenting a plan for phase 2.

(Councillor Day left the meeting.)

38. **Review of the Work Programme, Forward Plan and Comments from the Cabinet**

The Committee considered its work programme for 2021/2022 as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report.

Service Area Dashboard Update

Councillor Kohler reported that previously, a briefing session for Councillors had been requested about the existing data on the Dashboard, but he did not think this had been progressed. He would speak to the Democratic Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer to agree a way forward.

The Chair drew attention to an email that had been sent to all Councillors to inform them how to access information on the Council's Intranet.

Forward Plan

The Chair had raised the issue with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive about the high number of reports going to Cabinet in December. This was a concern because the Committee needed to ensure that there would be adequate time at the December meeting to scrutinise the merger decision.

February 2022 Work Programme

With the need to keep December 2021 meeting clear for the scrutiny of the merger decision, February's meeting was now looking as if it might become very busy. The question had therefore been raised as to whether an additional meeting of the Committee would be necessary in January. When the Chair asked Members' opinion, there was no response.

Potential item for the Work Programme

Councillor Kohler raised an issue that he had remarked at a recent Planning Committee meeting that there might be a gap in the policy framework. This concerned how listed buildings and historical buildings could contribute to the decarbonisation of the District – how solar panels could be installed on or near these buildings. The previous Local Plan had detailed recommendations in a sustainable buildings SPD; and detail was lacking in the current Local Plan, with the emphasis on officers weighing up the harm. Councillor Kohler felt this was something that should be improved.

The Committee requested that Councillor Kohler speak with Councillor Cooke to ascertain if there was a policy gap and how this might be closed. He was asked to report back to the Committee at the next meeting with his findings on whether work was required and options.

Resolved that

- (1) appendices 1 and 2 to the Work Programme report be noted;
- (2) Councillor Kohler to report back to the Committee at the December meeting on whether work is required to close a policy gap

relating to sustainability on listed/historical buildings; and

- (3) a progress update on the merger of the ICT systems be provided every six months.

(The meeting ended at 7.49pm)

CHAIR
7 December 2021