

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 5 December 2023 at Shire Hall, Warwick at 6.02pm.

Present: Councillor Milton (Chair); Councillors Armstrong, Barton, Day, Dray, D Harrison, Hunt, Payne, Redford and Russell.

Also Present: Councillor Chilvers – Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Davison – Leader of the Council, Councillor J Harrison – Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Councillor King – Portfolio Holder for Place and Councillor Wightman – Portfolio Holder for Housing & Assets.

56. **Apologies and Substitutes**

- (a) Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Browne and Luckhurst.
- (b) Councillor Dray substituted for Councillor Collins and Councillor Hunt substituted for Councillor Sullivan.

57. **Appointment of Vice Chair**

It was proposed, duly seconded and

Resolved that Councillor Armstrong be appointed Vice Chair of the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

58. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

59. **Minutes**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 31 October 2023 and 14 November 2023 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

The record of the Budget Review Group meeting held on 1 November 2023 were noted (see Appendix 1 to these minutes for the record of the meeting).

The Chair informed the Committee that he had contacted the Labour Group Leader, Councillor Wightman, about Labour Group attendance at Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings. He received a positive response and noted that there had been full attendance from Labour Group Members of the Committee at the 14 November meeting. He noted that there was not full attendance at the current meeting so asked Councillor Wightman to continue his efforts to require full attendance at meetings from his Group. Councillor Wightman explained that there were exceptional circumstances for the absence at the current meeting.

60. **Work Programme, Forward Plan and Comments from the Cabinet and Council**

The Committee considered its work programme for 2023/24 as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report as well as the responses Cabinet and Council had made to reports the Committee had scrutinised at its meeting on 31 October 2023 and the Budget Review Group had scrutinised at its meeting 1 November 2023 (Appendix 2 to the report). It also considered responses Cabinet and Council had made to reports the Committee had scrutinised at its meeting on 14 November 2023 (Appendices 3 and 5 to the report) and responses that Joint Cabinet had made to a report the Committee had scrutinised at its meeting on 14 November 2023 (Appendix 4 to the report).

The Chair informed the Committee that and Item on the Work Programme for the current meeting had been the Significant Business Risk Register. He had made the decision not to call this report in for scrutiny because the previous discussion on the report had been very detailed and had resulted in a recommendation that the report should be reviewed and restructured in line with the new Corporate Strategy.

The Deputy Chief Executive (DCE) explained that an interim version of the report would be ready in the new year but linked to this was an opportunity to review the Council's approach to risk, with a new risk management policy and improving the link between Service Area Plans, projects and those external risks that could impact the Council. The DCE informed Members that he was the Council's Risk Champion and as such, would be working with the Risk Manager. His recommendation to Cabinet would be that the Council's Risk Policy would be reviewed by Audit & Standards Committee, but the Overview & Scrutiny Committee would scrutinise specific risks. By June 2024, it was hoped to have a new approach to Risk Management agreed, a new Risk Policy in place and new reporting to make it easier for Members and officers to interpret and review.

The Chair advised Members that the Environmental Enforcement Update report had been postponed until the meeting in January. A new format for reports to the Committee would be used for this report as a trial. The proposal was that reports would be limited to four pages but this would mean that the information required in the reports would need to be fully defined by the Committee. Appendices to the reports would require authorisation from the Chair to ensure that reports remained succinct.

The DCE was asked to explain when the Committee could expect to see the Digital Strategy Update report. The Digital Strategy would be combined with the Change Programme business case, currently scheduled for Cabinet in March. There would be an opportunity for the Committee to consider the first draft of the report early in the new year.

An item would be added to the Work Programme for the meeting in January to re-evaluate all the items on the Work Programme. The Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer had sent an email to Councillors advising them that the intention was to examine how the Work Programme could be better structured and this would involve going back to the start and evaluating each item on the Work Programme to see if it

should remain and then formulating a criterion for what items would be added to the Work Programme in future. This would ensure that the Committee scrutinised important topics, which might not be coming to Cabinet on a regular basis but still needed scrutiny.

The Chair asked Members to read the Climate Change Action Programme ahead of the next meeting, consider what were the top four or five matters within necessitating further examination and bring these to the next meeting.

The Chair drew Members' attention to the Comments from the Cabinet report. One of the things the Committee had requested was to ask for a 'lessons learned' report as soon after Christmas as possible on the Asset Compliance review that had been conducted recently. Cabinet had debated the timeline requested and had asked for this to be made less onerous to "as soon as possible". The Chair advised that comments and recommendations to Cabinet had to be made very clear in their intention because he could only convey to Cabinet what had been said at the Overview & Scrutiny meeting. He also advised Portfolio Holders that he would welcome their contribution at meetings if it helped shape a recommendation that was clearly understood by all, or where a slight adjustment could make it acceptable to Cabinet.

61. **HEART**

The Committee considered a report from Housing which provided an update to Members in respect of the Home Environment Assessment and Response Teams (HEART) delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants and related services.

Since 2017 the five District and Borough Councils in Warwickshire and the County Council had delivered equipment and adaptations funded by Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's), addressed housing conditions and provided associated financial support through the HEART. HEART was a shared service hosted by Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council (NBBC). Leadership and oversight was secured through the HEART Board, whose membership was formed from all of the Warwickshire District and Boroughs and Warwickshire County Council.

The key function of the HEART Service was to deliver DFG's to fund adaptations and deliver aligned funding and support to enable people to live independently in their own homes. These were typically property adaptations, including stair lifts, level access showers and similar, that enabled older or disabled individuals to live in their own homes and avoid admittance to hospital or care facilities as a result of frailty or accident.

The Chair gave some background to why the Committee scrutinised the HEART service. This was a service that had experienced some issues in the past and there had been a number of critical reports that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had reviewed on a regular basis. The last review was undertaken 12 months previously when it had been noted that improvements to the service had been made. The current report was part of the ongoing agenda to maintain a watchful eye.

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Assets, Councillor Wightman, the Head of Housing and two officers from Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council (NBBC) - Paul Coopey – Head of Environment Services and Jane Grant – Assistant Director of Strategic Housing. Mr Coopey explained that he ran the HEART service and Ms Grant explained that the HEART service reported to her, but she was also a member of its Board and attended Board meetings to represent NBBC which hosted the service.

In response to questions from Members, the Portfolio Holder, Head of Housing and both officers from NBBC explained that:

- Where “Foundations” was mentioned at paragraph 1.4 in the report, it was referring to the national coordinating body for home improvement agencies that ran the service on behalf of Councils and within Councils as well. They provided the best practice guidance and did the coordinating, liaising with the Government on Councils’ behalf.
- It was difficult to pinpoint why there was a lower uptake of the service in the District than some other areas. It was possible that in the south of Warwickshire there was an affluence potential that was the cause of the low uptake. In the north of Warwickshire, there was more willingness to approach the Council for financial assistance. To find out the exact reasons for the difference would take a lot of research and the right resources. The Disabled Facilities Grants were means tested and the Team would work with those who did not qualify for grants but these residents would have to pay privately. Officers would look into the reasons why the service was not more widely used.
- Both the shared service and the District Council’s own communications team could advertise the service to residents. There was a responsibility on HEART to promote the service. The HEART partnership also included the County Council which was more likely to be in touch with people who were vulnerable. Information could be accessed through hospitals and through the countywide Lifeline Service. The relevant statutory services and many in the voluntary sector already had information of the programme and were ensuring the people in need of the service who approached them were being made aware; advertising was on top of these information sources.
- Residents who requested the service would be assessed on need, financing and ownership criteria for the property. Assessments would be passed to Councils in the case of council housing adaptations.
- Any issues between residents and contractors installing equipment would be followed up and sorted. A Customer Satisfaction Survey was undertaken at the end of the process. Any complaints and compliments were monitored and reported to the Board, so all Councils were kept informed throughout this process.
- Additional funding to clear any backlog of cases was being reviewed; alternative methods to generate revenue to pay for additional staff were being examined and a project plan was being prepared. It was hoped that a new team would be in place by April to help clear any backlog. The caseload would be monitored to see if any further action was required.

- Records were kept of all enquiries for the service and the new computer system would also allow records to be kept where the advice had been a referral to other agencies.
- It was noted that many of the clients preferred to respond to surveys using post rather than digital responses but as the client base became more tech-savvy, it was hoped that the balance would change. The Council responsible for collating survey data would be asked to keep a mindful eye to check that response rates did not drop as more digital survey methods became more commonplace.
- A number of projects were ongoing such as a change of IT system and these were taking away resources. When these were completed, performance would improve but currently they were causing a dip in service.

The HEART Team was thanked for all of their work and for the positive report.

62. **Cabinet Agenda (Non-Confidential items and reports) – Wednesday 6 December 2023**

The Committee considered the following item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 6 December 2023.

Urgent Item – Renewal of Microsoft Enterprise Agreement

The Committee raised concern about the lack of detail provided in the report, particularly around the areas of risk and alternative options, cyber security and protection of residents’ personal data. The Committee asked Cabinet that a review should be done, to look at the breakdown in the process leading to the current situation, and lessons to be learnt from it.

Item 4 – Q2 Budget Update 2023/24

The Committee noted the report and thanked officers for their work on it, especially for including the summary of reserves. The Committee asked that in the future, more work should be done on how the Council monitored its budgets on an ongoing basis, so that there was a lesser discrepancy between projections and the actuals.

The Committee asked for an update from the Portfolio Holder in relation to the underspent capital budget for disabled playground facilities, and what the plan for spending this budget was. The Committee asked for future reports to bring forward comments in the situations of underspend.

63. **Public & 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 items by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, as set out below:

Minute Number	Paragraph Number	Reason
64, 65 and 66	3	Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

64. **Cabinet Agenda (Confidential items and reports) – Wednesday 6 December 2023**

Item 15 – Associated Costs for the Purchase of 24 Dwellings at the Europa Way, Warwick

The Committee noted the report and supported the recommendations within it.

65. **Minutes**

The confidential minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14 November 2023 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

66. **Confidential Appendix 5 to the Work Programme, Forward Plan & Comments from Cabinet and Council**

The Committee noted the confidential appendix to Minute Number 60 - Work Programme, Forward Plan and Comments from the Cabinet and Council.

(The meeting ended at 8.04pm)

CHAIR
6 February 2024

Appendix 1 - The record of the Budget Review Group meeting held on 1 November 2023 and noted at the meeting of Overview & Scrutiny Committee 5 December 2023

Budget Setting Review Group

Record of the meeting held on Wednesday 1 November 2023 at Shire Hall, Warwick at 6.00pm.

Present: Councillors: Barton, Collins, Day, R Dickson, Falp, Hales, Luckhurst, Milton, and Tangri

Also Present: Councillor Roberts, Portfolio Holder – Neighbourhood; Councillor Chilvers, Portfolio Holder – Resources; Andrew Rollins, Head of Finance; Tony Sidhu, Principal Accountant (Systems); and Sophie Vale, Committee Services Officer.

1. Appointment of Chair

Councillor Milton was appointed to Chair the meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Browne and Tangri.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Falp declared an interest because her son worked in Neighbourhood Services at the Council, and her husband was involved in local football leagues which would be affected by some of the charges discussed in the report. However, she assured Members that she had an open mind and did not believe herself to be predetermined.

Councillor Barton declared an interest because he was occasionally hired for use the Royal Spa Centre but did not believe himself to be predetermined.

Councillor Milton declared an interest on behalf of the whole Group because it was understood that many, if not all, of them were regular users of the Council's leisure facilities and car parks.

4. Cabinet Agenda (Non-Confidential items and reports) – Thursday 2 November 2023

Item 4 – Fees and Charges 2024/25

The Budget Review Group had concerns about the increase in fees at the crematorium but were satisfied by the rationale behind the decision provided by officers.

The Group wished to draw Cabinet's attention to the following points regarding car parking charges:

1. the connection between car parking fees and other priorities such as the town centre economy and the climate emergency should be recognised.

The Council's ambition to encourage net zero carbon methods of transportation should be reflected in the parking charges strategy. To understand the impacts of these connections better and define a way forward in achieving the Council's goals, the Group encouraged officers to test hypotheses and pursue different avenues to find potential solutions;

2. the importance of having an aligned strategy with Warwickshire County Council in relation to transportation and car parking charges should be highlighted;
3. in future, the consultation for car parking charges should be widened to include all Town and Parish Councils and interested organisations such as the Chambers of Trade and Commerce for Leamington, Kenilworth, and Warwick; and
4. a review into car parking charges of all car parks linked to leisure facilities would be welcomed to ensure that they are fair and equitable across the District.

The Group welcomed the increase in charges for filming on Council land.

The Group wished to draw Cabinet's attention to the circa £170,000 of opportunity that had not been taken which could have been available had the projections of the last Medium Term Financial Strategy been followed.

(The meeting ended at 7.03pm)

CHAIR, OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
5 December 2023