

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 30 July 2024 at Shire Hall, Warwick at 6.00pm.

**Present:** Councillors Barton, Collins, Day, Dray, R Dickson, Hales, D Harrison, Luckhurst, Milton and Payne.

**Also Present:** Councillor Davison – Leader of the Council, and Councillor King – Portfolio Holder for Place.

## 26. Apologies and Substitutes

- (a) Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Armstrong and C Wightman; and
- (b) Councillor R Dickson substituted for Councillor Russell; Councillor Hales substituted for Councillor Redford; and Councillor Dray substituted for Councillor Adkins.

## 27. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

## 28. Minutes

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on the 8 July 2024 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record, subject to an amendment to remove Councillor Milton' name from the list of attendees, and minute numbers following in sequential order.

## 29. Joint Cabinet Agenda (Non-Confidential items and reports) – Thursday 1 August 2024

The Committee considered the following item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Joint Cabinet on Thursday 1 August 2024.

### Meeting Housing Growth Needs through the South Warwickshire Local Plan

The Committee noted that earlier during the day of the meeting, the Government had laid out its plans on planning reform and housebuilding. This came late in the day and officers and the Leaders of Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council had not had a chance to consider its implications in depth, but the Committee noted this intervention of Government was likely to lead to a change of policy.

The Committee also recognised the anxiety around the South Warwickshire Local Plans and the number of houses amongst local residents, and the potential impact of this.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommends to Joint Cabinet that, given the uncertainty introduced by the Government announcement, the numbers referred to in recommendation (2) should be "noted" rather than "agreed", and the report be amended accordingly in order to reflect this.

The Joint Cabinet was required to vote on this because it forms a recommendation to it.

Proposed Changes to the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) Part A Methodology for the South Warwickshire Local Plan

The Committee thanked officers for their work on producing the report.

In relation to the Financial Implications paragraph in both reports, the Committee notes the figures and asks Cabinet to provide assurance to Stratford-on-Avon District Council with regards to Warwick District Council meeting its financial obligations, noting that further funding will need to be agreed as part of future budget-setting.

### 30. **Climate Change and Biodiversity Reporting**

The Committee considered a report from the Programme Director for Climate Change. At its meeting on 6 February 2024, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed its work programme. The work programme included the consideration of a report relating to the Climate Change Action Programme and Biodiversity Action Programme and in particular, proposals for reporting and scrutinizing five key themes relating to these programmes. The report set out how and when those five key themes would be addressed.

1. Offsetting – the Council’s Ambition 1 meant that in order to achieve “Net Zero”, it was likely that some form of carbon offsetting would be required, albeit as a last resort. Initial discussions would be held with the Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) Advisory Group to agree how off-setting work would be manifested to allow clear proposals to be formed.

2. Adaptation - a revised Climate Change Adaptation Plan was agreed by Cabinet in December 2023. This plan set out the climate change adaptation actions that should be considered for implementation to ensure that the natural environment, people, buildings, and businesses were prepared for the impacts of climate change. It used the findings from the West Midlands and Warwickshire County Council Adaptation Plans, along with the outcomes of CCRA3 and NAP3, to create a localised plan for Warwick District. It was primarily a document for Warwick District Council to use, focusing on actions within the Council’s areas of influence and those actions it had direct control over. However, it did not discount partnership working to seek other opportunities for wider climate change adaptation.

The report proposed a further report to the Committee in April 2025, to include:

- updated international, national, or local data that needed to be given consideration in reviewing the Council’s local Action Plan;
- a short and accessible overview of the progress made on the Adaptation Action Plan;
- a more detailed review of Theme 1 of the Action Plan (Mainstreaming climate resilience into Council operations/services);
- impacts and learning from recent extreme weather events to consider how services might need to further adapt.

3. Data tracking (including carbon emissions) - at its meeting on 31 October 2023, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported a set of measures to

track data relating to the Climate Change Action Programme. The Committee's work programme in 2024 wished to focus on Low Cost, Low Carbon Energy as this had been given particular emphasis in the Corporate Strategy. Reference should be made to the Cabinet Report entitled "Low-Cost Low Carbon Energy Programme". It was intended to develop a "Dashboard" to allow the data to be summarised in a visual way. It was therefore proposed that this was presented to the meeting on 24/09/24.

Members noted that the climate change data presented to the Committee on 31 October 2023 would be collated and would be reviewed regularly by the Climate Change Team, the relevant portfolio holders and, by exception, the Senior Leadership Team.

4. Biodiversity Action Programme - the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) was agreed at Cabinet on 10 April 2024. The BAP included an action plan through 2030 and a series of measures to enable progress to be checked.

It was proposed that the measures, along with a highlight and exceptions report on the actions, were presented to the Committee annually for scrutiny, with the first report being scheduled for April 2025 at the completion of the first year of the Action Plan.

5. Residents Engagement & Communication – both the Climate Change Action Programme and the Biodiversity Action Programme incorporated communication and engagement strategies, with the latter Biodiversity Action Plan having a four-monthly rolling communications plan which showed progress and set out what was planned next. Based on this, Overview and Scrutiny Committee could consider a report in January 2025 (and thereafter annually) summarising climate change and biodiversity engagement and communication activity, providing an assessment of the activities, and asking the Committee to consider potential activities for the year ahead.

Risks were managed through the Service Area Risk Register and Project Risk Registers. It was suggested that drawing on the existing risk register, a risk assessment should be included within each of the reports proposed above.

In answer to questions from Members, the Programme Director for Climate Change and the Leader of the Council advised Members that:

- There would be an Advisory Group meeting in September, which would give officers a steer on how the offsetting piece might be taken forward. The report on carbon emissions would also be brought forward then, which would help identify an early prediction on what the shortfall might be in 2025. These reports would form part of the Cabinet agenda, which would give the Overview & Scrutiny Committee a chance to consider them should Members wish to do so.
- The carbon emissions monitoring would be done in spring 2026, when the Council would have the hard data, and the actual costs would be in the 26/27 financial year.
- The Council had been focussing on the Corporate Strategy and the Biodiversity Action Plan.
- The Council would not be carbon neutral as an organisation by 2025, and these trends were seen back in autumn 2023, when it became clear that was not going to be achievable. If the Council was going to use offsetting, it would be preferable not to pay another organisation and do it in-house, which might then also help others decarbonise.

The Chair emphasised that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee wished to inform early policy development, and there was little opportunity to do so when calling in a Cabinet report. He asked the Programme Director for Climate Change and the Leader of the Council if information could be brought earlier to the Scrutiny Committee, where it could be discussed cross-party in a public forum.

The Chair advised the Committee that if Members wished to create smaller groups to look at particular subjects from the report, that could aid the discussion, and he was happy to facilitate that.

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

### 31. **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 Chair informed the Committee that the General Housing Repairs & Voids Contract Ref WDC0007 report would be brought forward at the 24 September meeting, and it might need to be considered in confidential session.

The Change Programme – Case for Change report would be considered at the Committee’s 3 September meeting, and the Future High Streets Fund would be a short update via email to all Councillors by the end of September.

In terms of the corporate projects to be considered by the Committee, the Chair suggested Tachbrook Country Park for consideration, expecting to consider it no later than 13 November meeting. The areas covered by the report would be: purpose of the project; timeline for delivery; skills being in place to deliver; budget (how the project was delivered against its original budget and against anticipated running costs); governance of the project; project risks/ issues; and communications.

In terms of the Council’s responsibility for homelessness, the Chair considered that the Committee should spend time considering the big question it wished to ask and understand on the delivery of the service which could be: “Is the approach to homelessness by WDC right and/or appropriate”, then look at what information the Committee might wish to see in a report to support that. This supporting information could include:

- the Council’s statutory duties;
- Rough Sleeping levels and approach and definitions of homelessness;
- the Council’s Homeless Strategy;
- Expectation of the Community on the Council for this service;
- The demand on the service (currently and over time), and understanding how the Council was using its assets, such as William Wallsgrove;
- Temporary accommodation use and costs over time;
- Challenges in delivering the service (and the causes of these, for example, did the Council Policy create a challenge); and
- Cost of delivering the service in its current form.

The Committee was of the view that in addition to the above, it was important to understand the Council’s partnerships, evaluate them, and opportunities to enhance and strengthen those, as well as working with other agencies and

community wardens in addressing homelessness; and which of the prevention strategy was the most effective.

Councillor Day was grateful for the helpful Peer Review process, with specific recommendations having been made in the report received the week before. He asked if this might be something the Committee could look at scrutinising in the future. The Chair would take look at the nine recommendations and come with a proposal to the Committee as to which Members might wish to focus on.

On behalf of residents, Councillor Dray raised issues concerning the ID Verde contract, more specifically with incidents of grass not being cut. The Deputy Chief Executive would arrange a meeting with the Contract Manager and Councillor Dray, to raise those issues in the first instance.

In terms of the Children's and Adults' Safeguarding Champions, the Chair suggested that by not limiting this appointment to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee Members, this would give a larger pool to appoint from. The only caveat was that they should not be from the same political group as the Portfolio Holder, where some differentiation would help with accountability.

**Resolved** that

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) a data tracking (including carbon emissions) report be added to the Committee's Work Programme for the 24 September 2024 meeting as part of the Climate Change and Biodiversity reporting;
- (3) a Climate Change and biodiversity engagement and communication activity report be added to the Committee's Work Programme for the 21 January 2025 meeting as part of the Climate Change and Biodiversity reporting;
- (4) a Biodiversity Action Programme report be added to the Committee's Work Programme for April 2025 as part of the Climate Change and Biodiversity reporting;
- (5) a report on Adaptation be added to the Committee's Work Programme for April 2025 as part of the Climate Change and Biodiversity reporting;
- (6) the General Housing Repairs & Voids Contract Ref WDC0007 report be brought forward at the 24 September meeting;
- (7) the Change Programme – Case for Change report be considered at the 3 September meeting;
- (8) an update to the Future High Streets Fund be circulated via email by the end of September;

- (9) Tachbrook Country Park be added for consideration, with the report covering the areas above, be brought forward no later than 13 November;
- (10) the areas identified above in terms of homelessness, be agreed;
- (11) a report on the Peer Review process be added on the work programme at a date to be agreed by the Chair in consultation with officers; and
- (12) appointments to the Children's and Adults Champions be expanded to all Members, but not to those from the same political group as the Portfolio Holder for accountability reasons.

(The meeting ended at 7.38pm)

CHAIR  
3 September 2024