

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 JULY 2022

PRESENT:

Members of the Committee:

Councillors Eccleson (Chair), Edwards, Lawrence, Mahoney, Mrs New, Mrs O'Rourke, Mrs Parker and Rabin

Officers:

Aftab Razzaq (Chief Officer – Legal and Governance) Nicola Smith (Chief Officer – Growth and Investment) and Linn Ashmore (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in attendance: Councillor Picker (Portfolio Holder for Growth and Investment)

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 28 March 2022 and 19 May 2022 were approved and signed by the Chair.

5. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillor Ward.

6. PLANNING SERVICE PERFORMANCE AND DISCUSSION WITH THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR GROWTH AND INVESTMENT

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 4) regarding the details of performance and changes to the Growth and Investment Portfolio.

The Portfolio Holder and Chief Officer for Growth and Investment were present at the meeting to answer questions from the Committee on the report and other matters relating to the portfolio area.

During discussion the following points questions were raised (comments from the Committee in italics):

The long-term plans and vision for the town centre did not feature actions relating to Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) or on-street parking which were matters of concern for residents. There are no plans for an SPD or use of powers under Article 4 Directions for HMOs.

Response - On-street parking was recognised as an issue but came under the control of Warwickshire County Council (WCC) and there was little that could be done at a local borough level.

Five Cabinet working groups had recently completed work on short-term key themes based on improvements for the town centre and HMOs came up for discussion as part of that work.

Revised plans for the Town Centre Strategy were being worked up and it was anticipated a report would be put before Members at Full Council in September.

The main issue was the concentration of HMOs. Planning Services Working Party considered the topic of HMOs at its meeting in February and recommendations for a way forward were made. It was not possible to introduce a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) because there is no existing policy for HMOs in the Local Plan to link into. The Working Party recommended that controls over the numbers of HMOs be introduced based on specific geographical areas and this approach should be considered for inclusion as part of next review of the Local Plan.

HMOs were being run as commercial businesses. The inclusion of enough one-bedroom accommodation within the current Local Plan would have helped avoid the issues.

Response – Moving forward HMOs were a matter the Portfolio Holder was keen to address.

The Local Plan should include appropriate parking and charging points. The situation was worse in the urban area where it was assumed town centre residents would not need a vehicle and would favour public transport but this is not the case. The policies for urban areas should be the same as for rural areas where developments are required to provide parking spaces.

On-street parking was a problem that affected other areas and not just the town centre. Improvements in enforcement action was needed and more stringent decision making by the Planning Committee. WCC would benefit from an improved strategy and increased levels of income through enforcement around schools and other areas of the town but there was only a small team of traffic wardens.

Response – All policies are derived from national planning legislation and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Rugby is not unique and all local authorities have similar issues with parking standards. It was only possible to set maximum levels of parking and not minimum levels meaning there were no powers of refusal on planning grounds. Whether to include allocated parking was the decision of the planning applicant. WCC Highways can only refuse applications on the grounds of safety or free flow of the road network. Use of a vehicle in rural areas was viewed as being a greater necessity for access to amenities.

The issue was linked to sustainable transport options. The development at the former cattle market site was tied to this due to its location to support a shift from cars to more sustainable modes of transport.

Q. What is the current position of the staffing structure? The recruitment of an Economic Development Manager should be a priority.

A. The service area is subject to constant change in a highly competitive market, but there was confidence the vacant positions will be filled. The new structure for the Development Management Team will allow for the anticipated workload. A report was due to be considered by Full Council on 19 July seeking approval for authority to create the new posts required.

A proportion of the income generated through planning applications is ring fenced and will cover the cost of hiring temporary support if needed.

Q. Looking at the increased levels of housing proposed in planning applications, is the future land supply adequate particularly in light of Coventry City Council overstating its requirements?

A. Income generated through planning applications has been significant. The figures for land supply were due to be published next month but Rugby was in a healthy position. Once the ONS figures were received an assessment of what measures may be needed to meet housing need would be made. There is a duty to cooperate and once more was known about the level of need a report would be submitted to Planning Services Working Party and Cabinet. The figures from ONS were expected to reflect the issues from the 2016 data relating to Coventry when it was assumed that students attending the universities would remain local but that has not been the case.

RESOLVED THAT – the Portfolio Holder and Chief Officer be thanked for the detailed report and attending the meeting.

7. DRAFT MEMBER AND OFFICER WORKING PROTOCOL

The Committee received a report marked to follow on the agenda (Part 1 – agenda item 5) regarding the outcomes of a review of Member and officer working and the creation of a new protocol.

A fluid approach would be taken to member conversations, and these would be arranged as and when required initiated by Members or officers to discuss key work streams.

The dates for the open days would be pre planned and advertised.

The draft protocol had been included on the agenda of the meeting of Full Council on 19 July. Any changes or comments from the Committee would be reported to that meeting.

RESOLVED THAT –

- (1) the Member and Officer Protocol be recommended to Council for approval with no changes: and
- (2) the task group be thanked for their work on the protocol.

8. REVIEW OF GRAFFITI

The Committee received a report marked to follow on the agenda (Part 1 – agenda item 6) regarding the draft review report of the Graffiti Task Group.

Councillor Rabin, chair of the task group, presented the report and thanked members and officers for their involvement in the review.

The origin of the review topic was a Motion to Council in September 2021. The Chief Officer for Legal and Governance undertook to clarify whether the review report would be submitted to Cabinet or Council for approval.

RESOLVED THAT – IT BE RECOMMENDED TO CABINET/COUNCIL THAT the review report and recommendations be approved, subject to clarification from the Chief Office for Legal and Governance.

9. DRAFT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 7) regarding the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2021/22.

RESOLVED THAT – IT BE RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL THAT the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2021/22 be approved and published.

10. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report and a table listing future work programme topics, items due to be scheduled and outlining the current position of reviews (Part 1 – agenda item 8).

A review on the topic of Emergency Health Care Provision had previously been included in the work programme and subsequently it was agreed that the scope of the review should be broadened. It was important to have clear objectives for the review. It was agreed that an updated scoping paper be brought back to the next meeting for consideration.

A motion was included on the agenda for Full Council concerning ambulance response times. The topics were interrelated, and care was needed to avoid any duplication of work.

It was important that Portfolio Holders attended meetings to allow the committee to scrutinise performance in their portfolio areas. These should be scheduled into the work programme in advance.

RESOLVED THAT – the work programme be updated as minuted above.

CHAIR