

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 AUGUST 2023

PRESENT:

Councillors Norman (Chair), Leung (Vice-Chair), Ball, Booker, Ho, Hawkins, Hill, Holland, Trent, Ray, Robertson, Whitehouse and Woodward

8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies from Councillor Brian Yeates.

9 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made.

10 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 08 June 2023, previously circulated, were taken as read and approved as a correct record. It was noted that the original copy of minutes circulated had differed from those presented at full council.

11 HEALTH MATTERS

The Vice-Chair, Councillor Leung, attended the previous Staffordshire County Council's Health & Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on Monday 31st July 2023 to hear the agenda items – Introduction to Adult Social Care Assurance.

- Members asked how the representative to the County Council's Health & Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee is selected.

The Chair confirmed it was his political appointment on behalf of the committee.

Councillor Booker confirmed she would be a happy to provide support given her public health qualifications. Members asked the Vice-Chair to raise the closure of the GP practice in Burntwood and the knock-on effects of those patients being dispersed at the committee. Members also highlighted the importance of preventative care and healthy living for discussion. The Vice-Chair confirmed these were being discussed.

Members raised concerns about the ICB and additional S106 money for new GP capacity. Vice-Chair of the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee Councillor Richard Cox joined the discussion to confirm the ICB is aware of these issues and discussions are taking place. Simon Fletcher (Chief Executive) confirmed that as the planning authority, LDC is looking to push infrastructure to start of new developments, rather than coming at the end.

Members also asked the Vice-Chair to champion the maternity services at Samuel Johnson and within the district at the meeting on 16th October, as well as raise issues with delays on the A38 between Lichfield and Burton Hospital.

12 CITY CENTRE PEDESTRIANISATION TRIAL

The Chair welcomed Cabinet Member for High Streets & Visitor Economy Janice Silvester-Hall to the meeting. The Cabinet member confirmed the plan for a part-time, hybrid pedestrianisation approach. Conversations with city centre operators showed they were feeling significant impact. She highlighted that the 6-month consultation involved in this process, consumes a significant amount of the maximum 18-month trial period. The need for clear communications on pedestrianisation were stressed.

- It was queried why no drafts of the report had been made available for the pre-meeting given the appendices were available well before then.

The Cabinet member said that the request to prepare the report had only come through on the Wednesday before the pre-meeting and she was not fully aware of her need to attend the meeting at that point.

- The Chair asked about variable signage and what information these signs could provide.

The Cabinet member confirmed these signs should be in place by the end of the year and that they can display several different messages depending on the needs of the time.

- The Chair asked if there were any other towns or cities where this kind of pedestrianisation had worked.

Martin Gritt (Project Officer) agreed to send information about such towns and cities to the Chair.

- Members raised questions about the consultation timeframes at sections 3.8 & 3.9 of the report.

The Cabinet member confirmed that the statistics were first compiled during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021 under non-normal use circumstances. She confirmed a £7000-8,000 cost to revisit that.

- It was asked why the decision on pedestrianisation was published last week, before the report came to O&S for consultation with members. It was also asked why the cabinet member had not referred herself to the committee for advice.

The Cabinet member stated that having met with businesses about the plan, there was a need to respond as quickly as possible given the constraints of the 18-month trial period. She stated that it was certainly not her intention not to appear at O&S and that she valued the contribution of the committee and wanted consultation far and wide.

Simon Fletcher added that the idea of a part-time/hybrid basis for pedestrianisation was something that emerged from the workshops conducted with consultees.

- Members asked if there has been any additional car parking provision for blue badge holders on Thursday-Sunday.

The Cabinet member reiterated the end of year target for variable signage. She stated that data would be used to indicate occupancy levels of car parks. There has been a natural migration of blue badge holders to parking in Wade Street. She also highlighted a significant difference between peak rates and average rates of car parking. It was confirmed that the 10 disabled spaces in the multi-storey car park will be reallocated in due course and this may be the opportunity to revisit the options available with wade street.

- Members asked what is the plan for enforcement?

The Cabinet member said that engagement in the early days of the plan had not been strong, leading to a concern that soft enforcement would leave residents and businesses shocked by a stronger enforcement regime. Ideally, a scenario is desired where the information provided is so clear that very little enforcement is required.

- Members asked about alternative solutions such as park and ride.

It was confirmed that a land train and golf buggies have previously been suggested by consultees as alternative arrangements.

- Members questioned why considerably less has been spent on comms than on consultation fees.

The Cabinet member noted that she has previously lobbied for better comms at O&S and the authority was now better at conveying information than previously. She reiterated the need to be clear in comms, stating she would rather provide too much information than not enough.

RESOLVED: 2.2 - The Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided feedback on the trial to date, focusing particularly on the lack of consultation with members, part-time/hybrid system and issues faced by blue badge holders.

The results of the consultation process will be reported to the committee prior to any potential changes to make pedestrianisation permanent

13 REVIEW OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FUNCTION AT THE COUNCIL

The committee were asked for any initial views on the review of the Overview & Scrutiny function report.

It was stated by members of the committee who had sat on O&S under the previous system that Cabinet members appeared to have greater regard for O&S under the new system, bringing things to the committee for consultation. It was highlighted that this had not been the case with the report discussed at Item 5 and it was suggested that the Chair could write to the Leader, informing cabinet members to consult and attend O&S.

Members pushed for greater investment in the task groups and the value of written reports over verbal updates. The importance of encouraging all councillors to take part in task groups was highlighted and it was suggested task groups could be better served by having a fully non-O&S committee membership, guided by an O&S committee member Chair. It was indicated that task group Chairs would not just be presented with papers going forward but would instead be working with officers to guide them on the direction of travel.

Lichfield city masterplan.

Task group Chair Councillor Ball confirmed his wish to continue as Chair and to have a better gender balance of members on the taskgroup, from wards inside and outside the city.

Agenda items suggested for this group included:

- Moving the location of the bus station next to the railway station – witnesses from County Council should be questioned by the task group.
- Affordability of new housing – methods to improve this. External agencies should be interviewed to help know what options are available.

- How the joint venture agreement and future partnerships are assessed.

Taskgroups on Pedestrianisation and Public Transport were proposed, on condition of the successful completion of topic assessment documents.

RESOLVED: The Overview & Scrutiny provided initial views on the effectiveness of the changes to the Overview & Scrutiny function.

The Committee provided a steer on the need and membership of current Member Task Groups.

The Committee continued to review the terms of reference, to provide feedback to a full review of the O&S function which will be carried out at the end of this municipal year.

14 LOCAL ELECTIONS 2023 REVIEW

Christie Tims (Assistant Director Operations, Regulation and Enforcement) presented the review. She highlighted need to encourage candidates to have earlier nomination appointments. It was noted that where previous elections had been run by the election team, this was the first election with Simon Fletcher as RO and Kerry Dove first as DRO and with the Governance team led by Mark Hooper, with support from Sarah Pearce, Chris Lewis, Laura Brentnall and the rest of the new team members.

Polling day went well, with only 1 reported issue. Out of 17,721 people who voted on the day, only 24 were refused a ballot under voter ID rules and 16 of them later returned. Only 8 people did not return. If there was pattern to these 8 individuals it did not reveal itself. An experienced consultant is now aiding on revising the existing systems and processes, and to deliver the new statutory requirements by the end of the year.

The Chair gave his personal thanks to officers for their help with the nomination process.

- Members asked if there was any aggression from voters as a result of Voter ID rules.

Ms Tims confirmed there was only 1 reported incident of unhappiness, with some people actually keen to present their ID.

Simon Fletcher praised the team that prepared and ran the election as fantastic. He highlighted the positive buzz across the organisation following the collaborative work at the count. He did note that the verification process needs reviewing to ensure it runs more smoothly next time. He informed the committee that the SPI data will be analysed for trends and that it was recognised better engagement was needed to encourage younger voters to turn out. Members suggested using SPI data to identify reasons for any drop in turnout in specific wards including any links to higher levels of deprivation.

- Members asked what plans are in place for comms at future elections.

Christie Tims confirmed plans for online portal. By law the council will be required to refresh all proxy voters' details via an online portal.

- Members asked if we received any formal complaints regarding the election.

Ms Tims confirmed that there no formal complaints she was aware of.

RESOLVED: Members provided observations and comments regarding the recent elections, both district and parish, noting there were many vacancies for parish

councils and it was agreed to see if there was any way this poor response could be improved in future.

Members requested briefing papers following the full national report on Voter ID by AEA, and links concerning electoral commission results and information too.

15 WORK PROGRAMME

Members requested the Compliments, complaints, MP and FOI enquiries report 2022/2023 be added to the work programme.

Members requested a brief report on the Knife Angel, covering costs; outcomes; the civic awards; engagement.

Members requested a report on ICB utilisation of section 106 money.

16 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: "That as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business, which would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972".

IN PRIVATE

17 VERBAL UPDATE - CINEMA UPDATE

The contents of this item are exempt as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

(The Meeting closed at 8.59 pm)

CHAIR