MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD  
12 JANUARY 2015

PRESENT:

Members of the Board:  
Councillors Mahoney (Chairman), Cade, G Francis, Miss Lawrence, Roodhouse, Sandison (substitute for Councillor Keeling), Dr Shera and Dr Williams

Also Present:  
Councillor Stokes, Leader of the Council and Councillor Ms Edwards

Officers:  
Ian Davis, Executive Director; Adam Norburn, Executive Director; Doug Jones, Head of Business Transformation; Paul Ansell, Scrutiny Officer; Debbie Dawson, Scrutiny Officer; Linn Ashmore, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer

21. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN  
Councillor Cade was appointed Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the 2014/15 municipal year.

22. MINUTES  
The minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2014 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

23. APOLOGIES  
Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs Garcia and Keeling.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST  
Councillor Roodhouse declared a general non-pecuniary interest by virtue of being a member of Warwickshire County Council.

25. MOTION FROM COUNCIL – RUGBY GREEN RANGER GROUP  
The Board received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 5) concerning a motion referred by Council on 22 October 2014.

On 22 October 2014, Council had referred a motion on the subject of developing a Rugby Green Ranger group to the Board. The Board considered whether to:

- consider the matter itself and report to Cabinet;
- instruct an overview and scrutiny committee to appoint a task group to consider the matter; or
- refer the motion to the overview and scrutiny work programme workshop and then make a decision on the above options.
RESOLVED THAT –

(1) the motion on the subject of developing a Rugby Green Ranger group be submitted to the overview and scrutiny work programme workshop on 25 February, and

(2) the Board make a decision on 16 March on how to deal with the motion.

26. DISCUSSION WITH THE LEADER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Councillor Stokes gave members a verbal report on where we are now and the future direction of the council. The main points raised were as follows:

Since Councillor Stokes was appointed as Leader last September he had arranged a number of employee briefings held over a two week period which were attended by around 95 per cent of staff. They proved to be a valuable means of communication with staff and listening to their concerns.

It is more usual for a change of leadership to take place for political reasons and it was important to stress to everyone that business is likely to continue as usual in the immediate future.

The Leader has attended meetings with leaders and chief officers of other local authorities where it had become clear that Rugby Borough Council was held in high regard. The Leader felt it was important to share this with officers at the briefings and acknowledge the level of work and commitment from officers and the good working relationship that exists with other authorities.

Rugby is in a sound financial position compared to many other authorities.

With regard to structure and portfolio areas the priority is to manage the way forward ensuring there is financial stability in relation to Government grants. The future ambition is to enable the authority to become financially self-sufficient by 2020.

It is important to ensure that tax payers receive value for money and investments are made in the right areas.

With the Rugby World Cup (RWC) taking place this will be an exciting year. The council has recently agreed to underwrite £1m of significant plans that will build on the heritage and culture of the borough.

The recent ceremony giving the England women’s rugby team the Freedom of the Borough gave a flavour of the level of interest that could be generated and it is important to capitalise as much as possible on the RWC and create a legacy for the future.

One of the biggest issues faced this year is the effects of a combined West Midlands council formed by several authorities in the region which could include Coventry City Council.

If Coventry City Council chooses to break away from the current Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership that will have a significant effect on this authority. Rugby Borough Council needs to take an independent view and decide what path it should take.
Members raised the following questions for the Leader:

As the newly elected Leader what is your view of the council’s relationship with the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP), particularly in respect of the growth agenda and the level of housing growth?

It has been a steep learning curve but having met with the Minister of State for Housing and Planning in London it was clear he recognised Rugby Borough Council as a pro-growth authority. One difficulty facing the council was the perverse effect of the five year land supply rule. Despite being recognised as favouring growth, the council was unable to resist speculative planning applications on the grounds that it did not have a five year land supply.

Is the CWLEP considering the wider issues around infrastructure and highways as part of its plans, or are they being delayed?

The beginnings of this are visible. The CWLEP has a new Chairman which has caused some delay but things are going in the right direction and it is still early days. The Leader has held discussions regarding transport plans for Coventry and Warwickshire with the Leader of Coventry City Council. It was clear they are aiming to capitalise on their links with surrounding boroughs. Although Ansty Business Park is situated in Rugby Borough they recognise the benefits and importance of the site.

What precisely do you mean by being self-sufficient by 2020?

The aim is to become non-reliant on Government grants. This will require some consideration and planning and it was hoped this would happen based on a flexible approach.

How effective do you think the New Homes Bonus is?

This is a key area for discussion. Any Government in power will seek to reward growth. The New Homes Bonus could net this authority £2.4m next year, but if Labour were to gain power in the next general election they could scrap the scheme, although this could take some time to replace. A replacement initiative could be based on the revenue support grant. A Labour government may reward business rate growth at a higher level, which could compensate to a greater or lesser extent for any reductions elsewhere.

If the New Homes Bonus was replaced it was possible that combined authorities would benefit more.

Under a Conservative government the New Homes Bonus may remain and local retention of business rate growth may be increased albeit to a less generous extent than the amounts being proposed by Labour.

All other income sources would remain in one way or another. Councils need to become more entrepreneurial and seek to generate income from the services they provide. This is an option that Rugby could consider further in future.

Will the Rugby World Cup leave a lasting legacy, and do proposals link with the CWLEP?

The plans are being driven by the Council’s cross party working party with advice from external consultants. It is important we build on those plans and ensure there is a long term legacy.

There are a number of opportunities already being picked up by local businesses to increase footfall. There are plans to make a number of
improvements to enhance the appearance of the town centre which include a facelift for the walk of fame.

It was hoped the relationship with Rugby School could be built on further and also make the best use of the Rugby Art Gallery and Museum facility.

Discussions with the CWLEP have taken place and they are working with businesses on applications.

*Does Rugby School have its own agenda for the RWC?*
More would be known when the Leader had met with the new Headmaster the following week.

*Has Warwickshire County Council (WCC) made any commitment to support plans around the RWC?*
So far they have not made any formal commitment but informal discussions have been held with their Leader based on practical support, for example lamp post dressing and refreshing paving, rather than providing funds. There was some support from the WCC highways department for this type of work.

Conversations are being held on many levels and members were asked to come forward with any specific ideas or suggestions.

*Will there be a lasting legacy to re-energise the town centre as far as businesses are concerned and reduce the level of empty shops?*
It is important that we stop using the phrase ‘grow the town centre’. We need to focus on how we make businesses more productive. The Leader has begun visiting town centre businesses on an individual basis and feedback obtained from them matches this view. It is important to work together with businesses on plans for the RWC period.

The new Head of Planning and Recreation Services is working on the production of a strategy and vision for the town centre which will seek to manage the level of retail businesses while keeping the town centre viable. It is hoped that this will be put before members in February/March of this year.

The Executive Director commented on reasons why the Council is keen to promote the game and the link the sport has with the town:
- Businesses will see a spike over the period of the games through increased footfall in the town.
- To establish a level of civic pride. Rugby is one of the fastest growing towns and many of its residents are new to the town and it is hoped a sense of belonging can be created.
- To create a longer term legacy built on reputation, visitors to the town during the games may not be aware of the town’s connection with the sport and if they leave with a favourable impression this may lead to international awareness and repeat visits from more local visitors.

There are plans to work with local schools and it is hoped that a tournament being introduced by the leisure centre may turn into an annual event.

There will be a rugby village situated in the town centre for the seven week period of the tournament which will be used as a fanzone when matches are on. For the remainder of the time it can be used for the benefit of the community and members were invited to come forward with ideas and suggested uses for the zone so we can make the best use of the facility when there are no games being played.
A member suggested that a business opportunity could be created by setting up a World Cup “village” outside of the town centre.
The Leader welcomed any suggestions or ideas. He expressed his appreciation for the enthusiasm of officers who are working on plans for the RWC. A briefing session for all members is in the process of being arranged.

RESOLVED THAT – The Leader and Executive Directors be thanked for attending the meeting.

27. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW ACTION PLANS

The Board received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 8) regarding an exception report on the progress of overview and scrutiny review actions plans.

Members noted that there was only one overdue action which was for the Employee Welling review relating to the next employee survey. The Executive Director informed the Board that a shortened version of the survey was being drawn up and would be ready by the end of the month.

RESOLVED THAT – the report be noted.

28. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME PROGRESS

The Board received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 9) concerning progress in task group reviews, the work programmes of the Board and scrutiny committees and the work programme workshop format.

Memberships for two new reviews were being sought, Systems Thinking – What Next? and Promoting Independent Living. A few volunteers have already come forward but more are welcome.

The outcome of the work programme workshop, due to be held on 25 February, will be the main item for the agenda of the Board’s next meeting.

Members asked whether the outcomes of the Hackney Carriage Stands review would be put in place before the RWC and were informed that if the additional rank provision was approved, it could be that any improvements might not be in place in time for the RWC. It was not considered to be a key issue. The main use of taxis would be to transport visitors from the station, and there was already a privately run taxi rank at the railway station which was outside the control of the council and beyond the scope of the review.

A member of the task group informed the Board that representatives from WCC and the police were being invited to attend the next meeting of the task group when members were due to consider the potential sites for additional ranks.

RESOLVED THAT – the report be noted.