MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 OCTOBER 2015

PRESENT:

Members of the Committee:

Councillors Roberts (Chairman), Avis (substitute for Councillor Mahoney), Mrs A’Barrow, Butlin, Mrs Garcia, Keeling, Mrs Nash, Roodhouse, Mrs Simpson-Vince and Ms Watson-Merret

Officers:

Mannie Ketley (Head of Resources), Paul Ansell (Scrutiny Officer) and Linn Ashmore (Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer)

Councillor Mrs A’Barrow took the chair

5. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Buckley, Mahoney and Dr Williams.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Butlin declared a general non-pecuniary interest by virtue of being the Transport and Planning Portfolio Holder for Warwickshire County Council.

7. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2015/16 QUARTER 1

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 3) concerning an overview of the council’s spending and performance position in the first quarter of 2015/16.

The Head of Resources attended the meeting to answer questions.

During discussion the following points were made:

Car Parks
Members questioned the significant levels of write offs that had been reported at recent Cabinet meetings. The committee were informed these related to debts issued under our own systems that had been transferred over to the new service provider. The total amount to be written off was not known but was likely to be in the region of £150,000. The debt no longer belonged to the authority and would eventually be cancelled out.
Land Charges
Central Government were due to pick up the cost but this was yet to happen. It was expected that new burdens funding would be received to offset the costs and assist with underspends by the end of the year.

Crematorium
The rate of deaths – and hence the demand for cremations – could rarely be predicted accurately and was also subject to seasonal fluctuations. An overall picture of performance would be possible once a whole year of operation had elapsed.

The committee discussed the way exception data was presented and questioned whether the variance figure of £10,000 used as the red threshold should be reviewed.

The current thresholds were:

- **Green** – up to £5,000 variance
- **Amber** - £5,000-£10,000
- **Red** – more than £10,000 variance

Selecting too low a figure for scrutiny could result in unmanageable quantities of data and a suggestion was made that the variance could be tested by lowering the criteria for the traffic lights.

The Head of Resources undertook to explore how realistic it would be to increase the detail of finance and performance scrutiny, and the additional pressure on resources that this may create.

A further option was for the committee to select particular service areas to concentrate on.

It was noted that the other Overview and Scrutiny Committee was due to consider the performance data for quarter 2 at its next meeting, in line with the new scrutiny structure arrangement whereby quarterly finance and performance scrutiny would alternate between the committees. It was important that the committees did not duplicate each other’s work and a uniform approach was required. The Scrutiny Officer offered to raise this topic for discussion at the next meeting of the scrutiny committee chairmen and vice-chairmen.

Councillor Roberts took the chair.

LI 128 Footfall Benn Hall
A fall in the footfall had continued. Members noted that the management had been taken back in-house and there was not enough historical data to demonstrate a trend. It was understood that the summer months were normally the quieter period and the situation was likely to improve as the Christmas/New Year approached. There had also been a recent change to the management. The Scrutiny Officer interrogated the RPMS system online and demonstrated that the latest footfall figures were as follows:

- June 2015 – 2754
- July 2015 – 3295
The committee commented that the situation needed to be addressed and further review was required. The current success of local events and activities related to the Rugby World Cup should be maintained and a lasting legacy should be established which would make better use of the facility.

LI 058A and LI 058C Number of staff on long term and short term sickness
The figures for long term sickness absence were improving but the level of short term sickness had appeared to be rising, though there were no explanatory notes for this. The report showed that the variance in the number of employees on short term sickness was relatively low.

The committee requested a breakdown in the figures between office based and manual employees for performance reports from quarter 3 onwards.

Members asked about the comparisons between physical and psychological causes of absences and whether officers were under pressure to take on additional work. It was noted that stress was only a minor contributory factor.

The results of the last staff survey carried out some time ago had been delayed while an effort was made to improve the response and the current situation was unclear. The committee commented that the staff survey should be resolved and a cut off was now required.

It was agreed that the Head of Resources be requested to report on the points minuted above at the next meeting.

RESOLVED THAT – the Head of Resources be requested to report on the staff survey and the variance in the number of employees on short term sickness absence at the next meeting.

8. HACKNEY CARRIAGE STANDS – REVIEW REPORT

The Chairman of the Hackney Carriage Stands task group, Councillor Belinda Garcia presented a report concerning the draft report of the Hackney Carriage Stands review (Part 1 – agenda item 4).

The task group had considered a number of potential rank sites but the trade was reluctant to adapt and preferred to use the smaller ranks as a filter system to feed into the main rank at the Clock Tower, meaning any rank system could not be properly accessed by customers.

Members asked about the provision of a hackney carriage rank at Asda and were informed that Asda has a private arrangement with a private hire company which used a small private rank in the underground car park. Members commented that hackney carriages did not appear to like being hailed in the street.

It was acknowledged that new technology will drive change in the way the service is accessed and there was a need for it to become more customer-focused.
Once the recommendations in the review report had been approved the next stage would be the statutory consultation which would include adjacent businesses.

It was unlikely the final outcomes would be known until around 6-9 months’ time due to the amount of work involved, which included rewriting and resubmitting the existing taxi rank orders, and also because the Licensing and Safety Committee’s priority was to review rank provision at the railway station.

RESOLVED THAT – the Hackney Stands review report be submitted to Cabinet on 16 November.

9. REVIEW OF CYCLING

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 5) concerning a review of cycling.

As previously agreed by the chairmen and vice-chairmen of both scrutiny committees this committee was due to carry out a light-touch review of cycling on 19 November. Relevant officers from the county transport and highways team would be present at the meeting to answer questions about the cycle network development plan.

Members of the committee were asked to scope the questions and key lines of enquiry for the review and they considered the suggested questions included in the report.

During discussion the following points and questions were raised for inclusion at the next meeting:

- Cycle routes should become part of the planning process for new developments and employment sites. It was possible that monies may be available from Sustrans.
- How would the routes be maintained, for example will they be kept clear of debris and stones?
- If routes were not being used was there a reason for this such as lack of maintenance?
- The education of cyclists, pedestrians and other road users. Some form of communication strategy would be useful and would encourage best practice.
- The borough as a whole should be included and not just the town centre.
- Work should be carried out with neighbouring authorities where the boundaries meet. An example of this was the DIRFT site.
- Ways residents can access key points in the town by cycling, such as the college should be explored.
- Routes should be produced where a demand exists, such as schools. Safer ways of travelling to schools was already being explored by the county council. There were obvious health benefits from cycling and it would result in fewer cars on roads near schools.
• Does data exist for the number of cyclists using routes and how is this measured?

• Rural areas were more problematic and could be dangerous for cyclists.

A suggestion was made that it would be helpful to have maps of current cycle routes at the meeting as part of the introduction. This would enable gaps to be identified.

RESOLVED THAT – Members were asked to submit any further suggestions to the Scrutiny Officer.

10. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 6) concerning the future work programme and the progress of task group reviews.

The Economy, Development and Culture portfolio holder will attend the next meeting and members were asked to consider issues within the portfolio and prepare questions in advance.

The following discussion points were raised:

• Feedback on the Rugby World Cup
• Inviting the portfolio holder to comment on two key priorities that she regarded as being particularly important
• What were the major issues for the future?
• The Benn Hall
• Tourism

Items scheduled for the next meeting included:

Car Parking
The focus will be on the on street parking enforcement contract and management of car parks. This will include residents parking schemes and rural areas.

The committee will decide whether to deal with this item as a light-touch item for a future agenda, or whether to hold a special meeting.

Rugby BID Review
The Head of Planning and Recreation will report on the outcomes of the review.

Overview and Scrutiny Handbook

Cycling

RESOLVED THAT – the work programme be agreed.

CHAIRMAN