



Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Council chamber, the Forum, Towcester on Tuesday 7 February 2023 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Dermot Bambridge (Chair)
Councillor Jo Gilford (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Bob Purser
Councillor William Barter
Councillor Pinder Chauhan
Councillor Paul Joyce
Councillor Charles Morton
Councillor Kevin Parker

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Anthony S. Bagot-Webb
Councillor Paul Dyball
Councillor Terrie Eales
Councillor Louisa Fowler
Councillor Enam Haque
Councillor Richard Solesbury-Timms

Also Present:

Councillor Rebecca Breese - Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment and Rural Affairs
Councillor David Smith - Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement, and Regulatory Services

Officers:

Stuart Timmiss, Executive Director - Place and Economy
Jane Carr, Director of Communities and Opportunities
Simon Bowers, Assistant Director of Assets & Environment
Paul Everard, Planning Policy and Heritage Manager
Vicky Rockall, Community Safety and Engagement Manager
Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager
Maisie McInnes, Democratic Services Officer

84. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

85. **Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 December 2022 were agreed and signed by the chair as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

86. Chairman's Announcements

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting and explained that there would be a slight reordering to the agenda with part of Item 8 taking place first to accommodate for Councillor Jo Gifford needing to leave at 7 to attend another meeting.

87. Updates from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Groups

At the Chair's invitation, Councillor Jo Gilford delivered a presentation on the Waste & Resources Strategy: Members Working Group. The Chair thanked Councillor Jo Gilford for the comprehensive presentation.

Councillor Jo Gilford then provided an update on the Northampton Town Plan and asked members to consider the scope for pre-decision scrutiny and highlighted the purpose, key lines of enquiry and outcomes.

The Executive Director of Place, Economy & Environment provided an update on the progress of the BHS and M&S redevelopment and explained that procurement was being looked into with the M&S buildings, as well as a soft market testing purchasing exercise to ensure viability and the removal of asbestos was also being investigated.

The Chair thanked both Councillor J Gilford and the Executive Director of Place, Economy & Environment for the update and asked if there was any indication of timescale of when scrutiny would be able to investigate this. The director assured members that a business plan was being drafted and this would be circulated for scrutiny members' input.

Members asked if there were any foreseeable risks and issues with the building. The Executive Director of Place, Economy & Environment explained that Northampton was renowned for historic tunnels and other archaeological matters, but this was to be expected with the buildings acquired in the town centre. He also added that it would be valuable for scrutiny to include Councillors Breese, Larratt, and Lister into the scope to attend future meetings as Cabinet Members who were involved with the regeneration of the town centre.

Members expressed concern at the major development and the Chair felt that a task and finish was not the best approach and wider scrutiny involvement would be a more useful process. The Chair asked members for approval of the scope. Members agreed the scope with the addition of the Cabinet Members and the Chair explained the scope would be circulated as part of the minutes outside of meeting.

Councillor Chauhan provided an update on the Tree Policy Task and Finish group and explained the report of the Tree Policy Task and Finish group had been to Cabinet in December and received suggestions at the meeting. PLACE Overview and Scrutiny would continue to monitor the progress of the tree policy and strategy, and this would be added to the work programme. The Chair praised Councillor Chauhan and the task and finish group for their hard work.

Councillor Bagot-Webb delivered updates on the Highways Contract Group and Active Travel Oversight Group respectively. He expressed his disappointment in the lack of speed and urgency with progression. The Highways Oversight group would be receiving an update in March on the performance of the contract after the 6 month initial period. The terms of reference for the oversight group had been updated and members were keen to have an oversight of what was happening in terms of highways to give residents reassurance as he felt the state of the main roads with potholes was appalling. The Executive Director of Place, Economy & Environment explained that the department had set a timescale for work, and they were on target to meet the March deadline and will have had meetings with Kier. He clarified the Oversight group was to look at the overall performance of the contract with Kier.

In terms of the Active Travel Oversight group, Councillor Bagot-Webb shared that the meeting had been moved to 23 May 2023. The Executive Director of Place, Economy & Environment explained that the service area had been disaggregated between NNC and WNC and James Povey had joined the team on Monday to take things forward and there was a recruitment exercise in place which would hopefully resolve staffing issues.

The Chair thanked Councillor Bagot-Webb for the updates and agreed with the Executive Director of Place, Economy & Environment that members should separate their ward member role from working on the Oversight groups.

RESOLVED: That the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the updates from the Task and Finish Groups.

88. **Local Plan Part 2 - Northampton**

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment and Rural Affairs thanked the committee for the invite to attend and explained the Local Plan Part 2 was a long process and was at the conclusion stage and was due to go to Full Council. She detailed the executive summary contained in the report and handed over to the Planning Policy and Heritage Manager.

The Planning Policy and Heritage Manager explained that the proposals were submitted to reflect the hearings, and proposals for the modification of the plan, including main modifications which were agreed with the inspectors, to make the Plan sound. Following this the Proposed Main Modifications and a round of Further Main Modifications were put out to consultation and inspectors considered the responses and sent a draft Final report for fact checking. The council received the final draft version on Friday which concluded the plans were legally sound and compliant subject to modifications being made and closed the plan. The final version was being produced to take on board recommendations in the inspectors' final report and comments from the consultation, modifications and changes on policy map and non-material changes. The Planning Policy and Heritage Manager explained the Local Plan Part 2 was subject to adoption by the council and the opportunity for scrutiny was detailed in paragraph 6.5 of report.

The Executive Director of Place, Economy & Environment explained that scrutiny was part of the process requirement, and the Council had the decision whether to

adopt or not to adopt the Local Plan Part 2. There were rare incidences where modifications came back, and principles changed, and councils may choose not to adopt. This was an opportunity for scrutiny to flag any concerns before the report went to Full Council.

The Chair explained that Place Overview and Scrutiny could choose whether to scrutinise the document or consider that the scrutiny in place was sufficient and pass onto Full Council.

Members discussed the report and expressed concern at the inflexibility of the plan. Members felt that the plan needed to be passed onto Full Council so the Council could start working on the WNC plan. The Executive Director of Place, Economy & Environment explained that the plan goes through process of consultation on issues and options which developed the Council's strategy and set of policies. He emphasised that government inspectors scrutinised the document and essentially the plan was a fixed document and was up to the council whether to adopt, the structure did not allow for a living document.

Members discussed the scrutiny process and felt that the Planning Policy Committee that was in place added another layer of scrutiny. Members asked for clarification between the local plan and spatial strategy. The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment and Rural Affairs explained that the Spatial Strategy was now known as the Local Plan and the council were working on the WNC Local Plan.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment and Rural Affairs and the Planning Policy and Heritage Manager for attending.

Upon a vote members agreed to add the Local Plan Part 2 to the work programme and monitor the progress going forward.

RESOLVED: That the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

a) Noted the Council's progress in producing the Northampton Local Plan Part 2.

b) Considered the opportunity to scrutinise the new Local Plan for West Northamptonshire at future stages in its production and agreed to add this to the work programme.

89. **Crime and Disorder Scrutiny**

The Chair introduced the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny item and welcomed the Director of Communities and Opportunities, Community Safety and Engagement Manager and Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement, and Regulatory Services.

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement, and Regulatory Services thanked members for the invite to attend and present the report to committee. Director of Communities and Opportunities explained they were presenting with their Chair of Community Safety Partnership hat on and that the

report focused on safety progress performance and key priorities and any activity from January-December 2022. The Community Safety Partnership was well-established and had a good governance structure and good engagement from partners which were all listed in the report. West Northants valued the diversity within the community, and used intelligence led data shared from partners and engagement with community to plan activity work.

The Community Safety and Engagement Manager presented the report and explained it had been 12 months since they last attended Place Overview & Scrutiny. The report included data from a rolling 12 month basis which were displayed in red for the previous year, red for the previous post-covid and grey for pre-covid base to March 2020. Compared to other community safety partnerships there had been a decrease in crime rates over the last 3 months but an increase in domestic cases and sexual violence. With the cost of living crisis, they were expecting a higher increase in crime, but this trend would not show until a few months later. The data in the reports could also be viewed by locality and in terms of the highest crime and deprivation areas.

The Community Safety and Engagement Manager highlighted the partnership activity contained in section 5 of the report which showed key points:

- a Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Coordinator role had been created to ensure the delivery of the strategy and a working action plan to reflect the priorities with a multi-agency approach to delivery
- the Community Safety-Young Peoples Animation programme went live and was a free resource for schools aimed at year 6 pupils covering Fire and water safety, Knife crime and gangs, Personal safety and crime prevention, child sexual exploitation and online safety, hate crime, road and rail safety and mental health.
- delivered and supported 60 community engagement events, bringing communities together.
- secured Safer Streets fund over past 2 years with £1.7m invested in WNC and was hoping to secure funding in second round for Daventry area.

Members questioned the reporting of an increase in resourcing and the effectiveness of this with a reported increase in crime rates. The Director of Communities and Opportunities responded that there was a rise in crime nationally, but measures had been put in place and this was proving to have a positive result. With the cost of living and post-covid pressures such as housing there was an increase in crime. The department were tackling areas which had been highlighted as strategic priorities and without the partnership working the percentage figures recorded would be much higher.

Members asked to see the results of the domestic abuse board that had been set up. The Community Safety and Engagement Manager responded that they would be happy to share outside of meeting as the coordinator for this was new in post and had worked hard to set up and would be providing frontline officer training on domestic abuse and would become the single point of contact for the service.

Members asked a question regarding society, policing, and the need for more reporting. The Director for Communities and Opportunities responded that the directorate were determined to make improvements to make a difference as people's behaviour was at the root cause of crime and economic development, sufficient housing, and ensuring people had access to support made a real difference to the level of crime. The Council were committed to investing in localities, using preventative methods, and working with partners and having shared responsibilities. They were also providing education for primary school children and upwards.

Members noted that there was a mention of online safety within the animation training for schools but no mention of social media. The Community Safety and Engagement Manager responded that a module had been added specifically on the topic of social media and in terms of putting the package together the team worked with experts such as Simon Aston in the education team to ensure the topic was covered effectively. There were also numerous face to face events, the young citizens programme and other initiatives which targeted priority areas such as this and the modules were universally offered to all schools.

Members made a point around the data reporting with the chart in alphabetical order and asked if this could be categorised in crime groups to make more accessible for members to read. The Community Safety and Engagement Manager said she would pass this onto the police analytical team who produced the data.

The Chair asked a question surrounding drug-related and county lines crime. The Community Safety and Engagement Manager responded that the team were proactive in Northampton town centre and Northamptonshire police had worked hard targeting known individuals and making it difficult for them to come into the county. Work had also been done to install CCTV and improve lighting to prevent crime in places such as the Racecourse and Becket's Park in Northampton. She concluded that there was a strong partnership effort in this area to proactively reducing crime in this area.

The Chair thanked the Director of Communities and Opportunities, the Community Safety and Engagement Manager and the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement, and Regulatory Services for attending and delivering their comprehensive report and responding to questions.

RESOLVED: That members noted the report and agreed to bi-annual reporting on Crime and Disorder with an update report coming to the Place Overview and Scrutiny committee every 6 months.

90. **Flood Risk Management**

At the Chair's invitation, the Assistant Director Assets and Environment delivered the presentation on Flood and Water Management Service.

The Assistant Director Assets and Environment concluded his presentation and invited members to ask questions. Members asked what happened in an emergency situation. The Assistant Director responded that the response depended on the

nature of the situation, if it was individual houses flooded on a small scale the protocol would be for those affected to phone 999 to initiate an emergency response, or for larger scale matters the Council had an emergency team who would initiate their rollout response.

Members deliberated the issue of housing development sites and drainage. Members discussed farming techniques, flooding and flood plains, tree planting and flood causes with the Assistant Director Assets and Environment.

Members shared that there was funding available to undertake flood work that the Council could apply for.

Members considered the staffing issues in the flood team and the skills shortage in this sector with the need for work to be outsourced currently in many councils and the environment agency. The Assistant Director Assets and Environment assured members that he was committed to getting the team to where it needed to be, and work was being done with HR.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director Assets and Environment for his informative presentation and asked if the presentation slides could be circulated outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That members considered:

(1) The presentation on Flood and Water Waste Management.

(2) That Scrutiny of flood and water waste management takes place in Autumn 2023.

91. **Review of Committee Work Programme 2022-23**

The Chair introduced the work programme and shared that a lot of the content had been covered at the meeting this evening. There would be a progress update on actions outlined in the action plan on fly tipping at the meeting on 18 April 2023. On the list of items to be scheduled a further report on libraries and the meeting date for this was still to be confirmed, as well as the Assets strategy, the Council's Carbon programme, and Economic strategy.

The Chair asked members for their input and members discussed that the Sustainability Strategy would be useful at the next meeting in March as this would tie in with fly tipping and the Carbon programme would be contained in the presentation as it was embedded in the strategy. Members also felt the Broadband Contract would be a good fit for the March meeting.

In terms of the WNC Local Plan, members considered that this was a good opportunity to provide scrutiny on the proposal before the consultation went live. The Executive Director Place, Economy and Environment shared there would be four or five opportunities for scrutiny to get involved with the policy development before it goes forward for consultation. He added that he would be happy to bring colleagues from the directorate to future meetings for progress updates and for members to review concerns and opportunities.

The Chair also asked members if they would like a workshop day working with different areas across the Council. The Chair suggested that a date be put in diaries for members to discuss at a future meeting so the Deputy Democratic Services Manager could plan the workshop and members could share ideas of what they wanted to see at the workshop event.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and concluded the meeting. He shared the date of the next meeting was 21 March 2023.

92. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 21:00

Chair: _____

Date: _____