



**West  
Northamptonshire  
Council**

## **Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Minutes of a meeting of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at The Jeffery Room, The Guildhall, Northampton on Tuesday 17 May 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present           Councillor Dermot Bambridge (Chair)  
                      Councillor Jo Gilford (Vice-Chair)  
                      Councillor Anthony S. Bagot-Webb  
                      Councillor Pinder Chauhan  
                      Councillor Louisa Fowler

Also               Jane Carr (Director of Communities & Opportunities)  
Present:           Carl Dorney (Library Service Manager)

Apologies       Councillor Janice Duffy  
for                Councillor Terrie Eales  
Absence:         Councillor Enam Haque  
                      Councillor Charles Morton

Officers           Stuart Timmiss (Executive Director – Place & Economy)  
                      Tracy Tiff (Deputy Democratic Services Manager)

### **54.    Declarations of Interest**

None advised.

### **55.    Minutes**

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.

### **56.    Chairman's Announcements**

The Chair reminded the Committee that training for Members, "Doing Good Scrutiny", was scheduled for 15<sup>th</sup> June and invitations had been sent.

### **57.    Communities and Opportunities Directorate**

The Director of Communities and Opportunities delivered a presentation on the creation of the Communities and Opportunities Directorate and outlined its key areas of focus, which included housing solutions, anti-poverty, sports and leisure, skills and economic development, and regeneration.

The Chair thanked the Director of Communities and Opportunities for her presentation and invited Members to ask any questions.

The Committee made comment and asked questions. In response to questions, the following points were explained:

- The role that the Director of Communities and Opportunities had in transformation was key in setting up the framework for priority projects; a programme of transformation was ongoing which included housing solutions, a debt money advice review, a transport review, and future ways of working. Each of the priority programmes sat within individual services so those services had ownership and were brought into the delivery of those programmes. The Transformation Board was driving this, and regular updates continued to be brought to Cabinet.
- People and Place Directorates remained separate, however there was a “bridging unit” that worked with all partners. In operational terms, Communities and Opportunities worked in one place, and in terms of delivery for residents, the directorate was focused on facing outwards to deliver services and outcomes that met peoples’ needs.
- Systems integration was ongoing; 823 different systems were being used which needed to be prioritised and restructured/disaggregated. The focus was currently on systems used by customers.
- Officers were working with NCALC to empower the voluntary sector as equal partners, to share responsibilities and increase volunteers’ skills.
- Officers were thinking of creative ways to enhance services, e.g., expanding the scope of libraries. (Recently, a Thrive Award was presented to a librarian who provided urgent assistance to a homeless person; a protocol for dealing with similar situations had now been produced and made available in all West Northamptonshire libraries. Upon request, it was confirmed that this protocol would be shared with all Members.)
- Currently there were hubs in all of the large towns in West Northamptonshire. The Estates Strategy would look at identifying the need for hubs in smaller towns and villages within West Northamptonshire.

The Director of Place and Economy confirmed that a further update on Communities and Opportunities would be brought to the next meeting and an update on systems would be brought to the meeting in September for the Committee to undertake scrutiny.

The Chair thanked Members for their contributions. He concluded the discussion and informed Members that there were no recommendations, and the presentation was for information only, the Committee would undertake scrutiny. Further information regarding the joint working between Place and People Directorates would be provided, as would how we work with partners and how partnerships would evolve. The Committee would receive further information in particular in relation to hubs, what they consist of and deliver.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee received and noted the presentation on the Communities and Opportunities Directorate.
- (2) That further information regarding the Opportunities and Communities Directorate is presented to the meeting of this Committee on 12 September, in particular around partnership working and how this is evolving and community hubs and what they consist of and deliver.

58. **Libraries**

Carl Dorney, Library Service Manager, delivered a presentation on the journey of the library service including a timeline of the service's progress in the last 5 years, locations of both statutory council-run and community-managed libraries, the services that libraries offered, and future plans.

The Chair thanked Mr Dorney for his presentation and invited Members to ask any questions.

The Committee made comment and asked questions. In response to questions, the following points were explained:

- Mental health training was being provided for library staff.
- Work was ongoing to identify partners based on the individual needs of each town/village.
- With regards to plans to create new libraries, it was advised that the library service would respond to needs as they were identified.
- Sourcing Ukrainian books was proving to be a challenge since the books were coming out of Ukraine, however, there was a lot of literature available online.
- The library service was able, at present, to support the increasing population in Middleton Cheney. It could increase this support if necessary, but Mr Dorney stressed that it must be managed carefully.
- There was a history of providing a library service in prisons; it made a surplus from HMP Wood Hill.
- There were 2 rooms available for hire at Brackley library which generated income.

Members were impressed with the services that libraries offered and noted that they were a safe space for many. It was further noted that libraries within West Northamptonshire had a bigger burden placed upon them than libraries in other counties, since there was no additional funding available for the Council to provide.

The new library strategy would be brought to the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee once it was complete and added to the Work Programme in the first quarter of 2023. A pre- Scrutiny Cabinet report would also be produced.

The Chair thanked members for their contributions. He concluded the discussion and informed Members that there were no recommendations, and the presentation was for information only.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee received and noted the presentation on the library service.
- (2) That the Library Strategy is considered by this Committee at the appropriate time, approximately early 2023 for the Committee to undertake pre Scrutiny of the Strategy.

59. **Review of Committee's Work Programme**

The Chair advised that a request from People OSC had been received in respect of NPH/WNC responsibility for environmental issues. The Committee felt that the issues raised by People OSC were of a detailed, operational nature and not pertinent to the remit of this committee. The Deputy Democratic Services Manager would work with the Chair and contact the Chair of People OSC to explain why the committee would not be adding this to their work programme for the autumn 2022.

A timeline for the Active Travel Oversight Group was now available and contact would be made with the Chair – Councillor Bagot-Webb to set up meetings of the Group. Councillor Bagot-Webb confirmed that the meetings would begin at the start of July and take place in Towcester.

The Tree Policy Task and Finish Group had two more evidence gathering meetings scheduled. Evidence had been received so far from community groups, WNC and parish councillors, and a consultation was currently underway. Following the evidence gathering meetings, the Group would consider its draft report which would then be presented to this committee at its June meeting for approval. Cabinet would then consider the report and any recommendations accepted by Cabinet would be monitored by this committee.

The Chair advised that Appendix A had been tabled which contained information regarding the carried Motions of Notice for the predecessor Councils that were within the remit of this committee. The Committee agreed to review these after the meeting, and that they would be circulated amongst absent members, and that the committee would look at them in detail at its meeting in June.

The Committee discussed the work programme for 2021/22 in detail.

In respect of the Sustainability Strategy, the Executive Director – Place & Economy explained that strategies were currently being programmed. Timelines and details were needed before they could be added to any scrutiny work programmes. Targets were currently being set and recruitment was taking place within Economic Development. The Executive Director – Place & Economy would advise the committee when targets had been set.

**RESOLVED:**

The Committee agreed its updated Work Programme 2021/22.

60. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 20:09pm.

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_