

Minutes of a meeting of the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee

At 7.00 pm on Monday 5th February, 2024 in the
Corby Cube, George Street, Corby, Northants, NN17 1QG

Present:-

Members

Councillor Melanie Coleman
Councillor Philip Irwin
Councillor Graham Lawman

Councillor Mark Pengelly
Councillor Geoff Shacklock

Officers

George Candler, Executive Director of Place & Economy
Graeme Kane, Assistant Director of Highways & Waste
Rob Harbour, Assistant Director of Growth & Regeneration
Kerry Purnell, Assistant Director Communities and Leisure
Chris Wragg, Head of Strategic Transport
Ben Smith, Head of Democratic Services
Carol Mundy, Senior Democratic Services Officer, (Committees/Members)
Emma Robinson, Democratic Services Support Officer.

26 Election of Chair

The Head of Democratic Services, Ben Smith, introduced this item and explained that as both the chair and vice-chair were no longer members of the committee that there was a requirement for a new chair to be elected thereto.

Mr Smith sought nominations for this position.

Councillor Shacklock proposed that Councillor G Lawman be elected as chair and this was seconded by Councillor Coleman and upon being put to the vote the motion was declared carried.

Councillor G Lawman was duly elected as chair of the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

Councillor Lawman thanked members of the committee and expressed his thanks to Councillor G Mercer for her work as the previous chair and wished her every success in her new role as an executive member.

Resolved that Councillor G Lawman be elected as chair of the committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

Councillor Graham Lawman – in the Chair

27 Apologies for absence

Resolved that it be noted that Councillors Anslow, Fedorowycz and Wilkes had submitted apologies for this meeting.

28 Minutes of the meeting held on 19 December 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 December 2023 were received.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 December 2023 be approved and signed as an accurate record of that meeting.

29 Members' Declarations of Interest (if any)

The chair invited those members who wished to do so to make a declaration of interest.

Resolved to note that the following declarations were made:

Councillor	Item	Reason
G Lawman	Communities Strategy and Strategic Investment into the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector.	Personal Director of Shire Community Services and Hemmingwell Community Centre
M Pengelly	As above	Personal Volunteers at Stephenson Way Community Centre

30 Communities Strategy and Strategic Investment into the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector

The circulated report of the Assistant Director Communities and Leisure, Kerry Purnell was received.

The assistant director presented the report to the committee along with appendix A, the North Northamptonshire Council's draft Communities Strategy.

The strategy had been co-produced with representatives from the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) and set out the new strategic grants framework for a period of three years from 1 April 2024. It also detailed the new infrastructure support arrangements to be tendered and contracted for a three-year period from 1 September 2024.

The report informed the committee that there were 168 VCSE member organisations connected to the locality based networks in Kettering and Corby with 200 across Wellingborough and East Northants, many were self-funding and ranged from small volunteer-run community groups to larger charities, some providing specialised work, such as debt casework, mental health counselling, support to victims of domestic abuse, and drug treatment and recovery.

The purpose of the strategy was to emphasise and strengthen the role of the VCSE, residents and communities to deliver the corporate place and Northamptonshire Integrated Care Systems' 'Live your Best Life Strategy', within the context of the place-based delivery model.

The strategy would bring together key themes which underpin a number of national and local agendas into a co-ordinated framework for effective partnership working with the VCSE and will be achieved through mutually beneficial relationships between all directorates in the council, with the VCSE and town and parish councils to support positive relations across all organisations to drive innovation, collaboration and meaningful co-production.

The report detailed the five principal aims for the period 2024-2027. Provided within the strategy were eight key themes further detailed in the report with the following themes being of focus for 2024-2027:

- Core cost support to the Community Centres, which were supported by the former sovereign councils;
- Financial inclusion;
- Community transport;
- Prevention of social isolation for older people;
- Community mental health and wellbeing;
- Increasing resilience in the VCSE to provide support for vulnerable residents, as identified through the new Support North Northants Service (SNN);
- Promotion and advocacy for equalities.

The chair thanked Mrs Purnell for the report and information presented and invited the committee to comment thereon.

The comments and questions raised are summarised below:

- It was commented that in the former East Northants area there were limited community centres, however it was pointed out that there were many village halls that would be used for various groups and these may be supported by parish or town councils or receive grant funding;
- The lack of suitable facilities for young people was noted and more youth support in general would be welcomed;
- It was noted that Community Centres provided excellent facilities and were a great asset to all ages and continued engagement and support was key;
- In relation to the levelling up work undertaken on the Kingswood estate, a question was asked about how progress could be demonstrated and what impact the project had achieved for those living in the area. Committee was informed that levelling up was not directly related to this report but that the subject of levelling up would be the subject of a separate report to the Executive.
- Officers were asked when tender documentation would be available. Officers clarified that the documentation had been written and once the grant agreements had been finalised and adopted the specification would go out to the marketplace in the next couple of months.
- Members commended the voluntary sector for all the work undertaken in the community and commented that it was a big return for a relatively small amount of money.

- Reference was made to the ongoing renovation work at Grosvenor House. It was confirmed that there would be an opportunity for the voluntary sector to use the multi-use building as a space to work out of and provide a One-Stop Shop Service if they wished to do so.
- It was noted that there would be community centres built soon on the sustainable urban extensions (SUEs) such as Hanwood Park, Stanton Cross, and these would need support to grow and develop in the future.
- A further comment was noted that there was no inflationary link to the funding, which may be worth investigating.

The chair proposed the recommendations within the report, which on being put to the vote were declared carried.

Resolved that it be recommended to the Executive that:

- (i) The Communities Strategy be approved;
- (ii) Approval be given to the proposed VCSE Strategic grants framework and the proposed VCSE Infrastructure support arrangements for the period 2024-2027.

31 **Bus Service Improvement Plan & Funding**

The circulated report of the Assistant Director, Highways and Waste was received.

Mr Wragg, Head of Strategic Transport presented the report to committee. He referenced the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) appended to the report along with further appendices relating to the enhanced Partnership Plan, the Enhanced Partnership Scheme and the list of proposed new/improved bus services. He was supported by Mr Douglas, Principal Public Transport Officer.

He explained that the Government in March 2021 had published the 'Bus Back Better, the National Bus Strategy for England (outside London). NNC had also published its own Bus Service Improvement Plan, approved by Executive in November 2021.

An enhanced partnership with local bus operators and the council had been formed with the enhanced partnership plan and enhanced partnership scheme being agreed by the Executive in April 2022.

NNC had not received funding initially from the Department of Transport, however, a grant had been allocated in the sum of £569,412 of Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus grant funding for each of the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25. In October 2023 an allocation of £2.045m revenue funding was received.

Whilst the funding was welcomed there was concern that this would lead to expenditure in year one, with the potential for this to be withdrawn in subsequent years, due to a lack of funds. Spending plans were currently being drawn up and would focus on service improvements where it is possible that enhancements can become financially viable in a short timescale or which can access alternative funding sources beyond 2023/26. The Department of Transport required an updated BSIP by 12 June 2023 and this was being worked on.

The chair thanked Mr Wragg and Mr Douglas for their report and opened the subject up to committee to discuss further.

Summarised below are the comments and questions raised by the committee:

- Members considered that the local bus services were inadequate in the rural areas, leading to long-term isolation for those living in many of the villages. A question about why buses going from one destination to another could not be diverted to stop at villages to ensure that communities had a regular service. There was concern expressed about the lack of transport in the East Northamptonshire area.
- The X4 Service was referenced as an extremely useful service travelling between Northampton to Peterborough calling at various places including, Earls Barton, Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby and this was a regular and well used service. It was also noted that routes to Rushden Lakes were useful and regular.
- Regarding bus services within the towns, these were deemed to be good, but it was considered that these could be extended to village areas.
- A question was asked as to whether future Section 106 contributions could be directly used to fund bus services? Sustainable Urban extensions, such as Priors Hall and Weldon Park, were located outside of the towns and those living there would need transportation. It was suggested that the Developer Contributions Scrutiny Panel could consider this
- It was suggested that a review of long-standing bus services should be undertaken.
- Improvements to bus stops, previously agreed by sovereign councils, should be prioritised.
- There was also concern that transportation was poor to enable the public to access hospital services to attend out-patient appointments often having to get three buses, which was not acceptable.
- A question was asked over whether the subsidised bus services had increased bus usage.
- It was understood that there would be challenges as long-term funding was not known and that to promise a service and then cancel it would be very unpopular.
- It was noted that some services were essential to ensure that people could get to employment such as the routes to Park Farm Industrial Estate and other industrial estates.
- Working with bus operators was encouraged and essential to provide services that would be used and would be viable.

The chair thanked members for their comments and proposed that the recommendation within the report be put. On being put to the vote the motion was declared carried.

Resolved that:

- (i) The contents of the report be noted, and that approval be given to the proposal to develop an updated Bus Service Improvement Plan, to include proposals for spending the £2.045m of BSIP revenue funding indicatively allocated to the council for 2024/25;
- (ii) The concerns and feedback of the committee be noted.

32 Surplus Assets Disposal

The chair informed the committee that this item had been withdrawn from the agenda.

33 Exempt appendices for Surplus Asset Disposals

It was noted that as the item above had been withdrawn from the agenda the appendices would not be discussed.

Chair

Date

The meeting closed at 8.41pm