

MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITTLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 OCTOBER 2017

PRESENT:

Members of the Committee:

Councillors Sandison (Chair), Brader, Douglas, Gillias, Roberts and Ms Watson-Merret

Also present:

Nick Andrews (Rugby Youth Council)

Officers:

Adam Norburn (Executive Director), Matthew Deaves (Communication, Consultation and Information Manager) and Linn Ashmore (Democratic Services Officer)

19. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 11 September 2017 were approved and signed by the Chair.

20. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillor Mrs O'Rourke.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

22. RUGBY YOUTH COUNCIL

The committee received a verbal report from Nick Andrews on current projects. The following points were made:

- The annual debating competition was held on 12 October in the Council Chamber and was a great success. Four secondary schools participated in the competition:
 - Lawrence Sheriff School
 - The Avon Valley School and Performing Arts College
 - Harris Church of England Academy
 - Bilton School
- Harris Church of England Academy won the competition for the second year in a row.
- The schools debated a range of topics including:

- There should be a second Scottish referendum
- Monitoring of social media by Government
- Dating techniques should be taught in schools
- The national curriculum focuses too heavily on exam preparation
- Belief in inheritance tax
- Belief in a sugar tax
- Legalisation of the drugs industry
- The main discussion topic was hate crime with the consensus being that hate crime was more prevalent among young people, but in a subconscious manner due to a lack of understanding.
- The main topic was supported by Warwickshire County Council's Hate Crime Unit and was linked to the National Hate Crime Awareness Week 2017 running from 14 to 21 October.
- There was a consensus of opinion amongst the students that schools should provide education on the law in relation to hate crime.
- The schools also agreed that religious beliefs were a cause of hate crime.
- The arrangements for the Mental Health Conference due to be held in March were progressing well. A range of external agencies would attend to give talks, presentations and workshops on relevant topics such as the new services available, diagnostic tools and suicide prevention.
- Seven secondary schools had confirmed attendance and others had expressed interest.
- An art project would be launched shortly to feature works created by young people reflecting their feelings about mental health. This would be a visible means of communicating the concerns of young people to teachers.
- A county wide 'One Voice' Public Speaking Competition focussed on homophobia and the LGBTQ+ community.
- The British Youth Council's Private Member's Bill to reduce the voting age to 16 in parliamentary and other elections (Votes at 16) was expected to have its second reading at the House of Commons on 3 November.
- On 10 November, members of the UK Youth Parliament will debate on the results of the 'Make Your Mark' ballot at the House of Commons to select their campaign topic for 2018. The topics included:
 - Votes at 16
 - Curriculum for Life
 - Mental Health
 - Work Experience

During further discussion the following points were made:

The rise in hate crime was a current issue of national interest. One suggested reason for the spike was that people felt more confident in reporting incidents to the police, and being taken more seriously.

An online reporting system was due to go live on 18 October.

Students from The Avon Valley School and Performing Arts College were involved in a project with Warwickshire County Council to create a single called Love Instead of Hate to raise awareness of hate crime.

Members praised Nick Andrews for his hard work in extending the voice of young people and noted that work was ongoing to expand the use of social media and reach out to different schools and groups.

The Youth Council would welcome new interest at its meetings which were held at Hill Street Community Centre on the second and fourth Monday of each month commencing at 4.30pm.

Interested young people were encouraged to become Members of Youth Parliament or VOX, the county youth panel and the nomination period was due to commence shortly.

The committee thanked Nick Andrews for his briefing.

23. REVIEW OF INFORMING AND ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITIES

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 4) concerning the draft one-page strategy and timing of the review.

The committee considered the revised one-page strategy and the following comments were made or opinions expressed:

- The list of consultees did not include any external groups or particular demographic groups or individuals.
- Very few members of the public attended the last scrutiny work programme workshop last year.
- A member of the public, who had also been present at the workshop last March, commented that people have ideas but it was not clear what happened to them. Engagement with the right people at the right time was needed. The consultation on the Local Plan was offered as an example of not engaging with the public at an early stage.
- An example of the approach taken to public engagement by Braintree District Council was given which involved the creation of a People's Panel.
- People were more likely to engage with the council if they thought their views would be listened to, and their ideas were progressed.
- People's views did not necessarily remain consistent over time. For example, there was initially a lot of objection to the building of the crematorium, but now the facility was open it was clear this was a great success.
- More publicity was needed on areas the public could be involved in. The Youth Council was on the mailing list for scrutiny committees but the general public needed to look out for information themselves. The public were not necessarily aware meetings were open to all.
- There was a need to get the message across that the council wants to hear people's views. The focus should not only relate to controversial topics but consider what affects the public on a daily basis.
- A new approach was needed, based on how, where and when the public wants to engage or receive information. This could be via the internet or social media.
- Advertising in local papers was not the best method due to the low circulation rates but online publishing through the papers' websites could be worth considering.
- It was important to go out into the community and connect with the public in a timely manner.
- An example was given of officers going out to meet with sheltered housing residents which had a more effective result than writing letters.

- Consultations were not always carried out in a timely fashion and were sometimes rushed.
- The council has been in a position when it has needed to explain decisions after they have been made rather than consulting beforehand. It does not often have to face making tough deadline driven decisions.
- There were examples of difficult decisions taken quickly due to the timing of budget cycles. The green waste bin collection was an example of this, but it was recognised that both councillors and the public should ideally be involved in the decision making process at an early stage.
- Public involvement in the democratic process was also important. Some points that could be considered included webcasting or recording of meetings, the time meetings were held, and what information to publish online or link to the council website.
- The outcomes of the review could result in cost implications and funding/resources should be considered.
- Members were keen to get a better understanding of the public mind set and the techniques to engaging in the most effective manner.
- The business community should be involved in the review and the Local Government Association should be consulted for evidence.
- Councillors were representatives of the communities they serve and care was needed to ensure the review does not become politically motivated.
- Comments made by the public should be recorded and published. It was noted that all responses received during the Local Plan consultation were publicly reported.
- There were many examples of successful community involvement and listening to residents. Examples included the creation of the Centenary Park in Newbold and the consultation on a Lifeline scheme in Dunchurch.
- The involvement of residents in Whinfield Street on a residents parking scheme had a good outcome for the people living there and resulted in county council not having to find funding.
- Where a statutory duty to consult exists, the Council always does this.

The following changes to the one-page strategy were agreed:

What should be considered?

Add resources and case studies.

Who shall we consult?

Add residents and the business community to the list. The Federation of Small Businesses or Chamber of Commerce could be approached to represent the business community.

Many of the points raised could be explored within the scope of the review. The detail would develop as the review progressed and it was important to recognise success too and look at examples of what worked well.

RESOLVED THAT – the revised one-page strategy, subject to the amendments minuted above, be approved.

24. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 5) concerning the progress of scrutiny reviews and the overview and scrutiny forward work programme for 2017/18.

Public Spaces Protection Orders Review

The scrutiny sub-group held its first meeting on 10 October. Members commented that that an excellent presentation had been received from the Regulatory Services Manager and his team that included a wide range of issues and examples of potential nuisance behaviours that could be incorporated into Public Spaces Protection Orders.

The group were looking to publicise the review and seek feedback on public concerns in relation to the use of public open spaces. A stall had been booked at the Rugby Town Community Forum being held at the Benn Hall on 4 November.

If permission could be granted, another suggestion was for members to go out to the Elliott's Field and Junction One Retail Parks to engage with members of the public.

Town Centre Heritage Task Group

The next meeting was scheduled for 25 October. There had been a change to the programme of work and this meeting would concentrate on the use of IT and software to enhance the visitor experience.

One further meeting would be scheduled to consider the draft review report.

Joint meeting of Brooke and Whittle – 6 November

It was agreed that members of the public should be able to submit questions for all/any of the four portfolio holders by forwarding these to Democratic Services.

The next joint meeting was due to be held on 29 January with the Leader and Executive Director and would take the same question and answer style form.

Members agreed last year's session was a success. The budget proposals would be available and could provide topics for discussion.

Members would shortly be invited to submit questions. Three weeks' notice was requested to allow for detailed responses to be prepared.

Work Programme Workshop – 7 March 2018

The scrutiny chairs and vice-chairs would begin planning for the workshop shortly, and will focus on how to engage better with the public possibly through social media.

The committee noted the position regarding reviews and the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

RESOLVED THAT – the report be noted.

CHAIR