

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 SEPTEMBER 2025

PRESENT:

Members of the Committee:

Councillors Timms (Chair), Hassell, Lawrence, New, Sayani and Srivastava

Officers:

John Murphy (Chief Officer for Legal and Governance), David Burrows (Chief Officer for Regulation and Safety), Nicola Smith (Chief Officer for Growth and Investment), Jon Illingworth (Chief Officer for Finance and Performance), Paul Pritchett (Environmental Health and Community Safety Manager), Claire Baldwin (Community Safety Team Leader), Neil Holly (Development Strategy Manager) and Linn Ashmore (Democratic Services Officer)

Also Present:

Councillor C Edwards (Portfolio Holder for Communities and Homes) and Councillor Mistry (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Performance)

Chief Inspector Angus Eagles (Rugby Area Commander), Inspector Stephanie Brown and Sergeant Guy Mountford
Philip Seccombe (Police and Crime Commissioner for Warwickshire (PCC))

12. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2025 were approved and signed by the Chair.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

14. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Freeman and Parker.

15. COMMUNITY SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 4) regarding a summary of work in relation to crime and disorder, as delivered through the Rugby Community Safety Partnership.

The Portfolio Holder for Regulation and Safety, the Chief Officer for Regulation and Safety, the Environmental Health and Community Safety Manager and the Community Safety Team Leader attended the meeting and answered questions from the Committee. The report was presented by the Environmental Health and Community Safety Manager.

Also in attendance were representatives from Rugby Police and the Police and

Crime Commissioner for Warwickshire who addressed the Committee and answered questions put to them.

The Committee raised a number of questions on topics including:

- The reasons why women and young girls may feel unsafe? It was reported that surveys had been carried out with residents to understand whether there had been actual instances or whether there was a perception of feeling unsafe. An evening event was held with Police on 4 August and the areas highlighted were being explored further. A request was made for information on where the hotspots were and what action was being taken.
- Was information on incidents and complaints from the multi-cultural community available? Officers undertook to provide information on this to be shared with the Committee.
- Perception and misinformation were raised as a concern. There was a danger that facts could be distorted. It was reported that the survey showed the perception of crime was much higher than instances of actual crime. Mirrored with national statistics was the number of women subjected to low level activity. This was not classed as assault but could be comments that make women feel uncomfortable. This was an area that required further work. It was clearly a social problem that needed to be addressed nationally.
- Community Wardens will act and follow up on community tensions and will offer advice or signposting.
- Youth violence and what initiatives had the most and least impact? If more funding was available where would this be spent?

The work was carried out through the partnership. There were a number of layers beginning with low level anti-social behaviour up to organised crime. There was a stepped approach beginning with contact with individuals and parents. Trends can change so it was important to have a flexible approach.

It was difficult to measure success of the preventative measures in place. The Police reported that high visibility community policing was a proven deterrent and helped tackle the fear of crime.

Education in schools helps to get young people to think about their actions and the public perception of seeing groups of young people versus their freedom to congregate.

The Police monitor information and disinformation.

The Walk with Us daytime walks for women and girls was a hugely successful initiative aimed at people meeting the police in an informal situation. This was aimed at tackling violence against women.

The virtual reality headsets within the anti-knife crime campaign had been a great success in engaging with teenagers. During a serious crime inspection held two years ago the headsets were held up as a beacon of innovative practice.

- Domestic abuse, what was being done to break the cycle of repeat offending?

The Red Snapper initiative was based on actively looking at the point of engagement with suspects in custody for lower-level DA incidents, including suspects from 14 years old. This allows early intervention to change mindsets.

The multi-agency safeguarding hub at Saltisford was a vital piece of work where all referrals were examined in detail. By first thing the next morning the victim care actions and interventions would be triggered.

This included where children were involved.

The PCC commented that most domestic violence took place in the home, and it was important victims had the confidence to report incidents. The Refuge charity, co-commissioned by the PCC and WCC provides specialist support for victims. Refuge will remove children from home where there is domestic violence. It was a society problem.

One example of partnership working in terms of domestic abuse was an event arranged by the OPCC focusing on the code of practice for victims of crime. This was aimed at ensuring victims of crime were aware of their rights and what help and support was available. A Warwickshire wide partnership initiative was DASIP (formally the VAWG Board) and there was a DA Steering Group lead by the WCC Domestic Abuse Commissioner. Many of the individual workstreams intertwine and as part of a call for wider governance and scrutiny the subgroups that sit under the Safer Warwickshire Partnership Board provide key updates to the partnership board. It was useful if those groups remain task based. A Rugby based Task and Finish Group was in the process of being set up to focus on domestic abuse in greater detail. The group would be made up of housing officers and all the key partner agencies. The Committee requested that councillors be involved in that work.

- Operation Encompass, what are the timelines to ensure schools are informed at the earliest where a child was in urgent need of support having experienced an adverse situation? Data was sent to Saltisford, unless there were a life and death and situation. This could mean that information was not received by partner agencies and action may not take place for a few days.
- It was important that schools receive the information about a child as soon as possible. The Police undertook to take the issue back to the new DCI check how streamlined the process was and ensure prompt action was taking place. It was noted there were off duty safeguarding leads based in schools who could be contacted out of school hours. Voice of the Child was an initiative being rolled out to all police officers and staff. This covered how to speak to a child to check on their wellbeing and understand what had occurred.
- Business crime. A question was asked about whether shops feel safer now than two years ago? Levels of business crime had reduced by 15% from last year. There were a number of tools available including effective CCTV and increased police visibility and well publicised crack downs on serial offenders and organised crime. The Committee was informed of an example of recent partnership working that resulted in a positive outcome in relation to an organised crime incident. Business crime was taken seriously by the police. There were now two full time PCSO's and two full time police constables dedicated to working in the town centre. Also working more closely with the Economic Development team at the council on improving aspects of businesses trading illegally. The PCC reported that Warwickshire Retail Crime Initiative encouraged businesses to join to help keep themselves safe. There were types of retail crime, small acquisition crime and organised crime. Work with The Regional Organised Crime Unit has carried out a number of operations in Warwickshire to try and take out some of the organised criminals.

The Chair thanked all the invited guests for their attendance and sharing valuable information.

RESOLVED THAT – the report be noted.

16. PRODUCTION OF THE NEW LOCAL PLAN

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 5) regarding an update on the progress of the timescales for the new Local Plan and including an update to the risk register previously reported to Cabinet on 4 March 2025.

The Chief Officer for Growth and Investment and the Development Strategy Manager were present and answered questions from the committee. The report was introduced by the Development Strategy Manager.

During discussion some of the points raised were:

The grey belt assessment timeline had slipped, and a concern was raised about further delays. The Local Plan timetable was ambitious and there were changes on the horizon. The report set out the anticipated completion date for all pieces of evidence but there were no cast iron assurances. However, progress was still on track.

The Committee called for all councillors to be kept informed as soon as possible about the options they will be required to decide on in January 2026, and to ensure the options were fully understood.

It was essential that councillors were in a position to be able to make an informed decision. Officers planned to engage with all political groups once all of the evidence was available. Previously information was shared through a cross-party Planning Services Working Group but now not all political groups were involved. Meetings with political groups were being arranged then it would be a matter for the political group leaders to decide on the format for how the final information should be presented prior to the meeting of Cabinet in January to ensure all councillors were well informed. It was stressed that there were no party whips in place for decision making on the Local Plan.

A lot of public engagement was being carried out and the Committee asked about evidence that the engagement had had an impact. Officers confirmed that all responses, around 5,000, were read and then summarised. Any duplicated points or issues would be highlighted, including how many had been raised. A report on the consultation findings would be presented to Cabinet and Council at the start of next year. Responses would be carefully considered and responded to in detail. If required, further technical evidence was being commissioned to be able to respond. In addition to the log of responses, a log of the changes requested to the Local Plan, the policies map and the evidence-based documents was being prepared. All comments received help to prepare the best Local Plan possible.

It was important to have the narrative behind the Local Plan's decisions.

The Committee requested details of the proportion of the build on grey belt land be shared.

Councillors would be made aware of all the options before any details were to be made public.

It was important that documents and messages were easy to understand and as accessible as possible. There were a number of audiences for the evidence, including the public, the Planning Inspectorate and various interested parties who wish to take part in the Local Plan examination. Examples of successful approaches taken during the stages so far was videos and also an executive summary document. This could be looked at again for the information published on the website. Officers were open to ideas on how to make the details more accessible to a wider audience.

The next consultation stage would be based on a questionnaire to provide information for the benefit of the Planning Inspector.

Regarding engagement with young people, officers attended local primary and secondary schools to hold age related sessions. Further work was needed on engaging with young people.

Concerns were raised about capacity and provision for neurodiverse needs. Warwickshire County Council was the education provider and responsible authority. However, WCC were engaging with the council by providing data for modelling purposes, but this was for mainstream schooling and not special education need and this was not within the scope of planning for development of the Borough.

The Local Education Authority was a key stakeholder and consultee, and it was their duty to state what the need was based on the growth and housing needs. This included SEN. Officers commissioned further evidence for primary and secondary school numbers and the parts of the Borough where there is need based on mainstream schooling.

There were plans for a sixth form entry for the South West Rugby allocation within the current Local Plan. That would be carried forward to modelling for the next Local Plan. The position had changed and the development was not being built out as quickly as envisaged.

The outline planning application from Homes England that incorporated the housing and the school site had been received but there was more work for the LEA to do to determine what the trigger would be in terms of timing for that school. That would be their decision to make.

RESOLVED THAT – the report be noted.

**17. GENERAL FUND, HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET
MONITORING AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING – QUARTER
1 2025/26**

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 6) containing a link to the report included on the agenda of Cabinet for the meeting held on 15 September 2025.

The Portfolio Holder and the Chief Officer for Finance and Performance were present and answered questions from the committee.

For the 2025/26 municipal year it had been decided to split the report into three parts to allow for focus on particular areas. Within the General Fund reporting, key focus areas had been introduced and this year the focus was on staffing and agency costs. In addition, any particular high-risk issues would be drawn out into the reports.

In terms of monitoring, it was only month three into the financial year and so far there was little financial detail.

Another change was that in-year exception reports considered by the Budget Working Group and portfolio holders would be submitted to Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee asked about key performance indicators that were not on target and were informed the dashboard showed 11% were RAG rated as red. A new initiative had been introduced for red rated KPI's whereby the owner was required to complete a series of questions on bringing that target back in line. Those initial detailed responses were expected by the end of September.

These would be incorporated into the next reporting cycle for a detailed analysis.

A current red rated target was the BID Levy collection. Processes were being put in place to improve the collection rate.

All red rated KPIs should be reported even if the issue had been resolved. It was important that red rated KPIs should be addressed as soon as possible.

It was noted that quarter two was coming to an end and a wider picture should be available for the next meeting. The report may be a draft position statement.

RESOLVED THAT – more detailed information of KPIs and red rated KPIs should be incorporated into the report for the next meeting.

18. DRAFT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 7) regarding the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report presenting a summary of the work undertaken by the Committee during the 2024/25 municipal year.

RESOLVED THAT - the draft Annual Report be approved for submission to Council with a recommendation that the report be published, subject to the addition of the Chair's foreword.

19. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 8) regarding the overview and scrutiny work programme.

The Committee discussed the importance of engagement with young people and the concerns raised around misinformation and disinformation, community safety and education and how this could be monitored. It was noted that community cohesion was being discussed at the Equality and Diversity Working Group.

It was agreed that engagement with young people should be incorporated into the work of the Customer Journey Task and Finish Group which was due to commence its review work.

RESOLVED THAT – the topics included on the work programme were agreed with the addition of an item on the proportion of building on grey belt land.

CHAIR