MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 MARCH 2026

PRESENT:

Members of the Committee:
Councillors Timms (Chair), Hassell, Lawrence, New, Sayani and Srivastava

Also Present:
Councillor Mistry (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Performance),
Councillor C Edwards (Portfolio Holder for Regulation and Safety) and Councillor Harrington

Ja'Neen Day (Chief Executive, Warwickshire Association of Local Councils)

Officers:
Dan Green (Chief Executive), John Murphy (Chief Officer for Legal and Governance), Jon Illingworth (Chief Officer for Finance and Performance), David Burrows (Assistant Director for Regulation and Safety), Thomas Griffiths (Assistant Director for Digital and Communications), Paul Pritchett (Environmental Health and Community Safety Manager), Matt Roberts (Community Safety Projects Officer) and Linn Ashmore (Democratic Services Officer)

39. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2026 were approved and signed by the Chair.

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2026 were deferred to the next meeting.

40. APOLOGIES

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

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTERST

There were no declarations of interest.

42. UPDATE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR AND COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REORGANISATION (CGR)

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 4) regarding an update on Local Government Reorganisation and Community Governance reviews in the Council area.

The Chief Executive introduced the report raising the following key points:

Government had begun its statutory consultations on the proposals submitted for Warwickshire. These consultations close on 26 March. The council was invited to comment on the proposals submitted by neighbouring councils, and they are able to comment on this authority's proposal.

The timeline from Government remained unchanged with the final proposal expected in the summer.

Some of the key workstreams already taking place included:

- The six councils for Warwickshire were working well together. A new programme structure had been established, and the six Chief Executives were meeting every fortnight to progress the overall programme.
- A number of further workstreams sit under the overall programme with representation from the Chief Officers from Rugby Borough Council (RBC) relating to finance and governance. Other workstreams included human resources and contracts that were being looked at collectively.
- This was all part of a discovery phase, and that piece of work will continue while awaiting the Government's final decision.
- The more fundamental decision work on the new authority was being held back until the Government decision was known.
- The Shadow authority was be expected elected in May 2027 and vesting day would be in April 2028.

The Chief Executive answered a range of questions from the Committee. The key responses were:

- Retaining key staff was important. It was acknowledged this was a worrying time for staff, but the Chief Executive was arranging to hold a monthly briefing for all staff to keep them updated on progress and maintain regular engagement.
- The services provided will still need to be delivered to residents. There will be little change for several years. The name of the council may change but changes to the operation will take time.
- This does not mean fundamental change for all staff. The majority of jobs below senior level would be retained in some way. Evidence suggests there is a recruitment challenge following the establishment of a new unitary authority.
- There was a keenness to support the development of staff and the new unitary will result in numerous opportunities for staff.
- TUPE legislation provides protection of continued employment for staff below Chief Executive level. All other staff will be TUPE'd across to the new unitary authority.
- The council remains a sovereign authority up to the transition to a new unitary authority in April 2028 and a safe and legal budget was required. Work continues in parallel with the work on the arrangements for the new unitary authority.
- A £3m reserve had been built in to support the transition period. It was expected around £1m would be drawn down each year.
- Work will begin in April on budget setting for 2027-28 to ensure council services continue and considering the expected structural changes and possible controls on spending imposed by Government.
- There were reserve balances in place and there were no material weaknesses. Work would continue with the external auditors.
- There was a reserve risk assessment in place and that would be reviewed each quarter. All potential risks for the next four years have been rag rated.
- As part of the Warwickshire wide Section 151 group, monthly conversations were being held with an agreement for full disclosure between authorities. The potential risk either locally or across Warwickshire would be addressed and that would be brought back to Members as appropriate.

The Chief Executive of the Warwickshire Association of Local Councils (WALC) reported that their role was to support town and parish councils. WALC was a membership based not for profit organisation. In terms of LGR, WALC had been working with members since the beginning. Briefing sessions were organised from Warwickshire County Council and independently. Training sessions were also available. Free training and advice sessions were being held on topics such as asset transfer. WALC want parish councils to see LGR as an opportunity.

The statutory Government consultation was supplemented locally with a community engagement in the form of a questionnaire seeking the views of residents on what services they would like to see and what is important to them.

The Assistant Director for Digital and Communications reported that the questionnaire was still live for another week or two and there had been a good level of engagement so far. It had been published on the website and on social media. Parish councils had also been encouraged to respond.

WALC had been approached to respond to the Government consultation, but they will be writing to Government to stress the importance of parish and town councils. That response will be shared with RBC and partners.

There was a mixed picture in terms of parishes across the Borough. The Chief Officer for Legal and Governance reported that there was one CGR for Clifton upon Dunsmore approved by Council that was progressing and Council had also approved the commencement of the process for the formation of a Rugby Town Council. As part of the start of that process a public consultation exercise would be carried out. That consultation would include opportunity for wider comments on trying to bring forward ideas on unparished areas. Being mindful of staff resources, contact would be made with the existing parish councils. It was hoped to draw information from unparished areas when the borough wide consultation is shared. Once that consultation was complete WALC would work with them to create that body.

The are two core ways to establish a new parish council with either a decision by RBC or a petition.

The shadow authority would carry out its own consultation exercise on what services should be provided and what that authority looks like, and it was anticipated that would be young person friendly.

The Government was clear that all two-tier authorities will become unitary authorities. Doing nothing was not an option.

The Gunning Principles set out the responsibility of Government in carrying out public consultations.

With CGR and the formation of a Rugby Town Council there will be multiple consultations. A Member working group will be established and there was the opportunity for the public to become engaged and ask questions at public meetings. The process is much closer to residents.

RESOLVED THAT – the report be noted and a further update be provided to the Committee at the appropriate time.

43. TOWN CENTRE COMMUNITY SAFETY

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 5) regarding an overview of community safety arrangements within Rugby town centre following the cessation of the Rugby Business Improvement District (BID).

The Portfolio Holder for Regulation and Safety introduced the report. Officers were thanked for their hard work on the council's provision of the CCTV service ready for 1 April.

Community safety was about all partners working together and the CCTV service was just one element to be looked at in the round.

The report outlined the progress for the transition following the disestablishment of Rugby First, but this was still an ongoing piece of work and changes were still taking place. The Portfolio Holder stated she was confident that resources would be available and the council would work in partnership with the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), WCC and Police to make the town centre as safe as possible. These were big changes that were multifaceted working within specialist procurement processes and a regulatory framework needed to be adhered to.

During discussion some key points raised were:

In response to a concern raised about the safety and security of town centre businesses and owners, it was acknowledged that this was a matter that had been previously reported and there were a myriad of partners working on this. It was hoped that there would be additional Community Safety Warden (CSW) resources in the town centre. There was a meeting held with local businesses and Pubnet to support making things as safe as possible. Town centres do experience anti-social behaviour issues, but it was about designing out crime and other solutions. The Portfolio Holder undertook to pick this up outside the meeting and talk to police about this matter. Data is monitored carefully by officers.

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) had announced his grants for the coming year. Hate crime was taken seriously. Resources were needed for monitoring of hate crime and for raising awareness. Hate crime was an under reported crime and the PCC has put grant funding into a number of schemes that Rugby will see the benefit from. These include training, awareness and reporting mechanisms. There were other safe avenues to report this crime other than the police.

The data shows that the greatest levels of shop lifting take place in the out-of-town shopping centres. There is a need for resources to be focussed on all areas and not just the town centre.

The Rugby First Rangers were also affected, and this would affect the resources within the CSW team and put more pressure on the police. A question was asked about that partnership.

There were plans to increase the number of CSWs. The police will respond as it determines to be appropriate. This was one of the priorities of the CSP. There was a highly accomplished Community Safety Team at the council who carry out a lot of monitoring and data collection and are aware of the issues. A lot of work was carried out behind the scenes. There was a flexible approach based on where the underlying issues are.

The transitional arrangements for the town centre have been pulled together at short notice and there was a need to monitor what is or is not working well. It will take time to embed and that may not be until the end of the year.

Anti-social behaviour is seasonal, and instances vary between winter and summer. The big events in the town centre also bring challenges. The council was committed to having a soft landing and continue with town centre activities that was still being worked up but community safety was a key part of that. It was important that local businesses report crimes.

It was important to educate young people and provide facilities to keep them occupied and to understand the reasons behind anti-social behaviour. Police response times need to improve. Police response times have improved, and they are working hard but that would be a question to direct to the police.

The CSWs were carrying out a survey with young people in the town centre, and they were getting good quality evidence on what they need and what they perceive to be safe places. That will underpin some of the community safety work moving forward. Young people need a voice, and this was part of the CSP work moving forward.

A restorative approach was needed to deal with young people getting involved in crime. Training on hate crime was on the curriculum for all schools.

There were appropriate controls in place to protect CSWs while they carry out their duties including PPE, body worn cameras and radio systems back to a 24/7 control centre. All CSWs were fully trained in conflict resolution, mediation, de-escalation techniques and dynamic risk assessments. Joint visits were carried out with the police when appropriate.

It was acknowledged that the police should be invited to attend future meetings when community safety was on the agenda.

The CSWs were tackling anti-social behaviour in the town centre in the same manner as the town Rangers would have done. It was difficult to quantify the loss of the town Rangers. The CSWs work borough-wide and not just in the town centre and they have a wider range of powers. The CSWs are statutory enforcement officers authorised by the council to enforce various pieces of legislation. They are well placed to tackle any issues in the town centre.

As part of the transitional arrangements, the council was rationalising equipment. The emergency call points were at end of life and those still in operation would be decommissioned at the end of March. They will all be removed. The transition was also an opportunity to modernise and improve the community safety infrastructure. There was technology that offers a similar service that officers were considering to be introduced.

The CSWs operate over a longer period than the town Rangers until 10pm and they also work on Sundays meaning they were better placed to support the nighttime economy.

A meeting was taking place with the Street Pastors to discuss how they can continue being supported.

The cleanliness of the town centre was a matter for the appropriate directorate, and this was being discussed. BID Levy payers have paid Rugby First in the past for services that included street cleaning. This was one area where there would be a difference in approach. The council has a commitment to keep the town centre clean, and it currently cleans every morning. As part of the soft landing, that will be extended to additional services during the day and some responsive services such as litter picking. The focus will be on keeping public areas clean and free of litter.

The council will continue to engage with businesses and residents and obtain feedback. The Rugby App has geo location capability that can be used to report issues. It is a transitional arrangement but may need to refine as we learn more about the need.

It was noted that WCC was responsible for the cutting back of trees in the town centre.

The Town Centre Regeneration Working Group was the body where Members could report issues through their political group representatives.

RESOLVED THAT – the update report be noted and the points raised be incorporated into the annual report on community safety to be considered by the Committee in September.

44. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 6) regarding a summary of the latest budget and performance monitoring information.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Performance was present to answer questions from the Committee.

In response to a question about the backlog on benefit payments which affected the most vulnerable, the waiting time related to queries in the inbox which was a figure set at a particular point in time. With the annual council tax billing the system was down for around two weeks. This was always a challenging time.

The DWP target to process housing benefit change was 16 days. As at quarter 3 that target was met. The average number of days to process claims was 30 days and the council was currently performing at 25 days so below DWP standards.

A request was made for data on length of time people were waiting was made rather than an average statistic.

Many positive changes were made over the last year, including the combining of the benefits and revenues teams. There was a lack of staff and that was being addressed with additional budget being allocated through the budget setting process and it was hoped that when recruitment has taken place improvement will be seen over the next quarter.

Pressure on housing repairs budget. It has doubled 0.85m to £1.7m. Radical change and challenge. Have we lost control? Where are the controls?

Regarding the increase in the housing repairs budget from £0.85m to £1.7m, a change had been made to bring the service under one chief officer.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Homes reported that one of the key issues was that there was no proper database in place. A lot of interventions have been put in place over the past year. The social housing regulation inspection was carried out in November that highlighted areas where more work was needed.

Instead of being part of the Housing Service, the Property Repairs Service (PRS) was part of the Works Services Unit and there were challenges. This year has seen a new development at Tiber Way so teams are working in a collaborative way with proper equipment and vans have the stock teams need.

Investment in new software was planned for April to record repairs properly. Repairs were being carried out but they were not recorded, and this affected the data. There were some inherited challenges including different software systems and a situation where only 60% of property surveys had been completed. This was being addressed.

There was no budget for the repairs that inevitably followed when stock surveys were carried out. That additional money has been allocated and next year will see improvements.

Fewer properties will be void for any length of time and with a better relationship with tenants, they can report repairs quickly. The reporting process was being streamlined with a single point of contact rather than through different teams.

The spend on consultants had risen from £627,000 in 2024/25 to £1.8m in 2025/26. Experts were sometimes needed to carry out a specific piece of work rather than employing staff. The bulk of forecast spend was sitting under Growth and Investment and Digital and Communications portfolio areas and most related to town centre activity. A breakdown was reported within a private report on town centre assets.

Lot funded through reserves from a Local Plan point of view a lot was externally funded. Not from 25/25 core revenue budget.

The council was in the lower quartile of salary and recruitment was challenging. There were high levels of vacancies, and it was sometimes necessary to bring people in to carry out the work to maintain service levels. A benchmarking exercise was being carried, and the outcomes will be reported to Cabinet soon.

There was a budget pressure of 3% on the £22m on staffing costs in the General Fund which was relatively small.

Staff morale was paramount during the LGR, and the salary issues should be resolved. The use of agency staff also has an impact on wider teams having to train agency staff.

The use of supplementary expertise was acknowledged but the level of spend on agency staff was high and this was not a good use of taxpayer's money. The issues were known and these were being addressed. It was hoped that change would be seen in the next year.

RESOLVED THAT – the update be noted.

45. CUSTOMER JOURNEY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 7) regarding a progress update on the review work to date.

Councillor Harrington, Chair of the task and finish group addressed the Committee.

The overall aim was to look at the customer journey from a holistic perspective.

The review commenced with spending a day with the Customer Services team. The small team were doing an amazing job. They take 100,0000 calls each year, 12,000 emails and the abandoned call rates were coming down. The concerns raised included the communication between departments was an issue and this is where improvements were needed. Following this, the group decided on visiting other departments.

The task group then spent time with the Revenues and Benefits team. They work very hard, but the team had reduced resources.

The task group intends to visit other departments to learn more and understand what changes may improve the customer journey, such as a wider use of technology and in particular the promotion of the reporting App.

Freeing up call handling time would allow quality time to be spent with customers who need more support via the telephone.

During discussion the following points were answered:

There was a need to improve communication with the right systems and processes in place and a greater cohesion across the authority.

There was a misconception that customer call the Contact Centre multiple times. There was a lag between people's perception and the actual performance of the Contact Centre. Wait time had reduced to below 1minute 30 seconds on an average basis. Tracking of repeat calls on a particular topic was being tracked, and the figure was currently around 4%. The aim was for one call one to result in resolution. The latest figure for call demand year on year had dropped to 38.5% which showed significant inroads to improvement.

There should be a way of tracking the time it takes to get the point of resolution rather than how quickly the Contact Centre responds.

Wider use of Monday.com was being rolled out across the council. There had been a delay due to staffing issues in the IT team, but it was hoped this would happen in the next 10 weeks.

The introduction of service level agreements setting timescales for responding to customers would be helpful.

It was important to get the widest spread of accessibility to all individuals and communities in Rugby.

There were plans to use an AI assisted tool to summarise Cabinet and Council papers based on the average reading age of the UK. Hard copies will be made available in the reception area as well as online so a greater proportion can access the democratic process. Multiple language translations and braille versions will also be available if required.

Using real customer experiences and their journey will help provide evidence for the review.

The Committee recommended that the task group diarise when the work will be completed and put together a calendar and timeline. It would be helpful for the Committee to understand when the review was due to be completed.

RESOLVED THAT – the progress report be noted.

46. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

A request was made that the planning application process for a major development that was recently determined be reported to Planning Committee. The Chief Officer for Legal and Governance undertook to review the situation and advise on the matter.

RESOLVED THAT – the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be agreed.

CHAIR