

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of Warwickshire County Council held on 29 November 2017

Present:
Councillor Clive Rickhards (Chair)

Councillors Jo Barker, Margaret Bell, Parminder Singh Birdi, Peter Butlin, Les Caborn, Mark Cargill, Richard Chattaway, Jonathan Chilvers, Jeff Clarke, Alan Cockburn, John Cooke, Andy Crump, Yousef Dahmash, Corinne Davies, Nicola Davies, Neil Dirveiks, Judith Falp, Jenny Fradgley, Bill Gifford, Pete Gilbert, Dan Gissane, Clare Golby, Seb Gran, Colin Hayfield, John Holland, John Horner, Andy Jenns, Kam Kaur, Keith Kondakor, Jeff Morgan, Bill Olnor, Maggie O'Rourke, Bhagwant Singh Pandher, Anne Parry, Dave Parsons, Caroline Phillips, Wallace Redford, David Reilly, Howard Roberts, Jerry Roodhouse, Andy Sargeant, Izzi Seccombe, Dave Shilton, Jill Simpson-Vince, Bob Stevens, Heather Timms, Adrian Warwick, Alan Webb, Matt Western, Chris Williams, Pam Williams and Andy Wright.

1. General

(1) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Sarah Boad, Mike Brain, Keith Lloyd and Kate Rolfe.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

2. 0-5 Redesign of Children's Centres

A Councillor Richard Chattaway, Leader of the Labour Group, moved the motion as set out on the agenda and reproduced below and was seconded by Councillor Corinne Davies:

'This Council supports the ambition of ensuring all of Warwickshire's children have the best start in life. To ensure there are sufficient resources to achieve this ambition, the Council agrees to amend the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2018/19 by the inclusion of £1.12 million for Children's Centres to be met from reserves. Any change to the ongoing funding should be considered as part of the 2018/19 budget process.'

Councillor Richard Chattaway emphasised the value of a debate at full Council in allowing all members the opportunity to express their views on this important issue and to ensure there are the resources in place to meet the Council's commitment to ensuring children have the best start in life. Speaking later in the debate, Councillor Chattaway reminded members that the Council agreed four years ago that there should be a focus on services for 0-5 years as there was evidence that support for these early years was important in helping children achieve the best outcomes possible in later life. He added his particular concerns with regards the changes to children centres in Nuneaton and Bedworth area and in particular that the centres that are retained are still being expected to make financial cuts. Councillor Chattaway stated his support for having services that are fit for purpose and that this required investment.

B Councillor Jerry Roodhouse, Leader of the Labour Group, moved the following amendments and was seconded by Councillor Jonathan Chilvers, Leader of the Green Group:

(1) Add the following words after 'life' at the end of the first sentence:
'recognising that further development is necessary to build an effective service for the long term.'

(2) Delete in the second sentence the words after 'agrees to' and include the words:

'use £1.12 million of reserves to reduce the impact of this cut and amends the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2018/19 accordingly. This should be funded from Children & Families or People Group reserves and from corporate reserves.'

(3) Add the following words at the end of the last sentence:

','including investigation of using funds from growth in the Council Tax base as a sustainable solution.'

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse added his support for this opportunity for all members to debate this issue.

Councillor Roodhouse explained that the amendments sought to bring forward money, that is available in the budget, through the smart start programme, to allow the time that is needed for the changes to take place. Councillor Roodhouse added that there remains a lot of detail to be worked through and that he had serious concerns with regard to some of the changes, in particular the proposal to have only two volunteer coordinators, and that decisions were being taken when the outcomes of these are not yet known. The amendment therefore sought to give more time for properly planned progression of the project.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers, in seconding the amendments, explained that he appreciated that the use of reserves is not sustainable in the long term which was why the amendments sought to identify on-going funding from the Council Tax base. This followed the approach agreed by Council in February when it agreed to use increases in the council tax base above 0.75% to go into a Capital Investment Fund. The increase was 2.1% (or 1.35% above the assumed level of 0.75%) which meant £2.7m went into that fund. Councillor Chilvers added that given the growth in council tax comes late in the year, it is necessary and appropriate to use reserves for the short term.

C Councillor Richard Chattaway stated that he accepted the amendments put forward by Councillor Jerry Roodhouse and Councillor Jonathan Chilvers and therefore the motion under debate was as follows:

'This Council supports the ambition of ensuring all of Warwickshire's children have the best start in life, *recognising that further development is necessary to build an effective*

service for the long term. To ensure there are sufficient resources to achieve this ambition, the Council agrees to use £1.12 million of reserves to reduce the impact of this cut and amends the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2018/19 accordingly. This should be funded from Children & Families or People Group reserves and from corporate reserves. Any change to the ongoing funding will be resolved as part of the 2018/19 budget process, including investigation of using funds from growth in the Council Tax base as a sustainable solution.

DEBATE

The following points were made in support of the motion:

- The first 1001 days of a child's life has been proven to be crucial so time should be taken now to ensure this is right. The budget should be developed starting from what is needed and how much it will cost.
- The 40% cut in budget in 2013/14 led to decline in those reached by Stockingford children's centre, with cuts in hours for family support in an area of high deprivation and further cuts are being sought which cannot be sustained by the centre.
- There is increasing poverty, evidenced by growth in use of foodbanks, and Warwickshire has one of the lowest levels of social mobility. The work of the Childrens Centres are needed to break the cycle of deprivation.
- The driving force for the redesign has been a cut in the budget. Providers are having to make 23% cut and the level of savings cannot be achieved by building closures alone and there will be staff cuts.
- There is a need for improvement but that cannot be achieved by cutting the budget. Funding is needed to manage the change.
- Bringing services together in one centre brings down costs and the centres need to be accessible and in walking distance.
- The proposals may lead to the council reaching less people. More research is needed to ensure there is enough resources and that the approach will work.
- Postnatal depression can hit anyone, services need to be open to all, reducing reach will mean people will not be picked up.
- Staffing is the most important aspect of the service but there will be a loss of qualified staff.
- The increased reliance on outreach is likely to lead to increased costs. Funding is needed to ensure the change is properly managed.
- Preference should be given to investment in people and in the next generation and avoid costly interventions in the long run.
- Sometimes it is necessary to have buildings. The centres in Nuneaton and Bedworth are needed as they are accessible, particularly for many who do not have transport. There is benefit in having services under one roof and it is doubtful that there will be much saving from disposing of them.
- There is no certainty about what will be provided or whether third parties will be interested or how those that are left will be able to manage 20% cut in budgets.

The following points were made against the motion:

- The consultation on the Redesign of Children's Centres has shown that transformation is needed as the current service is failing to reach and help many who most need it. There are over 1,000 families who are not currently being reached.
- People transform children's lives (not buildings) and there is investment in family social workers who will be able to identify those who need support.
- The two areas of lowest social mobility – Nuneaton & Bedworth and North Warwickshire have had investment in children's centres - but it has not delivered.
- There will be 14 family centres and work is going forward with providers and schools to provide services.
- There have been attempts to attract people to the centres who most need the services to attend (e.g. by changing the times of opening) but this has not worked. There needs to be changes and these should happen now.
- The proposed closure of some centres (e.g. Mancetter) have not attracted opposition because there is recognition of a need to change to improve services, to increase outreach.
- The Cabinet member and officers have worked hard to produce this plan and it is important that members ensure that it does work.
- The redesign would have been necessary regardless of the need for savings, as there is a need to change in order to improve services through more outreach and better support for those in need.
- Using reserves is poor financial management and there is no guarantee that the council tax base will meet the costs in future. Although the number of houses may increase and increase the tax base, there will also be an increase in need for services.
- The longer the redesign is delayed, the more families are not being supported, and staff need to have clear direction.

Councillor Jeff Morgan, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children Services, made the following points in response to the debate:

- The smart start strategy 2016-2020 includes a statement that the increasing financial pressures mean that the model of children centres across the County is unsustainable.
- The importance of the first 1001 is built into the thinking behind the redesign. The focus is on a more targeted offer. A universal service will not focus on those who most need the services.
- Essex County Council has reduced its 86 children centres down to 37 and is reaching 22% more families as a result of its changes. Wolverhampton, with 10 centres, has been praised by Ofsted for its work and for reducing the number of looked after children.
- Consultation revealed that there is a perceived stigma around children centres and it is not about insufficient resources.
- As many front line staff as possible will be protected.

VOTE

Councillors Chattaway, C Davies, Dirveiks, Holland, Olnier, O'Rourke, Parsons, Phillips, Webb and Western requested a recorded vote.

A vote was taken and the motion at C was **LOST** the vote being 18 for and 35 against, as set out below:

For	Against	Against
Cllr Richard Chattaway	Cllr Jo Barker	Cllr Kam Kaur
Cllr Jonathan Chilvers	Cllr Margaret Bell	Cllr Jeff Morgan
Cllr Corinne Davies	Cllr Parminder Singh Birdi	Cllr Bhagwant Singh Pandher
Cllr Nicola Davies	Cllr Peter Butlin	Cllr Anne Parry
Cllr Neil Dirveiks	Cllr Les Caborn	Cllr Wallace Redford
Cllr Judith Falp	Cllr Mark Cargill	Cllr David Reilly
Cllr Jenny Fradgley	Cllr Jeff Clarke	Cllr Howard Roberts
Cllr Bill Gifford	Cllr Alan Cockburn	Cllr Andy Sargeant
Cllr John Holland	Cllr John Cooke	Cllr Izzi Seccombe
Cllr Keith Kondakor	Cllr Andy Crump	Cllr Dave Shilton
Cllr Bill Olnier	Cllr Yousef Dahmash	Cllr Jill Simpson-Vince
Cllr Maggie O'Rourke	Cllr Pete Gilbert	Cllr Bob Stevens
Cllr Dave Parsons	Cllr Dan Gissane	Cllr Heather Timms
Cllr Caroline Phillips	Cllr Clare Golby	Cllr Adrian Warwick
Cllr Clive Rickhards	Cllr Seb Gran	Cllr Chris Williams
Cllr Jerry Roodhouse	Cllr Colin Hayfield	Cllr Pam Williams
Cllr Alan Webb	Cllr John Horner	Cllr Andy Wright
Cllr Matt Western	Cllr Andy Jenns	

There were no further items for debate.

The meeting closed at 12.15 p.m.

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Chair