

The **WARWICK AREA COMMITTEE** met at **WARWICK** on the **24th JANUARY, 2006**.

Present:-

Councillor Sarah Boad (Chair)
“ Ken Browne
“ Les Caborn
“ Alan Cockburn
“ Jose Compton
“ Chris Davis
“ Eithne Goode
“ Marion Haywood
“ Bernard Kirton
“ Tim Naylor
“ Raj Randev
“ Mota Singh
“ John Whitehouse

Also Present:-

Officers: Graeme Fitton and Jo Cooper (Environment and Economy Directorate), David Carter, Tim Healey, Peter Hunter and Alwin McGibbon (Performance and Development Directorate), Dave Clarke (Resources Directorate).

1. Budget 2006/2007

David Clarke, Strategic Director of Resources, explained that as part of the budget consultation process for 2006/2007, it had been agreed that a presentation would be made at each of the County Council's Area Committees followed by an opportunity for members of the public to ask questions. He said that there were basically four types of local authorities in the Warwick District that impacted on the Council Tax. The County Council was the largest of them with a gross budget of around £637m (£500m net) in the current year. The budgets for the other authorities were – Warwick District Council £70m gross (£20m net), Parish and Town Councils ranging from £2,000 to £0.75m and the Warwickshire Police Authority around £78m. Half of the County Council's current budget was spent on Education and a quarter on Social Services. Contrary to popular belief, most of the County Council's funding came from the Government with the Council Tax funding around 29% of spending.

The County Council received notification of the grant it would receive for 2006/2007 on the 5th December 2005. At the same time, the Government had made it clear that it would be capping Council Tax increases in excess of 5%. The Government were introducing the Dedicated Schools Grant with schools receiving direct funding. The Dedicated Schools Grant would be £255.843m, representing a 6.3% increase for schools. The County Council were not able to

divert any of this funding for any other purpose, but were able to top up that figure if they wished. As the funding was considered adequate to cover current pressures on schools, Members would be advised that if they wished to give any further funding to schools it would be for development.

As a result of the Children Act, the Social Services Department was being split with the creation of a separate Children and Families Directorate. Traditionally the County Council spent more on Children and Families Services than provided for by its Formula Spending Share and this was funded from reducing that spent on Adult Services. The respective figures were:-

	Budget £m	Formula Spending Share £m	Variance £m
Children & Families	31.7	24.9	6.8
Adult Services	81.7	89.2	(7.5)
	<u>113.4</u>	<u>114.1</u>	<u>(0.7)</u>

Members would have to decide whether they wished to address this disparity.

The available resources excluding the Designated School Grant and assuming a zero increase rate in the Council Tax amounted to £261.075m (£74.505m Government Grant, £184.628m Council Tax and £1.942m Reserves including Local Authority Business Growth Initiative). The County Council Base Budget was £255m, leaving a net available resource of £6.075m.

There were four main pressure drivers on the budget:-

- (1) *Inflation* – Pay inflation was running at 3-3½%; in the main pay settlements were negotiated nationally. Price inflation was running at 2-2½%. The County Council was a large user of gas and electricity and the recent prices increases had a serious impact.
- (2) *Demography* – For example, although people were living longer they did not necessarily have a good quality of life with the consequence that there was an increasing call on the County Council budget.
- (3) *Loss of funding* – Specific Grants were incorporated in RSG.
- (4) *Statutory requirements* – New requirements were imposed on the Council.

The Revenue pressures facing the County Council (excluding schools) was:-

	£m
Inflation (3.1%)	8.0
Proposals inside existing policies	9.5
Revenue impact of capital	0.4
	<u>17.9</u>
Proposals outside existing policies	<u>10.1</u>
	<u>28.0</u>

1% Council Tax was equal to £1.846m and 1% efficiency saving was equal to £2.294m. Therefore £17.9m was equivalent to savings of 7.8% or Council Tax of 9.7% and for £28m the figures were 12.2% and 15.2% respectively.

There were three main thrusts to achieve efficiency savings:-

- (i) Top slicing from all departments.
- (ii) A programme of modernisation service reviews.
- (iii) Value for money reviews.

The Chair opened the discussion to members of the public.

Mrs. Harris

She asked if a fairer way could be used to collect the Council Tax. She was a pensioner and had to pay £900 per annum whereas there were a couple with two children who lived a few doors away who only paid £1,200.

Dave Clarke said that he and the former Deputy Leader of the Council had given evidence to Sir Michael Lyons who was heading a review into the Council Tax system during which they had drawn attention to the type of situation raised by Mrs. Harris. The Final report of the review was expected at the end of 2006; originally this was to have been at the end of 2005 but the scope of the review had been extended to look at local government services.

Mr. Peter Young

He had three points to raise:-

- (a) There was unnecessary cosmetic work being done to libraries. He sought reassurance that this would be examined.
- (b) Large lorries were constantly delivering new furniture and computer equipment to the Shire Hall. He asked what happened to the old equipment.
- (c) There had been media notification that 25% of the Council Tax was being used to bolster local government pensions.

Dave Clarke responded:-

- (A) The Library Services was one of those services subject to a review into alternative ways of delivery such as an extension of the use of mobile libraries.
- (B) The County Council had invested substantially in computers and most staff used them constantly. Computers wore out and had to be replaced. The County Council purchased computers through the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation at huge savings. Redundant computers were offered to voluntary organisations.
- (C) There were various pension schemes; the main one for Shire Hall staff involved a contribution of 11.7% to the Fund. The Fund was subject to

reevaluation every three years and it was expected that a new, cheaper pension scheme would be in place for the next reevaluation. It was expected that the employees' contribution rate would also increase. The employer's contribution rate was slightly higher for teachers. As there was no fund for Fire Service uniform staff, it was difficult to identify an accurate figure for the employer's contribution.

2. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Michael Doody and Dave Shilton.

(2) Members' Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Personal interests relating to any item on the agenda arising by virtue of the member serving as a District or Borough Councillor were declared by Councillors Les Caborn, Alan Cockburn, Jose Compton, Chris Davis, Eithne Goode, Bernard Kirton, Mota Singh and John Whitehouse.

3. Public Question Time

(1) Queensway, Leamington Spa – access to houses and parking across verges

Mrs. O'Reilly and neighbours

There was a problem with parking on the road because of HGV usage people using it as a racetrack at night. A number of cars had been involved in accidents while being parked beside at the roadside. In consequence, cars parked on the wide 9 to 10 metre green verges causing damage to the verges during wet weather. There was a bus stop with no hard standing and in wet weather mothers with small children were forced to wait for the bus by standing in the road. It was suggested that lay-bys be created so that cars could park safely off the carriageway and avoid parking on verges.

Councillor Mota Singh supported the residents and confirmed that it was a busy road with traffic being generated by the M40 and A452.

Councillor John Whitehouse said that the suggestion for the creation of lay-bys was a new proposal and he believed it was worth investigating.

(2) Waste Disposal Strategy

Janet Alty, Green Party

She expressed concern about the Waste Management Strategy, a copy of which had been obtained through the use of the Freedom of Information legislation. She was concerned that the democratic process had not been used. Decisions had been made behind closed doors with no public agenda or minutes. She asked for a meeting with Councillor Ken Browne who had chaired the body that had produced the strategy so that he could allay her

concerns about incineration. There were plans for a large incineration plant in Nuneaton and the public needed reassurance and real consultation.

Graeme Fitton, Head of Warwickshire Engineering, said that the Waste Management Strategy would be published on the 31st January 2006. It would be reviewed in five years. The Waste Development Framework was being consulted upon and there was to be a public meeting at Manor Hall on the 15th February 2006. He would let Janet Alty have a copy of a leaflet giving details about the meeting.

Councillor Ken Browne said that the issue had arisen primarily as a result of a press release from Friends of the Earth. The use of the Freedom of Information Act to obtain a copy of the document had been inappropriate as it was freely available and a simple request would have achieved this. He had originally shared her concerns about incineration but he had been convinced. The process proposed had the support of environmental overseers. The proposed procedure was an end of process incineration after all recyclables had been removed. This was different to the process in Coventry where everything was incinerated. The alternative favoured by Friends of the Earth, Mechanical Biological Treatment, was not proven and there was still residual waste at the end. It was necessary to divert waste from landfill to avoid huge fines. He had been assured that the new technology for incineration was much safer. He did not believe that it was appropriate for him to meet with Janet Alty as his involvement had been with a group that had involved discussions with the District Council. Friends of the Earth had never lobbied him about incineration even though there was arrangement for them to alert him over GM crop trials.

Councillor Jose Compton supported Councillor Ken Browne's comments and confirmed that the District Council had cascaded information to Parishes.

4. Consultation & Appraisal of Proposed Reconfiguration of Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance NHS Trust

The Committee considered the report by the Strategic Director of Performance & Development.

Alwin McGibbon, Health Scrutiny Officer, introduced the report and said that the Committee were being given the opportunity to feed comments into the consultation process.

The following comments were made during the discussion:-

Councillor Bernard Kirton felt that the process was being rushed. He was not convinced by the arguments for merging the Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance NHS Trust into a larger West Midland organisation. The argument that being part of a bigger Trust would make the service less vulnerable financially was not borne out by facts as the larger Birmingham Trust was in deficit. The Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance Service was three star and first class. He saw it as the imposition of regional government by central

government and saw no reason to accept an untested and untried proposal on the basis of one consultant's report.

Councillor Marion Haywood had been convinced by what Malcolm Hazel had said in the report.

Councillor Ken Browne cautioned members that Malcolm Hazel had a substantial interest as Chief Executive of the Trust. However, he was not convinced about the need for the merger. He then moved, seconded by Councillor Tim Naylor:-

That the Warwick Area Committee would not wish to see a structure that would denude and would not reinforce local responsiveness to patients and weaken not enhance the ability to respond to major incidents.

Councillor Les Caborn was against a huge conglomeration that offered no savings and would produce a remote bureaucracy. It was essential to look after local people.

Councillor Bernard Kirton, seconded by Councillor Chris Davis, moved as an amendment:-

That the Warwick Area Committee see no good reason for changing a perfectly good ambulance service that serves Warwickshire people well.

Councillor Chris Davis said that he was seconding the amendment because it was stronger. The Trust was a high performing and the proposed savings were dubious.

Councillor John Whitehouse supported the amendment and expressed concern about the lack of evidence for the case for merger.

Councillor Tim Naylor said that the Committee should not place itself in a position of prejudging the plan but should make it clear that it was opposed to any reform that would not improve services.

The Chair said that the Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee had discussed the mergers and it had been clear that the one that most concerned them was the proposed merger of the Ambulance Trust. At the meeting it had been indicated that local control rooms would be retained but it subsequently became clear that that commitment was only for two years.

Councillor Ken Browne said that he was happy for the amendment to be incorporated in his motion. It was accordingly Resolved:-

That the Warwick Area Committee see no good reason for changing a perfectly good ambulance service that serves Warwickshire people well and would not wish to see a structure that would denude and would not reinforce local responsiveness to patients and weaken not enhance the ability to respond to major incidents.

5. South Warwickshire Community Development Network

The Committee received a presentation from Charles Stevens, Heart of England Community Foundation.

The following points arose from the presentation and subsequent question and answer session:-

- (1) The purpose of the Network was to simplify the grant claiming procedure for groups by providing a standard grant application with questions common to all agencies.
- (2) The Network would enable a grant application to be steered towards the most appropriate agency or photocopying the application to a number of agencies.
- (3) The process would not delay an application being received by an agency.
- (4) Where information was wanted that was specific to a particular agency an insert containing that information would be produced to go with the template application form.
- (5) The Network would prevent groups from obtaining the same grant from different agencies although it would be possible for a number of agencies to allocate shares of the grant between themselves.
- (6) If the Network proved successful, it would be intended to seek Lottery funding to employ full-time staff probably based with the CVS.
- (7) The Network operated within the Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon Districts.

The Committee noted the proposal to use the Network for the next round grants for the Community Development Fund.

6. Proposed 30 mph Speed Limit – Tachbrook Road, Whitnash

The Committee considered the report by the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy and it was then Resolved:-

That the proposed 30 mph speed restriction along Tachbrook Road, Whitnash be implemented as advertised.

7. Warwick Road, Leek Wootton – Proposed Pedestrian Crossing

The Committee considered the report by the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy.

The Chair confirmed that members were aware that sites A and B had been transposed on the plan at appendix C.

In introducing the report, Graeme Fitton referred to a petition that had been circulated, containing the signatures of 21 persons, objecting to locating the crossing at site A.

Councillor Dennis Eassom, Leek Wootton Parish Council

The Parish Council was unanimous in its support of site A for the location of the Puffin crossing. This had been the site of the school crossing patrol before that post fell vacant eighteen months earlier. It had the best visibility and wide pavements. Site B was unsuitable because it had poor visibility and very narrow pavements. If site B were adopted, the youngest and most vulnerable children would be forced to cross Woodcote Lane at a busy junction by the Anchor Inn Public House, use the crossing and then having to cross the entrance to Hillmorton Road, which again was a busy junction.

Judith Ward

There was a need for a crossing and site A was the safest option. Site B was on a bend and close to traffic turning in from Woodcote Lane.

Sarah Williams

She was disappointed by the report as it was biased and distorted and contained no reference to the petition that was circulated that evening. The Parish Council's view did not represent the local community. The safety of the children attending secondary school should also be considered; 20 children caught the bus to Kenilworth School each day unsupervised and nine disembarked at the north end of the village and were forced to cross Warwick Road unaided. Children also used the recreational ground at the north end. A larger number of children and residents would use the crossing if it were located at site B.

Councillor Jose Compton said that as the local County Councillor it was not an easy decision. However, the provision of the crossing was under the Safer Routes to School Initiative and was directed to the Primary School and Site A had been the site of a school crossing patrol. Together with members of the Parish Council, she had visited the sites on three occasions. Site B already had a pedestrian refuge but the pavement was extremely narrow at this point. On balance she considered that Site A was the best option, although she acknowledged that she had received several e-mails disagreeing with Site A.

Councillor Eithne Goode agreed that it was a difficult decision but favoured site A because it favoured the younger children. This would encourage children continuing to go to the Primary School in the village.

Councillor Ken Browne said this was a case where the Committee should defer to the knowledge of the local County Councillor who was accountable to the residents. He supported the recommendation for site A.

Councillor Alan Moore

He confirmed that the path was too narrow at site B to enable a crossing to be located there.

Councillor Alan Cockburn supported site A because the visibility was better.

The Chair said that she had visited the sites and confirmed that site A was the best option. While she was there a bus from Kenilworth dropped passengers off at the southern end of the village.

Councillor Jose Compton, seconded by Councillor Ken Browne, moved and it was Resolved unanimously:-

That the approval be given to the proposed puffin crossing near Church Lane, Leek Wootton (Scheme A).

8. Draft Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Warwickshire

The Committee considered the report by the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy and it was then Resolved:-

That the Warwick Area Committee welcomes the Draft Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan; the results of the consultation exercise for the Plan; and the proposed changes to the Plan and congratulates the Countryside Access Team in the Environment and Economy Directorate for its work in producing the Plan.

9. Warwick Area Committee – Half-Year Report

The Committee considered the report by the Strategic Director of Performance & Development.

It was noted that there were many amber indications in the Lifelong Learning and Development section of appendix 1 and it was therefore proposed that a separate session should be held with the officers of the Children, Young People and Families Directorate prior to the next meeting to discuss the issues in depth.

Graeme Fitton circulated an alternative set of information in relation to page 9 of appendix 1 based on the end of year figures and the half-yearly figures would

be circulated shortly. He said that the alternative information represented a more realistic picture of the trend in the reduction in road accident casualties.

Peter Hunter referred to a question raised by Councillor Raj Randev on page 8 of appendix 2 concerning schools with Race Equality Policies. The County Education Officer had written to the 11% of schools who were still without polices and the Area Education Officers and Race Equality Officer would meet the schools to ensure that polices were put in place.

It was then Resolved:-

That the Warwick Area Committee notes the contents of the report.

The Chair said that the session with the Children, Young People and Families Directorate would take place at 4 p.m. on the 21st March, 2006.

10. Well Being Fund 2005/6 – Funding Proposals

The Committee considered the report by the Strategic Director of Performance and Development.

- (1) Introduction and**
- (2) Well-being Fund – Available Resources**

These paragraphs were noted.

- (3) Wellbeing Fund Proposals**
 - (a) Action 21 – Volunteer Development Worker**

It was understood that the award of the contract to Action 21 for the operation of the recycling shop at the Princes Drive refuse disposal site had been on the basis of the range of material they were prepared to handle and not price. In those circumstances it would be in order for the Committee to agree the grant if they wished to do so.

It was then Resolved:-

That approval be given to a grant of £7,000 to Action 21 towards the cost of a volunteer development worker to promote and support volunteer activity linked to the operation of the Action 21 Recycling Group and Recycle Shop at the Princes Drive refuse disposal site in Leamington Spa and to promote and support volunteer activity in respect of a programme of walking for health in Warwick District.

(b) Warwick District Shopmobility – Business Consultancy Support

Resolved:-

That approval be given to a grant of £2,500 to Warwick District Shopmobility to provide Business Consultancy support in developing a sound business plan and funding strategy for the organisation.

11. Provisional Items for Future Meetings

The Committee noted the following provisional items:-

21 March 2006

Capital Programme for Integrated Transport 2006-07 – draft for Warwick area
Area Community Learning Plan – progress in 2005/06 and projections for
2006/07

Workshops:-

- Monday, 20th February 2006 at 4 p.m. – Decriminalisation of parking and Neighbourhood Policing.
- Tuesday, 21st March 2006 at 4 p.m. – session with Children, Young People and Families Directorate's representatives – see Minute 9.

12. Minutes of the meeting of 22 November 2005 and matters arising

(1) Minutes

Resolved:-

That the minutes of the meeting of the Warwick Area Committee held on the 22 November 2005, having been circulated, be approved with the addition to of the words “would be approached to help facilitate the process” to the final bullet point under Minute 3 (page 3) and be signed by the Chair.

(2) Matters arising

(i) Minute 2 – Night Owl Bus Service

It was noted that a letter had been sent to Mr. Andrews giving him details of alternative bus services. The cost of providing the particular bus service that he wanted would have been £350 per night. It was agreed that a copy of the letter should be sent to Councillors Raj Randev and Bernard Kirton.

(ii) Minute 4 – Number of children educated in temporary classrooms

It was noted that there were 417 primary school children and 517 secondary school children being educated in temporary buildings.

(iii) Minute 7 – Kenilworth/Leamington Spa cycle route

It was noted that this cycle route had been included in the Local Transport Plan for the medium/longer term.

(iv) Minute 7 – Coventry Arena – railway station

It was noted that discussions were taking place in respect of a new railway station in respect of the Coventry Arena but this would be sited within the boundaries of the city.

(v) Minute 7 – Parking proposals at Leamington Spa Railway Station

The parking proposals at Leamington Spa Railway Station were linked to a planning application and had been placed on a back burner while a further planning application was being prepared.

(vi) Minute 10 – Lord Leycester Hospital Retaining Wall, Warwick

It was noted that the work on the wall would start in mid-February and would last 6 to 8 weeks.

(vii) Minute 15(2)(ii) – A429 Coventry Road, Warwick – Possible Lowering of Speed Limit

In response to a question from Councillor Jose Compton, Graeme Fitton confirmed that the publication of revised Circular 1/93 was still awaited.

13. Any other items

None.

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Chair of Committee

The Committee rose at 8.58 p.m.