

County Council

Tuesday 15 December 2020

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Alan Cockburn (Chair), Councillor Peter Gilbert (Vice-Chair), Councillor Helen Adkins, Councillor Jo Barker, Councillor Margaret Bell, Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi, Councillor Sarah Boad, Councillor Mike Brain, Councillor Peter Butlin, Councillor Les Caborn, Councillor Mark Cargill, Councillor Jonathan Chilvers, Councillor Jeff Clarke, Councillor John Cooke, Councillor Andy Crump, Councillor Yousef Dahmash, Councillor Corinne Davies, Councillor Nicola Davies, Councillor Neil Dirveiks, Councillor Judy Falp, Councillor Jenny Fradgley, Councillor Bill Gifford, Councillor Daniel Gissane, Councillor Clare Golby, Councillor Seb Gran, Councillor Colin Hayfield, Councillor John Holland, Councillor John Horner, Councillor Andy Jenns, Councillor Kam Kaur, Councillor Keith Kondakor, Councillor Jeff Morgan, Councillor Maggie O'Rourke, Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher, Councillor Anne Parry, Councillor Dave Parsons, Councillor Caroline Phillips, Councillor Wallace Redford, Councillor David Reilly, Councillor Clive Rickhards, Councillor Howard Roberts, Councillor Kate Rolfe, Councillor Jerry Roodhouse, Councillor Andy Sargeant, Councillor Isobel Seccombe OBE, Councillor Dave Shilton, Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince, Councillor Dominic Skinner, Councillor Heather Timms, Councillor Adrian Warwick, Councillor Alan Webb, Councillor Chris Williams, Councillor Pam Williams and Councillor Andrew Wright

1. General

(1) Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

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

No declarations of interest were made.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 13 October 2020 were considered by Council. Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Leader of the Council) moved the minutes. Councillor Jeff Clarke (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) seconded. A vote was held.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the 13 October 2020 meeting of Council are agreed as a true record.

(4) Chair's announcements

1) Recent Awards

Councillor Alan Cockburn (Chair of Council) stated, "Warwickshire County Council has won a national award for a project to support new and expectant parents who are care leavers. The National Leaving Care Bench Marking Forum (NLCBMF) announced Warwickshire as joint winners of the Best Project Award at a virtual event during Care Leavers Week on 21 October.

The Baby Box Project, led by Liss Philips was launched earlier this year. It was set up to provide useful supplies to help care experienced young people who have recently become parents. Boxes include essential items such as nappies, wipes, new-born clothes, thermometers, bibs, towels and other necessities and also provides the young parents with financial support to help them buy items such as a cot, buggy or car seat. To further support care leavers, the project has a Young Parents Forum that is led by young people to raise awareness of the service and to discuss issues that are important to young parents. The project, along with other support during the COVID-19 pandemic has supported numerous young people, during challenging times. A young person who received a baby box during lockdown said: "I love all of it, it's so useful. I am very grateful and appreciative of the gesture." The team at the council has worked incredibly hard bringing the project together and promoting Warwickshire's role as Corporate Parents, and now Corporate Grandparents, to care for inexperienced young people in Warwickshire.

Umar Teerab, a Family Support Worker at WCC, and a care leaver and previously an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker, also won an award from the NLCBMF for Champion of the Year 2020 for his contribution to supporting other young care leavers"

Councillor Jeff Morgan (Portfolio Holder for Children's Services) congratulated Liss Philips and Umar Teerab on their respective achievements adding that children and families are at the heart of the County Council.

Umar and Liss were then invited to address Council.

Umar described how he had come to the United Kingdom in 2013 as an unaccompanied asylum seeker. At that time he spoke no English. He rapidly set about learning the language winning an award from Coventry City College in 2016. In 2017 he commenced a car mechanics course but in 2018 he applied for and obtained a role with Warwickshire County Council. In 2019 he won the Apprentice of the Year Award and at the same time he completed his apprenticeship.

Umar explained how he received much support and been encouraged to push himself. His aim is to achieve as much in life as is possible.

Liss Philips a care experienced parent and family support worker thanked Council for the invitation to address the meeting. Liss was pleased to see her recent award being recognised. Council was informed that career development opportunities are available for care experienced parents. Liss added that the past can cloud people's views and there is a need to

level the playing field to enable people to prosper. There was no shame to be had being a care experienced parent and she considered she is a good role model for her son.

She had received much support from Warwickshire County Council. In particular Liss singled out Shinderpaul Bhangal from the Children and Families Team for his encouragement and support.

2) Death of Miles Marriott and Andrew Burnham

Councillor Alan Cockburn reminded Council of the passing in 2020 of three County Councillors. He then stated,

“It is with a heavy heart and great sadness that I need to inform Council of the recent passing of two of our close colleagues in Enabling Services.

Both Miles Marriott in the Health and Safety Team and Andrew Burnham of ICT passed away over the last few weeks. Both were highly respected and valued colleagues with decades of service to our both our colleagues and residents of Warwickshire.

This has been a shock to all who knew Miles and Andrew. Miles passed away quite suddenly. He was a private man but was someone who always supported colleagues with a smile and graciousness. Some of you may remember Andrew’s recovery from COVID being reported in the local and National press. To lose such a generous and warm colleague after everything he has been through has been an awful shock for his family and friends. We will keep both of their families in our thoughts.

We have passed our condolences to both families and we will continue to liaise with them to offer as much support as they need. We will share the details of the books of condolences after the meeting for any colleague who would like to share their thoughts”.

A minute’s silence was held for Miles Marriott and Andrew Burnham.

(5) Public Speaking

There were no public speakers at the meeting.

2. Warwickshire County Council Preparations for EU Transition

Councillor Izzi Seccombe moved the motion and reminded Council that a briefing on EU transition had recently been held. She stated that at the time of the meeting she had hoped that there would be some agreement on an EU trade deal. This had yet to happen. Warwickshire County Council had been working hard with businesses to prepare them for whichever outcome there may be. Work is ongoing with the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce.

It had been thought that there was to be a new inland border facility in Warwickshire but it has been decided that this is to be at Birmingham Airport. Trading Standards staff have been trained but there remain some concerns over capacity to manage the expected workload.

The EU Settlement Scheme is set to end in June 2021. There are currently 41000 EU nationals based in Warwickshire. Councillor Seccombe closed by explaining that the UK Shared prosperity Fund is expected to continue.

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader of the Council) seconded the motion and reserved the right to speak.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) observed that EU transition should have been resolved sooner. Local government, he observed, would be left to intervene when things go wrong. Funds had been made available to the Council to help manage the transition, but these would be insufficient. He thanked officers for the recent briefing and for their hard work to date. Councillor Roodhouse added that businesses are unclear on what is required of them. The government website was cited as being particularly unhelpful. Council was informed that problems at Felixstowe docks and a global shortage of shipping containers was leading to difficulties with importing goods into the UK.

Councillor Keith Kondakor forecast that any trade deal agreed would not be comprehensive. He expressed his sympathy to those involved in manufacturing. The report he felt was too focused on business. Consideration should also be given to the wider population. For example, there is likely to be a reduction in immigration. This could have an impact in terms of recruitment to jobs.

Councillor Sarah Boad (Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) reminded Council that the EU referendum was held four and a half years ago. People's livelihoods are at risk either through the Pandemic or EU transition she added.

Councillor Peter Butlin expressed his disappointment that the trade deal had not been agreed. It was, he suggested, a matter of who blinks first. The only thing to be done at this stage is scenario planning, filling in the gaps where there is no knowledge. The County Council has been doing a good job. Communication is the key if people are to be helped, he concluded.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe stated that she was confident that the County Council will do its best in difficult circumstances. The UK is an entrepreneurial nation that will recover. This will, however, take time.

Vote

A vote was held. The motion was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council:

- 1) Notes the approach and progress made by the County Council in preparing for the end of the EU Transition Period on 31st December 2020; and
- 2) Notes the areas of work which will require ongoing review beyond the end of the Transition Period.

3. Education (Schools) Capital Programme 2020/21

Councillor Colin Hayfield (Portfolio Holder for Education and Learning) moved the motion and introduced the report stating that the bulk of the money to be allocated was to go to Stratford-upon-Avon and Nuneaton. That the report and proposals were not the Education Sufficiency Strategy was emphasised.

Councillor Jeff Morgan seconded the motion and reserved the right to speak.

Councillor Corinne Davies welcomed investment in schools although in some instances she considered that this was too late. The net result is that parents have to drive their children across the town to access school places. She asked whether a decision on the provider for the new Top Farm, Nuneaton school had been made.

Councillor Keith Kondakor expressed his concern over the way in which school places are assigned. Schools now have too much say in determining their numbers. In addition, government "wave funding" along with funding through the County Council leads to a degree of uncertainty. For example, in June 2019 Nuneaton missed out on wave funding. Nevertheless, Etone has taken in more pupils. There is also a case for a new school in the Weddington/St Nicholas area of Nuneaton. A proper secondary school building programme is required.

Councillor Jeff Clarke welcomed the report and the investment at Etone College. He explained that school place planning is undertaken by the County Council. Schools that expand too soon tend to attract children from across town. The key is to provide places for local children. Councillor Clarke requested that local residents around Etone College be consulted prior to any development.

Councillor Mark Cargill thanked officers and members for supporting the development at Stratford-upon-Avon High School.

Councillor Clive Rickhards welcomed the proposals for Coughton C of E Primary School in Alcester adding that an overarching system for planning school developments would be of use. In addition, there needs to be more joined up thinking between services at the Council. For example, new toilets and a classroom are proposed for Coughton Primary but thought needs to be given to traffic issues as well.

Councillor Ann Parry welcomed the proposals for Stratford-upon-Avon High School but asked that secondary allocations for Wellesbourne be reviewed. At present half of year 6 children in Wellesbourne move to Kineton whilst half go to Stratford. This means that friendship groups are split.

Councillor Jenny Fradgley welcomed the proposals for Stratford-upon-Avon High School noting the need for new primary schools associated with major development.

Councillor Jeff Morgan (who had seconded the motion) observed that the allocation of school places is one of the few statutory responsibilities left with the County Council in terms of education. He observed that when the expansion is completed Stratford-upon-Avon High School will have a roll of around 2000 pupils. He assured members that school place planning is well managed.

In closing Councillor Colin Hayfield noted that the assignment of funds for expansion is a stage in the implementation of the Sufficiency Strategy. Responding to Councillor Corinne Davies, Council

was informed that a provider had yet to be identified for Top Farm School. He reminded members that it is sometimes the case that siblings have to attend different schools.

Councillor Clarke was provided with an assurance that residents close to Eton College will be consulted. Councillor Hayfield noted that school drop off and pick up is a problem at most schools. Finding solutions is the responsibility of school governors as well as the Council.

To Councillor Parry's observations regarding Wellesbourne, Councillor Hayfield agreed to take these away to reflect on.

To Councillor Fradgley Councillor Hayfield stated that the case for another school in Stratford-upon-Avon had yet to be established.

Vote

A vote was held.

The motion was carried with one vote against and no abstentions.

Resolved:

That Council:

- 1) Approves the addition of £16.594 million to the capital programme to deliver the schemes outlined in Section 3.
- 2) Authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to invite tenders and enter into the appropriate contracts on terms and conditions considered acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources, or (where the scheme is school-led) to make the necessary funding arrangements for these schemes.

4. Emscote Road Corridor Improvements

In introducing this report Councillor Jeff Clarke explained that the scheme had already been considered and endorsed by Cabinet. Councillor Clark then moved the motion. Councillor Pam Williams seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

The proposals for the Emscote Road were welcomed by a number of local members including Councillor Les Caborn, Councillor John Holland, Councillor Nicola Davies, Councillor Bill Gifford, Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi and Councillor Judy Falp. Comments included the welcoming of works to improve Portobello Bridge, the need to address issues with the canal bridge junction by Tesco's, the need for a clear cycling strategy, the need to engage with local residents to minimise negative impacts, a desire to see a clear timeline for this scheme and the need to progress neighbouring projects.

Councillor Keith Kondakor commended the inclusion in the appendices of information detailing the benefits of cycling and walking.

Councillor Pam Williams (who seconded the motion) commended the project adding that improvements on the Emscote Road had been needed for many years.

Councillor Jeff Clarke closed the debate by thanking officers for their hard work. He emphasised the need to keep traffic flowing and agreed that it will be necessary to engage with local residents and businesses as the project proceeds. Finally, he stressed that Portobello Bridge had presented a series of challenges but considered that the proposed new deck will provide the solution to many issues.

Vote

A vote was held. The motion was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council

- 1)
 - a) Approves the allocation of £6.645m from the Capital Investment Fund to the Emscote Road Corridor Improvements Scheme;
 - b) Adds the scheme to the capital programme at a total cost of £10.239m; and
 - c) Agrees that the allocation from the Capital Investment Fund is reduced by the amount of any alternative external funding secured in the future.
- 2) authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to invite tenders and award all necessary contracts, on terms and conditions considered acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources, and secure all necessary consents and take all such other steps as the Strategic Director for Communities considers necessary to deliver the scheme.

5. Appointment of Chair of Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Local Pensions Board

Councillor Kam Kaur (Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation) introduced and moved this report and recommendation. Councillor Izzi Seccombe seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

There were no questions on the matter.

Vote

A vote was held. The motion was agreed with one abstention and no votes against.

Resolved:

That Council approve the appointment of Mr Martin Rehorn, Director of Finance and Treasurer for Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, as the Chair of the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Local Pensions Board for a period of 3 years.

6. Notices of Motion

1) Eco Schools

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse moved the following motion.

“This Council is committed to tackling Climate Change and has declared it as a priority. Council also committed itself to work in line with the UN Sustainable Development goals of which Education is one part.

Council recognises that schools and education are a critical part of tackling climate change. It also recognises that the Eco Schools programme needs reinvigoration across Warwickshire with the ambition that all schools can achieve green flag status.

Council requests:

1. That a survey takes place of all schools across Warwickshire about their progress in achieving Eco School status, to include a question about what support they need.

and

2. That the findings are reported to the Climate Change group and Portfolio Holder with recommendations on what actions need to be taken”.

In support of the motion Councillor Jerry Roodhouse stated that he was keen to reinvigorate the eco schools initiative across Warwickshire. A survey was required in order to make informed decisions regarding progress and support.

This was seconded by Councillor Jenny Fradgley who reserved the right to speak.

Amendment

Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Heritage & Culture) proposed an amendment which stated,

“This Council is committed to tackling Climate Change and has declared it as a priority. Council also committed itself to work in line with the UN Sustainable Development goals of which Education is one part.

Council recognises that schools and education are a critical part of tackling climate change and would like to work with schools to encourage them to achieve the Eco Schools green flag status or equivalent. It also recognises that the Eco Schools programme needs reinvigoration across Warwickshire with the ambition that all schools can achieve green flag status.

Therefore Council requests

- Recognises that schools are currently focused on getting through the Covid crisis and on delivering the core curriculum

- Asks that a survey takes place of all schools across Warwickshire from September 2021 on activities currently undertaken relating to climate change and about their progress in achieving Eco School status or equivalent to include a question about what support they need.
- That the findings are reported to the Climate Change group and Portfolio Holder Cabinet with recommendations on what actions need to be taken.

(Strike through = deletion, Italics = addition)

This amendment was seconded by Councillor Mark Cargill who reserved the right to speak.

Debate

Councillor Keith Kondakor highlighted the role that schools have to play in setting the environment agenda. Warwickshire schools have demonstrated their commitment to the environment through tree planting and green travel initiatives. The impetus should not be allowed to slide because of the pandemic. Eco schools, he added are not simply about reducing plastic bag usage and recycling. Consideration should be given to building projects with insulation and energy use at the fore.

Councillor Helen Adkins agreed that eco school considerations should embrace energy use and insulation. She did not agree with the amendment but would support the original motion.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers agreed that school buildings should be part of the eco school initiative.

Councillor John Holland agreed with the original motion. Council was reminded of the length of time it took to get a cycle route from the Woodloes estate in Warwick to Aylesford School. 20 years at a time when the local authority had more influence over schools. He added that development and new builds provide an opportunity to insist on green travel plans for schools.

Councillor Clare Golby expressed her support for the amendment stating that the present focus should be on continuing education during the Pandemic. Now is the wrong time to be distracting schools with eco schemes.

Councillor Mark Cargill (seconded of the amendment) suggested that everyone supports the principle of eco schools. They are important for ecology and sustainability. Some schools plant wild flowers but there is then no follow up and the project folds. A clear business case for each project is required. Councillor Cargill concluded by stating that in his view original motion lacked the detail that the amendment offered.

Councillor Jenny Fradgley (seconded of the original motion) explained that considerations around the Pandemic should not override environmental matters. Young people, she said, see the previous generation as wasteful and irresponsible. The motion as proposed by the Liberal Democrat Group is considered to be a reasonable means of getting schools thinking. The eco school initiative provides the framework to look at all environmental issues. Since funding was withdrawn in 2011 the energy behind the scheme had been lost.

Councillor Heather Timms (proposer of the amendment) reminded the Council that as it is not an Education Authority it can only encourage schools to act in a certain way. At the moment schools

are focused on managing the Pandemic. For now, it is important to develop an evidence base so that an understanding of each school's needs can be established.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (proposer of the motion) stated that before tabling the motion, advice was sought from officers. It was clear, he said, that members support eco schools. However, the amendment only served to build delay into the process. He agreed that the withdrawal of funding had led to a loss of impetus. However, there is a desire to see all schools having green flag status and the proposal before Council would require little funding.

Vote on Amendment

Councillor Keith Kondakor (supported by Councillors Chilvers and Holland) requested a recorded vote.

Those who voted for the amendment.

Councillors Barker, Bell, Singh Birdi, Brain, Butlin, Caborn, Cargill, Clarke, Cockburn, Cooke Crump, Dahmash, Gilbert, Gissane, Golby, Gran, Hayfield, Horner, Jenns, Kaur, Morgan, Pandher, Parry, Redford, Reilly, Roberts, Sargeant, Seccombe, Shilton, Simpson-Vince, Timms, Warwick, C. Williams, P. Williams, Wright (35)

Those who voted against the amendment

Councillors Adkins, Boad, Chilvers, C. Davies, N. Davies, Dirveiks, Falp, Fradgley, Gifford, Holland, Kondakor, O'Rourke, Parsons, Phillips, Rickhards, Rolfe, Roodhouse, Skinner, Webb (19)

There were no abstentions.

Vote on New Substantive Motion

The amended motion became the new substantive motion on which a vote was held. This was passed (48 votes for, 2 against and 2 abstentions)

Resolved:

This Council is committed to tackling Climate Change and has declared it as a priority. Council also committed itself to work in line with the UN Sustainable Development goals of which Education is one part.

Council recognises that schools and education are a critical part of tackling climate change and would like to work with schools to encourage them to achieve the Eco Schools green flag status or equivalent.

Therefore Council

- Recognises that schools are currently focused on getting through the Covid crisis and on delivering the core curriculum

- Asks that a survey takes place of all schools across Warwickshire from September 2021 on activities currently undertaken relating to climate change and about their progress in achieving Eco School status or equivalent to include a question about what support they need.
- That the findings are reported to Cabinet with recommendations on what actions need to be taken.

2) Student Finance

Councillor Dave Parsons proposed the following motion.

During the pandemic government financial support has been extended to businesses and workers. A number of Councillors have been contacted by Warwickshire students and their parents with concerns that students have received no financial help as such and have, in the vast majority of cases, received a service which is far from that which is normally provided by our university system. As a consequence, and taking into account the financial wellbeing of students living and/or being educated in Warwickshire this Council urges our national government, by means of a letter to the relevant Government Minister, to remove all interest payments on loans provided for the 2020 / 21 academic year and that no interest should be charged at any point in the future for loans covering the current academic year.

Councillor Corinne Davies seconded the motion and chose to speak. Councillor Davies informed Council that her youngest daughter had started university in 2020. It was not the experience she was expecting. She had been obliged to live in halls of residence and most of the tuition she had received had been on-line. She started her term late and was expected to leave early.

Councillor Davies added that there has been a rise in mental health problems amongst students. These have included suicides. Finally, Councillor Davies observed that some courses such as dentistry cannot be taught on line. In these instances students may be required to take the whole of their final year again.

No amendments were proposed.

Debate.

Councillor Keith Kondakor expressed his support for the motion stating that students should have been tested for the virus when they arrived at university.

Councillor Peter Butlin observed that the County Council would have very little influence over the matter covered by the motion. Council was reminded that students are not required to pay back their loans until they are earning a good income. The Council's concern should be to stimulate the local economy.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe stated that Warwick University has put extensive measures in place to support face to face teaching. It also runs a welfare fund to support students in need.

Councillor Clare Golby informed Council of the low interest rate that student loans have. This means that repayments start low at around £38 a year. The payments should be regarded as a

graduate contribution. Councillor Golby added that university is not the only option for young people. Finally, she suggested that if students consider that they are receiving a sub-standard service they should take this up with their university. If they fail to do this, then the service will not improve.

Councillor Helen Adkins (who has a son at university and who is herself a university lecturer) explained that the purpose of the motion was not to criticise universities but to support students by lobbying government for support.

Councillor John Horner stated that 80% of student loans do not get paid. He questioned why the Council would write to government regarding an issue over which it has little influence. To do so repeatedly reduces the political capital of the Council.

Councillor Dave Parsons (proposer of the motion) challenged members who considered that the Council should not be writing to government on the matter. He was surprised that no one had suggested speaking to students or parents. There was, he felt, a clear reason to lobby government on the matter. It was wrong for students to be required to repay loans that are higher than mortgage rates and inflation.

Vote

A vote was held.

Votes for the motion 20

Votes against the motion 34

Abstentions 0

The motion was defeated.

3) Support for Care Leavers

Councillor Pam Williams moved the following motion.

“Warwickshire County Council has responded extremely well to the increased pressures thrown up by the pandemic, not least in the Children and Families Service area where we have seen how two of our care-experienced young people, now employed by the Council, have been awarded national prizes for their outstanding work with other young people.

As the principal corporate parent, this Council wishes to record its thanks to everyone involved with our young people in care and requests the Chief Executive to write a thank you letter to the Children in Care Council acknowledging their efforts at this difficult time”.

Councillor Margaret Bell seconded the motion and elected to speak. She explained how when she had first become a County Councillor the first briefing she had attended was concerned with corporate parenting. She had sat of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and had listened to young people from the Children in care Council. Councillor bell cited the House Project in Nuneaton which provides young people with a front door.

Debate

Councillor Clive Rickhards expressed his support for the motion and welcomed the reference to Shinderpaul Bhangal earlier in the meeting.

Councillor Jeff Morgan agreed with comments about the House Project adding that young people have made the transition to their own accommodation over time.

In closing the debate Councillor Pam Williams reminded members that the Children in Care Council is not just concerned with care leavers. It covers children of all ages.

Vote

A vote was held.

Votes for the motion 52

Votes against the motion 2

Abstentions 0

Resolved:

“Warwickshire County Council has responded extremely well to the increased pressures thrown up by the pandemic, not least in the Children and Families Service area where we have seen how two of our care-experienced young people, now employed by the Council, have been awarded national prizes for their outstanding work with other young people.

As the principal corporate parent, this Council wishes to record its thanks to everyone involved with our young people in care and requests the Chief Executive to write a thank you letter to the Children in Care Council acknowledging their efforts at this difficult time”.

4) Universal Credit

Councillor Caroline Phillips moved the following motion.

“This council notes:

The £20 increase to the basic rate of Universal Credit (and the tax credit equivalent) announced by the Chancellor on 20th March as part of his pandemic response package reflected the reality that the level of benefits were not adequate to protect the swiftly increasing number of households relying on them as the crisis hit. They have had a positive effect on the lives of thousands of local claimants who are better able to pay for life’s essentials such as food, clothing and utilities.

The local economy has also benefited from the increase in benefit levels as claimants spend their money locally thereby supporting local businesses and jobs.

Next April the Government plans to cut the benefit level for millions of claimants by ending this time limited increase.

This council resolves to:

1. Write to the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak and to the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson demanding that the £20 increase to Universal Credit is made permanent and extended to claimants on legacy benefits.

2. Work with other local government organisations to collectively pressure the government to make the £20 increase to Universal Credit permanent”

In supporting the motion Councillor Phillips explained that in 2017 -19 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation undertook research into destitution. It was found that 81% of people who are deemed destitute do not have complex needs. There are 16 million claimants of Universal Credit but many of those are in work poverty. The higher rate of Universal Credit has helped many people from falling further into destitution.

Councillor Adkins seconded the motion and reserved the right to speak.

Debate

Councillor Alan Webb explained that Universal Credit was introduced to act as a safety net to people. Jobs have been lost and people have less money. It is not possible to survive on state handouts. Food banks are getting busier and school children are missing out on meals. In addition, connectivity is very important to families. If a child does not have access to broadband and a computer, their learning will be impeded. This all costs money.

Councillor Keith Kondakor suggested that increases to Universal Credit were only introduced once people in London and the south east began to lose their jobs. Food prices are increasing which aggravates problems for people. Councillor Kondakor observed that the country has many entrepreneurs who are working hard on solutions for Brexit and the Pandemic. These people can be supported though Universal Credit. It will not make them lazy.

Councillor John Horner observed that Universal Credit is not a matter for the Council. He suggested that if members have concerns then they should write to their local MPs to raise them.

Councillor Dave Parsons expressed his support for the motion adding that people were now living in “Foodbank Britain”. The County Council, he said, has a responsibility to represent the interests of its residents.

Councillor Dan Gissane expressed his support for the motion. Many people have lost their jobs and landlords are finding that people do not have the money to pay the rent. Borough Councils have an opportunity to help businesses in town centres he concluded.

Councillor Maggie O'Rourke observed that the economic impact of the Pandemic will last for a long time. The County Council should do all it can to protect people. Mainstream benefits serve to take the pressure off local authorities so efforts should be made to retain them.

Councillor Clive Rickhards observed that the people who receive Universal Credit payments put this money back into the local economy.

Councillor John Holland said that he sensed a degree of sympathy from the Conservative members. He suggested that the Conservative Group submit an amendment calling for a letter to be sent to the Warwickshire MPs.

Councillor Helen Adkins (seconder of the motion) agreed with Councillor Holland's suggestion regarding a letter to the MPs. She expressed her disappointment that only one Conservative member had engaged in the debate. Universal Credit, she added is brutal in that it punishes the poor. The uplift of £20 per week had helped to keep many people from destitution, enabling them to cope. How will a single parent manage once the additional support is withdrawn?

Councillor Caroline Phillips (Proposer of the motion) thanked all of the speakers. She reminded all councillors that they have a responsibility as corporate parents and that child poverty was a continuing problem.

Vote

Councillor Adkins (supported by Councillors Phillips and Parsons) requested a recorded vote.

Those who voted in support of the motion.

Councillors Adkins, Boad, Chilvers, C. Davies, N. Davies, Dirveiks, Falp, Fradgley, Gifford, Gissane, Holland, Kondakor, O'Rourke, Parsons, Phillips, Rickhards, Rolfe, Roodhouse, Sargeant, Skinner, Webb (21)

Those who voted against the motion.

Councillors Barker, Singh Birdi, Brain, Butlin, Caborn, Cargill, Clarke, Cockburn, Cooke Crump, Dahmash, Gilbert, Golby, Gran, Hayfield, Horner, Jenns, Kaur, Morgan, Pandher, Parry, Redford, Reilly, Roberts, Seccombe, Shilton, Simpson-Vince, Timms, Warwick, C. Williams, P. Williams, Wright (32)

There were no abstentions.

The motion was defeated.

7. Member Question Time (Standing Order 7)

1) Question to Councillor Hayfield from Councillor Roodhouse

What assessments have or are been made of the adequacy of catch-up support for remote education and the purchasing additional devices or more textbooks?

Answer

Councillor Hayfield replied that catch-up funding has been provided to schools. The need for pupils to catch up on their education has been recognised as a huge problem for which Ofsted has been giving advice. The scheme that provides laptops to pupils remains open. The full impact of the Pandemic on education remains unknown and it will be some time before a clearer picture emerges.

A briefing will be provided for all members in the spring of 2021. It may be that this is a matter that the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee would wish to explore.

2) Question to Councillor Clarke from Councillor Fradgley

As the country moves towards 20mph in urban areas what is the view of WCC to developing a policy for 20mph in the county? There is a particular need to establish 20mph around schools and a policy would assist in establishing safer zones around our schools.

Answer

Councillor Clarke replied that the County Council generally supports the principle of 20mph speed limits around schools. However, lower speed limits can, in some instances, present more problems than they solve. The County Council follows the DfT guidelines on the matter. Speed should where possible be self-enforcing. Work is currently underway on the new Local Transport Plan. A member working group has been established to support this work. All members are invited to feed into the work of the group.

In response to this latter point, Councillor Fradgley encouraged all members to engage in the development of the LTP.

3) Question to Councillor Hayfield from Councillor Gifford

Does Councillor Hayfield agree that Marle Hall for nearly 50 years has provided a wonderful learning experience for Warwickshire Children? If it was to be lost how does he feel that experience could be replicated?

Answer

Councillor Hayfield replied that Marle Hall has, over the years, provided an excellent service to the children of Warwickshire. The Council is now engaged in a staff consultation exercise regarding the closure of the site. The facility is not self-financing and is expensive to retain. The number of people that now use the site is very small. Closing the site will save money which could be used to benefit a greater number of children. It is regrettable that Marle Hall is to be closed but there are other organisations that provide the same experience and that can be used.

In response to the answer Councillor Gifford asked to be sent a link to the consultation documents. This was agreed. In addition, he asked whether the County Council was engaging with the schools that use Marle Hall. Councillor Hayfield stated that the pattern of usage varies. Some schools use the site every year and some schools less frequently. Officers would ensure that schools are made aware of the alternatives to Marle Hall. He added that the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to look at alternative provision.

4) Question to Councillor Caborn from Councillor Adkins

Professor Chris Witty has stated that Covid highlights inequalities and thrives off inequalities. In the light of health inequalities across Warwickshire including within the BAME community can the

reason behind the cancellation of the task and finish review proposed by the Labour Group be explained?

Answer

Councillor Les Caborn promised to provide a written answer to all members after the meeting.

In response, Councillor Adkins stated that a response in the meeting would have been welcome.

5) Question to Councillor Clarke from Councillor Holland

Can the Council please be provided with a timeline for all road schemes in the Warwick and Leamington area?

Answer

Councillor Clarke stated that he would ask officers to provide what information they can.

In response Councillor Holland stated that he had yet to see a Portfolio Holder decision regarding changes to parking in Warwick. He asked for an update on that.

Councillor Clarke stated that Warwick Variation No. 6 had been delayed owing to significant workloads. He promised to share a list of minor works with Councillor Holland in the new year.

6) Question to Councillor Caborn from Councillor Rolfe

Is the Portfolio Holder aware of the Integrated Care Consultation that closes on 8 January 2021 and will the County Council respond to it?

Answer

Councillor Caborn stated that he was aware of the consultation and a response will be forthcoming from the County Council.

7) Question to Councillor Butlin from Councillor Kondakor

The Local Enterprise Partnership is supporting the proposal for a new battery mega factory. Will the Portfolio Holder do something to counter the myths around emission and lifecycles for electric cars as opposed to petrol and diesel cars?

Answer

Councillor Butlin assured Council that he deals in facts only.

In response Councillor Kondakor referred Councillor Butlin to a life cycle study undertaken by Aston Martin

8) Question to Councillor Seccombe from Councillor Chilvers

Regarding the new mega lab to be established in Leamington the government has promised contracts for local suppliers. However, contact with local businesses wishing to bid for contracts has shown they cannot find out how to do so. Although officers have looked into this, I am not confident that the process will be fair and transparent for our businesses. So will Councillor Seccombe make representation to the Department of health and Social Care to make sure that local businesses get fair access to contracts.

Answer

Councillor Seccombe stated that it is in everyone's interests to get a fair deal for Warwickshire. She stated that she had received letters on the same matter and from people seeking employment. Officers will be asked to pursue this. Councillor Seccombe agreed to write a letter.

9) Question to Councillor Seccombe from Councillor Parsons

Covid-19 tiers are due to be reviewed on 16 December. Will Warwickshire now be considered in its own right?

Answer

Councillor Seccombe replied that when tiering was introduced the original proposal was for Warwickshire to be included in a large West Midlands region. The end result was a tier with Coventry and Solihull. A letter had been sent suggesting that Warwickshire be regarded separately to Coventry and Solihull and early indications are promising. The incidence of Covid-19 across the county varies. At one point North Warwickshire was very high, but this figure has come down. However, increases have been seen in Warwick and Stratford. The Council is keen to protect businesses, but it must keep residents safe.

10) Question to Councillor Timms from Councillor Dahmash

How is the Winter Grant Scheme helping schools in Warwickshire?

Answer

Councillor Timms stated that vouchers were due to be despatched on 16 December. All but two Warwickshire Schools had responded, downloading information regarding free school meals. Vouchers will be sent out automatically. People do not need to apply. The Council has done a lot for people who are in hardship. Advice and support has been provided on energy and clothing and personal hygiene products have been distributed. If people are struggling there is an 0800 number they can ring. The Council is keen to ensure that everyone has a happy Christmas.

A briefing will be sent out to all members once the vouchers have gone out.

11) Question to Councillor Caborn from Councillor Kondakor

It is good to see Covid-19 vaccination being rolled out at UHCW. Can the Portfolio Holder provide an indication when vaccination will commence in Nuneaton and Bedworth?

Answer

Councillor Caborn stated that he could not provide an answer at present. However, as soon as the information is available this will be distributed.

In reply Councillor Kondakor asked that updates be placed on the member dashboard on a weekly basis.

12) Question to Councillor Clarke from Councillor Chilvers

There has been an increase in delivery vehicles in towns. Often engines are left running when deliveries are made. Can the Portfolio Holder explore ways in which low emission zones can be used to encourage companies towards the use of electric vehicles which are suited to this type of delivery?

Answer

Councillor Clarke stated that he was happy to liaise with delivery companies regarding the use of electric vehicles. That vehicles are left running is a matter for the police as it is an enforcement issue.

The use of low emission zones is something that can be investigated as part of the development of the Local Transport Plan.

8. Any Other items of Urgent Business

None

The meeting rose at 1.22 pm

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Chair