

Cabinet

Tuesday 18 April 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Isobel Seccombe OBE (Chair)
Councillor Margaret Bell
Councillor Peter Butlin
Councillor Andy Crump
Councillor Andy Jenns
Councillor Kam Kaur
Councillor Jeff Morgan
Councillor Wallace Redford
Councillor Heather Timms
Councillor Martin Watson

Others Present

Councillor John Holland
Councillor Dave Humphreys
Councillor Marion Humphreys
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse

1. General

(1) Apologies

None.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 16 March 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

(4) Public Speaking

Mr Richard Waller, on behalf of his step-son, Lewis Waller (resident in Bidford Upon Avon), attended to speak on item 9 on the agenda: Free Bus Travel (Concessionary Travel) Scheme

Review. Mr Waller explained that Lewis lived with Spastic Quadriplegia Cerebral Palsy and severe learning difficulties. Lewis used a wheelchair for mobility and was dependent on care and support 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

At the time of the meeting, Lewis was 34 years old and Mr Waller explained that Bidford (where Lewis was living) was not a vibrant, accessible, happening village or community for such an age group. Lewis needed to travel by bus for swimming, music, live bands, variety in pubs, bowling, and a variety of clubs and activities, all of which needed to be accessible.

Mr Waller advised that Lewis was in receipt of a full enhanced level of disability benefits, and after the financial assessment of care services, Lewis was left with a weekly allowance of £156 to cover all everyday expenditure such as heating, lighting, food, clothing and amount of pocket money. Mr Waller stated that it was indisputable that Lewis must have a carer with him even on the bus – this was not a luxury but a necessity.

However, Mr Waller advised that disabled travellers that needed a carer to travel with them were charged a two person fare by the bus operator, with a disabled traveller paying their fare through the local authority's concessionary fare scheme and a second fare for their carer. The cost of a Stagecoach day ticket for Lewis's carer was £11 per day at the time of the meeting. This was the most expensive tariff and it was not possible to buy a monthly pass since it was not transferable between carers.

Mr Waller further stated that the Equality Act 2010 stated that it was illegal to discriminate against service users due to their disability, and it was his view that residents in Warwickshire were being financial discriminated against as they were being double charged for a single service. He had asked the Council to review the legalities of Lewis being charged a fare for his carer by bus operators. To Mr Waller it appeared nonsensical as well as immoral that bus operators did not charge for an assistance dog, a pushchair, or luggage but were happy to charge for care.

He noted that neighbouring councils facilitated carer companion travel by having a "+1" or "C+" indicator on the disabled person's pass. Nothing new would be required as a carer companion scheme was already in practice across England. He suggested that the Council reached out to copy this system. Mr Waller noted that paragraph 7.7 of the report acknowledged that providing companion passes may cost the authority £100,000 per annum compared with the annual reimbursement budget of £5.1 million, with a recommendation for a feasibility study to be undertaken. He proposed that the companion scheme be introduced for a period of one year as the feasibility study, thereby saving the expense of a paper study which would have no immediate, tangible benefit to the dependence of disabled travellers.

2. Service Estimate 2023/24

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property) summarised the published report, noting that this was the usual report that followed the budget and MTFS approval and set out the detailed budget allocations for all the service areas. The report set out the service revenue and capital baselines used for quarterly financial monitoring reports together with changes to the revenue budget allocations. Councillor Butlin explained that the changes

reduced the Council's net spending by £1.9m to £378.9m, with the £1.9m added to reserves as set out in the report. In terms of Capital, review of the phasing of spend across financial years would take place once the 2022/23 outturn position was known and would be reported as part of the quarterly financial monitoring reports to Cabinet.

There were no questions or comments on the report.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the detailed revenue budget, savings plan, and capital programme for each of the Authority's services set out in Appendices A to M to the report;
2. Notes the adjustments to service revenue budget following the realignment of budgets within and between directorates since the budget was set on 7 February 2023, as outlined in Section 3 of the report and Appendix N to the report;
3. Approves the net transfer of £1.855m to reserves as outlined in Section 3 paragraph 2 of the report; and
4. Endorses the draw down of £0.375m from the Better Care Fund Development reserve detailed within resolution 3.

3. Warwickshire County Council Suicide Prevention Proposals

Councillor Margaret Bell (Portfolio Holder for Health and Adult Social Care) introduced this report which sought approval of the Coventry and Warwickshire Suicide Prevention Strategy 2023-30 (which had already been endorsed by the Health and Wellbeing Board) and the proposals for embedding suicide prevention activity within the Council's activities. The local approach built upon the work of the national suicide prevention programme which ran from 2018 to 2021 and reflected significant engagement with stakeholders, partners and the public. Within the Council, discussions had taken place to explore opportunities to build a suicide safe workplace which had culminated in an organisational commitment to suicide prevention captured in Appendix to the report, "Our Approach to Suicide Prevention". In term of funding, the Council had already committed dedicated resources to the development and implementation of suicide prevention activity across Coventry and Warwickshire in the form of the permanent employment of a Suicide Prevention and Partnership Manager funded from the Public Health Grant and an allocated project budget for 2023/24 supported the initial implementation and embedding of the new Strategy. From 2024/25 onwards, in order to continue to support the wider delivery of the strategy, ongoing funding was required to make the existing Coventry and Warwickshire Real Time Surveillance System permanent, provide ongoing suicide awareness and prevention training and support local awareness campaigns.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe commended the work of the Public Health Team for the production of the strategy.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse stressed the importance of the Real Time Surveillance System and the prevention and awareness training programme. He hoped that the training could be extended to Members.

Councillor Andy Jenns welcomed the Council's approach to building a suicide-safe workplace, reflecting on the impact that finding a suicide could have on an individual.

Councillor Andy Crump also sought provision of suicide awareness and prevention training for Members, noting that their role in the community could have a positive impact in collecting intelligence and saving lives.

Councillor Seccombe noted the lifetime impact of suicide on family and friends and welcomed the engagement of partners in the implementation of the strategy.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the Coventry and Warwickshire Suicide Prevention Strategy 2023-2030 on behalf of the Council;
2. Approves the Council's "Our Approach to Suicide Prevention" attached to the report at Appendix 1;
3. Approves the proposals for embedding suicide prevention activity within the Council's activities as set out in the report; and
4. Authorises the Strategic Director for People to identify a Suicide Prevention Sponsor to champion the role of the Council in the wider suicide prevention work programme.

4. The Draft Warwickshire Food Strategy 2023 - 2026

Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate and Culture) introduced the Warwickshire Food Strategy 2023-26 and delivery plan for approval. She explained that oversight would take place through quarterly reports to the Warwickshire Food Forum, a partnership of organisations and voluntary and community sector groups concerned with the supply of food to vulnerable people.

The strategy detailed the specific food challenges in Warwickshire drawing upon national and local data about food insecurity and diet-related ill-health. She went on to explain that the strategy set out the direction for the next three years across the three priority areas of food affordability and access, food education and choice, and sustainable choices. The delivery plan comprehensively set out the key actions and outcomes for Forum partners and Councillor Timms welcomed the strategy's encouragement of community involvement and participation as well as how to increase cultural awareness of food.

In response to a question from Councillor Jerry Roodhouse, Councillor Timms noted that Food Forum partners had been working with the Council prior to the cost of living crisis and confirmed that the strategy was evidence based and that the implementation of the delivery plan would also be evidenced.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe applauded the work that had taken place to produce the strategy, particularly, around the sustainability of food.

Resolved

That Cabinet approves the Warwickshire Food Strategy 2023-2026 as attached to the report at Appendix A.

5. Social Fabric Fund

Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate and Culture) reminded Cabinet that when the budget had been approved in February 2023, Council had requested that a proposal be brought forward to create a Social Fabric Fund to invest in social infrastructure within Levelling Up priority areas, embedding the community powered principle of “working with” communities rather than “doing to” or “doing for” communities. She added that the report also resonated with the government’s Levelling Up White Paper and had a good strategic fit with the Council Plan 2022-27, the Countywide Approach to Levelling Up, and the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2020-25.

Councillor Timms summarised the report which set out proposals for a £2.5m Fund (£1m revenue plus £1.5m capital) that would be used to provide grants and financial assistance to a range of recipients, including external community organisations. In addition the report recommended £320,000 was allocated to meet the operating costs of the Fund, including dedicated community workers, with specific responsibilities around supporting funding proposals from communities. It was anticipated that the Fund would run for two years, up to 31 March 2025. The report explained the two stage process that would be in operation, the first stage of which was an outline investment case which would be reviewed and, if successful, would be followed by a more detailed business case. Progress updates from any approved projects would be required every six months. It was intended that the Fund would be self-sustaining in the medium term by attracting social investors and philanthropists, and businesses would enable the level of investment to continue beyond March 2025.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe welcomed the report as an exciting addition to the support offered to lower layer super output areas (LSOAs) which complemented work taking place with the district and borough councils.

There were no other comments or questions on the report.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

1. Approves proceeding with the establishment of a blended £2.5 million Social Fabric Fund, comprising £1 million revenue, and £1.5 million capital, focusing primarily on the 22 Lower Super Output Areas identified in the Countywide Approach to Levelling Up, with the ability to flex this by exception as set out in paragraph 4.10 of the report;
2. Approves an additional one-off £0.32 million revenue allocation to support the operation of the Fund as set out in paragraphs 4.13, and 4.19 of the report;
3. Approves the £1.32 million revenue elements of the Fund being funded from the Council's Revenue Investment Fund;
4. Approves the £1.5 million capital element of the Fund being funded from the Council's Capital Investment Fund and approves its addition to the Capital Programme; and

5. Authorises the Strategic Director for Resources to take all steps as he considers necessary to establish and operate the Fund in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate, and Culture, and other Portfolio Holders as appropriate.

6. Household Support Fund Offer

Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate and Culture) summarised this report which sought approval for the allocation of the £6.945m Household Support Fund for 2023/24 and submission of the delivery plan to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). In doing so, she explained that the objective of the national Household Support Fund was to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs, specifically food, energy and water bills, grants to breakfast clubs etc and administration. The 2023/24 grant was an extension of the grant provided for local welfare schemes through covid and was now extended to support the most vulnerable with the cost-of-living. Councillor Timms drew attention to Appendix 1 of the report which detailed the proposed allocation of the Fund for the period between April 2023 and March. She noted that it was a requirement that the Fund must be spent or committed before 31 March 2024 and could not be held over for future usage.

In response to a question from Councillor Isobel Seccombe, Councillor Timms advised that she was working alongside Councillor Kam Kaur to bring forward ideas to drive forward encouraging those who were eligible for free school meals to take advantage of the provision.

Responding to a question from Councillor Margaret Bell regarding the provision of sanitary products for girls, Councillor Timms advised that the team would be addressing these issues and urged families to get in touch if they required support. Councillor Seccombe noted that Scrutiny was undertaking work on this issue and Councillor Timms advised that the lead officer would welcome opportunities to collaborate with colleagues on raising awareness and delivery of the Fund.

Resolved

That Cabinet

1. Approves the proposed allocation of the £6.945m Household Support Fund (HSF) for use between April 2023 and March 2024 as set out in the report, and subject to approval of the delivery plan by the Department of Work and Pensions, authorises the Strategic Director for Resources to implement the Fund allocations; and
2. Authorises the Strategic Director for Resources, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate & Culture to allocate revised funding should the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (“the Secretary of State”), in exercise of the powers conferred by section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, make any future determinations before 31 March 2024

7. UK Shared Prosperity Fund

This report was introduced by Councillor Martin (Portfolio Holder for Economy) who stated that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) was designed to replace the European Structural and Investment Funds which had provided significant investment in Warwickshire over many years, and which continued to support some of the Council’s business support and employability and

skills activities. In two-tier areas, the core UKSPF funding was delivered by district and borough councils and the smaller Multiply fund for adult numeracy via upper tier authorities. The government strongly encouraged lead UKSPF authorities to work with other places where it met the needs of a place and where joint delivery achieved value for money or better outcomes for residents and businesses. In particular, lead authorities were encouraged to work with other or neighbouring authorities (district, county or unitary) to agree and commission business support and people and skills activities over a larger scale representative of the business base or local labour market. The report set out a proposed role for the County Council in commissioning six county-wide business support programmes, including the extension of the current business start-up support and support to businesses in the tourism, leisure and hospitality sector programmes. Councillor Watson emphasised that this lead role and any further engagement would only be possible with the agreement of the district and borough councils through a series of individual agreements.

Councillor Andy Crump applauded the report and noted that the Council had the resource and experience to successfully conduct the role of accountable body.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

1. Supports the use of the remaining European Match Funding and Rural Growth Network Reserves alongside investment via the District and Borough Councils from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) in order to increase the scope and scale of specific joint programmes.
2. Subject to agreement with the District and Borough Councils:
 - (i) Approves the Council acting as accountable body for specific elements of UKSPF funding and for the Council to lead on the commissioning of joint programmes.
 - (ii) Authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to enter into UKSPF funding agreements with individual District and Borough Councils on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources.
 - (iii) Approves varying and extending two contracts with Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce for the ongoing provision of business start-up services and support to businesses in the tourism, leisure and hospitality sector using Council and UKSPF funding.
 - (iv) Approves the commencement of appropriate procurement activity and/ or competitive calls for projects to deliver the priorities of the UKSPF funding.
3. Authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to negotiate and enter into all necessary contracts and agreements required to deliver the approved recommendations on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources.

8. Proposals for Utilisation of Additional Funding for Apprenticeships and Re-skilling Activity

Councillor Martin Watson (Portfolio Holder for Economy) explained that this report set out proposals for the utilisation of the additional £300,000 for apprenticeships and reskilling activity agreed in the budget by Council on 7 February 2023. The report was presented against a backdrop of strong and increasing demand for labour across Warwickshire, yet the number of apprenticeships had fallen over recent years. Awareness and understanding of apprenticeships needed to improve and the report described five proposals which it was considered would create

the greatest impact to individuals, businesses, and the wider Warwickshire economy through improving information and understanding of apprenticeships, supporting businesses in creating new apprenticeships and encouraging the over 50s and those with SEND to consider apprenticeships as a viable route to gain employment.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse welcomed the report which now provided confirmation of the activities that would be funded. He noted that the levels of NEETS were still high in some areas of the county and considered that some joined up working in this area would be beneficial.

Resolved

That Cabinet approves the proposals as set out in Section 2.1 of the report for the utilisation of the additional funding of £300,000 pa approved in the Council revenue budget resolution (7 February 2023).

9. Free Bus Travel (Concessionary Travel) Scheme Review

This item was considered before the other substantive agenda items so that it could be debated immediately after public speaking.

Cllr Wallace Redford (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) thanked Mr Waller for his contribution and stated that the issues he had raised would be taken into consideration. He went on to introduce the report which comprehensive detailed the results of a review of the current concessionary travel scheme and consideration of potential options to amend the scheme in the light of the feedback from the review. Councillor Wallace advised that the Council had a statutory duty to deliver the national concessionary travel scheme but the Council operated an extension of the scheme in terms of the permitted hours of travel. After an extensive consultation which had attracted a considerable number of responses, he outlined the proposals as follows:

- To retain the current extended weekday travel times of 9am-midnight for older person's passes (statutory provision was for Off peak bus travel between 9.30am and 11.00pm on weekdays, and all day at weekend and on bank holidays).
- To allow all day travel disabled person's pass holders below retirement age for a trial period of 12 months in order to assess demand and cost implications
- To conduct a feasibility study on the introduction of a pass allowing travel for carers/companions of disabled people. Council Redford noted that this had garnered support of 74% of respondents to the consultation and the comments of the public speaker were also a reflection of this need.

Councillor Seccombe recollected the engagement that had taken place between the LGA and service users to inform and shape the national policy and noted the importance of companion passengers to facilitate this. She welcomed the direction of travel set out in the report and expressed the view that it was important to conduct a further assessment of the potential demand and costs involved in extending the scheme further.

Councillor John Holland, who shared the travel experience of a disabled resident in his division, supported a commitment to implementing a carers/companion pass immediately.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse echoed these comments and considered that since there were already figures evidenced in the report, the focus of the feasibility study would be financial. In response, Councillor Seccombe explained that the figures were needed before a decision was made and it was her view that this would be available in a relatively short space of time. She explained that the decision to extend the scheme should be evidence based.

Councillor Peter Butlin welcomed the report and the request from the Department of Transport to align financial support to usage. However, he noted that public transport services had been slow to recover from the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Councillor Andy Crump, expressed the view that it was important to take time to consider what an appropriate scheme would look like rather than rush into a scheme that may not meet service users' needs.

Councillor Seccombe reasserted the view that considering the feasibility of a passenger transport companion scheme would be a short exercise that could be completed over the summer. Monica Fogarty, Chief Executive, clarified that although the full feasibility study was due to conclude in August and then be reported to Cabinet, it would be possible to bring forward the element relating to companion passes to an earlier date.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the continuation of the Warwickshire County Concessionary Travel Scheme attached to the report at Appendix 1 for a further period of five years, from 1 April 2023 until March 2028, subject to the modifications referred to in resolution 2 below;
2. Approves the introduction of all day travel for holders of disabled person's passes below state retirement age, for a trial period of 12 months to commence as soon as possible after 1 April 2023; and
3. Supports further exploration of a stand-alone discretionary scheme for other groups of individuals and undertaking a feasibility study into introducing companion passes as set out in section 5 of the report with proposals to be reported back to Cabinet.

10. Tender to Establish a Replacement Taxi Services Dynamic Purchasing System

Cllr Wallace Redford (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) introduced this report, explaining that all bus and taxi transport organised by Transport Delivery was procured via two separate Dynamic Purchasing Systems (DPS), a Bus DPS and a Taxi DPS. Compliant with procurement legislation, a DPS was an electronic open marketplace system that suppliers could join at any time, and was designed to provide access to a pool of pre-qualified suppliers quickly and efficiently as the need arose. Cabinet had approved a replacement bus services DPS on 15 December 2022, and this report sought approval for the early replacement of the taxi DPS to address provisions for dealing with annual contract inflationary increases and ensure that allocated funding was more efficiently utilised.

There were no questions or comments on the report.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

- 1. Authorises the Strategic Director for Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning, to commence an appropriate procurement exercise to establish a replacement Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for taxi transport contracts; and
- 2. Authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to enter into all necessary contracts and agreements to establish the DPS for the provision of taxi transport on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources, with subsequent call-off contracts for specific routes awarded under the DPS in line with Contract Standing Orders.

11. Reports Containing Exempt or Confidential Information

Resolved:

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items mentioned below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972.

12. Exempt Minutes of the 16 March 2023 Meeting of Cabinet

The exempt minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 16 March 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

The meeting rose at 2.56pm

.....
Chair