

County Council

Tuesday 7 February 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Dave Humphreys (Chair), Councillor Christopher Kettle (Vice-Chair), Councillor Jo Barker, Councillor Richard Baxter-Payne, Councillor Brett Beetham, Councillor Margaret Bell, Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi, Councillor Sarah Boad, Councillor Barbara Brown, Councillor Peter Butlin, Councillor Jonathan Chilvers, Councillor Jeff Clarke, Councillor John Cooke, Councillor Andy Crump, Councillor Yousef Dahmash, Councillor Piers Daniell, Councillor Tracey Drew, Councillor Judy Falp, Councillor Jenny Fradgley, Councillor Sarah Feeney, Councillor Bill Gifford, Councillor Peter Gilbert, Councillor Brian Hammersley, Councillor John Holland, Councillor Marian Humphreys, Councillor Andy Jenns, Councillor Kam Kaur, Councillor Jack Kennaugh, Councillor Justin Kerridge, Councillor Sue Markham, Councillor Jan Matecki, Councillor Jeff Morgan, Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher, Councillor Daren Pemberton, Councillor Caroline Phillips, Councillor Wallace Redford, Councillor Kate Rolfe, Councillor Jerry Roodhouse, Councillor Isobel Seccombe OBE, Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince, Councillor Tim Sinclair, Councillor Richard Spencer, Councillor Heather Timms, Councillor Mandy Tromans, Councillor Martin Watson, Councillor Adrian Warwick and Councillor Andrew Wright

1. General

(1) Apologies for Absence

Councillors Jackie D'Arcy, Clare Golby, Sarah Millar, Chris Mills, Penny-Anne O'Donnell, Will Roberts, Ian Shenton, Mejar Singh, and Rob Tromans

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

None.

(3) Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 13 December 2022 were agreed as an accurate record for signing by the Chair.

(4) Chair's announcements

The Chairman highlighted some of the engagements that he had attended since the last meeting, included graduation ceremonies for students of law and medicine at Warwick University.

A one minute's silence was held in tribute to the victims of earthquakes in southern Turkey and northern Syria on Monday, 6 February 2023.

2. External Auditors' Annual Audit Report 2021/22

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader of the Council) moved the motion and introduced this report, noting the improvement since the previous year's report. Councillor Christopher Kettle seconded the motion.

Mr Avtar Sohal and Mr Jim McLarnon were in attendance as representatives of Grant Thornton to present their report. Mr Sohal drew attention to the executive summary in the report, and noted that overall it was a good report with no significant weaknesses to be highlighted.

There were no questions or comments on the report.

Vote

A vote was held. The recommendation was unanimously agreed.

Resolved:

That Council:

1. Notes the Annual Audit Report of the External Auditors, attached to the report at Appendix A; and
2. Requests that Cabinet consider and approve an action plan in response to the recommendations in the Annual Audit Report, for consideration and approval by Cabinet.

3. Warwickshire County Council Statement of Accounts 2021/22

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader of the Council) moved the recommendation and was seconded by Councillor Isobel Seccombe. Councillor Butlin observed that the report clearly demonstrated the Council's financial position and how it was intended to meet the Council's financial commitments. He noted that an unqualified audit opinion had been received.

Vote:

A vote was held. The recommendation was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council approves the Warwickshire County Council Statement of Accounts for 2021/22.

4. Warwickshire Pension Fund Statement of Accounts 2021/22

Councillor Andy Jenns moved the recommendation. In introducing the report Councillor Jenns emphasised that the fund was well-managed. Councillor Bill Gifford seconded the motion, in doing

so, he credited the Pension Team and Fund Advisors for the good health of the Fund, which was well managed with careful assessment of risks.

Vote:

A vote was held. The recommendation was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council approves the 2021/22 Pension Fund Statement of Accounts.

5. Annual Governance Statement 2021/22

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader of the Council) moved the motion and introduced this report, which presented the 2021/22 Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for consideration by the Council. The motion was seconded by Councillor Andy Jenns.

Vote:

A vote was held. The recommendation was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council approves the 2021/22 Annual Governance Statement.

6. 2023/24 Budget and 2023-28 Medium Term Financial Strategy

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property) introduced the item by thanking the finance team for their assistance and hard work in developing the budget. He then proceeded to set out the Conservative Group's budget proposals as contained in the appendix to the published report. In doing so he emphasised the following points:

- The proposed budget was based on the vision set out in the Council Plan and had been developed against the challenge of economic and political uncertainty and a turbulent policy environment. At the same time, demand for services was growing due to the aging population, more children and families needing support and communities under pressure from the cost of living and the impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic.
- The approach focussed on four key principles:
 - investing to support the most vulnerable in the community;
 - investing to support further economic growth across Warwickshire;
 - ensuring the services delivered by the Council provided value for money; and
 - using the Council's financial strength to ensure decisions made were sustainable over the medium-term.
- The proposals included:
 - Almost £25m invested to meet the growing numbers and cost of supporting elderly and vulnerable adults;

- Investment of over £5m in children’s social care services to meet the costs arising from the increasing numbers of children and families needing support, including investment of over £3m in additional staffing
- Almost £5m to support children and young people with disabilities and those with Special Educational Needs
- Whilst there were uncertainties around Government policy, the Council would not put business and Warwickshire on hold while clarity was awaited and the medium-term strategy focussed resources on social value and maintaining the growth trajectory of the Warwickshire economy. The proposals, therefore, included provision in the capital programme for £187m to support the delivery of the 2023 business plans of the Warwickshire Property and Development Group and the Warwickshire Recovery and Investment Fund, in addition to capital programme investment of over £140m to ensure Warwickshire had a thriving economy with the right jobs, training, skills and infrastructure.
- The proposals also included £300K to support apprenticeships and reskilling across the county and brought forward proposals for a Social Fabric Fund.
- The proposals committed resources to complete the £5m programme to implement the Digital Road Map, starting with a new customer platform approved by Cabinet in January 2023 and investing in digital technology and automation to both drive future cost reductions and improve the effectiveness of services.
- A further £800K investment was proposed in the Fire and Rescue Service which would further develop the joined-up approaches to fire prevention, protection and response as well as the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The Chief Fire Officer would be asked to develop viable proposals to further improve the value for money of the service.
- Investment in the SEND and Inclusion Change Plan would continue.
- Over £8m was proposed to be invested to meet the additional inflationary and demand costs in home to school transport together with £5m to match the expected overspend in high needs spending.
- Over £35m per year was proposed to be invested in maintaining Warwickshire’s infrastructure and to make sure services had the tools to do the job that were fit for purpose, with over half of this proposed funding being invested in Warwickshire’s roads.
- It was essential that reserves were used wisely and the reserve strategy included in the budget provided a clear framework to ensure these funds were effectively managed to meet the financial risks and uncertainties faced whilst enabling investment in the delivery of the Council Plan.
- Over the past nine years, the Council had delivered 90% of its planned budget reductions – almost £115m in total. The budget proposals included the delivery of a further £68m of budget reductions over five years, to be achieved through better procurement, improvements in efficiency, increased income and delivering reductions in demand.
- The proposals sought to use as little of the extra council tax flexibility provided by the Government as possible to balance the budget in 2023/24. This meant a 3.94% council tax increase for 2023/24 which was 1.06% below the maximum increase permitted by Government, a rise that was below inflation and equivalent to an increase of £1.20p per week for a Band D dwelling.

In summary, in commending the budget to Council, Councillor Peter Butlin considered that the budget strategy he had set out would address the short-term challenges faced whilst delivering medium-term financial sustainability to support the longer-term goals and ambitions of the Council.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

Amendments

Labour Group Amendment

Councillor Sarah Feeney highlighted the following points in the amendment:

- The challenging economic climate providing the backdrop to the budget setting.
- Recognition that the greater rise in Council Tax proposed by the amendment was a contentious point. However, she considered that the providing individuals with the right support came at a cost and with the amendments proposed there was no alternative than to seek an increase.
- Proposals to remove the community meals service could result in increased hospitalisation; the amendment therefore made provision for the investment of an additional £0.3m to ensure the service could be maintained as it was believed this would reduce cost pressures in social care moving forward.
- A focus on prioritising children and giving them the best start in life was supported by the proposed investment of £1.4m to support the first 1001 days of a child's life.
- In recognition of the difficulties families faced navigating the SEND system, it was proposed to undertake a project to co-produce options for providing a single point of referral for children needing SEND support and their carers.
- A one-off allocation was proposed to look at options for supplying short term care to older people so they were able to exit hospital or remain in their own homes. It was considered that this would ease the pressure on the NHS and avoid long term care.
- Proposals to increase the allocation to support the development and implementation of the Council's food strategy.
- Recognition of proposals to extend the children's homes programme to support children in care to remain in Warwickshire.
- The budget was balanced and had not failed to achieve the assurance of the S151 Officer.

Councillor John Holland seconded the amendment and reserved the right to speak.

Liberal Democrat Group Amendment

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse thanked Officers for their support in preparing the amendment and thanked the Cabinet for the work they had done throughout the year to implement the budget. He recognised the work that elected members did to achieve the best for communities in Warwickshire. He went on to highlight the following points put forward in the Liberal Democrat Group amendment:

- Despite economic challenges highlighted by fellow Members, thanks to the organisations that had been lobbying central government, there was a better than anticipated Local Government Finance Settlement.
- The amendment proposed the same Council Tax as the Conservative proposals.

- There were proposals to address forestry team pressures and the mainstreaming of funding going forward for outdoor education rather than a time limited allocation as this presented exciting opportunities which required sustainability.
- The main difference in the proposal was a focus on tackling generational issues, particularly around housing support for older people where it was proposed to make a reduced saving due to the growth of the older population. Reductions in the Better Care Fund would affect dementia care, etc, leading to increased pressure on the system at a time when demand would be increasing. It was essential that people were kept safe in their homes utilising appropriate technology.

Councillor Sarah Boad seconded the amendment and reserved the right to speak.

Green Group Amendment

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers also thanked officers for their support to develop the budget proposals and he welcomed comments in previous speeches regarding the importance of the first 1001 days of life and the demographic pressures in the county. He also highlighted the following points from the amendment:

- The amendment focussed on the twin challenges of investing in skills and reducing energy bills.
- In terms of skills, he considered that the additional funding in the Conservative budget for apprenticeships was welcomed but not enough. There were many new technologies being developed but the skills to use them was not being taught to enough people. He considered that there was a need for industry leads to teach their skills in order to support this aim and the amendment proposed procuring industry expertise as set out in the amendment to work in a wide range of educational settings.
- It was the ideal time to invest in energy conservation and generation which could save significant monies per year. The amendment proposed the investment of £0.3m to support the development of a gainshare energy conservation and generation programme for schools and community buildings.
- In conclusion, the amendment focussed on preparing for the future and long term investments, maximising on opportunities to work with partners to deliver new skills and high quality jobs in order to have a positive impact on the pressures being faced.

Councillor Tracey Drew seconded the amendment and reserved the right to speak.

Debate

Members of Council made the following points:

Councillor Jeff Morgan – Portfolio Holder for Children and Families:

- In response to the Labour Group's proposed amendments, he noted that the Conservative group had already prioritised areas of deprivation through the location of children's centres and the children's team had a focus on the first 1001 days. From the figures provided, it appeared that there was no allocation for an increase in foster care allowances which Councillor Morgan cautioned against due to the challenges of attracting people into the role.

- Over the last three years the Children & Families Service had undertaken a significant change in culture and practice and the Conservative budget would preserve and sustain the changes.
- He expressed pride in the good rating from Ofsted under the ILACS framework and noted the work taking place to become outstanding which would be supported by the Conservative budget proposals.
- The outcomes of the change programme had been impressive and there were two areas in particular which the proposed budget would support:
 - Improvement and expansion of early help support across communities including the recruitment of head teacher coaches to work with partners to review and strengthen processes and the creation of an Early Help and Support Hub in the Front Door (MASH) to triage cases presenting and action rapidly. Recruitment of Early Help Social Workers to support step up / down and to consult on and give direction on family situations that were at risk of escalation. Additionally, there were also Social Workers based in schools, funded by schools to provide advice and support where necessary. The numbers of children open to Early Help had risen by 52% over the last three years
 - Unfortunately, some children did need to be protected and cared for by the Council but the new ways of working had reduced the need for children to enter care by 7% in the last year, contrary to national trends where figures were rising. There were also national challenges regarding attracting individuals to the role of foster carer. The Conservative budget proposals supported an ambitious programme to develop children's homes and ensure children who needed to be cared for in a children's home were kept in the county.
- In conclusion, Councillor Morgan was proud of the Service and sought support for the Conservative budget to ensure that the work currently being undertaken could be continued and extended through the investment of £5.4m in Children and Families in 2023/24.

Councillor Justin Kerridge:

Councillor Kerridge expressed pride in the Council's achievements for children and young people and reflected on his recent visit to the House Project in Nuneaton which provided valuable support for young people from a care environment. He had been impressed with the facility which gave young people a chance to grasp the opportunities open to them. He sought protection for the service in the budget proposals.

Councillor Marian Humphreys:

Councillor Humphreys welcomed a focus on fathers through the change programme who had not historically been at the centre of children's services practices. She welcomed the implementation of the Caring Dads programme alongside the domestic abuse service which sought to work with fathers to change controlling, abusive and neglectful behaviours and improve their relationship with their children. She noted the impact that the programme had had to date in reducing the risk of harm and the level of intervention required from children's social care, improving the lives of children. She welcomed the continuation of the service.

Councillor Brett Beetham:

Councillor Beetham stated that he represented one of the most deprived areas in the county and he therefore welcomed the Conservative proposals which would see council tax kept as low as possible together with an investment in children through an increase in SEND assessment capacity. He was not supportive of the Labour amendment which would increase council tax and

the financial pressure on the residents in his division, and make cuts to foster care which would impact children. Similarly, he did not support the Green Group proposals to use higher levels of reserves, and proposals to reduce grass cutting and gritting.

Councillor Kam Kaur – Portfolio Holder for Education:

- Councillor Kaur noted that there was increasing demand for school places. The Council had worked hard with school settings to ensure children could attend the schools of parents' preferred choice. Additional school places had been created and the Education Sufficiency team had provided assurance that numbers met Department of Education requirements. The building of Oakley Grove School was on track and a new secondary school would be delivered at Top Farm.
- There was also cross-discipline working with investment in SEND showing results and performance with regard to NEETS being higher than the national average and those of statistical neighbours.
- There was a commitment to deliver the outdoor education strategy and 32% of education settings had engaged with the Council since the launch of the strategy.

Councillor Barbara Brown:

Councillor Brown extended congratulations for the exceptional work that had been done with regard to SEND in the county. Reflecting on her own personal experiences, she noted the need for investment in a single point of access to support parents navigate the SEND system and she supported a larger investment to meet the council's obligations in this service area.

Councillor Andy Jenns – Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation:

- Councillor Jenns highlighted some of the achievements that had taken place in his service area over the year to date, including the validation of the transformation programme through the LGA Peer Challenge which reflected on well managed change and the positive impact of the Council's transformation programme, a series of award wins for services in his portfolio including Chief Executive and Strategic Director of the Year in the MJ Awards 2022, Legal Team of the Year and Legal Project/Individual of the Year at the Lawyers in Local Government Awards 2022, West Midlands Regional Champions Award in the FSB Local Government Awards, and Excellence in Service Delivery: The Unsung Heroes Award at the PPMA Excellence in People Management Awards 2022. He also noted that the Library service had achieved National Portfolio Organisation status and customer service satisfaction levels remained high despite increasing demand.
- He also noted permanent allocations in the budget which benefited services in his portfolio including allocations for a data and analytics platform, ICT support costs, YourHR licence, additional costs of business support for SEND and Adult Social Care and an extension of the Local Government Association's National Graduate Development Programme
- There were also one-off allocations to cover growth in demand for recruitment support, increasing demand for business support to respond to demand pressures from Adults and Children's Social Care and Education, and to support change projects
- Councillor Jenns also highlighted savings in the budget including savings from reduced printing and stationery, increased use of drop-off boxes in library services, increased registration income, customer experience redesign and savings, efficiencies and service redesign in ICT, device refresh, migration and rationalisation of ICT applications, greater use of apprenticeships, and increased external income from Legal Services.
- Overall, Councillor Jenns considered that the Conservative budget proposals supported positive outcomes for the Council.

Councillor Margaret Bell – Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health:

- Councillor Bell noted that over the last year Social Care & Support (Adult Social Care) had continued to support the county's most vulnerable residents and enabled them to live as independently as possible, using the Start with Strengths based approach. To this end they had supported in the region of 11,000 people over the last 12 months with the majority (76%) supported in their own homes.
- Additionally, support had been provided for around 4,500 supported discharges from hospital by working in collaboration with the Care & Support market, the voluntary and charitable sector and local NHS.
- The Fair Cost of Care exercise required by the Department of Health and Social Care had been completed through active engagement with the local care market.
- There had been a proactive and collaborative approach to the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund announcement and associated requirements.
- In recognition of the success in this area, Warwickshire had been announced as a frontrunner for intermediate care by NHS England and as one of 6 national pilots, work was taking place with local partners to enhance the pathway 1 discharge to assess therapeutic offer.
- Councillor Bell noted that the government had increased the amount of the allowable levy for adult social care. Whilst she recognised that taking the maximum would be a burden in light of the increasing cost of living, it was important to provide the necessary funding in this arena. The Conservative budget proposals recognised the additional demand and rising cost of placements and supported recommissioning services for younger working age adults.
- Focussing on the transformation of adult social care pathways would reduce demand together with partnership working, the use of digital technology and automation and additional investment in extra care housing.
- In conclusion she was supportive of the Conservative budget which gave her confidence it would provide an effective and efficient service to residents.

Councillor Pete Gilbert:

- Councillor Gilbert considered that Conservative budget offered resilience to overcome the challenges being faced by the Council.
- He welcomed the financial investment toward the Warwickshire Academy in his division.
- Whilst he did not like raising council tax he considered it was important for Councillors to engage with residents and spend their money efficiently and wisely through proper policy for the challenges that were being faced now and in the future.

Councillor Wallace Redford – Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning:

- Councillor Redford welcomed the Conservative proposals to continue investment in the highways network with investment in school transport (including SEND where investment had been increased), cycling, buses and street lighting.
- He considered that the Conservative budget proposals recognised the challenges being faced and placed Warwickshire as a Council caring for its residents.

Councillor Adrian Warwick:

- Councillor Warwick noted that the majority of the budget was set in stone.

- He considered that tax increases were required but that it was important to recognise the impact of the cost of living crisis, with the financial impact of the war in Ukraine being at the forefront.

Councillor Caroline Phillips:

- Councillor Phillips expressed concern regarding funding for housing related support and community meals and the rise of foodbanks.
- She noted that austerity had had a negative impact on communities.
- She considered that the areas where the Council excelled, benefited at the expense of other areas which needed support and she considered that the Labour Group amendment sought to redress this balance.

Councillor Heather Timms – Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate & Culture:

- Councillor Timms celebrated the achievements of her portfolio of services and welcomed the careful management of reserves in the Conservative budget.
- In terms of the cost of living, she highlighted that the Council had continued to support the most vulnerable residents in the county and, following a Cost of Living Summit, numerous actions were taken to ensure support was immediately available for vulnerable communities to manage the cost of living challenges
- Councillor Timms welcomed the continuation of the Councillor Grant Fund.

Councillor Jack Kennaugh:

- Councillor Kennaugh considered that the Labour Group amendment was too tax heavy in a cost of living crisis.
- He was disappointed by Liberal Democrat and Labour Group proposals to reduce investment in apprenticeships.
- He considered the Green Group proposals were overly focussed on walking and cycling.
- However, he believed that the Conservative budget proposal provided much needed support on a broad range of services without risking financial security.

Councillor Martin Watson – Portfolio Holder for Economy:

- Councillor Watson noted that the current economy was tough on businesses but Warwickshire remained resilient with unemployment low (2.8% of the working age population, compared to 3.8% nationally) and with growth and investment being observed in key priority sectors, securing inward investment in the automotive, advanced manufacturing, digital creative and gaming businesses over the past year.
- The work of the Economy & Skills Team continued at pace, and the strong role played in supporting businesses across Warwickshire was recognised with award wins in two of four “best in region awards” at the FSB West Midlands Local Government Awards.
- Councillor Watson highlighted some notable successes/milestones from the work of the Economy & Skills Team over the previous 12 months including the 559 businesses supported to start and grow, secured £2.5 million from the Government's Multiply Fund and support for the District & Borough Councils with their £16 million investment plans for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, over £300,000 of funding from WCC Apprenticeship Levy had been shared with small businesses, over 600 businesses had been provided with dedicated skills support, helping them recruit, retain and upskill their workforce, a network of five Community Skills Hubs across the county had been created in partnership with the Library service, the "Warwickshire Supported Employment Service" had been launched to support

people with Learning Disabilities and Autism into employment, and a Green Recovery Grant programme had been launched to support businesses to reduce their energy costs

- Looking ahead to 2023/24, some key issues and opportunities would be facilitated by the Conservative budget proposals including, continuing to help businesses access the labour and skills they needed to grow and develop which would be facilitated by a £0.3m investment in apprenticeships, saving on inward investment and business centres to make them more efficient and effective, and ongoing delivery and expansion of the Warwickshire Recovery and Investment Fund including the launch of the PIF Property and Infrastructure Fund.

Councillor Andy Crump – Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety

- Councillor Crump noted the success of Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service in terms of collaboration and its response to major incidents, which had been recognised by HMICFRS.
- He took time to reflect on the impact of the heatwave in Summer 2022 and the response of firefighters to protect the community.
- Councillor Crump welcomed time limited allocations in the Conservative budget proposals for HMICFRS improvement activity and for third party training due to the BA Minerva unit currently not being in place.
- He noted that during the year 2023/24 the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service capital programme was circa £3.7m which would be used to replace vehicles, for equipment on fire engines and for training facilities.
- He also welcomed support in the budget for domestic abuse, the Safer Streets Project, 'Prevent', animal welfare and counterfeit goods, flooding and work with county highways
- In conclusion, he considered that the Conservative Group budget proposals were based on wise and effective expenditure to ensure that sufficient funding would be available to respond to emergencies.

Councillor Christopher Kettle:

Councillor Kettle offered thanks to the Deputy Leader and Officers for the budget proposals, noting the levels of investment and efficiency savings. He was impressed by efficiency in Council Services despite the savings that had already been made. Councillor Kettle welcomed a judicious use of reserves in the budget proposals which limited the financial impact on Warwickshire residents.

Councillor John Holland (Seconder of the Labour Group Amendment):

- Noted the role of all parties in the delivery of services and engagement in Committees, working groups and Council debates.
- He noted that more tax was being paid than ever before but that taxation at a local level was the smallest slice.
- He reflected on recent CCN meetings and interviews he had observed which suggested there would be a change of political colour at the next general election and the importance of being able to work together collaboratively despite the political divide.

Councillor Sarah Boad (Seconder of the Liberal Democrat Amendment):

- Noted the national political landscape which had impacted the economy.
- She expressed the view that council tax was an outmoded taxation device.
- Support was required for the most vulnerable in society and she noted how services like the community pantry were over-subscribed.

- She considered that the community meals service would be successful if it was promoted to those who needed it and she lamented its potential loss as it also provided an opportunity for a welfare check.
- She noted that plans for investment in apprenticeships in the Conservative budget had not been formulated and this was why it had been removed from the Liberal Democrat amendment.
- She noted the headway being made by the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service against the demands of HMICFRS Inspections and the partnership working that was taking place led by the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Crump and welcomed investment in diversity and inclusion in the service.

Councillor Tracey Drew (Seconder of the Green Amendment):

In seconding the Green Group amendment, Councillor Tracey Drew brought attention to proposals for enhancing active travel and support for the Council's active cycling and walking group. She noted that only a small percentage of the planned cycle routes were active.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Seconder of Motion) thanked the chamber for the contributions that had been shared.

- In supporting the Conservative budget, Councillor Seccombe applauded the achievements of the last year that had been shared by colleagues. She noted that the Council had an excellent workforce and the Conservative budget proposals delivered on providing a sense of direction for them.
- She acknowledged that it was a difficult time to raise council tax. However, the budget focussed on the people who required support, looking after children and social care services, whilst also investing in the skills agenda, and ensuring a resilient Council.
- She concluded that successive Conservative budgets were delivering a business society to be proud of, building skills and the economy for the future, whilst supporting those who relied on council services.

Councillor Sarah Feeney (Mover of Labour Group Amendment) replied that:

- The Labour Group amendment proposed a substantial increase to council tax and, whilst the Group did not want to raise taxes, it had made this decision in order to deliver the services it had prioritised as being the right course of action to support vulnerable people.
- She commented on the levels of Local Government funding and noted comments made in the Chamber regarding the economy and recent fiscal events.
- She particularly noted that savings made in the Conservative budget proposals related to housing for the elderly, hot meals, children with disabilities and drug services.
- She reiterated that the amended budget was balanced and had not failed to achieve the assurance of the S151 Officer.
- She welcomed recognition for the work that officers had undertaken and thanked them for all their hard work.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Mover of Liberal Democrat Group Amendment) replied that:

- Consistent funding should be embedded in the budget for the organisation of outdoor education.
- The substantive budget did not provide a strategy for delivery on apprenticeships and skills and so the Liberal Democrat amendment tackled this issue from the perspective of NEETS.

- The main choice the Liberal Democrat Group had taken in formulating the amendment was reducing funding from the integrated better care fund and tackling adult social care pressures.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers (Mover of the Green Group Amendment) replied that:

- There was only small differences in spending of the reserves between the substantive motion and the amendment. The amendment suggested partial changes to gully cleaning.
- All the amended budgets balanced over the period of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and had not failed to achieve the assurance of the S151 Officer.
- The role of the Trading Standards service and the skills and productivity agenda were highlighted as important.

Councillor Peter Butlin (Mover of the Conservative Group Motion):

- Despite the shortcomings of central government which had been highlighted in the debate, the Conservative Group had been flexible enough to present a balanced budget despite the challenges of the last 12 months.
- He extolled the virtues of the apprenticeship scheme and explained the ambition to spread the Council's ethos of apprenticeships across the business sector in Warwickshire.
- He commented on the need for flexibility around the renewable energy sector and the green energy market.
- A member working group would be set up following the meeting to consider the demand for home to school transport demand.

Votes

Vote on Labour Group Amendment

A vote was held on the Labour Group amendment. The results were 4 for, 41 against and 1 abstention.

The amendment was defeated.

Vote on Liberal Democrat Group Amendment

A vote was held on the Liberal Democrat Group amendment. The results were 5 for, 36 against and 5 abstentions

The amendment was defeated.

Vote on Green Group Amendment

A vote was held on the Green Group amendment. The results were 3 for, and 34 against and 9 abstentions.

The amendment was defeated.

Vote on the Conservative Budget

The Conservative budget became the substantive motion. A recorded vote was held. The results were:

Votes For (34)

Councillor Jo Barker, Councillor Richard Baxter-Payne, Councillor Brett Beetham, Councillor Margaret Bell, Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi, Councillor Peter Butlin, Councillor Jeff Clarke, Councillor John Cooke, Councillor Andy Crump, Councillor Yousef Dahmash, Councillor Piers Daniell, Councillor Peter Gilbert, Councillor Brian Hammersley, Councillor Dave Humphreys, Councillor Marian Humphreys, Councillor Andy Jenns, Councillor Kam Kaur, Councillor Jack Kennaugh, Councillor Justin Kerridge, Councillor Christopher Kettle, Councillor Sue Markham, Councillor Jan Matecki, Councillor Jeff Morgan, Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher, Councillor Daren Pemberton, Councillor Wallace Redford, Councillor Isobel Seccombe, Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince, Councillor Tim Sinclair, Councillor Heather Timms, Councillor Mandy Tromans, Councillor Adrian Warwick, Councillor Martin Watson, and Councillor Andrew Wright

Votes Against (11)

Councillor Sarah Boad, Councillor Barbara Brown, Councillor Jonathan Chilvers, Councillor Tracey Drew, Councillor Sarah Feeney, Councillor Jenny Fradgley, Councillor Bill Gifford, Councillor John Holland, Councillor Caroline Phillips, Councillor Kate Rolfe, and Councillor Jerry Roodhouse

Abstentions (1)

Councillor Judy Falp

Councillor Richard Spencer was absent from the room during the vote.

Decision:

Resolved:

That Council agrees the 2023/24 Budget and authorises work to continue on ensuring the 2023-28 Medium Term Financial Strategy is aligned with and supports the delivery of the Council's ambitions as set out in the Council Plan.

7. Treasury Management and Investment Strategy Statements

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader of the Council) introduced and moved this report, He noted that this was an annual report which had greater significance due to the implications of the Warwickshire Property and Development Group (WPDG) and the Warwickshire Rescue and Investment Fund (WRIF). A key aspect covered in the strategy was the intention to pre-pay the Council's next 3 years' pension fund contributions in April 2023, yielding a one-off gross benefit of £6.2m, through the pension fund being able to invest the pre-payment earlier to achieve a return equivalent to the discount provided. Councillor Martin Watson seconded the motion. There were no questions or comments on the report.

Vote

A vote was held. The motion was agreed unanimously

Resolved:

That:

1. The Treasury Management Strategy for 2023/24 (Appendix 2 to the report) be approved with effect from 1st April 2023.
2. The Investment Strategy for 2023/24 (Appendix 3 to the report) be approved with effect from 1st April 2023.
3. The County Council requires the Strategic Director for Resources to ensure that gross borrowing does not exceed the prudential level specified (Appendix 2 to the report, Section 3.22, Table 12 “Authorised Borrowing Limit”).
4. The revised lending limits for the Warwickshire Property Development Group come into immediate effect (Appendix 3 to the report, Annex 7).
5. The revised lending limits for the WRIF come into immediate effect (Appendix 3 to the report, Annex 7).
6. The County Council requires the Strategic Director for Resources to ensure that gross investment in non-Treasury investments does not exceed the prudential levels specified (Appendix 3 to the report, Annex 7).
7. The Council Council delegates authority to the Strategic Director for Resources to undertake delegated responsibilities in respect of both strategies (Appendix 2 to the report, Annex 7, and Appendix 3 to the report, Section 2.5).
8. The County Council requires the Strategic Director for Resources to implement the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy (Appendix 2 to the report, Section 2.11).
9. The County Council requires the Strategic Director for Resources to enact an early payment of pension fund contributions subject to the conditions set out in Appendix 1 to the report, Section 5.14 being met.

8. Any Other items of Urgent Business

Application for Dispensation

Councillor John Holland moved the recommendation that a dispensation be granted for Councillor Jackie D’Arcy which was seconded by Councillor Sarah Feeney. There was no debate but Council joined to wish Councillor D’Arcy well.

Resolved:

That the Council approves the absence of Councillor Jackie D’Arcy from meetings of the authority on the grounds of ill health.

The meeting rose at 1.47pm

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Chair