

Cabinet

Thursday 10 December 2020

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Chair)
Councillor Peter Butlin
Councillor Les Caborn
Councillor Jeff Clarke
Councillor Andy Crump
Councillor Colin Hayfield
Councillor Kam Kaur
Councillor Jeff Morgan
Councillor Heather Timms

Others Present

Councillors Helen Adkins, Judy Falp, John Holland, Keith Kondakor, Dave Parsons and Jerry Roodhouse

1. General

(1) Apologies

An apology was received from Councillor Clare Golby who had planned to attend the meeting to assist in presenting agenda item 8.

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

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2020 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

(4) Public Speaking

There were no public speakers at the meeting.

2. 2021/22 Budget and 2021-26 Medium Term Financial Strategy - Background Information and Proposals from Corporate Board

Councillor Peter Butlin introduced this item explaining that the report is the annual statement of Corporate Board that will inform and support the budget setting in February of 2021. The report was written prior to the announcement of the 2020 Spending Review. As a result, the report contained gaps in information. Cabinet was informed that the Covid-19 Pandemic had forced a review of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. In addition, Cabinet was requested to note that the result of the local government settlement is waited. Councillor Butlin cautioned that in the light of current pressures there may be a need to choose between increases in taxation or the imposition of more savings on services.

The report was welcomed by Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) who thanked officers for their hard work on the report.

Councillor Keith Kondakor referred to challenges presented by the EU Transition. He asked whether calculations had taken account of a possible fall in the value of the pound as a result of leaving the EU. In response, Councillor Kondakor was informed that the calculations and conclusions had taken account of many factors of which the EU Transition was one.

Councillor Dave Parsons (Deputy Leader of the Labour Group) expressed reservations over increases to Council Taxes adding that these should be limited in the future. In response to Councillor Parsons, Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet) observed that the precept to supplement funding for social care is a tax that was introduced to fill a gap. She added that Council Tax raised in Warwickshire should be spent in the County and that the government should work to establish the long term future of social care and how it will be funded.

Resolved:

That Cabinet agrees to:

- (1) Develop their draft 2021/22 Budget and 2021-26 Medium Term Financial Strategy proposals, taking into account the information presented in this report and the views of Corporate Board on that information;
- (2) Authorise Corporate Board to begin any preparatory work necessary to deliver the budget proposals, prior to the final decision on the budget on 8 February 2021; and
- (3) Ask Corporate Board to continue work to identify further invest-to-save opportunities that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Authority, minimise the service reductions needed and release some of the reserves being used to balance the Medium Term Financial Strategy to deliver the ambitions of the Council Plan.

3. Warwickshire County Council and Homes England Land Development Scheme(s) Pilot Working Arrangement

In introducing this item Councillor Peter Butlin explained the importance of the proposed property company to the Covid-19 Recovery Strategy. The role of Homes England in assisting with this pilot was emphasised.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe thanked officers for their hard work on the project. The experience they had brought to it was invaluable. Councillor Seccombe added that the property company will help to ensure that the right homes are built in the right locations.

Councillor Keith Kondakor commended the references to sustainability in the report adding that new developments should be based on the concept of the “walkable neighbourhood” with schools, GP surgeries and shops within easy walking distance. In addition, such facilities should be available early on in the life of the development. Nuneaton was cited where major housing development is being undertaken but services have yet to be provided.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse welcomed the report observing that it is unusual for Homes England to work with a local authority in this way. He noted the proposal for the development of solar farms on small holdings and emphasised the need for robust project management to reduce the risks.

Councillor Jeff Clarke (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) welcomed the project and the opportunities it will present to the Transforming Nuneaton initiative. Members’ attention was drawn to paragraph 3.5 and the stated aims of Homes England in working with the Council.

Councillor Kam Kaur (Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation) emphasised the need for strong governance to reduce risks. Each scheme will be assessed on its merits. Cost/benefit should not be established solely in financial terms but also in social terms.

Councillor Helen Adkins (Leader of the Labour Group) stressed the need to develop amenities and services as well as housing and called for every effort to be made to avoid the development of sub-standard housing.

Councillor Dave Parsons reminded Cabinet that mainstream developers have a responsibility to provide affordable and social housing. The County Council initiative should not be regarded by them as a means of avoiding those responsibilities. To this Councillor Izzi Seccombe agreed but she did remind members that affordable housing allocations are the responsibility of the district and borough councils.

Councillor John Holland observed that as well as building developments on the edge of towns people should be encouraged to move back into town centres.

In closing Councillor Peter Butlin noted that when, in the past, the Council had disposed of property for development it had relinquished control over it. The property

company will allow the Council to retain some control to ensure the right development is undertaken. He agreed that good governance will be essential and that people should be encouraged to live in and use town centres more.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

- 1) Approves Warwickshire County Council entering into a pilot arrangement on the basis set out in this paper ahead of a potential future collaboration agreement with Homes England.
- 2) Authorises the Strategic Director for Resources to enter into the pilot arrangement on terms and conditions considered acceptable to him.

4. Education (Schools) Capital Programme 2020/21

Councillor Colin Hayfield (Portfolio Holder for Education and Learning) explained that the report before Cabinet was one of a regular series of such reports. The principal points of focus of this report were Stratford High School and Etone College in Nuneaton. It was acknowledged that more school places will be required at Etone College and confirmed that plans are being developed for a new school at Top Farm, Nuneaton.

Councillor Jeff Clarke, whose division Etone College falls within, asked that before any new development is undertaken residents be consulted.

Councillor Keith Kondakor agreed that consultation in relation to development at Etone College should be undertaken with residents. Councillor Kondakor expressed the need for air quality monitoring around Nuneaton. In addition he expressed concern over the wave funding approach adopted by government. This, he stated, leads to uncertainty and increases the chances of school capacity being provided which will become redundant as new schools come on line. Three classrooms are required at Etone College but only one is to be built under current proposals. As new provision is made to the north of the town so traffic will increase as pupils are transported past Etone to the new school.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers welcomed that the report included a section on environmental implications. He was, however, concerned that environmentally friendly installations such as eco-heating would only be used if considered to be economically viable. Gas central heating, he added, will be banned in a few years so there seemed little point in installing it now. Councillor Izzi Seccombe agreed that there is a need for robust environmental assessments in drafting reports.

In closing Councillor Colin Hayfield agreed that consultation with residents would be undertaken in connection with developments at Etone College. Regarding environmental considerations Councillor Hayfield agreed that these should be given due consideration. The longer term aspiration is for Warwickshire to be a beacon for eco-schools. Regarding school sufficiency he assured Cabinet that there is a good

understanding of current and future demand for school places in the County. An offer was made to provide further briefings for members on how school sufficiency is maintained.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Recommends that Council approves the addition of £16.594 million to the capital programme to deliver the schemes outlined in Section 3.

2. Authorises, subject to Council agreeing to add the schemes to the capital programme, the Strategic Director for Communities to invite tenders and enter into the appropriate contracts on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources, or (where the scheme is school-led) to make the necessary funding arrangements for these schemes.

5. Annual Infrastructure Statement 2019/20

Councillor Peter Butlin explained that the County Council is obliged to provide the information set out in the report on an annual basis. Efforts had been made to make the information clearer.

Councillor Keith Kondakor agreed with the principle of providing the information on what services are provided. He did, however, consider that the information did not provide a fully comprehensive picture. As an example, he cited bus services in Weddington, Nuneaton. These are good, he said, but in one location there is a bus stop on only one side of the road.

Referencing page 7 of appendix 2, Councillor Kondakor noted that at Callendar Farm in Nuneaton funding had been made available but there had been a delay in providing the proposed school. There is, he suggested, a need to have timescales associated with schemes. In response to the comment regarding Callendar Farm, Cabinet was informed that schools cannot readily be built until there are sufficient children in the area to fill them.

Councillor Dave Parsons welcomed efforts to make S106 funding and CIL easier to understand. It is important that residents can see where the money is coming from and going to.

Councillor Peter Butlin concluded by stating that the transparency that the report provides assists officers in achieving results.

That Cabinet:

1) Approves the Annual Infrastructure Statement and supports its publication on the WCC website prior to 31st December 2020, as required by Regulation 121A of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations.

2) Endorses the approach laid out in this paper to the subsequent preparation and publication of further detail to support readers of the Annual Infrastructure Statement in future years.

6. Revenue Investment Funds 2020/21 November Report

Councillor Peter Butlin introduced the report by summarising the salient points.

Councillor Les Caborn (Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health) commended the Integrated Care Record Project and work on improving mental health and wellbeing. Of particular interest was that focusing on suicide and support. Councillor Peter Butlin observed that the incidence of suicide had increased during the Pandemic. More investment, he suggested, should be made in this area.

Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Heritage & Culture) commended the Solar Together Project adding that the future of energy generation lay in renewable resources.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

- 1) Supports the progress made on the Climate Change strategy with a new Solar Panel project approved by Corporate Board under the under the authorisation delegated to Chief Executive at a cost of £0.094m.
- 2) Approves the bids as detailed in section 2, amounting to £1.413m from the Sustaining Prevention Fund and £0.385m from the Commercial Fund.
- 3) Approves the bid as detailed in section 3.1 amounting to £0.250m from the Capital Investment Fund and agree to add this to the capital programme.
- 4) Notes the approval of Corporate Board for the remainder of the funding requested in bids detailed in Section 3 from the Covid-19 government grant funding.
- 5) Authorises the Strategic Directors to procure and enter any agreements to give effect to the above proposals on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources.

7. Review of Warwickshire County Council's Environmental Management System

Councillor Heather Timms explained that she had been very keen to bring this report forward. Warwickshire County Council is one of a handful of County Councils that employs a certified EMS to help manage its environmental performance. The information is used to ensure that the correct projects are being brought forward.

The report and work to which is relates were commended by Councillors. Councillor Jonathan Chilvers observed that the evaluation of key risks and challenges was

particularly strong. He added that efforts should be made to reduce the negative impact of major housing development in the county. In addition, the economy needs to be managed in such a way that CO2 emissions are reduced.

Councillor Keith Kondakor observed that an environmentally sound organisation can save money. The work set out in the report should extend to highways and transport and also the consideration of planning applications. In response Councillor Timms agreed to consider for future reports transport, green schools and construction projects.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

- 1) Endorse the continuation of WCC's certified environmental management system to ISO 14001:2015 following an appraisal of the work undertaken in the previous year.
- 2) Note the environmental risks and objectives noted in this report and confirm that they are suitable.

8. School Road Safety Education Task and Finish Review - Report of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Andy Crump (Portfolio Holder for Resources and Fire & Rescue) introduced the item explaining that the report was that of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Crump explained that Councillor Clare Golby (Chair of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee) had been due to present the report but had had to give her apologies. He read out a statement from Councillor Golby in which the report and its recommendations were commended. Councillor Crump proceeded to summarise the key findings of the Task and Finish Group as set out in the report.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe thanked the Task and Finish Group for its work and added that road safety for children is a theme frequently raised at parish council meetings.

Other members expressed their support for the report and recommendations adding that road safety is an issue that is frequently raised with them.

Councillor Helen Adkins observed that the Safer Routes to School initiative had ended and whilst most primary schools requiring attention had received it, some senior schools had yet to be addressed.

Councillor Kam Kaur reminded members that they each have a delegated budget which can be used on road safety schemes related to schools.

Councillor Andy Crump closed by informing the meeting that work is being undertaken with schools to provide secure cycle and scooter storage. In addition, on-

line school assemblies are empathising road safety messages. The key, Councillor Crump suggested, is to achieve long term behavioural change.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Support the internal and external bids for two School Travel Plan Officer roles for a two-year period, which will be separately assessed through the appropriate funding processes.

BUT

If either of the bids are not successful, make a decision whether this growth bid should be added to the MTFS pressures in the budget proposals to be recommended to Council in February 2021.

2. Encourages all County Councillors to actively assist the School Safety Team in their work with schools, including promoting the SAFER project and any school champion work.

3. Asks that the School Safety Team provides support to School Champions and County Councillors when needed.

9. West Midlands Rail Limited Governance Evolution

Councillor Jeff Clarke explained the need to revise the governance arrangements for West Midlands Rail Limited. The key elements of the report were summarised for Cabinet.

The meeting was informed that Councillor Peter Butlin is currently the Chair of West Midlands Rail Limited. This will cease in 2021.

Councillor Keith Kondakor observed that Nuneaton sees a number of cross-country trains which do not fall under the control of West Midlands Rail Limited. It will be important to ensure that service provision is coordinated. In addition there continue to be capacity issues at Birmingham New Street Station. This, it was suggested, needs urgent attention.

Councillor Peter Butlin submitted that the proposal before Cabinet will be good for Warwickshire. It will be good to have the Mayor as a non-voting Chair.

Resolved:

That Cabinet supports the proposed changes to the governance arrangements for West Midlands Rail Limited as set out in the report.

10. How We Work Programme - Agile Working Offer and Online Protocols

Councillor Kam Kaur explained that prior to the Pandemic the County Council had been examining the way in which its staff operate. The introduction of M365 and new devices had gone a long way to enabling a new approach. The first Pandemic lockdown had seen over 4500 staff move overnight to a new approach involving home working.

Cabinet was informed that a new agile working approach is to be introduced to staff. It is considered to be an exciting new development that has already seen a reduction in staff sickness.

Councillor Helen Adkins welcomed the introduction of flexible working but suggested that staff should be given the choice of whether they adopt it. The cost of working at home need to be taken account of with staff being paid for heating and lighting their own homes.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse noted that the report used the terms “flexible working” and “agile working” in the same way. He noted that they are two separate concepts and suggested they should be used in a way distinct from each other.

Councillor Keith Kondakor noted that despite home working appearing to be less stressful, people can “burn out” at home as easily as in an office environment. Some staff would benefit from enhancements to their broadband connection; an enhancement that might cost relatively little to the Council. Finally, Councillor Kondakor stressed the need for people to leave their houses for fresh air and a break during the working day.

Councillor Les Caborn considered that the proposals before Cabinet would provide a good work/life balance to staff. He did, however, acknowledge that it would not suit everybody.

Councillor Jeff Morgan (Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services) added that it is good for people to be together as it helps develop an esprit de corps.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Supports the adoption of the Agile Working Offer and Online Protocols as part of the How We Work programme as set out in Appendices 1 and 2.
2. Notes the overall progress of the How We Work Programme and the future work to complete the Programme as set out in Appendix 3.

11. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Agreed.

12. (Exempt) Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 November 2020

The exempt minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 12 November 2020 were agreed.

13.(Exempt) Estate Master Planning

The recommendations were agreed as set out in the published exempt report.

14.(Exempt) - Establishment of a WCC Ofsted Registered Children's Home

The recommendations were agreed as set out in the published exempt report.

The meeting rose at 15:50

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Chair