

Cabinet

Tuesday 7 December 2021

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

Others Present

Councillors Jo Barker, Judy Falp, John Holland and Jerry Roodhouse

1. General

(1) Apologies

No apologies for absence were given at the meeting.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

During the course of the meeting the following declarations were made.

1) With reference to agenda item 6, Annual Education Sufficiency Update 2021, Councillor Jerry Roodhouse declared a non-pecuniary interest as his daughter is employed at Peter's Place, Trinity School, Leamington Spa.

2) With reference to agenda item 12, All Age Carers Support, Councillor Jerry Roodhouse declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Director of Healthwatch Warwickshire.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 25 November 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

(4) Public Speaking

There were no public speakers at the meeting.

2. 2022/23 Budget and 2022-27 Medium Term Financial Strategy – Background Information and Options

Note – During the meeting Items 2 and 3 were transposed with item 3 being considered before item 2. However, these minutes adhere to the order of business as set out on the published agenda.

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader of the Council) introduced the published report which he described as “ground zero” ahead of the council meeting in February. It was emphasised that the options before members are those developed by Corporate Board. They do not represent a draft budget proposal. Councillor Peter Butlin suggested that some tough decisions will be required particularly around tax increases to cover social care costs. In addition, the entire £45m identified out of reserves will be required. On a positive note, the meeting was informed of additional funding that has been made available to the council during the Comprehensive Spending Review. A new element to be considered is inflation. Previously this has not been factored in. It is now, however, back in the system.

Referencing page 52 of the report Councillor Judy Falp expressed concern over any cuts to Housing Related Support. In addition, she asked that Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) and work on domestic violence continue to be supported.

Concerning Housing Related Support Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Leader of Council and Chair of Cabinet) told the meeting that Warwickshire County Council is the only upper tier local authority that continues to fund this. The service is primarily one for district and borough councils.

Councillor John Holland (Leader of the Labour Group) agreed that inflationary factors should be taken seriously. He counselled that SEND will continue to cost a great deal. Also, any increased income that the government realises from National Insurance is unlikely to be provided to local authorities to support adult social care.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse agreed that the proposals to use increases in National Insurance to pay for social care are unlikely to benefit the council. The spending settlement will be for one year making planning difficult. Three years would have been preferable. He looked forward to seeing the levelling up paper, but this appears to be some way off.

Councillor Margaret Bell (Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health) acknowledged that discussions are required with district and borough councils concerning Housing Related Support. She assured Cabinet that she is aware of the uncertainties facing adult social care.

Councillor Andy Crump (Portfolio Holder for Fire and Rescue and Community Safety) welcomed any additional funding to tackle flooding. He noted the comments concerning MARAC and committed to speak to Councillor Falp about her concerns.

Councillor Peter Butlin agreed that central government does not appear to be helping with additional funding. Additional funds from increases in National Insurance are being directed to the NHS. None are coming to local authorities.

Good decision making in the past now allows the Council to develop a series of options he concluded.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

- (1) Agrees to develop its draft 2022/23 Budget and 2022-27 Medium Term Financial Strategy proposals, taking into account the information and advice presented in the report; and
- (2) Authorises Corporate Board to begin any preparatory work necessary to deliver the budget proposals, prior to the final decision on the budget on 8 February 2022.

3. Developing Our Council Plan 2022

Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Leader of Council and Chair of Cabinet) explained to the meeting that a new administration should “set out its stall” through its corporate plan. The plan sets out the council’s priorities and allows budget setting and action planning to take place. In terms of overall priorities, the new plan is not very different from the one it is to replace. It continues to focus on economic well-being and the protection of the most vulnerable. However, it now refers to making life better for all and to addressing climate change.

Councillor Andy Jenns (Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation) described the process of consultation that had been followed. Response rates had been encouraging although more engagement from communities in the north and east of the county would have been welcome. Overall, the proposed strategic objectives had been well received.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) welcomed the draft plan and agreed that a greater engagement by people in Rugby would have been beneficial. He added that it can be difficult for some people to engage with consultation but eventually service changes are made that will impact on them. Councillor Roodhouse questioned how well the content of the plan will translate into strategies and actions. He also wondered how transparent service delivery is. It was suggested that Power BI has a role in monitoring the effectiveness of the plan. Members need to make the best use of this.

Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate and Culture) welcomed the Council Plan noting that 897 people have now signed up for the “Voice of Warwickshire” initiative. She asked that the plan contain a reaffirmation of the pledge to plant one tree for each resident of Warwickshire.

Councillor Kam Kaur (Portfolio Holder for Economy and Place) emphasised that the plan serves as a guide to give direction. Under it will sit a series of compartments. People in the north of Warwickshire should be encouraged to engage in the overall process. She concluded that the council is good at producing strategies but needs to be better at establishing how well it is doing in their delivery.

Councillor John Holland observed that the May 2021 election was a major consultation exercise when it was possible to gauge people's views. He suggested that although Power BI is a useful tool for assessing progress there is a need for independent quality control. Internal Audit operates to support managers and tends to focus on finances. The delivery plan should be reflected in operational business plans and the job descriptions of staff.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe emphasised that through the plan it will be able to enhance the services provided by the council. Covid has prompted a deep dive in the county and enhanced people's understanding of it. The plan addresses the issues discussed by politicians ahead of the May 2021 election. Matters such as the economy and jobs are featured but people are also encouraged to help themselves.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

- 1) Notes the messages from the Public Engagement exercise and the State of Warwickshire reports as presented in the report, and from the Covid 19 Recovery Closure report presented to the same agenda in relation to the development of the Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy
- 2) Endorses the proposed Areas of Focus and supports the next steps for finalising the Council Plan 2022-2027 as set out in the report.

4. Covid-19 Recovery Plan

Councillor Izzi Seccombe introduced the report reminding members that the COVID-19 recovery plan had been produced in the summer of 2020. Short life member working groups had been very successful in developing a way forward. Since then, a great deal of work had been undertaken by council staff, communities and partners. A fifth recommendation expressing Cabinet's thanks to staff was proposed and agreed.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse echoed the comments of Councillor Seccombe. Staff, he said, are now tired and whilst Microsoft Teams has been of great use it has also served to apply greater pressure to staff members. Councillor Roodhouse considered that recommendation 3 is key. COVID will not go away and people need to be prepared for this. COVID needs to be moved from the exception into everyday business.

Councillor Heather Timms welcomed the proposed additional recommendation. She commended the Local Welfare Fund for its achievements especially with regards to free school meals and also the Green Shoots initiative which had been showcased at COP26 by the LGA.

Councillor Kam Kaur thanked staff for their efforts during the Pandemic. The council, she stated, had performed well during a difficult time.

Councillor Judy Falp commended ICT for the timely roll out of Microsoft 365. In addition, she thanked Monica Fogarty (Chief Executive) for the way in which she had kept everyone informed.

Councillor Any Jenns supported the additional recommendation noting how quickly staff were able to adapt to agile working.

Councillor Andy Crump observed how partners displayed a can-do attitude abandoning silos to get the job done.

Monica Fogarty assured Cabinet that their message of thanks will be relayed to staff. She concluded by observing that members' preparedness to step back and allow the staff to do their jobs was to be commended.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the progress made on the implementation of the Council's COVID-19 Recovery Plan;
2. Supports the inclusion of the ongoing themes identified in section 2 of the report below in the development of the refreshed Council Plan 2022-2027;
3. Notes that actions that require a continued focus at Council level will be included in the Integrated Delivery Plan which will accompany the Council Plan (paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5); and
4. Gives approval to the publication of a document that summarises the impact of COVID-19 on Warwickshire and the progress contained in the report as part of the public communications for the new Council Plan.
5. Recognises and thanks all staff for their tremendous hard work and commitment to the people of Warwickshire during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

5. Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement 2020/21

Councillor Peter Butlin summarised the published report explaining that whilst there is no obligation to produce such a document it is considered important that members be kept informed of the sources and destination of outside or developer funding.

There were no questions from the floor.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

- 1) Approves for publication the Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement attached at Appendix 2.
- 2). Authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to approve for publication all future Annual Infrastructure Funding Statements.

6. Annual Education Sufficiency Update 2021

Councillor Jeff Morgan (Portfolio Holder for Children, Families and Education) explained to Cabinet that the council has a responsibility to ensure that there are sufficient school places in any area. The target is to have 4% spare capacity in each area. However, population growth serves to make this increasingly difficult. Certain pressure points are already recognised eg secondary school provision in Polesworth and primary school provision in Baddesley. When there is a shortage it is important to hold discussions with trusts, schools and officers.

The five area meetings had proved successful as a means of communication issues with members and also gathering their views and understanding.

John Holland observed that most development to the south of Leamington and Warwick is close to Warwick. He suggested that Roman Catholic schools such Trinity in Leamington should offer places to Catholic children only. This was disputed by other members who noted that children from all faiths should be able to attend a Catholic school.

Councillor Margaret Bell thanked Councillor Morgan for the five local meetings that had been held to consider capacity. She agreed that Polesworth will present a major challenge as it is the location of much housing.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse reminded Cabinet that children still need to cross from one side of Rugby to the other to attend school. This, he considered, is unacceptable. Regarding special education provision he considered that the situation regarding places will only deteriorate.

Councillor Jeff Morgan welcomed members' comments regarding the local schools capacity meetings. The update, he said, provides a useful picture but it is only a snapshot.

Resolved:

That Cabinet endorses the Annual Education Sufficiency Update 2021 and notes the proposed schemes to ensure sufficiency of school places in Warwickshire.

7. Outdoor Education and Learning Strategy

Councillor Jeff Morgan opened this item by explaining that outdoor education can mean different things to different people.

The document placed before Cabinet is an enabling strategy, this being a good means of approaching policy and delivery. Development of the strategy had involved a number of members and those from educational settings. Councillor Jeff Morgan urged schools to include outdoor education in their curricula. It is unknown whether any similar strategies exist nationally, but it is thought not. The expectation is that the strategy and its implementation will result in a network of professionals in schools that can focus on outdoor education opportunities.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse welcomed the strategy emphasising that it should be a stand-alone corporate document and not a sub strategy of the education strategy. Members agreed that this should be the case and added a statement to recommendation 2 to that effect.

Councillor Peter Butlin agreed that children should be given the opportunity to be educated outdoors. He observed that often the chances of this are determined by affordability.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the recommendations made by Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 16th November 2021 (attached as appendix 1); and
2. approves Warwickshire County Council's Outdoor Education and Learning Strategy as a corporate strategy of the Council (attached as appendix 2).

8. Constitution Review

Councillor Andy Jenns introduced this report stating that the council is obliged to maintain an up-to-date Constitution.

Councillor Peter Butlin stated that the council is keen to speed up decision-making whilst maintaining good governance and transparency.

Councillor Andy Crump observed that flexibility is required when applying for government grants that have very short lead in times.

Resolved:

That Cabinet endorses the changes to the Constitution, Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations and recommends them to Council for approval.

9. Local Area SEND Inspection

Councillor Jeff Morgan explained that the report before Cabinet covered the draft written statement of action produced in response to the Summer 2021 SEND inspection. This inspection covered partners eg Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust and the Clinical Commissioning Group as well as the County Council. A series of strengths and weaknesses had been identified by the inspectors. Of the five areas for improvement two fall under the purview of the council. These were the online offer and the incorrect placement of some children. The online offer has been launched and work is ongoing to address concerns regarding child placement.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe noted that a combined meeting of the Children and Young People and Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees was due to be held to consider this. Children, she said, are best placed within their own community. Schools need to be well-equipped and feel confident to provide support.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse informed members that a small member working group has been convened to monitor progress with service improvements.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the outcomes from the Ofsted and CQC local area SEND inspection.
2. Endorses the progress made to date to deliver the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) and delegates to the Strategic Director for People, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children, Families and Education, authority to make any changes necessary to finalise the WSOA for submission to Ofsted and the CQC by 24th December 2021.
3. Approves the request for additional one-off funding of £98,750 over the remainder of 2021/22 and into 2022/23 to support delivery of the Written Statement of Action, to be met from the 2021/22 underspend in Corporate Services and Resourcing.

10. 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.

11. Exempt Minutes of the 25 November 2021 Meeting of Cabinet

Resolved:

The exempt minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 25 November 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

12. All Age Carers Support

Councillor Margaret Bell introduced this item and summarised the exempt report.

Resolved:

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

The meeting rose at 15:48

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Chair