

County Council

Tuesday 14 December 2021

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

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

1. General

In the absence of Councillor Pete Gilbert, Councillor John Horner, Vice-Chair of Council, took the Chair for this meeting.

(1) Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Richard Baxter-Payne, Barbara Brown, Jackie D'Arcy, Yousef Dahmash, Pete Gilbert, Andy Jenns, Sarah Millar and Penny-Anne O'Donnell.

(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 28 September 2021 were agreed as an accurate record for signing by the Chair.

(4) Chair's announcements

Councillor John Horner, chairing this meeting, made the following announcements:

1) Care Leaver National Bench Marking Competition

At the Care Leaver National Bench Marking Forum Warwickshire were once again key leaders of the forum. Umar Teerab and Liss Phillips who work as Family Support Workers in our Corporate Parenting Service organise and facilitate the national forum with a small group of care leavers.

I am delighted to report that this year Liss Phillips won the Best Speech and the Champion of Champions competition. She delivered a heart-warming speech and her peers recognised her as champion of champions. Coming first in both of these is a real achievement.

Huge congratulations to Liss.

Members joined to congratulate Liss Philips.

2) Death of Former Chief Fire Officer, Kieran Amos

It is my very sad duty to report that our former Chief Fire Officer, Kieran Amos died on 23 November after a short illness.

Kieran was CFO for Warwickshire for just over two years before his retirement in July this year. His career in the fire sector spanned nearly 30 years in a range of roles serving the communities of Surrey, West Sussex, and Warwickshire and he had also worked at a national level on the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme and within the National Resilience Team.

Those of us who knew him are very fortunate to have worked alongside such a special person. Physically imposing, he had a larger-than-life personality to match. Kieran was a humble and funny individual but most of all he was genuine, compassionate and kind. These qualities shone through in all that he did including the huge role he played in the response to the pandemic and his work with equality, diversity and inclusion.

He has certainly left a legacy that will be built upon as we continue the work he did to make Warwickshire safer for all.

Our condolences go to Kieran's family and all those who knew him within the Fire and Rescue Service.

Ben Brook, the current Chief Fire Officer, was invited to make a statement and he shared the tribute that had been read at Mr Amos' funeral the previous day. The tribute acknowledged Mr Amos' 'gentle giant' character, the difference he had made during his 32 years in the fire service, his passion for making a difference and the positive impact he had on many lives. Mr Amos had possessed a wonderful ability to connect with people which had enabled him to achieve a great deal in Warwickshire. Mr Brook concluded that Mr Amos was a person who would be sadly missed by Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service, Warwickshire County Council and the Fire Service nationally.

Members made the following comments in memory of Kieran Amos

Councillor Andy Crump noted that Mr Amos had very recently retired and had only been aged 50 at the time of his death. He noted the big impression that Mr Amos had made in terms of his leadership, innovation and his contribution to the Pandemic response. His thoughts and prayers were with Mr Amos' family.

Councillor Sarah Boad echoed previous comments, expressing her sadness at the news. She had many abiding memories of Mr Amos and praised his leadership style and desire to make Warwickshire FRS the best it could be. She noted that he would live on in memory for a very long time.

Councillor Seccombe reflected on Mr Amos' achievements in his relatively young life. She noted that he was richly talented and helped people be the best they could be. He possessed a genuine belief in people and the ability to forge partnerships and touch hearts. Councillor Seccombe noted that Warwickshire County Council was a much better organisation because of Mr Amos' tenure and he had achieved a great deal which she trusted the organisation would build upon. She concluded that she was immensely saddened by the announcement but was glad to be able to say that she knew him.

Councillor Adrian Warwick also reflected on Mr Amos' larger than life character and noted that it was a pleasure to have him attend Overview and Scrutiny. Councillor Warwick observed that he had great memories of a lovely man and Warwickshire was the poorer for his loss.

Councillor John Holland noted that the work Mr Amos had done had been valued by all parties and he shared the sentiment that his loss was deeply unfair. He had met Mr Amos in July before his retirement when his pride in the Fire Service was notable.

Councillor Judy Falp reflected on her first meeting with Mr Amos, and how she immediately felt like she had a good friend. Like others, she felt people were better for knowing him and was deeply saddened by his loss.

A minute's silence was held in memory of Kieran Amos.

(5) Petitions

None.

(6) Public Speaking

None.

2. Application for Dispensation

Noting the presence of Councillor Howard Roberts at the meeting, the Chair advised that this item was not required.

3. External Auditors' Annual Audit Report 2020/21

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader of the Council) moved the motion and introduced this report, noting that the new Code of Audit Practice required the production of an Auditor's Annual Report to be considered by the Full Council instead of an Annual Audit Letter for consideration by the Audit and Standards Committee.

Mr Ciaran McLaughlin and Mr Jim McLarnon were in attendance as representatives of Grant Thornton to present their report. Mr McLaughlin had been responsible for the delivery of the final accounts audit and the value for money work. He noted that the report on the Council's arrangements was positive and he particularly highlighted elements of the report relating to the Council's strong financial sustainability, governance arrangements and the Council's role in improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources. Mr McLachlan pointed to the key recommendations in the report which noted the outcome of the joint CQC and Ofsted report published in September 2021, which made it incumbent upon the Auditor to find a significant weakness in that area. However, given the transformation in Children's Services, there was confidence that the issues would be addressed. He noted that there were no further significant issues. The auditors were also satisfied that there was appropriate governance and management of the Warwickshire Pension Fund. The Covid arrangements that had been in place throughout the year and had also been considered and no significant weakness had been found. Mr McLachlan concluded his report by noting that it was expected to be able to sign an unqualified opinion on the financial statements and thanked officers and staff for their support in providing information to the auditors.

Councillor Singh Birdi seconded the Motion, thanking the auditors for their presentation and reiterating thanks to Council staff.

Vote

A vote was held. The recommendation was unanimously agreed.

Resolved:

That Council:

- (1) Notes the Annual Audit Report of the External Auditors, attached at Appendix A to the report; and
- (2) Supports the development of an action plan in response to the Annual Audit Report, for consideration and approval by Cabinet.

4. 2020-21 Annual Governance Statement

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader of the Council) moved the motion and introduced this report, which presented the 2020/21 Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for consideration by the Council. The motion was seconded by Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi.

Vote:

A vote was held. The recommendation was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council approves the 2020/21 Annual Governance Statement.

5. Warwickshire County Council Statement of Accounts 2020/21

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader – Finance and Property) moved the recommendation and was seconded by Councillor Adrian Warwick. He observed that the report clearly demonstrated the Council's financial position and how it was intended to meet the Council's financial commitments.

Vote:

A vote was held. The recommendation was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council approves the Warwickshire County Council Statement of Accounts for 2020/21.

6. Warwickshire Pension Fund Accounts 2020/21

Councillor John Horner moved the recommendation. In introducing the report Councillor Horner emphasised that the fund was well-managed and expressed his thanks to Council staff for their support and advice to the Pension Fund Investment Sub-Committee.

Councillor Peter Butlin seconded the motion.

Councillor Bill Gifford noted his pleasure at seeing the pension fund in surplus and felt that this could be aligned to Members' awareness of climate change and, as a result, how climate change had been considered in the investment strategy. He noted that the surplus was a good result and, consequently, there may be a slight reduction in the amount the County Council and employers had to pay in.

Vote:

A vote was held. The recommendation was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council approves the 2020/21 Pension Fund Statement of Accounts, and authorises the Strategic Director for Resources to make any amendments to the final version of the accounts as are required to take account of any observations from the external auditors.

7. Appointment of External Auditors

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader of the Council) moved the motion which was seconded by Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi.

Councillor Bill Gifford considered that the recommendation was appropriate and he strongly supported its approval.

Vote:

A vote was held. The recommendation was unanimously agreed.

Resolved:

That Council approves Warwickshire County Council opting-in to the sector-led body procurement, conducted by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited, for the appointment of the Authority's external auditors from April 2023.

8. Constitution Review

Councillor Kam Kaur (Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation) introduced this report and moved the recommendations. The aim of the review had been to simplify the presentation of the Constitution without changing the balance between Member and Officer decision making. The language of the document had been updated and full details were comprehensively set out in the report.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe seconded the motion, noting the importance of the Constitution to the Council's governance processes and that it was important to ensure the correct balance of decision making between Members and Officers.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers noted that most of the changes were sensible but noted two areas of concern to him. The first was the additional emergency powers for the Chief Executive in times of crisis since he noted that an effective decision making solution had been operated throughout the pandemic via the Leader and he considered that the powers should be vested in the Leader in the first instance who could then delegate them if necessary. Secondly, he had concerns around the uplifts for the levels of delegated decision making, considering that the figure was not reflective of inflationary rises. He understood the need for quick decision making but he considered that the urgent portfolio holder decision making process was a more appropriate mechanism than giving additional delegated powers to officers.

Councillor Butlin noted that it was appropriate that the decision making processes be considered in light of the experience of the Council throughout the Pandemic. He noted from this experience that it was reasonable to scrutinise the speed of decision making and consider any lessons learnt over the previous 18 months. It was still not possible for individuals to act unilaterally as part of the proposed change and consultation was still required. The Council's ability to act swiftly was important to support vulnerable people and potentially save lives and he was therefore supportive of the proposals being of the view that there were sufficient safeguards built in the process. Councillor Adrian Warwick echoed this view.

Councillor Kaur responded that the Council was very good at transparency and noted that all through the Pandemic there had been engagement with councillors and officers and this was something to be proud of. She emphasised the Deputy Leader's comments that it was important to adjust processes to keep pace with the changing landscape.

Vote:

A vote was held. The recommendation was agreed by a majority.

Resolved:

That Council approves the amendments to the Constitution, Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations as set out at Appendices 2a, 2b and 3 to the report.

9. Appointment of Independent Member to Audit and Standards Committee

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

There were no questions on the matter.

Vote:

A vote was held. The motion was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council approves the appointment of Mr Robert Edwards Zara as an Independent Member of the Audit and Standards Committee.

10. Appointment of Representatives to the Local Pension Board and Fire and Rescue Local Pension Board of the Firefighter's Pension Scheme

Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince introduced and moved this report and recommendation. Councillor Christopher Kettle seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

There were no questions on the matter.

Vote:

A vote was held. The motion was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council:

- (1) Approves the appointment of Mr Jeffrey Carruthers, Director of Finance at Warwickshire Police, as a scheme member representative on the Local Pension Board.
- (2) Approves the appointment of Councillor John Horner to the Fire and Rescue Local Pension Board of the Firefighter's Pension Scheme.

11. Notices of Motion

1. Flood Alleviation and Drainage

The Liberal Democrat Group proposed the following motion as set out on the agenda:

“This Council has responsibility for flood resilience and has been successful in leveraging funding from the Environment Agency to deliver flood prevention schemes, it also partners with the River Severn Partnership and the River Trent Partnership which is a group of local authorities working together to gain extra funding from government for flood prevention works.

This Council also recognises the amount of planned growth in housing across the County. Weather patterns are changing, and we now see increasingly heavy rain falls which are creating drainage issues especially on highways in urban areas.

The County Council acting as the highway authority, uses its climate change adaptation policy as a framework of action where it needs to adapt to these more frequent changes in weather.

This Council therefore

1. Requests that the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate & Culture arranges for a review to be conducted to ensure that effective drainage policies are fully considered.

and

2. Invites Seven Trent Water to explain its adaptation policies in relation to drainage matters and to explore closer working relationships with elected members in the Divisions they represent.”

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse moved the motion, seconded by Councillor Bill Gifford.

Amendment

Councillor Heather Timms proposed a friendly amendment. This was seconded by Councillor Isobel Seccombe who reserved her right to speak. The amendment stated:

“This Council has responsibility for flood resilience and has been successful in leveraging funding from the Environment Agency to deliver flood prevention schemes. The Council has strong relationships with partner organisations including the Environment Agency, Districts and Boroughs and Severn Trent. The council has joined, ~~it also partners with the River Severn Partnership and the River Trent Partnership which are is a groups of local authorities working together to gain~~ extra attract additional funding from government for flood prevention works.

This Council also recognises the amount of planned growth in housing across the County. Weather patterns are changing, and we now see increasingly heavy rain falls which are creating drainage issues especially on highways in urban areas.

The County Council acting as the highway authority, uses its climate change adaptation policy as a framework of action where it needs to adapt to these more frequent changes in weather.

This Council therefore

1. Would support a proposal being brought forward for a flood alleviation and flood adaptation summit with key partners ~~Requests that the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate &~~

~~Culture arranges for a review to be conducted~~ to ensure that effective planning and drainage policies are fully considered.

and

2. Requests that the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers undertaking a review of this Council's flood alleviation and drainage policies and invites Seven Trent Water, the Environment Agency and other partners to provide evidence for this review, in order to develop to explain its adaptation policies in relation to drainage matters and to explore closer working relationships between partners and councillors in their individual with elected members in the Divisions they represent."

The amendment was accepted by Councillor Roodhouse as a friendly amendment.

Debate

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers expressed support for the motion as he noted that flooding could be a disruptive and traumatic event. He considered that the maintenance of drainage was one of the most important aspects of the Council's maintenance.

Councillor Sarah Feeney observed and suggested that one of the areas Scrutiny could consider was the effect in urban areas where parking was an issue that impeded jetting teams. She felt that this was an issue that would increase exponentially with car ownership and, therefore, the number of contractors used and how they were mobilised was a key issue.

Councillor Jeff Clarke observed that drainage affected all areas and was a wide-ranging issue that he would welcome for scrutiny at Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Bill Gifford observed that the Council had some responsibility for flooding, but the point needed to be made to Severn Trent that they had a responsibility to work with the Council and take responsibility when necessary.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe welcomed the acceptance of the friendly amendment and noted that her personal concerns were about the way the whole system worked.

Councillor Heather Timms thanked Councillor Roodhouse for accepting the friendly amendment which she felt had given the motion more power. She had been excited by the prospect presented by the River Severn Partnership of leveraging government funding to the region and noted the similar the opportunities presented by the River Trent Partnership. In the division that she represented flooding from the River Avon had a real impact on local people and businesses. She concluded by thanking Councillor Clarke for welcoming the issue for scrutiny and encouraged all members to get involved.

Vote:

A vote was held, and the amended motion was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

This Council has responsibility for flood resilience and has been successful in leveraging funding from the Environment Agency to deliver flood prevention schemes. The Council has strong relationships with partner organisations including the Environment Agency, Districts and Boroughs and Severn Trent. The council has joined the River Severn Partnership and the River Trent Partnership which are groups of local authorities working together to attract additional funding.

This Council also recognises the amount of planned growth in housing across the County. Weather patterns are changing, and we now see increasingly heavy rain falls which are creating drainage issues especially on highways in urban areas.

The County Council acting as the highway authority, uses its climate change adaptation policy as a framework of action where it needs to adapt to these more frequent changes in weather.

This Council therefore

1. Would support a proposal being brought forward for a flood alleviation and flood adaptation summit with key partners to ensure that effective planning and drainage policies are fully considered.

and

2. Requests that the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers undertaking a review of this Council's flood alleviation and drainage policies and invites Seven Trent Water, the Environment Agency and other partners to provide evidence for this review, in order to develop relationships between partners and councillors in their individual Divisions .

2. Tree Planting

The Conservative Group moved the following motion as set out on the agenda:

"This Council has made the commitment within the Council Plan 2020-2025 - *'We will partner with our communities to plant a tree for every Warwickshire resident'*. In order to meet this commitment, this Council supports the:

1. Production of a Tree/Woodland Strategy for Warwickshire (with an offer to the District and Borough Councils to co-produce the Strategy) with the key priorities of connecting green corridors, increasing biodiversity and increasing tree coverage
2. Production of a costed action plan for consideration with target dates for the provision of the tree cover within the county to meet this commitment
3. Identification of land that could be used for tree planting, including land owned by the County Council, such as country parks, particularly to support the Queens Green Canopy
4. Acceleration of the development of a costed business case of options, to include the option of establishing a tree nursery within the county, to secure a reliable tree supply for the future
5. Investigation of the opportunities for community orchards to help improve the supply of fresh, local produce and boost the health of residents;
6. Proposal to work with the voluntary sector to deliver tree planting plans, including via Borough, District and Parish Councils;

7. Involvement of schools, colleges and universities and their pupils and students in carrying out tree planting and woodland maintenance;
8. Identification and documentation of sources of funding available to the Council and voluntary organisations to pay for tree planting;
9. Reporting of progress on the commitment on a regular basis to the cross party Climate Change Working Party.”

Councillor Tim Sinclair moved the motion. In doing so he noted the benefits of trees and spending time in nature, the valuable environmental contribution of trees in relation to carbon collection, flooding and the provision of habitats. A commitment had been made to plant a tree for every resident and this motion represented a practical plan to achieve this objective.

Councillor Adrian Warwick seconded the motion and reserved the right to speak.

Amendment

Councillor Jenny Fradgley proposed a friendly amendment which was seconded by Councillor Kate Rolfe. The amendment stated,

“This Council has made the commitment within the Council Plan 2020-2025 - *'We will partner with our communities to plant a tree for every Warwickshire resident'*. In order to meet this commitment, this Council supports the:

1. Production of a Tree/Woodland Strategy for Warwickshire in partnership with the Soil Association and the Forestry Commission (with an offer to the District and Borough Councils to co-produce the Strategy) with the key priorities of connecting green corridors, increasing biodiversity and increasing tree coverage
2. Production of a costed action plan for consideration with target dates for the provision of the tree cover within the county to meet this commitment
3. Work with all elected members to increase biodiversity by identifying land in their County Divisions that could be used along with the identification ~~Identification~~ of land that could be used for tree planting, including land owned by the County Council, such as country parks, particularly to support the Queens Green Canopy
4. Acceleration of the development of a costed business case of options, to include the option of establishing a tree nursery within the county, to secure a reliable tree supply for the future
5. Investigation of the opportunities for community orchards to help improve the supply of fresh, local produce and boost the health of residents;
6. Proposal to work with the voluntary sector to deliver tree planting plans, including via Borough, District and Parish Councils;
7. Involvement of schools, colleges and universities and their pupils and students in carrying out tree planting and woodland maintenance;
8. Identification and documentation of sources of funding available to the Council and voluntary organisations to pay for tree planting;
9. Reporting of progress on the commitment on a regular basis to the cross party Climate Change Working Party.”

Councillor Sinclair did not accept the amendment, stating that the original motion allowed an acceleration of activity which was not supported by the proposed amendment.

Debate

Councillors Jerry Roodhouse and Bill Gifford expressed sadness that the friendly amendment had not been accepted as a genuine attempt to increase partnership working.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers welcomed the effort that had been put into presenting this strategy but, in the context of carbon reduction, he cautioned against accepting funds from investment schemes without considering the wider overall impact. He noted that it was important not to provide opportunity for organisations to support tree planting locally to offset pollution/habitat destruction in another part of the world.

Councillor Pemberton also supported the importance of ensuring that any carbon credit schemes were locally based, and outlined the approach of local planning authorities to provide further clarification on this point.

Councillor Clare Golby noted that some of the most deprived areas in the county would not have green space to accommodate tree planting and it was important to look for alternative arrangements for residents in those areas.

Councillor Drew sought assurance that the motion included a commitment to plant the right tree in the right place and she saw value in a partnership approach to support this.

Councillor Will Roberts noted that the organisations included in the amendment were experts in the field and expressed bafflement as to why it was considered working in partnership with them would slow down the process. He supported the amendment.

Councillor Kate Rolfe, who had seconded the amendment, extolled the virtues of partnership working and urged Councillor Sinclair to reconsider accepting the amendment to include working with partnership bodies.

Councillor Adrian Warwick seconded the motion and in doing so he noted the desire to get the work done and make the area better. He observed that consultation could be included as part of the process, but not tying other bodies to the work allowed a quicker response.

Councillor Timms welcomed the motion. She expressed her pride in the initiatives that she had led in the county regarding climate change and considered that the motion accelerated that work. She noted the Council's commitment to partner with its communities, ie the whole of Warwickshire, and she considered that the motion strengthened that commitment due to reference to a Tree and Woodland Strategy for Warwickshire. She noted that talks had also commenced with the Woodland Trust. She particularly welcomed the tree nursery, as it provided an opportunity to engage all the residents in Warwickshire and provide home grown trees to feed into the strategy. She welcomed Warwickshire as a green and pleasant place to live and wanted to see that legacy endure for future generations.

Councillor Butlin celebrated the wellbeing impacts of trees and the duty of the Council to ensure that Warwickshire remained green.

Councillor Sarah Boad encouraged councillors and residents to identify suitable places for tree planting but did not see why the Woodland Trust or Forestry Commission should not be included in

planning. She considered that more creative debate about the location of trees was needed. She shared an anecdote which demonstrated how protective residents were of the trees in their area and, echoing the sentiments of those before her, celebrated partnership working and urged the acceptance of the amendment.

Councillor Sarah Feeney reiterated the comments of Councillor Golby, noting that tree planting was a wider issue than focussing on country parks as not all residents could get to them and it was important to consider other areas for planting.

Councillor John Holland was supportive of joint working with the borough and district councils, noting that Warwick District Council was also looking at a tree planting scheme. He noted that it was important to create a joined-up approach and work together.

Councillor Justin Kerridge reflected on comments about the lack of green space in urban areas and considered this issue needed a wider approach which could see regeneration projects include tree planting.

Councillor Jack Kennaugh supported the motion, noting that he too represented an urbanised area and welcomed any planting schemes.

Councillor Jenny Fradgley considered that tree planting was one of most difficult undertakings for community groups, as it was important to ensure several factors were right, particularly citing the species of tree, the space, the location of utilities, and highways policy. The presence of a partnership allowed for a clear policy and rules to exist.

Councillor Sinclair replied that he recognised the importance of planting the right tree in the right place and that the motion represented an investment in the future.

Vote:

A vote was held, and the amendment was lost. A further vote was held on the substantive motion and was carried.

Resolved:

This Council has made the commitment within the Council Plan 2020-2025 - '*We will partner with our communities to plant a tree for every Warwickshire resident*'. In order to meet this commitment, this Council supports the:

1. Production of a Tree/Woodland Strategy for Warwickshire (with an offer to the District and Borough Councils to co-produce the Strategy) with the key priorities of connecting green corridors, increasing biodiversity and increasing tree coverage
2. Production of a costed action plan for consideration with target dates for the provision of the tree cover within the county to meet this commitment
3. Identification of land that could be used for tree planting, including land owned by the County Council, such as country parks, particularly to support the Queens Green Canopy
4. Acceleration of the development of a costed business case of options, to include the option of establishing a tree nursery within the county, to secure a reliable tree supply for the future

5. Investigation of the opportunities for community orchards to help improve the supply of fresh, local produce and boost the health of residents;
6. Proposal to work with the voluntary sector to deliver tree planting plans, including via Borough, District and Parish Councils;
7. Involvement of schools, colleges and universities and their pupils and students in carrying out tree planting and woodland maintenance;
8. Identification and documentation of sources of funding available to the Council and voluntary organisations to pay for tree planting;
9. Reporting of progress on the commitment on a regular basis to the cross party Climate Change Working Party”

3. **Ambulance Services**

Councillor John Holland moved the following motion, seconded by Councillor Sarah Feeney.

“This Council notes that two of our blue light services serve the county of Warwickshire, that is Warwickshire Police and Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service. Our ambulance service is provided via West Midlands Ambulance Services.

This Council requests that an invite be sent to the Chief Executive of the West Midlands Ambulance Service in order to consider how the ambulance service can be strengthened for the residents of Warwickshire and to agree an action plan.”

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse proposed the following amendment which was seconded by Councillor Bill Gifford.

“This Council notes that two of our blue light services serve the county of Warwickshire, that is Warwickshire Police and Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service. Our ambulance service is provided via West Midlands Ambulance Services. This Council requests that an invite be sent to the Chief Executive of the West Midlands Ambulance Service in order to consider how the ambulance service can be strengthened for the residents of Warwickshire and to agree an action plan along with the consideration of ~~considers that the NHS should consider the option of~~ establishing a Warwickshire Ambulance Service, as a standalone unit separate from the West Midlands Ambulance Service. ”

Councillor Margaret Bell proposed an amendment to the Liberal Democrat amendment which was seconded by Councillor Jo Barker who reserved her right to speak. The amendment stated

“This Council notes that two of our blue light services serve the county of Warwickshire, that is Warwickshire Police and Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service. Our ambulance service is provided via West Midlands Ambulance Services.

This Council requests that an invite be sent to the Chief Executive of the West Midlands Ambulance Service in order to consider how the ambulance service can be strengthened for the residents of Warwickshire and to agree an action plan ~~along with the consideration of establishing a Warwickshire Ambulance Service, as a standalone unit separate from the West Midlands Ambulance Service.~~”

The amendment was accepted by Councillor John Holland.

In moving the amended motion Councillor Margaret Bell stated that the reason for the proposed deletion was rooted in a discussion that Scrutiny had been involved in with the Ambulance Service, which highlighted the systemic issues that were faced. She welcomed a conversation with the Ambulance Service Chief Executive to put forward an action plan for Warwickshire to improve services for residents. However, she did not think it would be possible to engage the Chief Executive on a reorganisation of the Service. She noted the history to the formation of the West Midlands Ambulance Service which shaped her belief that it would not be profitable to push for a change of structure. However, this did not prevent the ambition to seek to improve services for residents and she was therefore happy to support the proposal to meet and devise an action plan, concluding that the Blue Light Collaboration Board was the best forum to facilitate the discussion.

Debate

Councillor Sarah Boad stated her belief that the Ambulance Service was struggling to cope and maintain the level of required service. She noted the efforts of Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service in relation to the Hospital to Home initiative. She stated that it was important to ensure residents received the best deal possible and supported the motion to achieve that aim.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe expressed the view that the amendment improved the motion to the extent that it focussed on what was possible and allowed a dialogue to be opened with the Ambulance Service and for work to take place in partnership.

Councillor Robert Tromans echoed previous comments, agreed that the Blue Light Collaboration Board was the appropriate forum for discussion and expressed his hope that the Ambulance Service would engage.

Councillor Jo Barker supported the view that it was important to ensure the Ambulance Service was working as well as it could for the benefit of residents.

Councillor Sarah Feeney stated that the Ambulance Service was not currently delivering for residents, particularly noting her concern that a petition from Rugby residents regarding the removal of a casual ambulance station had not been responded to. She argued that a level of accountability was needed and that if the motion did not deliver a viable action plan, that the issue should return to Full Council for consideration.

Councillor Holland supported the view that residents needed a first class Ambulance Service and he considered a blue light service for Warwickshire was needed.

Vote:

A vote was held, and the amended motion was agreed by a majority.

Resolved:

“This Council notes that two of our blue light services serve the county of Warwickshire, that is Warwickshire Police and Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service. Our ambulance service is provided via West Midlands Ambulance Services.

This Council requests that an invite be sent to the Chief Executive of the West Midlands Ambulance Service in order to consider how the ambulance service can be strengthened for the residents of Warwickshire and to agree an action plan.”

The meeting adjourned at 12.40pm and reconvened at 1.00pm.

4. Relaunch of SureStart

The Labour Group proposed the following motion as set out on the agenda.

“This Council notes the statement by the Chancellor in his October budget speech stressing the importance of the first 1001 days of life. Accordingly, this Council supports the development of a costed business case to consider the relaunch of Sure Start Children’s Centres in the county.”

Amendment

Councillor Sarah Boad proposed a friendly amendment. This was seconded by Councillor Jerry Roodhouse who reserved his right to speak. The amendment stated,

“This Council notes the statement by the Chancellor in his October budget speech stressing the importance of the first 1001 days of life. Accordingly, this Council will further supports the early years development especially increasing wrap around family support services and requests that of a costed business case to consider this and the relaunch of Sure Start Children’s Centres in the county is developed.”

The amendment was accepted by Councillor Holland as a friendly amendment.

In moving the amended motion Councillor Boad reflected on the history of SureStart in Leamington and the subsequent opening of Children’s Centres. She considered that whilst services were still available, they were perhaps not working as well as they might as they were serving big areas without being funded sufficiently. She wanted to see an increase in wrap around family support services. The first three years of life were very important and she noted the impact of the Pandemic on young children and the lack of opportunities for nursery/parent and toddler groups. She thanked the Labour Group for bringing forward the motion and accepting amendment.

In seconding the motion Councillor Roodhouse observed that wrap around services were key to the motion. He stated there were children and families suffering through the Pandemic and there was a need for services in the community to support them.

Debate

Councillor Jeff Morgan recognised the sentiments of the motion and the crucial 1001 days in early years support. However, he stated that he could not support the motion as the Council was already doing the work referred to and there was a significant amount of data available to demonstrate the positive impact that the Children and Family Centres were having.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe supported Councillor Morgan's comments, reflecting on the creation of family hubs and outreach facilities to meet the needs of children

Councillor Judy Falp also reflected on the inception of SureStart and, whilst she understood Councillor Morgan's comments, she did not consider that the family hubs concentrated on the first 1001 days of life.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers supported Councillor Falp's view and reflected on the decline in school readiness which had been noted in recent years. He considered that there would be benefits to undertaking research in this area and it would be interesting to see if investment in the first 1001 days reduced issues in the school system in terms of savings on SEND provision.

Councillor Caroline Phillips was supportive of the motion considering that the crucial focus on early years had been lost with the introduction of family hubs. She considered that support for new mothers was vital as they did not always have generational support and SureStart was a way to plug that gap. She welcomed a shift in focus on to new mums and babies.

Councillor John Holland considered that SureStart supported the levelling up agenda. He suggested that evidence demonstrated that SureStart was one of the best investments made by the public sector. He noted that supporting families and stopping deprivation saved money in schools and public services. He had crafted the motion in such a way that he hoped it would receive cross party support.

Vote

A vote was held, and the motion was defeated.

12. Member Question Time (Standing Order 7)

(1) Question to Councillor Heather Timms from Councillor Jerry Roodhouse

Could the Portfolio Holder report back on the survey of schools that has taken place regarding Eco School status as agreed by Council on 15 December 2020?

Answer from Councillor Timms

We are still committed to the Council resolution, however, the focus within schools has been on operating safely during the Covid crisis and catching up on learning as we are all very aware. We are preparing an internal funding bid via the project management system for resources to work with schools on climate change issues and a survey is being prepared to take place early next year to inform this work.

We also have our Green Shoots projects and nine of those are in schools and offer green shoots projects to help the children learn about climate change. We also have a number of schools that are still engaged with the national Eco Schools project. Through our Waste Education Team we have also engaged with 12 schools and nearly 3,000 pupils and their families on the schools waste reduction project, so far this academic year and we have more planned for next year.

We also send out a waste reduction newsletter to all schools and on to families - that will go out next week to help reduce the expense of waste and reduce carbon emissions.

The Education Secretary also announced in his speech at the COP26 event a vision around children being taught about the importance of conserving and protecting our planet. They are talking about a world-leading climate change education through a model science curriculum to be in place by 2023. That will include a new virtual National Education Pack to track progress against other schools across the country and are also discussing a Climate Leaders award which will work in a similar way to the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme.

(2) Question to Councillor Margaret Bell from Councillor Jerry Roodhouse

The market in Warwickshire has been described as fragile, how fragile does the portfolio holder consider the market to be in Warwickshire and what is the present state regarding care staff across the area and what is the greatest risk at this point in time?

Answer from Councillor Bell

The care market is fragile on a national level and certainly that is reflected in Warwickshire specifically relating to the care workforce. Overall, locally the present state of care staff is variable across the market. The areas that are most at risk are those working in supported living, specialised supported housing and some care homes for individuals with learning difficulties and disabilities, and the domiciliary care service – ie those carers that go into people's homes to help.

There is targeted activity under way to help mitigate some of these workforce risks. Some examples of that are

- There is an ongoing virtual mutual aid call every week so that the people in the market can share good practice, ask questions, solve problems collaboratively
- There is also an extensive recruitment and retention programme being led by our Council's Strategy and Commissioning Team
- There is a robust escalation process so that the market can approach the Council's Adult and Social Care Commissioning Teams to agree flexible support delivery to try and focus as much on frontline care as possible in the most safe way
- We have the ongoing receipt of national infection control and work force funding.

Yes, the care market is fragile but we are working on it, we are very aware of it and we are doing what can to address these issues.

(3) Question to Councillor Heather Timms from Councillor Jenny Fradgley

Is there any follow up on community groups who have been awarded Green shoot grants to ascertain whether they are on line to get their project up and running or if they need guidance and signpost that help?

Answer from Councillor Timms

In short yes. The Green Shoots officer team have contacted all the grant recipients to enquire on their projects' progress, specifically seeking answers to:

1. Where their project is providing a benefit
2. Have they started, if not when will they start, and whether the project has any major milestones
3. Details on any payments made so far

We are looking for responses by 16 January and we will then follow up with any grant recipient that needs help to get their projects underway.

(4) Question to Councillor Margaret Bell from Councillor Jerry Roodhouse

Would the portfolio holder agree that nutritional meals for residents in care homes is important? If so, what assurances and checks are conducted by the Council about ensuring that this is being delivered for residents and how is this monitored?

Answer from Councillor Bell

This is a very important area and one that is well recognised across our Council. Good nutrition and hydration is fundamental to both physical and psychological wellbeing for all of us and obviously for people in care homes too. Both the CQC regulations and Warwickshire County Council outcome based contract set the minimum standards that care homes need to work to. These standards, which lead to the key nationally set nutrition and hydration requirements, talk about how residents should be supported with dignity and respect and supported to eat or drink and require that mealtimes are a pleasurable experience.

To ensure that our care homes meet these standards, Warwickshire County Council undertakes a range of quality assurance and support activities. When we carry out a quality assurance activity, mealtimes are observed, officers spend time talking to residents about their experiences and their meal choices, officers specifically check how any feeding support and or dementia needs are being met and they will check if residents have a modified diet and how this is being recorded. They also check for signs of poor nutrition or dehydration and check that staff know how to identify these and how to respond appropriately. The Quality Assurance Team expect all care staff have been trained in how to support a resident with eating and drinking to promote their independence and dignity. Often, we see good practice exceeds the minimum requirements, for example in some care homes there is a picture menu especially for residents with dementia needs so that they can see and choose what it is they want to eat. In addition to that we have key data that we monitor around the number of staff that have received the required training, how many customers are at high risk of malnutrition, and if this risk has increased or decreased while they have been in the care of the care home. If we identify areas that need to be improved, a smarter service improvement plan is agreed with the home management team which is then monitored.

I hope that you are assured, like I am, that this is very high on our agenda and that the nutrition of patients in our care homes is being well looked after and mealtimes are done with respect and dignity and hopefully it is a pleasurable experience.

(5) Question to Councillor Margaret Bell from Councillor Bill Gifford

Councillor Bell, I am sure you agree with me that though Warwickshire GPs have faced tremendous workloads and severe stress in responding to the challenges of the pandemic for almost two years this is not widely understood. So, in the face of yet another new variant, we

should be seeing how we can publicly support our local GP surgeries. What can this Council do to make the work of our local GP surgeries more widely understood and appreciated?

Answer from Councillor Bell

GPs have a busy time at the moment, lots of areas of our health service are under increasing pressure and primary care is no exception. It is estimated that there is about 120% activity in primary care compared to pre-pandemic times. Many GPs have been involved in the vaccine rollout and are now being asked to support the booster programme.

GPs are being supported. We have very sound partnerships across Coventry and Warwickshire. Where systems are under pressure, we look for systemic responses in terms of support. The CCG are in close contact with primary care and they are working together to ensure that we deliver high quality accessible GP services across Warwickshire. In most cases practices are responding well to the pressure on services. Where there are issues, the CCG is working closely with them and this might be on anything – for example on technical issues, as some GPs did not have a telephone system that could work in a way that supports the modern way of working so the CCG have been helping them to install an appropriate system.

The Warwickshire North Place Partnership recently in their meeting had a presentation from a leading GP and she gave two key messages that she wanted to get out into the community.

1. GPs have learnt a lot during the pandemic on the appropriate use of the telephone in terms of triage and treatment and that patients should be assured that when used appropriately they should have confidence in that system. The GPs are getting very used to this system and know when it is appropriate and when it is not.
2. Many practices have a number of different clinicians working together and patients should not be surprised if they are directed to a nurse practitioner, pharmacist or a paramedic as part of the practice if that is thought to be the best route for them.

A third emerging message is that as GPs are going to form the backbone of the new booster program, some routine care will need to be paused during this priority of getting adults their booster vaccines.

Warwickshire County Council can work with GPs and the CCG to get these messages out to the public and to recognise how the GP practices are responding to these very considerable pressures.

Cllr Gifford welcomed the response in terms of the work that is being done by the GP surgeries, but he had a concern that the general public did not fully understand the pressures and he wondered what the Council could do to get that message across.

Councillor Bell responded that the Council could use its own communication channels to get the messages across as well as work jointly with the CCGs and GP practices to get those key messages across.

(6) Question to Councillor Jeff Morgan from Councillor John Holland

In September 2020, Council resolved to lobby parliament for increased funding for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Can I ask for a progress report please?

Answer from Councillor Morgan

Cabinet has raised the issues of SEND funding with central government through a formal letter in January 2021. Cabinet Members have also requested to meet with the Secretary of State and a tentative date is in the diary for January. I am sure funding will come up at that time. In terms of cross party lobbying, this has been agreed as one of the purposes of the cross party SEND Members Panel which met for the first time on 6 December. Sadly, the establishment of this Panel was delayed as a result of the local elections and the SEND Local Area Inspection. However, this group has agreed to take the issue of funding forward and will identify the necessary actions.

Councillor Holland asked if the Portfolio Holder agreed 15 months is a long time to wait for implementation of a council resolution?

Councillor Morgan agreed to discuss the issues outside the meeting.

(6) Question to Councillor Clare Golby from Councillor Kate Rolfe

On 17 November at a meeting of the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee you made the following statement – “GPs have got to step up and they have got to start opening their doors and they have got to start providing the services that they are duty bound, I would say, to provide. All the other health services throughout Covid have done that, I would say, but I don’t think we can say the same about GPs definitely don’t”.

Your statement has caused much consternation amongst our GP practices in Warwickshire. In fact, when visiting my GP last week he showed me the video clip of your statement and asked me if I was there and if I agreed with what you said. I was embarrassed and very upset by this. Would you please apologise for saying this to your fellow Members here today so as to avoid any of them being put into an embarrassing situation as indeed I was.

Answer from Councillor Golby

I have received many emails with regard to that comment. The comment was made in a wider context of the meeting and if the only takeaway from the meeting is those words, it is a real shame as it was an excellent scrutiny meeting.

I have received several emails from people speaking on behalf of GPs and they have received a response which stated that I apologised if my comments offended. I was also asked to provide evidence for my comments, and I have referred to the Healthwatch report on GP Access during Covid-19 which was published March 2021 where some of the key findings were that GP appointments were not meeting people’s needs and similarly people struggled to get appointments for regular health checks, treatments and medication reviews.

I have invited the people who had presented themselves as speaking on behalf of GPs to attend and take part in the Task and Finish Group to review GP Services and that invitation has been accepted.

(6) Question to Councillor Margaret Bell from Councillor Sarah Feeney

Over the weekend it has become apparent that Rugby's rates of vaccination are about 10% lower than the rest of county and we are also one of first towns in the county to have identified the omicron variant and we're just hoping to get some updates over the coming weeks about what we can do to encourage vaccination and what we will do combat omicron within Rugby and the wider county?

Councillor Bell responded that she would obtain some information on this topic to share with Councillor Feeney.

13. Any Other Items of Urgent Business

There were no urgent items.

The meeting rose at 1.53pm

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Chair