

County Council

Thursday 29 September 2022

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Dave Humphreys (Chair), Councillor Richard Baxter-Payne, Councillor Brett Beetham, Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi, Councillor Sarah Boad, Councillor Barbara Brown, Councillor Jonathan Chilvers, Councillor Jeff Clarke, Councillor Andy Crump, Councillor Tracey Drew, Councillor Judy Falp, Councillor Jenny Fradgley, Councillor Sarah Feeney, Councillor Bill Gifford, Councillor Peter Gilbert, Councillor Clare Golby, Councillor Brian Hammersley, Councillor John Holland, Councillor Marian Humphreys, Councillor Andy Jenns, Councillor Kam Kaur, Councillor Jack Kennaugh, Councillor Justin Kerridge, Councillor Christopher Kettle, Councillor Sue Markham, Councillor Sarah Millar, Councillor Chris Mills, Councillor Jeff Morgan, Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell, Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher, Councillor Caroline Phillips, Councillor Wallace Redford, Councillor Will Roberts, Councillor Kate Rolfe, Councillor Jerry Roodhouse, Councillor Isobel Seccombe OBE, Councillor Ian Shenton, 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. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

The Chairman stated that, given the sad news from Buckingham Palace on 8th September 2022 that HM Queen Elizabeth II had died, and the period of national mourning that followed, it was appropriate for Council to take time at the start of this meeting to mark this historic occasion.

Council stood for one minute's silence in memory of HM Queen Elizabeth II.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe led tributes, commending the Queen's dedication of her life to service and how thoroughly and well she had fulfilled her pledge. The soft partnership work that Her Majesty had conducted internationally had been of incalculable benefit to the United Kingdom. 15 Prime Ministers had served her and she had provided wise counsel to them all and been a rock for the country. It was a true reflection of her strength of personality that, in the two days before her death, Her Majesty was putting her duties first and welcoming a new Prime Minister. Councillor Seccombe stated that Her Majesty's interest in people of all ages, nations, and races; her interest in their work and communities and how those communities were supported was the foundation of her soft partnership skills. Councillor Seccombe also reflected on Her Majesty's visit to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1986, and her support of the Royal Show at Stoneleigh. She noted that the Queen had effortlessly mixed her personal interests with public duty and this was no doubt what helped her to deal with the stresses and strains of life in public service. Councillor Seccombe extended condolences to the Royal Family and commended their strength in sharing their loss in such a public way. She considered that Her Majesty's guidance had undoubtedly been of great important

to her family, particularly King Charles III, and the world would be a better place with more people like the Queen. In conclusion, Councillor Seccombe expressed her gratitude to those individuals and teams who had supported the efforts of the County Council and the Lord Lieutenant's Office through the period of national mourning.

Councillor John Holland echoed the remarks of Councillor Seccombe, particularly noting the Queen's long and dedicated service during which she had seen the evolution of the British Empire into the Commonwealth and how her influence had seen it develop into the strong organisation it was. Councillor Holland noted the links the people all over the world had to the Queen and the United Kingdom and how many British people could claim to have met the Queen. He noted that the Queen had travelled to Warwickshire on a number of occasions, for public and private events, and her signature appeared in the Register at St Mary's Church as she had witnessed a private wedding there.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse placed on record thanks to HM Queen Elizabeth II for her commitment throughout 70 years' service. This was a momentous occasion in history as the Elizabethan period came to an end and the massive task of changing coins, notes, stamps, letter boxes, etc began. Councillor Roodhouse reflected on the Queen's sense of humour and the way that she could relax people with her smile.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers reflected on his work with people struggling with addiction and homelessness and how despite the chaos and disarray of their lives, for many of these people their grandmother was a constant in their life; the Queen had very much been a grandmother to the nation. She had been a touchstone of continuity, stability and wisdom as things changed over the course of her reign and her loss was deeply felt. Councillor Chilvers noted that the baton had now been passed and considered that in many ways it lay with each elected Member in the Chamber representing their residents and communities and requested that each redouble their efforts to provide stability and, in honour of Her Majesty, be the person that people can turn to when they need help.

Councillor Judy Falp reflected on the fact that the Queen was the only monarch she had known and recalled her father being moved to meet the Queen as the Royal Family had remained in London throughout the second world war. Councillor Falp also recalled meeting King Charles III at the Royal Show and commended his love for his people and the countryside and she considered that, in turn, Prince William would make a good monarch. She commended the Royal Family for their strength in their loss, particularly the Queen's grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Councillor Pete Gilbert considered that it was important for the Chamber to take time to pay tribute. He extolled HM Queen Elizabeth II as the greatest monarch in history and that to have witnessed this in our lifetime was a privilege. He reflected on her ability to combine majesty with humility and her optimistic attitude which was always apparent in her inspirational Christmas broadcasts. Councillor Gilbert reflected on the personal responsibility with which the Queen undertook the role of Supreme Governor of the Church of England and considered that it was not necessary to be a Christian to admire her devotion to her faith and the way she conducted her life in observance of that faith.

Councillor O'Donnell shared a personal experience when HM The Queen had visited the village in which Councillor O'Donnell's family had lived and how she had her sister had been jubilant when the Queen pointed out the Silver Jubilee banner they had created. Councillor O'Donnell also

reflected on the Queen's values, her role as an emotional anchor for the nation, and admired her ability to bring peace and reassurance, never waivering or complaining during her 70 years of service. Councillor O'Donnell concluded with the famous Paddington Bear quote: "Thank you Ma'am, for everything".

Cllr Christopher Kettle commended the example that Her Majesty had set and how steadfast and unshakeable she was, demonstrating her strength of character in the face of adversity such as when Michael Fagin broke into the Palace. He noted that the Queen had continued travelling well into her twilight years and hers was an example he would remember for all his life.

Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi shared his family's memories of the then Princess Elizabeth visiting Kenya and returning to Britain a Queen. He had personally met her on two occasions and shared his admiration for her ability to make those she spoke to feel at ease and like the most important person in the world. Councillor Birdi considered that the Queen was a unique person and a great lady to learn from.

2. General

(1) Apologies for Absence

Councillors Jo Barker, Margaret Bell, Peter Butlin, John Cooke, Jackie D'Arcy, Yousef Dahmash, Piers Daniell, Jan Matecki, and Jill Simpson-Vince.

(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 19 July 2022 were agreed as an accurate record for signing by the Chair.

(4) Chair's Announcements

1) Commonwealth Games

The Chairman, Councillor Dave Humphreys, made the following statement:

"Summer seems a long time ago now but, if I can, may I take you all back a few weeks to when the Commonwealth Games lit up the region in a truly momentous 11 days. Warwickshire played a huge part in the spectacle, and I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the fantastic efforts that went into delivering the county's elements of the Games this summer. It was a once-in-a-generation opportunity to host such important events in Warwickshire and our county and, indeed, this Authority, certainly rose to that occasion. What we showcased to those who attended the Road Races and Lawn and Para-Bowls, along with the global audience of many millions, was truly Warwickshire at its very best.

The work that took place across Warwickshire County Council over two years is nothing short

of remarkable and the fact that, in order to deliver such successful events, teams as diverse as County Highways, Trading Standards, Communications and Localities all co-ordinated perfectly is a testament to what an incredible organisation the County Council is and what we can achieve when we work together.

There are so many outstanding highlights from the 11 remarkable days of activity in Warwickshire, like the huge number of spectators lining the streets of Warwick for the road races and the packed live-site locations in Warwick and Leamington Spa that brought the games to life for so many residents who flocked to watch the action on the big screens.

But, as well as what we did see, there is what we didn't see. Despite the closures of roads needed to host the road race, residents were able to move around on the day and transport networks were maintained throughout. The day passed without incident and very little complaint. It takes some serious planning to go under the radar like that.

So, I would like to extend the thanks of this Council to everyone who was involved in making the Commonwealth Games in Warwickshire the incredible spectacle that it was. While I have already noted the efforts of so many of our officers throughout the council, I would recommend for particular approval the dedication and professionalism of our project lead, Rachel Baconnet (pron. Bac-on-ay), and also of John Noakes and Aaron Corsi, all of whom went way beyond the extra mile in coordinating our Games activity."

2) Former Councillor John Haynes

Councillor Dave Humphreys, Chairman, made the following statement:

"It is my sad duty to inform Council of the recent passing of former County Councillor John Haynes.

John, a Labour Councillor, served as a Warwickshire County Councillor for two decades between 1989 and 2009, including a year as Chairman. However, he had served his community for much longer, winning his first election back in 1958 as an Exhall ward councillor on the former Bedworth Urban District Council. He was a popular local character, dedicated to the town of Bedworth, and the wider county, and had many stories to tell of his time in office.

Our condolences go to John's wife Hilda and their family."

Councillor Humphreys invited Council to stand for a minute's silence in memory of Councillor Haynes before inviting Councillors to pay their own tributes.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe spoke in memory of John Haynes, noting his amiable character and commitment to the County with a particular interest in law and order. She expressed commiserations to his family.

Councillor Pete Gilbert praised John Haynes' passion for his community and his long service. He expressed his respect for him and expressed condolences to his family. Councillor Gilbert considered John Haynes a local champion whose death was a great loss to the community.

Councillor Sarah Boad expressed her sadness for the loss of a good servant to his community. She noted that he was a community councillor who cared very deeply for the county.

Councillor John Holland also paid tribute to John Haynes and his reputation as a hard working and conscientious councillor who would be sadly missed.

(5) Petitions

The Chair welcomed Mr Keith Turncliff to the meeting to present a petition requesting the installation of average speed cameras in Long Itchington.

Mr Turncliff made the following statement:

My request is for Average Speed Cameras to be installed on the A423 and Leamington Road in Long Itchington.

I worked for Warwickshire Police for over 35 years, mainly as a front line Police Officer, so have witnessed at first hand the results of speeding and the impact of fatal accidents on families.

After retiring, I have been a main member of the local Community Speed Watch team and devoted many hours in an effort to reduce speeds in the village. During my time with the CSW team I have witnessed vehicles travelling at 66 mph in 30 mph areas, on both the Southam Road and the Leamington Road. Then we had the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, since then, things have got worse. Warwickshire Police do carry out regular checks in the village as they recognise the problem we have, but tend to locate themselves outside the Duck on the Pond PH and only for the odd hour now and again. They need to vary the location and times where they carry out their checks.

This has had a knock on effect as the local CSW team is now redundant, because we cannot operate within a 2 mile radius of a location used regularly by Warwickshire Police - which effectively covers the whole village. To the best of my knowledge NO speed checks have ever been carried out on Leamington Road by Warwickshire Police, which is disappointing as we have proved to them that Leamington Road does have a speeding problem. For the purpose of this ePetition, I was fortunate to loan a speed gun from Warwickshire Police and carried out some covert checks in the 30mph areas, in order to obtain an accurate picture of speed in the village. My survey of 1,884 motorists, showed that 86% were exceeding the speed limit.

52 motorists were travelling at speeds of 52 mph or greater, which would have resulted in a disqualification from driving.

I believe there are three 'hotspots', where a fatal accident is most likely to occur in the village. By far the area that causes me most concern is at the entrance to the Two Boats Public House on Southam Road. Vehicles accelerate down the hill travelling South and those

travelling North fail to brake before they enter the 30 mph zone. There is a flashing 30 mph sign on the Southam Road, at this location, when travelling North. I submit that over 90% of vehicles trigger this flashing sign. There has been a fatal accident here in the past, albeit over 5 years ago. During the survey, two HS2 8-wheeler HGV lorries were clocked at 48 mph and 55 mph travelling North here. The highest speed of 73 mph was also recorded here, but going out of the village South towards Southam, which was 10% higher than previously recorded 66 mph, prior to the Covid pandemic.

I believe the second most likely location for a fatal accident in the village is Leamington Road at its junction with Short Lane, as there have been several damage only road traffic collisions but none resulting in serious injury. Vehicles travelling out of the village accelerate far too early and those entering the village ignore the various speed reduction measures already in place. These measures are countdown markers on the approach. Dragon's teeth painted on the road when entering the village, followed 150 metres later by a small single chicane. I did record speeds of 60 mph at this junction during my survey.

My third 'hotspot' is in the vicinity of the new pedestrian crossing where I also recorded speeds of 60 mph during the survey. There has been one fatal accident involving a mobility scooter and one serious injury accident within 100 metres of the crossing, both within the last 5 years.

Elsewhere, I recorded speeds of 71 mph leaving the village travelling north on the A423 towards Marton and 60 mph past Greenway's Care Home. These speeds are expected to be found on a dual carriageway or motorway, BUT NOT on village roads with pedestrian traffic, disabled persons on buggies, children going to and from school, dog walkers, horse riders, a care home and parents with prams and pushchairs.

Since I started this ePetition, there has been one fatal and one serious accident on the A423 between Long Itchington and Marton. I believe there will be more fatal accidents on this section of road and that a fatal accident will also happen within the village very soon.

I do understand that there are other areas in Warwickshire which have higher incidents of injury and fatal accidents. But it is a sad state of affairs when we as villages need more people to die in order to get the measures we so desperately need. More 30mph repeater signs, roundels on the road and flashing speed signs may help. An extra crossing facility in the vicinity of Lilac View would assist locals and help to reduce speeds.

Motoring has evolved, driving standards have fallen and traffic calming measures that may have been suitable 10 years ago, may now need a drastic re-think. I have looked at ALL of the traffic calming measures available and have come to the conclusion that in order to make the roads safe, Average Speed Cameras are the only solution.

Both Marton Parish Council and Long Itchington Parish Council support this petition. It's not just about speed and accidents. Raised speeds increase noise and pollution and we would ask that WCC also consider the effect that speeding vehicles have on the quality of life and will WCC help the residents of Long Itchington live their best lives?

I repeat this request is for average Speed Cameras to be installed on the A423 and

Leamington Road in the village of Long Itchington.”

Councillor Wallace Redford (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) thanked Mr Turnecliff for the petition adding that he would consider it and provide a response.

(6) Public Speaking

None.

3. Education Capital Programme 2022/23

Councillor Kam Kaur (Portfolio Holder for Education) moved the recommendation as set out in the report. Councillor Mandy Tromans seconded the recommendation and reserved the right to speak.

Debate

Councillor Tracey Drew quoted paragraph 3.4 of the report that “the vehicle access and car parking will be configured to allow future shared access to the existing Evergreen School adjacent to the site if required should expansion of the special provision be undertaken.”. Councillor Drew commented that the group would continue to push for design and build that maximised access and opportunities for active travel as well as vehicle travel. She reminded the meeting that Myton Road was a national cycle route and therefore, joining up the cycling and walking routes at the front and rear of this building was essential.

Councillor John Holland raised two issues: one regarding the lack of developer funding to support the building of Myton Gardens Primary School and the other focussing on the siting of Oakley Grove School.

Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi considered that the scheme was much needed and welcomed the investment in education.

Councillor Mandy Tromans spoke in support of the report, welcoming the proactive investment in the area to address shortfalls in provision.

In response Councillor Kaur noted that the siting of Oakley Grove and the associated negotiation of Section 106 funding was the responsibility of Warwick District Council and funding had already been allocated.

Vote

Upon being put to the vote, the motion was carried by a majority.

Resolved:

That Council agrees to add to the capital programme the scheme delivery of a school at Myton Gardens, at a cost of £13.400 million funded from Department for Education grant.

4. The Impact of Inflation on the Capital Programme

Councillor Isobel Seccombe (Leader) moved the recommendation as set out in the report. Councillor Adrian Warwick seconded the recommendation and reserved the right to speak.

Debate

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse welcomed the report and reflected on the current national economic situation and how that would impact on local authorities. He understood that there would be a need to prioritise the capital programme and he welcomed the provisions in the paper to report to scrutiny. Looking ahead, Councillor Roodhouse considered that there was a hard budget round ahead.

Councillor Will Roberts noted that the report informed Council that 47 schemes had been identified in the approved capital programme where it was likely schemes would need additional funding approved to deliver the projects in full and sought agreement that, for transparency, these schemes be identified publicly.

Councillor Sarah Feeney expressed concern that monies would need to be reallocated, asserting the need for councillors to understand which schemes would be put on hold as communities would be counting on them to improve the areas where they lived. Like Councillor Roodhouse, she anticipated hard times ahead.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers welcomed a prudent piece of good governance but expressed concern about the exemptions detailed in paragraph 2.10 of the report and sought some reassurance in this regard.

Councillor Bill Gifford expressed his support for the proposals and commended the work that had been produced.

Councillor Adrian Warwick reflected on the reasons for the economic pressure, citing the conflict in Ukraine as a key cause. However, he was delighted to commend the report which supported the ongoing delivery of the capital programme.

In reply, Councillor Seccombe thanked Members for their comments and offered reassurance that there was clarity in terms of needing to deal with committed schemes as quickly as possible and the proposals set out in the report allowed for that to happen. She acknowledged that there would need to be some prioritisation but considered that the proposal was a sensible way of dealing with current pressures. In doing so, she commended the prudent financial management of the council over many years but recognised that this did not result in immunity to the current financial pressures facing the country. She also recognised that there would be a very challenging budget ahead.

Vote

Upon being put to the vote, the motion was carried with unanimous support.

Resolved:

That Council:

1. Sets aside £15m of the Capital Investment Fund to create an Inflation Contingency Fund to manage the impact of inflation on the approved capital programme; and

Delegates authority to make allocations from the Fund to the Strategic Director for Resources, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property in accordance with the proposals in paragraph 2.9 of the report.

5. Officer Delegations

Councillor Andy Jenns (Leader) moved the recommendation as set out in the report. Councillor Andy Crump seconded the recommendation and reserved the right to speak.

Debate

Councillor Tracey Drew asked what impact the changes set out in paragraph 2.4.3 would have on the gypsy roma traveller community.

Councillor Sarah Feeney welcomed the clearer delegations with regard to the gypsy roma traveller community and welcomed the position with regard to special severance payments.

Councillor Crump – welcomed the sensible and reasonable delegations in the report relating to fire and rescue which gave more operational independence to the Chief Fire Officer.

Councillor Jenns thanked Members for their comments and clarified that the delegations would allow issues to be dealt with more quickly which would be of benefit to the gypsy roma traveller community.

Vote

Upon being put to the vote, the motion was supported unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council:

1. Approves the amendments to the Constitution as set out in Appendix 1 to the Report.

Authorises the Strategic Director for Resources to make any consequential amendments to any Human Resources or other corporate policies required as a result of the statutory guidance on special severance payments and the consequent changes to delegations.

6. Notices of Motion

The meeting adjourned while Members considered the amended Motions which had been tabled. The meeting reconvened at 11.55am.

Cost of Living

Two motions had been received on this topic with an amendment from the Conservative Group on each and, in the circumstances, the Chairman considered that the two motions and amendments should be debated in the round.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse moved the Liberal Democrat motion as printed on the agenda:

“This Council recognises that we are in the middle of the worst cost of living crisis for 50 years and that it is having a major effect on many local people:

This Council therefore calls for a local Cost-of-Living Emergency Summit to be arranged, with stakeholders, including Citizens Advice, Food Banks, Local Trades Unions, Chambers of Commerce and local MPs to explore how more local help can be provided for those struggling with the cost of living – including extending the use of discretionary payments.

This Council also notes that increasingly Local Authorities are developing ‘Library Plus or ‘Warm Bank’ schemes, to give residents a place to stay warm and keep the cost of bills at home down after school and during evenings and weekends. The Council requests the Chief Executive to develop a funded plan for the use of ‘Warm Banks’ across the County which will include later opening for Libraries and other council owned buildings. where possible.

Finally this Council requests that the Leader writes to the Secretary of State expressing this Council's concerns over the impact that the cost of living is having on residents and also writes to the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority and Leaders of all other Local Authorities in the West Midlands Region asking them to pass similar motions so we can take a united stand as Local Government to force the Government to do more to help local people.”

In moving the motion, Councillor Roodhouse noted the decisions of the Bank of England and the impact that would have on mortgages and considered that the economic situation was due to wider causes than the war in Ukraine. He considered that the winter, which could be harder due to climate change, would prove particularly difficult. He considered that a co-ordinated mechanism in the form of a website was needed to support residents through the cost of living crisis and also considered that the council's buildings could be utilised in support and that the covid network should be reinvigorated. He noted the amendment and supported debating the motions in the round.

Councillor Sarah Boad seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

Amendment:

“This Council recognises that we are **moving into one of the most significant** in the middle of the worst cost of living crisis **crises** for 50 years and that **inflation** it is having a major effect on many local people **and businesses**.

~~This Council therefore calls for a local Cost-of-Living Emergency Summit to be arranged, with stakeholders, including Citizens Advice, Food Banks, Local Trades Unions, Chambers of Commerce and local MPs to explore how more local help can be provided for those struggling with the cost of living – including extending the use of discretionary payments.~~

This Council also notes that increasingly Local Authorities are developing 'Library Plus' or 'Warm Bank' schemes, to give residents a place to stay warm and keep the cost of bills at home down after school and during evenings and weekends.

This Council welcomes work officers are undertaking to prepare a package of measures to support residents and communities with the cost of living, and a recent meeting of the six Warwickshire Council Leaders and Chief Executives to discuss the cost-of-living crisis.

The proposed cost of living measures will be presented to October Cabinet, in the context of an evaluation of the Government's recently announced package of measures to support people with the cost of living. This Council calls for the report to include the following:

- **Extending the Warwickshire Local Welfare Scheme to support residents over the winter**
- ~~The Council requests the Chief Executive to d~~**Developing** a funded plan for the use of "Warm Banks" across the County which will include later opening for libraries and other council owned buildings where possible **a network of "Library Plus" or "Warm Hub" schemes, working with community and voluntary organisations, to give residents a place to stay warm and keep the cost of bills at home down after school and during evenings and weekends**
- **Working with key partners, expand on the information already available on the County Council Website, to create a "Cost of Living Hub" as an online resource offering practical and financial advice to struggling residents**
- **Convening a Warwickshire Cost of Living Summit to be arranged with key stakeholders and partners to help address the current crisis**
- **Working with community and voluntary organisations to develop a community response to the crisis, building on what already exists, and**
- **Working with Council staff and VCSE organisations to ensure we maximise the opportunities to inform and support residents in crisis and direct them towards services that can advise on saving money on heating bills, employment and skills and wellbeing support.**

~~Finally this Council requests that the Leader writes to the Secretary of State expressing this Council's concerns over the impact that the cost of living is having on residents and also writes to the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority and Leaders of all other Local Authorities in the West Midlands Region asking them to pass similar motions so we can take a united stand as Local Government to force the Government to do more to help local people."~~

[Additions in bold and underlined]

In moving the above amendment, Councillor Isobel Seccombe considered that a consolidated coordinated approach was at its essence. She reflected on the risk to budgets and needed to understand how the cost of living was going to impact residents so that resources could be targeted appropriately between the county, district and borough councils, town and parish councils and the voluntary sector. To this end, she suggested the inclusion of town and parish councils

wherever voluntary organisations were mentioned in the amendment. Councillor Seccombe noted that much of the amendment was already being anticipated with a report scheduled for Cabinet in October 2022. Meetings with district leaders and chief executives had taken place about a coordinated response and she considered that this approach would avoid duplication and recognise and support the role of other organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau. Councillor Seccombe was supportive of a Warwickshire Summit and noted that this would provide an opportunity to test proposals against need with partnership agencies. She did not accept that it was appropriate to write to the secretaries of state and instead believed the focus in Warwickshire should be on delivery with partners.

Cllr Heather Timms seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

Councillor Roodhouse accepted the amendment as friendly.

Councillor Sarah Feeney then moved the Labour motion as printed in the agenda:

“In response to the current rate of inflation and its effect on the residents and businesses of Warwickshire, this Council will

- Expand on the information already available on the County Council Website, to create a ‘Cost of Living Hub’ as an online resource offering practical and financial advice to struggling residents.
- Convene a local Cost of Living Emergency Summit, inviting stakeholders such as Citizen’s Advice, food banks, trade unions, charities and other partners to help address the current crisis.
- Work with partner agencies to develop a ‘One Warwickshire’ regular system of partnership reporting to help track the impact of the cost of living crisis at local level to grow our evidence base for our needs analysis and so we can target our response accurately.
- Work with community and voluntary organisations to develop a community response to the crisis, building on what already exists and taking a social justice approach. Ideas include a network of welcoming spaces where people can spend time, have access to Wi-Fi, free activities and support.
- Work with council staff and VCSE organisations to roll out signposting training to ensure we maximise opportunities to inform and support residents in crisis and direct them towards services that can advise on saving money on heating bills, employment and skills and wellbeing support.
- Seek to prioritise, subject to available funding, children’s centres and nurseries when faced with real-terms Government funding cuts to Local Authorities.
- Call on Party Group Leaders to lobby the Government to:
 - i. Keep benefit payments in line with inflation, in a system similar to the state pension ‘triple lock’; and

- ii. Continue to provide free school meals during school holidays and for it to expand eligibility to include anyone in receipt of Universal Credit.”

In moving the motion, Councillor Feeney recognised the principle of local government to support and serve its communities. She noted that inflation had reached a 40 year high and there were 50% increases in energy prices. She recognised that people were already living in debt and struggling, and noted reports that even households with an income of £45,000 per year would struggle, that women would be disproportionately affected and those with disabilities were facing very difficult choices. She noted that impacts were not just on individuals, but also on businesses. She highlighted that the crisis was exacerbated by numerous factors, including low increases in real wages and cuts to benefits. Councillor Feeney went on to point out the increasing reliance on foodbanks. She urged the council to work with as many partner organisations as possible to ensure that the right information was delivered to the right people at the right time. She sought a practical solution that supported local families to remain in their homes.

Councillor Sarah Millar seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

Amendment:

- **“This Council recognises that we are moving into one of the most significant cost of living crises and that** ~~In response to the current rate of inflation~~ **is having a major** ~~and its effect on the~~ **many local people** ~~residents and businesses. of Warwickshire, this Council will~~

This Council also notes that increasingly Local Authorities are developing ‘Library Plus or ‘Warm Bank’ schemes, to give residents a place to stay warm and keep the cost of bills at home down after school and during evenings and weekends.

- **This Council welcomes work officers are undertaking to prepare a package of measures to support residents and communities with the cost of living, and a recent meeting of the six Warwickshire Council Leaders and Chief Executives to discuss the cost-of-living crisis.**

- **The proposed cost of living measures will be presented to October Cabinet, in the context of an evaluation of the Government’s recently announced package of measures to support people with the cost of living. This Council calls for the report to include the following:**

- **Extending the Warwickshire Local Welfare Scheme to support residents over the winter**
- **developing a funded plan for a network of ‘Library Plus’ or ‘Warm Hub’ schemes, working with community and voluntary organisations, to give residents a place to stay warm and keep the cost of bills at home down after school and during evenings and weekends**
- **Working with key partners, Eexpand** on the information already available on the County Council Website, to create a ‘Cost of Living Hub’ as an online resource offering practical and financial advice to struggling residents
- **Conveninge** a local ~~Warwickshire~~ **Warwickshire** Cost of Living ~~Emergency~~ **Emergency** Summit, **to be arranged with key** ~~inviting stakeholders~~ **and** ~~such as Citizen’s Advice, food banks, trade unions, charities and other partners to help address the current crisis~~

- ~~Work with partner agencies to develop a 'One Warwickshire' regular system of partnership reporting to help track the impact of the cost of living crisis at local level to grow our evidence base for our needs analysis and so we can target our response accurately.~~
- **Working** with community and voluntary organisations to develop a community response to the crisis, building on what already exists, and ~~taking a social justice approach. Ideas include a network of welcoming spaces where people can spend time, have access to Wi-Fi, free activities and support~~
- **Working** with council staff and VCSE organisations to ~~roll-out signposting training to ensure we maximise opportunities to inform and support residents in crisis and direct them towards services that can advise on saving money on heating bills, employment and skills and wellbeing support.~~
- ~~Seek to prioritise, subject to available funding, children's centres and nurseries when faced with real-terms Government funding cuts to Local Authorities.~~
- ~~Call on Party Group Leaders to lobby the Government to: i. Keep benefit payments in line with inflation, in a system similar to the state pension 'triple lock'; and ii. Continue to provide free school meals during school holidays and for it to expand eligibility to include anyone in receipt of Universal Credit."~~

[Additions in bold and underlined]

Councillor Isobel Seccombe moved the amendment above, noting that it brought the motions into alignment and lamented that this approach had not been taken from the outset. Again, she noted that the content of the amendment reflected the work that was already taking place to bring a paper to Cabinet in October 2022 and hoped that it supported the intentions of the original motion and what could be achieved by working together with other councils and organisations.

Councillor Heather Timms seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

Councillor Feeney accepted the amendment as friendly (with the similar addition of town and parish councils already suggested) and requested that all groups had an input into the summit, which was agreed by Councillor Seccombe.

Debate

Councillor Barbara Brown noted the impact on the third sector with increasing customers and reducing funding resulting in the need, in some cases, to use reserves. She pointed to statistics which demonstrated a decline in the third sector offer and noted that donations would also reduce as donors felt the impact of the cost of living themselves. Councillor Brown, therefore, cautioned against placing emphasis on the role of an unsupported third sector and asked that thought be given to the stress that was mounting on the sector.

Councillor Will Roberts welcomed the motions and recognised the need to work together to help Warwickshire residents. He noted that not all residents were connected to the internet and sought opportunities to connect with and signpost those residents too.

Councillor Adrian Warwick considered that conflict in Europe was the root cause of the current climate and he emphasised the need for unity at this time. He welcomed the inclusion of parish councils in the Motion and noted national support that had been made available for households.

Councillor Pete Gilbert welcomed the collegiate atmosphere in the Chamber. He stated that it was clear to him that local residents would struggle and it was important to ensure that action taken for them was effective. He noted that it was not just the vulnerable and elderly who might find themselves unable to access online services, but also those residents with pay as you go plans who may struggle to top up their credit. He noted that there was misinformation among residents and it would be important to make sure that messages were clear and accurate. Councillor Gilbert also acknowledged that there would be an impact on small businesses who were already struggling against the tide after the impacts of the credit crunch and Covid-19.

Councillor John Holland welcomed the agreement on the motions but was moved by the lack of action that local authorities could actually take and that the crisis had been building for some time. He believed that lobbying government was, therefore, key to the debate. He particularly noted widening inequalities and the rise of foodbanks. Councillor Holland sought a joint approach to the proposed summit to ensure that everyone who could make a valuable contribution through their attendance received an invite.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers noted the stark portraits of the cost of living that had been shared. He believed that it made sense to take a co-ordinated approach and provide clear support and guidance for residents. Councillor Chilvers believed that there were many reasons for the current economic difficulties but that the situation had been exacerbated by recent fiscal moves by central government which would have long term implications for residents.

Councillor Heather Timms welcomed the united approach in the Chamber. She recalled the reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic which had supported growth in the voluntary sector and considered that this would provide a backdrop of support to the cost of living crisis. By way of illustration, she pointed to the introduction of community pantries. She also highlighted the importance of the skills agenda and the local welfare scheme. She emphasised the need to work together to do practical things to deliver results for residents of Warwickshire, including the establishment of a cost of living hub and the need for local councillors to be fully aware of the opportunities available so that they were well placed to provide advice and signposting to residents.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe noted that there was already a report being drafted on this topic which was due to be presented to Cabinet in October. However, events leading up to its publication could result in a change to its content and work with the district and borough councils was a particularly important factor that would be key to ensuring an appropriate delivery mechanism. Councillor Seccombe noted comments regarding overburdening the voluntary sector, recognising that many organisations were facing financial and capacity challenges. She noted that it would not be possible for the Council to solve the problem, but it was possible to make things easier and provide clarity on what support was available. The financial challenges ahead would also impact on the Council and, therefore, a practical approach was needed. She concluded that the summit would provide a worthwhile opportunity to bring together partners and the business sector.

Cllr Sarah Boad welcomed the discussion on joint working. She challenged assertions that the crisis was a result of conflict in Europe, considering that there were other economic reasons for the situation. She echoed comments about the need to manage misinformation, the impact of rising prices and welcomed the inclusion of town and parish councils in the response.

Cllr Sarah Millar reflected on the deletion of the word emergency from the motion despite the tone of the debate. She considered that the roots of the situation extended further back than the commencement of the war in Ukraine and highlighted the impact of the recent mini budget. She looked forward to the summit and urged more data tracking as she believed it was important to understand how the situation could be managed. She put on record her view that she did not think the amended motion was addressing the cost of living emergency in the right way.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse considered that the debate had resulted in some interesting and valid comments. He reflected on recent events and the potential impact on local government. He echoed comments to revitalise and reinvigorate the Covid-19 network to tackle the cost of living crisis. He concluded by emphasising the need for central government to recognise the importance of local government and its ability to deliver results.

Councillor Sarah Feeney welcomed suggestions to utilise soft powers and thanked the chamber for recognising the impacts that the current situation had on local people and businesses. She reiterated comments that advice and information needed to be clear and precise with delivery methods on- and off- line. She also considered that there were a myriad of causes for the current situation.

Vote

A vote was held. The motions (as amended) were carried unanimously.

Resolved:

This Council recognises that we are moving into one of the most significant cost of living crises and that inflation having a major effect on many local people and businesses.

This Council also notes that increasingly Local Authorities are developing 'Library Plus' or 'Warm Bank' schemes, to give residents a place to stay warm and keep the cost of bills at home down after school and during evenings and weekends.

This Council welcomes work officers are undertaking to prepare a package of measures to support residents and communities with the cost of living, and a recent meeting of the six Warwickshire Council Leaders and Chief Executives to discuss the cost-of-living crisis.

The proposed cost of living measures will be presented to October Cabinet, in the context of an evaluation of the Government's recently announced package of measures to support people with the cost of living. This Council calls for the report to include the following:

- Extending the Warwickshire Local Welfare Scheme to support residents over the winter
- Developing a funded plan for a network of "Library Plus" or "Warm Hub" schemes, working with community and voluntary organisations and town and parish councils, to give residents a place to stay warm and keep the cost of bills at home down after school and during evenings and weekends

- Working with key partners, expand on the information already available on the County Council Website, to create a “Cost of Living Hub” as an online resource offering practical and financial advice to struggling residents
- Convening a Warwickshire Cost of Living Summit to be arranged with key stakeholders and partners to help address the current crisis
- Working with community and voluntary organisations and town and parish councils to develop a community response to the crisis, building on what already exists, and
- Working with Council staff and VCSE organisations to ensure we maximise the opportunities to inform and support residents in crisis and direct them towards services that can advise on saving money on heating bills, employment and skills and wellbeing support.

Green Motion: Affiliation to Electronics Watch

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers moved the following motion as printed on the agenda:

“This Council will:

1. Investigate affiliation to Electronics Watch in order to support our efforts for supply chain accountability for procurement of ICT hardware, electronics, including solar panels and batteries.
2. Bring a report to Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview & Scrutiny no later than February 2023.”

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Chilvers recognised that devices were built all over the world, including areas where the workforce could be exploited during the metal extraction process. He noted that the number of devices procured by the Council was relatively small and it was, therefore, difficult to make an impact on the transparency of complicated global supply chains to reduce the impact on those being exploited. The Motion therefore sought to assist through an organisation called Electronics Watch. Details of the organisations’ website had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Councillor Will Roberts seconded the Motion and reserved his right to speak.

Debate

Councillor Sarah Boad supported investigating affiliation further and looked forward to hearing more in a future report.

Councillor Tim Sinclair had investigated the company’s website, and believed Electronics Watch to be an initiative from an organisation seeking radical change, with a political premise and an anti-corporate philosophy. He was, therefore, unable to support affiliation.

Councillor Sarah Millar considered that the Motion supported key themes important to the Council, including addressing the climate emergency, and therefore supported investigations into affiliation.

Councillor Warwick echoed the concerns of Councillor Sinclair. He noted that the Council had robust procurement methods in place and stated he would not be comfortable working with a politically motivated organisation.

Councillor Tracey Drew highlighted growing awareness of an increase in demand for resources and the impact on sourcing materials. She considered that this Motion represented an opportunity to counter these impacts and human exploitation in a small and meaningful way.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe considered that the organisation's website did not have enough information and she felt it lacked credibility at the current time. In the future, this may change, but she currently felt it was more of a political statement. She urged the Chamber to be aware that agreeing to explore affiliation would divert finite resources away from other workstreams. She also pointed out that the Council had a credible procurement process.

Councillor Caroline Phillips countered comments about the organisation's website, considering that it did not show political influence.

Councillor Ian Shenton reflected on the time that had been spent during this meeting focussing on the cost of living crisis and, in light of that, he believed that diverting attention and resources to explore affiliation at this time was not appropriate.

Councillor Will Roberts lamented the arguments against the motion. He emphasised that the motion was seeking investigation into affiliation and focussed on the independent, not for profit, status of the organisation which he stated other Councils had signed up with. He expressed the view that it was important to ensure public funds were spent in a fair and ethical way to address human rights issues around the world.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers also expressed disappointment at the response to the Motion and did not recognise the poor characterisation of the organisation that had been put forward during the debate. He emphasised the independence and not for profit status of Electronics Watch and explained the aims of the organisation to make ethical links across the globe. He noted that, as an end consumer, the Council had more power as a buyer than many other people around the world. He considered this was a constructive tool to use in the procurement process and hoped that the principles of the Motion could be supported.

Vote

A vote was held and the Motion was defeated.

7. Member Question Time (Standing Order 7)

(1) Question to Councillor Redford from Councillor Feeney

"A number of services in Rugby seem to be regularly cancelled in the morning at the moment. I've been informed by residents that the No 4 bus service at 7.45 is frequent cancelled leading to overcrowding on the next service. It is a bus that school children use to get to school and it does create problems when it doesn't run.

Also the 85 which goes to Coventry has similarly been cancelled a number of times with passengers waiting an hour for the next bus. One lady was 2 hours late for work in Coventry one day. I also know that a visually impaired resident gets that bus with his guide dog and its very difficult for them to make alternative arrangements if the bus does not turn up.

Can we ascertain why certain buses are cancelled on a fairly regular basis and also what steps the operator is taking to ensure that this will not be happening going forward?"

In response, Councillor Redford indicated that the problem lay with bus companies having extreme difficulties in recruiting staff, not just in Warwickshire, but nationwide. This was an ongoing situation although there were some indications that these difficulties were coming to an end at a local level. There had been a few problems in Rugby, with Councillor Redford noting problems with the timetables, reductions and cancellations. However, Councillor Redford advised that he had received assurances from Stagecoach that there would be an easing of the situation in the week following the meeting.

(2) Question to Councillor Redford from Councillor Holland

"Warwick town centre has an Air Quality Management Order in place. Computer modelling of air quality and traffic flows has shown that there is only one possible scheme. This was agreed by Cabinet in 2016 and all work is fully funded.

The scheme can be seen at www.Warwickshire.gov.uk/warwicktowncentre
There has been no progress since May 2021. Will you ensure that the street work is completed as soon as possible?"

Councillor Redford agreed to do what he could to support the process and informed the meeting that it was proposed works at the St Johns Junction would be starting in July 2023 with further engagement with the local communities in the coming weeks.

By way of supplementary question, Councillor Holland asked for serious resource to be directed to the scheme. He noted that public consultation for St Johns was expected in July 2022 but nothing had happened and in fact over the previous 12 months, monthly meetings had taken place with no action moving forward. He considered that the scheme represented approximately two years' worth of work which could have been finished in 2018 or, accounting for some over-run, at least before the pandemic. There were other issues linked to the scheme, like a pedestrian crossing for the new GP Surgery which opened in June last year. A financial contribution had been received but the work was being held up by the work at St John's despite there being limited connection. Councillor Holland opined that the scheme was fully funding but resourcing was an issue. Councillor Redford repeated his agreement to do what he could to push the scheme along.

(3) Question to Councillor Redford from Councillor Drew

"Does the Portfolio Holder share concern that the travel plan for the new secondary school in Kenilworth, to open in a year's time, anticipates school runs being almost exclusively by car? Will he commit to work with myself, head teacher and officers to improve this plan?"

Councillor Redford provided the requested commitment. In doing so, he emphasised that it was a planning requirement for the school trust to submit the travel plan to the Council and that had not

yet been done. He, therefore, expressed his appreciation for anything Councillor Drew could do to expedite this.

(4) Question to Councillor Kaur from Councillor Fradgley

"I have been made aware of problems with admissions this year. Have the issues behind these problems been resolved now and are you confident they will not happen again? Are all children now accommodated?

Would you please give me the average time over the last three months between an application being made for an in-year school place and a place being allocated."

Councillor Kam Kaur advised that the most school places were allocated during the main school transfer window (March for secondary places and April for primary places). In-year admissions generally involved children moving into Warwickshire or wishing to change school, and for the current year included children arriving in Warwickshire under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Many of the children applying for in-year moves had existing school places. This was a different process to the annual process which went smoothly in the current year for both primary and secondary schools.

Councillor Kaur explained that the Council's Admissions Service had experienced some challenges in the weeks prior to the meeting with regard to in-year admissions. In-year admissions were complex, not least because most school places were already taken making it challenging to balance parental preference with capacity, statutory class size limits for infant classes and the code requirement to apply oversubscription criteria to all those wanting places in oversubscribed schools.

Councillor Kaur went on to advise that the revised School Admissions Code in 2021 required some changes to be put in for summer 2022. The in-year process could only be run for high volumes when the schools were open. The School Admissions Code 2021 recognised that in-year admissions was a complex process and required in-year admissions to be processed within 15 school days, with an aim of 10 school days in the school year to which they apply. Some challenges had been experienced when introducing and embedding the new way of working, combined with an even higher than usual number of in-year applications received over the summer. Councillor Kaur expressed her apologies to schools and families affected by the impact of the changes, particularly noting poor service responding to calls and emails.

Despite these problems, the Council provided offers to secondary school applications by 9 September 2022 and primary by 16 September 2022. The Council had moved into a regular fortnightly process of processing batches of in-year applications received since September and expected to make further offers to those children by the end of the current week, again, in-line with the time expectations set out in the Code. The Council was embedding and refining its new processes, answering queries, apologies where the service had not met the standards aspired to and contacting schools to help support them with the changes. There was confidence the necessary changes were being embedded which would stand Warwickshire in good stead for the future.

With respect to the second part of the question, Councillor Kaur advised that as the Council had to process all the applications in the current school year from 1 September 2022, timeliness was measured against the Code requirement of 15 school days from the start of term and would

measure timeliness from receipt to offer during the rest of the school year. By 16 September 2022, the Council had processed over 1600 in-year applications for the current school year and were in the process of issuing offers in the current week for over 500 further applications received since the start of term (ie approximately three to four weeks ago). In doing so, it was expected that the majority would be processed within the 15 school days required.

Councillor Fradgley sought an email of the comprehensive response. She also stated that she had been asked by two or three schools in her division if they could contribute towards a discussion with the Council as to the issues they had encountered and put their experience to the Council to see if they could improve the situation for the following year.

Councillor Kaur stated that it was important to conduct a lessons learnt exercise which would involve schools. She appreciated any feedback that was submitted through the process.

(5) Question to Councillor Redford from Councillor Feeney

“I wondered if you would be able to set out the criteria and process for requesting average speed camera installation. Is there a different criteria for high speed roads in rural areas to that of high speed roads in towns?”

Councillor Redford advised that there was currently no difference in criteria. Some pilot studies were being conducted and Councillor Redford committed to sharing the policy criteria with Councillor Feeney at an early opportunity.

(6) Question to Councillor Watson from Councillor Warwick

“Could the portfolio holder confirm what the predicted saving to Warwickshire County Council is of the changes to National Insurance, welcome the retention of the higher threshold for our staff, and advise how the savings will be used?”

Councillor Martin Watson answered this question in the absence of Councillor Peter Butlin. He stated that the cost to the Council of the 1.25% uplift introduced in April 2022 was about £1.3m. Following the Chancellor’s announcements in the previous week, that the increase would be reversed from 6 November 2022, it was expected a reduction in costs of circa £1.3m next year and a part year effect of circa £0.5m for the current year. The £0.5m saving for the current year would be redirected towards the cost of the 2022 pay award when it was agreed. The current national employers’ offer would cost £1.6m more than the 4% uplift that was included in the budget that was agreed in February 2022 and the saving would reduce the need to use reserves to close the gap.

In the following year, as set out in the report to Cabinet in July 2022, the Council needed to find an estimated additional £20m cost reduction to balance the medium term financial strategy across the next five years. The £1.3m full year benefit would be put into the mix to help limit some of the more difficult decisions that would be required. However, the financial answer was not always straightforward and it was worth noting that in the current year a one-off grant was received from Central Government of £9.6m to increase inflationary pay and National Insurance and demand pressures.

Whilst the government had said that the money that was intended for health and social care through the levy would now be funded through general taxation and borrowing until the provision 2023/24 financial statement was announced in December, the Council would not know if the £9.6m would continue to be received in full or if the way it had been distributed between authorities would change. Essentially, meaning that the government may take the £1.3m back and say effectively the position would be net neutral. The expectation was it would be used to offset some of the challenges, however, the worst case scenario was that the Council might not get it anyway or it might be taken back.

Councillor Watson considered it worth mentioning the National Insurance reduction was welcomed. He thanked Councillor Feeney for her prior statements on the economy as he believed that a vibrant economy underpinned everything the Council did.

The Treasury had estimated that 920,000 businesses would also save an estimated £10,000 in the following year as a result of the National Insurance reversal with 20,000 of them being taken out of paying National Insurance entirely due to the increase in the employment allowance which rose from £4,000 to £5,000 in April 2022. In particular, small businesses, who employed over 13m people in the UK, will see a cut to their National Insurance bills in the following year which would be worth approximately between £4,200 for small businesses and £21,700 for medium sized businesses. In total 900,000 micro, small and medium businesses would benefit from the reversal of the National Insurance increase.

(7) Question to Councillor Timms from Councillor Beetham

“As the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate & Culture is aware I've been long championing the mobile community pantry in Camp Hill since the idea first came up and was very glad when Camp Hill was chosen due to being one of the top 3 most deprived areas in Warwickshire. I have been talking to residents who have used the service and residents who want to use the service and have received great feedback on this as it solves more than just the food issue but is part of a wider range of services that help improve people's financial state.

This is something Warwickshire County Council should be proud of providing in Camp Hill yet we do not hear a lot about it, with most media focus being on the non-mobile solution in Lillington can the portfolio holder please confirm how the project is going from a County perspective as I imagine from the chats I've had with residents it must be quite subscribed to and can the portfolio holder confirm for me the future of the community pantry in Camp Hill as well as the County promoting the work Camp Hill branch like it has in Lillington?”

Councillor Heather Timms welcomed the opportunity to highlight the success of community pantries bearing in mind that they had only been open for four months. There was a static site at Lillington which was open two days per week and mobiles at Camp Hill and Arley which were one day per week. The decision was taken to soft launch these facilities and also to have referrals from agencies in the first instance, but due to word of mouth, consideration was being given to how those facilities were responding. Proposals were being finalised around their future and that would be coming through in a report on the cost of living to Cabinet in October 2022. There was a website for the community pantries and it was aimed to populate it with more information as it progressed. Councillor Timms reflected on a recent webinar she had attended to talk to communities about the scheme and she stated that it would be really powerful to have case studies because the wraparound services of the community pantries was a really important part of

the scheme. There were those provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau and already they were starting to address debt issues and sorting out benefits for people. She was aware that the Department for Work and Pensions wanted involvement, along with MIND to address mental health issues as well so there was lots of scope within the community pantries to address those concerns and really meet the needs of residents in those emergency situations. Councillor Timms added that over 50 Ukrainian families had used the community pantries. The journey to setting up the communities pantries started at least 18 months ago but having them in place at this time had been absolutely phenomenal and they would be a real asset to Warwickshire as it addressed the cost of living crisis.

Councillor Timms acknowledged a supplementary request from Councillor Beetham seeking data with regard to the usage of the Camp Hill Community Pantry to be provided to him.

(8) Question to Councillor Seccombe from Councillor Holland

“The Council accounts were always presented to the July Council before Covid. What steps are being taken to return to this timetable now that Covid restrictions have been removed.”

Councillor Isobel Seccombe advised that the situation was not as straightforward as suggested by the question. She noted that until 2017 the deadline set by government was for all councils to present their audited accounts by the end of September. In 2018 and 2019 the government brought forward the deadline to the end of July. Whilst the County Council had been able to comply with the earlier date, many authorities had not been able to meet the deadline, and it had subsequently slipped again to the end of November. This was largely due to a number of issues, not least the increasing complexity of local authority operations and hence accounts which increased the amount of audit work required and an associated lack of capacity in the audit system. At the time of the meeting, the timetable requirements for the following year was still awaited but the Council was working to the end of November which was the required government deadline date previously.

Councillor Holland expressed concern that the deadline was the end of November but the Council meeting was not set until December. He noted the usefulness of the accounts in the judgments that councillors had to make, highlighting that information was only useful if it was accurate and timely and he considered December too late. He urged all those involved in the process to revert to July deadlines.

Councillor Seccombe responded that the deadline was set by government and it was a national requirement. She repeated that there was less capacity in the system and audits were a lot more complex than had historically been the case. The issue was not about the Council presenting its accounts for audit but more about the auditors have the capacity to deliver the audit. As much as an earlier date might be preferable, Councillor Seccombe noted that the auditors had queues of authorities and public sector bodies to audit and in the previous year it had been a struggle to get the accounts audited in time as the Council was behind other big organisations in the queue.

(9) Question to Councillor Seccombe from Councillor Rolfe

“Warwickshire is one the 38 local authority areas expected to benefit from the new Investment Zones scheme announced by the government.

Bearing in mind that not one of the 22 priority places identified in this council's draft report 'Spreading opportunity, embedding aspiration and tackling disparities' is in the Stratford district, does the Leader of the council expect that the Stratford district will benefit from the Investment Zones scheme, or will we be restricted to providing extra housing for those relocating to the new Zone?"

Responding to the question, Councillor Seccombe advised that the announcement about Investment Zones identified 38 potential sites across the county, with the site of the proposed Gigafactory having been set out specifically as one potential site. However, other locations in the county could come forward for consideration. The identification and selection of potential sites for Investment Zones would be undertaken in partnership with the district and borough councils and would be based on the criteria that government set out in terms of growth and deliverability within two years.

Councillor Rolfe asked for the response in writing and seceded to Councillor Chilvers to ask a supplementary question on her behalf. Councillor Chilvers noted that the details of the Investment Zones had not been finalised but that there was discussion about them not going through normal local authority procedures and he asked the Leader to confirm she would not allow the sovereignty of Warwickshire to be bypassed in the new Investment Zones.

Councillor Seccombe responded that the details around Investment Zones were vague but the speed of delivery was an important part. The gigafactory already had planning permission and that was one of the reasons it was part of the proposals. It was sitting within the fast track devolution proposals of the West Midlands Combined Authority. She advised that the Council had been told that all local authorities would be fully engaged. She knew little more than other councillors at this stage other than there may be flexibilities about the speed of development but she needed more understanding about what that actually meant.

(10) Question to Councillor Morgan from Councillor O'Donnell

"Could you please give an update on the progress with opening children's residential homes in the county and in particular I am interested in the home in Stratford-upon-Avon"

Councillor Jeff Morgan reminded the chamber of the Council's plan to open four children's homes around the county. The homes were for children for whom finding a foster placement was not possible, for instance there may be complex needs or other issues which prevent the Council looking after them in the county. There were four homes in the plan: Stratford-upon-Avon, Leamington Spa, Nuneaton and the final property was hoped to be in Bedworth or North Warwickshire. Frustratingly, the Stratford-upon-Avon home was ready for occupation but Ofsted had not yet been able to make their visit in order to make their judgement.

Councillor O'Donnell asked what timeline was offered by Ofsted but Councillor Morgan did not have this to hand and made a commitment to provide details after the meeting.

(11) Question to Councillor Redford from Councillor Golby

"We've got an organisation currently waiting to complete a planning application for submission to Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council that, if passed could bring hundreds of jobs to an area of deprivation. The consultation period for the planning application expired in January 2022 and the

application cannot be progressed because there is a delay in the County Highways response. In the spirit of levelling-up, can the Portfolio Holder commit to immediately expediting this response with his officers so that the application can at least be progressed to the next steps of the planning process.”

Councillor Redford answered in the affirmative.

(12) Question to Councillor Redford from Councillor Golby

“In 2017 one of the first things I voted on in this Chamber was agreeing a budget for some highways works and junction reconfiguration on College Street, Heath end Road and Greenmoor Road . There had been several dates given as a prospective start date for this project and this morning I was informed that there were more delays and this is now as a result of network management’s refusal to progress the Greenmoor Road project because of over-running works on the Bermuda Bridge project. This would potentially add another year on to the likely start date for the Heath End Road and Greenmoor Road junction reconfiguration which was not acceptable. We cannot continue with slippage on projects that would arguably deliver big benefits in my area and beyond because the Bridge project is running a year behind. Can I ask the Portfolio Holder to expedite Greenmore Road reconfiguration with his officers and push this project forward a priority regardless of the status of the Bermuda Bridge project?”

Councillor Redford answered in the affirmative.

(13) Question to Councillor Timms from Councillor Will Roberts

“Several locations have been identified for new investment zones in Warwickshire. The RSPB, Wildlife Trust and National Trust have said the new Investment Zones put forward in the mini budget will be an unprecedented attack on nature. Can you tell me whether you will be supporting investment zones that will have a detrimental effect on biodiversity in Warwickshire?”

Councillor Timms responded that she did not have enough information on what would be coming forward so she was not able to answer. However, she had taken a keen interest in the Coventry airport expansion when the Wildlife Trust had been very concerned due to the proximity of the Brandon Marsh Nature Reserve and she was very supportive at that time of their arguments with regard to the expansion. She stated that the investment zone at Coventry airport would not have the same detrimental impact on wildlife or biodiversity in the area but obviously more information would be available with the passage of time and she would be able to make a judgement about what was done going forward.

(14) Question to Councillor Seccombe from Councillor Chilvers

“In 2013 the Conservative Administration expressed scepticism about fracking like underground coal gasification when an application came forward. Given the announcement last week by the Prime Minister that fracking and UCG might be back on the agenda, will the Leader reaffirm that scepticism for this damaging technology?”

Councillor Isobel Seccombe stated as there was no viable interest at the time, she considered the question was asking her to pre-empt a situation which had not arisen and the technology was not understood. She suggested a wait and see approach was the correct response.

8. Any Other items of Urgent Business

None.

The meeting rose at 2.07pm

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Chair