

Cabinet

Thursday 9 November 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Isobel Seccombe OBE (Chair)
Councillor Margaret Bell
Councillor Peter Butlin
Councillor Andy Crump
Councillor Yousef Dahmash
Councillor Kam Kaur
Councillor Jan Matecki
Councillor Heather Timms

Others Present

Councillor Sarah Boad
Councillor Barbara Brown
Councillor Jonathan Chilvers
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse
Councillor Tim Sinclair

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillors Sue Markham and Martin Watson.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 12 October 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

(4) Public Speaking

There were four public speakers in relation to item 10 on the agenda, Warwickshire Fire and

Rescue Service Resourcing to Risk Proposals.

Penny Barry stated: "I am requesting the Cabinet reject all of the proposals on the agenda for Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service and ask Chief Fire Officer Ben Brook and Councillor Crump to review and amend the proposed changes. Surge fire stations will be storage sites and will leave the County dangerously inadequate to respond to emergency situations, particularly those living in the south. We must not lose our on-call firefighters. Part-time firefighters are not the answer. It is accepted that Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service must make improvements following the last two HMICFRS inspections. These proposals are not the answer. Furthermore, there is not sufficient information within the proposals, for Cabinet to make an informed decision. I draw your attention to page 9 of the addendum, and I quote "We are not yet at the stage of making a firm recommendation". Therefore, objection to all of the proposals should be your only conclusion. Changes need to happen. I suggest that the Chief Fire Officer, Ben Brook, needs to go back to the drawing board and explore other options which should include keeping on-call to keep the people of Warwickshire safe. Is there a proposed budget cut for Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service and, if so, by how much and is this steering the proposals? These proposals are spurious, the only option to the Council is to reject them now.

Jill Machado stated: "I've lived in Bidford all my life, so I've seen what's gone on and what's not gone on. I went through the last system of what Warwickshire County Council did, which was the closures of the fire stations and I sat with you, whoever was on at that time, I sat with you then and we went through and we fought for Bidford. The main reason why we fight for Bidford is because the area is a high risk area, and which Chief Fire Officer Ben Brook has pointed out is a high risk area. We have two rivers, we have desperate flooding, which has just occurred again. We also have the A46 which comes alongside the back and between Alcester and us towards Evesham – that is an absolute death trap. We've also got the crossroads, an accident death trap. We have all these high risk areas, then we also have to support HMP Long Lartin, just over the border. It happens quite regularly that the Fire Service are called to go and attend with Hereford and Worcestershire on that side. I know there are changes afoot with Hereford and Worcestershire, so Pebworth may not stay the same, so my main point is we need to re-look at these proposals and especially in the case that Bidford is a high risk area, a dangerous area to be."

Elizabeth Uggerloese, Clerk to Bidford-on-Avon Parish Council stated: "The maps in Appendix 6 demonstrate how vulnerable the south of the county will be if most of the stations are relegated to surge stations with a 30 minute to a two hour call time target. How can you ensure that villages in the south of the county will be safe after 10pm when the only cover for the whole of the district will be one appliance based in Stratford. With this in mind, have you considered the current relative response times of existing on-call stations. Bidford's turnout was 69.3% for October and specifically 88.5% from 19:00 hours to 07:00 hours. How can the County Council consider relegating thriving stations like this to unused buildings resulting in the loss of effective stations for filling an important service to their local communities. An example of the fatal cost of these closures in the south of the county is a domestic fire incident which occurred this summer in Bidford in the early hours of the morning. Due to existing cover, the fire was put out with no loss of life. If these proposals had been approved, it would not be one, but three to four dwellings on fire and potential loss of life. Please think carefully about the safety of Warwickshire residents when considering the proposal in front of you which in effect will result in the closure of the majority of on-call fire stations with

potentially serious safety issues.”

Penny Taylor, Chair of Bidford-on-Avon Parish Council stated: “We understand that the Fire Service needs to regularly review ways of working and performance targets but you won’t be surprised to learn that the people of Bidford have very serious concerns about the proposals being put forward. Firstly, averages don’t work. The statistics in the proposal all refer to averages and I am sure the averages will improve. The average response times, take no account of the time it will take to reach the edges of the county from Stratford overnight. You’ll always achieve better average response times if you put your focus on built up areas. It is the distribution curve that matters. How long will it take for appliances 1 and 2 to reach, say, Shipston or Henley or Bidford in the middle of the night? Better averages are no good to you when you are dying in a road traffic accident at 11pm south of Bidford or trapped in a flood or a house fire in a rural area. One of the key issues mentioned in the proposal is turnout. It’s clear some fire stations have poor turnout percentages and, of course, this needs to be addressed, but is the solution really to take them all out rather than try and find ways to improve things. As you’ve heard, Bidford, which has one of the best turnout responses in south Warwickshire, is quoted as averaging 70% but that 70% hides what’s happening between 7pm and 7am, as Elizabeth mentioned, when the turnout response is 88.5%. That’s Bidford firefighters being at home on call out. Now the number of fire engines: I was unable through the proposals to be clear on this but it certainly appears that seven or eight fire engines or vehicles, depending on the option model, will be surge vehicles. It’s not quite clear, but I’d like to know where these are placed. Will they be placed at the surge stations, will they be fire engines, what will they be? If they’re fire engines, if there was a fire engine at Bidford station in preparation for a surge call out, surely it makes sense to carry on covering routine call-outs at peak evening and overnight when your call-out firefighters are at home and available? Why stand them down? And if it goes wrong and we need on-call stations again, it would take years to get them back up to where they are now and to get the watch commanders that can do it. In summary, changes are no doubt needed, but surely we need to retain what we’ve got in stations where it’s working, otherwise, the message is don’t be involved in a serious incident after 10pm unless you happen to live near Stratford or Leamington. Good average figures don’t save lives.”

The Chair thanked the speakers for their comments but noted there may have been a misunderstanding regarding the purpose of the report later on the agenda and there would be some reassurance during the debate.

2. Council Plan 2022-2027 Integrated Performance Report Quarter 2 2023/24

Councillor Yousef Dahmash, Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation, noted that the report summarised the Council’s performance in Quarter 2 against the strategic priorities, and Areas of Focus, set out in the Council Plan 2022-2027. Once again, the wider national context remained a critical frame within which to view the Council’s performance including the legacy impact of the Pandemic, global conflict, and high inflation which all presented specific challenges and impacted the Council’s ability to deliver services. However, the Council was rising to the challenges and doing far better than most.

Of the 105 Key Business Measures (KBM)s detailed in that Performance Management Framework (PMF), 91 were available for reporting in this quarter. 65% of KBMs were reported as On Track and 35% Not on Track with further detail in the report. The remaining 14 were new measures not

due for reporting until Quarter 3 or Year End. The overall position was comparable to that reported at Quarter 1 continuing a reasonably consistent, strong performance delivered against the PMF. Councillor Dahmash highlighted positive elements of the report in relation to performance and noted the key main performance challenges, also as set out in the report. Turning to HR, Councillor Dahmash noted that vacancies had reduced again since the last quarter, and sickness absence had decreased slightly over the last quarter. In terms of Risk Management, Councillor Dahmash pointed out that during Quarter 2, a risk working group was convened to review and refresh the strategic risks that face the Council in the pursuit of its priorities. In conclusion, Councillor Dahmash noted a positive picture with awareness of the challenges being faced and sought Cabinet's support for the recommendations.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse noted that paragraph 2.5 of the report discussed the emerging themes of performance and he wished to highlight special educational needs, education and health care plans (EHCP) and associated performance. He had looked at Power BI in this regard and had concerns that this was an ongoing and pressing area of challenge. He queried whether it was necessary to review the Terms of Reference of the SEND Members Panel to address the challenges. His understanding was the focus needed to be on pre-school aged-children in nurseries, early years and family support help as, by the time children were of school age, it was too late for an EHCP. This demonstrated the cross-over between education and early years and the two chief officers for this area and he considered that the two should be brought together. As the SEND Members Panel tended to be more education focussed, he considered that expanding the remit would also be helpful. Due to the challenges and increasing costs involved his view was that the issue needed to be tackled now.

In response, Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education, noted concerns about the rising number of EHCPs and the data given on Power BI. She noted that education and early years colleagues met regularly and were working together under one directorship, in a way that was much improved upon from the past. It was agreed that Councillor Kaur and Councillor Roodhouse would discuss the issues after the meeting.

Councillor Barbara Brown also noted a growing need in this area, which she considered was likely to continue, and urged a more radical take on a solution which considered the issue more broadly.

Councillor Secomme noted the interdependencies that existed across a number of service areas and partnerships and that the Council did seek new approaches to challenges. It was recognised that SEND was a key area of demand and she welcomed discussions on this topic.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the Quarter 2 2023/24 organisational performance.
2. Refers the report to Overview and Scrutiny Committees to consider, in detail, the information relevant to their individual remits.

3. 2023-24 Financial Monitoring Report - Forecast Position as at Quarter 2

Councillor Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property explained that the quarter 2 position headline was an overspend of £16.3m, however, taking account of funding and reserves

already set aside the net residual overspend was £4.9m which was within tolerance levels. However, this was a £4m increase in the net overspend since Quarter 1. The net overspend would be funded from Directorate and General risk reserves, which at 1.2% difference to budget was within the +/-2% acceptable tolerance limit. The net overspend masked the fact that there was a £26.5m net service overspend, off-set by a reduced £21.6m corporate services underspend, which had reduced since Quarter 1 due to an increased overspend on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Councillor Butlin explained that the DSG deficit on the High Needs Block was solely responsible for the worsening position since Quarter 1 and overspends were being seen in all areas of SEND provision due to significant increases in the number of Education, Health and Care Plans, but most significantly in independent school places at an £8m overspend due to a lack of sufficient mainstream provision. The £26.5m service overspend, was broadly the same in overall terms since Quarter 1, but with some material changes at a service level as detailed in the report. Councillor Butlin explained that savings continued to be significantly under-delivered at 44%, £6.6m forecast to be delivered, although this was a 2% increase on Quarter 1. The most significant shortfalls related to difficulty delivering demand reductions in Social Care & Support and Children & Families.

Councillor Butlin also explained that in respect of Capital, the Quarter 2 controllable budget sat at £190.8m, with the Quarter 2 forecast showing £162.1m as deliverable. The main movements relating to project reprofiling and delays (net £30m reduction), mainly related to the Education (£13.1m reduction) and Environment, Planning and Transport Programmes (£14.3m reduction), as set out in Appendix B to the report. Councillor Butlin concluded that the overall reduction in the current year capital programme avoided the need to externally borrow, which was contributing to the in-year capital financing revenue savings throughout.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the forecast overspend of £4.856m (1.3%) that would need to be funded from the Directorate and General Risk Reserves at the end of 2023/24;
2. Notes the forecast delivery of savings for 2023/24 of £6.609m, and the consequent shortfall against the target;
3. Notes the action plan developed by Corporate Board, to address service overspends in 2023/24 and mitigate their medium-term impact;
4. Notes the forecast capital spend for 2023/24 of £162.117m; and
5. Notes and approves the movement in the forecast spend on the capital programme of £28.664m from 2023/24 into future years and notes the carry forward of Corporate schemes of £0.150m and S278 contributions of £6.830m.

4. Treasury Management Half Year Monitoring Report

Councillor Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property introduced this report, noting that with the continued increase in interest rates and volatility of gilt rates, this six-monthly review of the Council's treasury management activity was more exciting than usual. Since last reported at the 2022/23, outturn there had been a net cash outflow from the organisation of £67m, mainly due to the repayment of £49m of the Council's long-term borrowing. Consequently, long term borrowing had reduced to £272m at the 30 September 2023, and the repayment returned a £1.93m net

discount, which could be released over the next 10 years and was part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy savings. The repayment also reduced the Council's debt repayment concentration period in the 2050's and returned some debt headroom. High interest rates had also returned £8.89m against a budget of £1.8m, which was also fundamentally helping offset the service overspends highlighted in reports. This was anticipated to continue into the second half of the year but would potentially start to reduce from 2024/25 as cash balances and interest rates inevitably reduced, but a level of shorter-term benefit was built into the Medium Term Financial Strategy refresh from higher interest rates. Councillor Butlin went on to explain that as a result of the high interest rates, a decision was taken not to make an early pension fund payment, as more could be earned by the Council investing the money itself, compared to the discount rate offered by the pension fund. This also meant the Council maintained a level of flexibility over cashflow as well, as it was not locked in for three years, which would have been the case with a pension fund early payment option. Councillor Butlin added that non-treasury investments were well below where they were expected to be by this point in the year due to agreed Warwickshire Recovery Investment Fund investments not having been physically made, but approvals were in place to use the current year's PIF and BIG pillar allocations, subject to the final deals being signed.

Councillor Andy Crump welcomed the report and expressed gratitude to the team for providing this contribution to the budget and freeing up resources to fund services. Similarly, Councillor Secombe welcomed the news ahead of what was a challenging budget.

Councillor Butlin expressed his own thanks to the team and indicated that the reason reserves had been available for allocation was due to their excellent management, enabling the Council to balance the budget for the year. Looking ahead, with due diligence, the Council would manage the Medium-Term Financial Strategy going forward.

Resolved

That Cabinet notes the update on Treasury Management activity and performance in respect of the first 6 months of the 2023/24 financial year.

5. Annual Education Sufficiency Update (Ages 0-25) 2023

This report was presented by Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education, who stated that the Council had a statutory duty to ensure that sufficient early years, childcare, primary, secondary and post-16 education places were available for their area, including places appropriate for pupils with Special Educational Needs/Disabilities (SEND). She advised that the Annual Education Sufficiency Update (Ages 0-25) 2023 was supplementary to the County Council's Education Sufficiency Strategy and outlined the Council's approach to this duty, including pupil number forecasts from September 2023, compared against school capacities. Details of any pressures expected during that period were included, along with proposed solutions such as school expansions. Sufficiency of early years, childcare, post-16 and SEND places were also assessed. Council Kaur noted that across the county as a whole, there was sufficient capacity to provide early years and childcare places to all that required it. There was also a sufficient number of places for Post-16 students. Demand for early years places was expected to increase in some areas of high housing development.

She noted that the trend in Warwickshire was for increased demand for specialist education provision. Provision in Specialist Resourced Provision and special schools was being expanded and a 'deep dive' review was taking place, as part of the Delivering Better Value Programme, which would lead to recommendations on whether any further special school provision should also be commissioned.

Eleven new schools had opened in Warwickshire since 2010, as well as several permanent school expansions contributing to an overall increase of over 10,000 new permanent school places in the last 10 years. During the next fifteen-year period it was expected to deliver at least another seven new schools, alongside several expansion projects for both mainstream and specialist settings. In the longer term, if all proposed housing development across the county was built as suggested, this figure could rise to as many as 24 new schools being required to meet the need for school places. Early years places and Specialist Resourced Provision would be provided in all new schools where appropriate.

Councillor Kaur highlighted the forecast mainstream pupil numbers as set out in the report and noted that the forecasting methodology used was based on DfE guidance. Councillor Kaur went on to state that demand for primary places in all year groups could be accommodated in existing schools in most planning areas. Areas of high housing development including Nuneaton, Rugby, Kineton, Kenilworth and South of Leamington were forecasting a need for additional primary school places and this was addressed in the Update.

Councillor Kaur noted that all areas of the county were experiencing pressure on Secondary school places in some year groups, as a combined result of larger resident cohorts moving through these year groups and new housing development in the county bringing new families during the school year. In addition to new schools opening and permanent expansion of existing schools as detailed in the Update, to meet the increasing need for places during the school year, Secondary schools would be required to take a small number of pupils over capacity in most year groups and in most areas by the end of 2023. The local authority was working with Secondary schools to support the introduction of temporary expansions/additional places and the Fair Access Protocol would continue to be used as appropriate.

Councillor Kaur provided reassurance that proposed additional school expansions and new schools would be subject to the usual processes of governance prior to submission for Council approval, including of capital expenditure.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe, Chair and Leader, noted that there was a theme to the challenges being discussed around demand for SEND and she considered that this meant changes for schools and how they continued to meet the needs of the community. Councillor Seccombe considered that this required a serious discussion with schools, including academies.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse expressed his concern regarding SEND that the age that children required support was becoming younger, impacting family centres and nurseries and this would continue to increase demand in future years. He welcomed the proposed deep dive and looked forward to the outcome of the report. He considered that some Member oversight was required to support a culture shift towards a more corporate approach. Councillor Roodhouse indicated he was not supportive of academisation which limited the prospects for a strategic approach. He explained that he had spoken to a primary school headteacher in the days before the meeting and praised the exceptional work she had been doing to ensure the school played its role in the

community but he noted a different approach from secondary schools. In his view, the pressures coming through the system were increasing and would continue to do so with self harm, alcohol, and suicide now being noted in younger age groups. He asked how long the feasibility work with regarding to Rugby North would take.

Councillor Kam Kaur agreed with sentiments expressed around culture but, as could be seen from the report, a lot of work was taking place and the sufficiency team were constantly planning and forecasting. She noted the rise in the need for education, health and care plans and the need to plan now for how schools could support the Council to meet those challenges, bringing the Warwickshire family of schools into a more collaborative way of working.

Councillor Margaret Bell noted that the report did not go into detail on the proportion of in-year places required and whether these were rising. Councillor Kaur responded that in-year applications were having a big impact and there were challenges around schools capping their admission numbers.

Resolved

That Cabinet endorses the Annual Education Sufficiency Update (Ages 0-25) 2023 at Appendix 1 to the report and confirms its support for the development of design, feasibility and detailed costings for the proposed projects identified in the report.

6. Fair Access Protocol

Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education introduced this report, explaining that the changes sought to address the challenges highlighted by the previous agenda item (Annual Education Sufficiency Update (Ages 0-25) 2023). The existing Fair Access Protocol was not user-friendly and readers struggled to comprehend its content. After a consultation process which took opportunities to reach out to a wide variety of forums, including the Head Teachers Conference and Educational Head Teachers Board, the aim of the new Fair Access Protocol was to ensure that children were placed more promptly. The Protocol was a more fair, cohesive and transparent document which provided for more frequent Panels and ensured that the most appropriate places were granted using a bank of supportive information and pool of head teachers to operate objectively on behalf of the sector, supported by multi agency panel representation.

Councillor Peter Butlin expressed his support for the proposals which he considered would see children placed in the most appropriate schools and thereby create a saving on the home to school transport budget.

Resolved

That Cabinet approves the introduction of a new Fair Access Protocol for Warwickshire Schools from January 2024 to support a more efficient and effective way of placing children where we have been unable to secure a school place.

7. Sustainable Futures Strategy

Councillor Heather Timms, Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate & Culture thanked officers and others who had taken part in the formulation of the strategy which was the culmination of 12 months' hard work by officers, partners and other stakeholders with a major part to play in supporting the Council's commitment to become a net zero organisation by 2030 and as a county by 2050. The Strategy had been designed to support the local economy and create a workforce with the skills required for a thriving Net-Zero Warwickshire. A series of broad expert panels covering the key themes set out in the report had been held over Summer 2023 with experts from business, public sector, academia research and development, agriculture and horticultural sectors, district and borough councils and the West Midlands Combined Authority. All Overview and Scrutiny Committees had also been consulted.

Councillor Timms advised that the Strategy was accompanied by comprehensive delivery and activity plans which set out how the Council would achieve each of the key aims and established a framework towards a sustainable future for Warwickshire. She noted that the strategy would need financing far beyond the resources of the Council and that potential opportunities for innovative methods of funding had been set out in the Strategy. Engagement and collaborative working would be critical as the strategy and delivery plan was developed further.

Councillor Seccombe reflected on the economic changes and opportunities that would be provided as a result of the move to net-zero and considered that it was important to start to map those and provide guidance on upskilling for a future which would require new skills and provide new career paths.

Councillor Tim Sinclair thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers involved in developing the strategy for actively taking on board the comments of overview and scrutiny.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse welcomed a well-presented Strategy which provided a good steer towards net zero and working with Warwickshire's district and borough council on their climate emergency strategies. He noted that services would need to adapt to a changing world and he welcomed the adaptations to meet these challenges but considered that these needed to be accelerated going forward.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers welcomed the analysis section of this well-presented document and he considered it reflected his views on being ambitious regarding off-setting. He considered there was a lot of work to do to align transport aims with assets like cycling facilities. He thanked those involved in the process of developing the Strategy.

In conclusion, Councillor Timms stated that that the strategy was a framework which was inter-dependent with other strategies such as the Local Transport Plan (LTP4), the Energy Strategy, Food Strategy and emerging Economic Strategy and its success would require a collaborative approach.

Resolved

That Cabinet approves the Sustainable Futures Strategy and the supporting delivery plan.

8. Petitions Scheme

Councillor Yousef Dahmash, Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation, explained that at Council in March 2023, it was resolved that the Council would review its Petitions Scheme and develop a protocol surrounding how the Council responded to petitions. It was no longer a statutory requirement for Councils to have a Petitions Scheme but the Council had no intention to removing the facility. The aim of the review was to consider how the Council could ensure an engaging and responsive experience for those people presenting petitions, and in reviewing the scheme officers had considered examples of practice nationally, alongside the views expressed by members at the Council meeting in March 2023. Appendix 2 set out the proposed approach which maintained a 'menu-based' approach to petitions, rather than a 'rules based' approach which provided some flexibility and greater consideration of how the Scheme was applied in practice. If Cabinet endorsed the proposals, they would be recommended to Council and, if approved, an amendment to the standing orders in the constitution would be required.

Councillor Sarah Boad welcomed the proposals as providing a good method of democratic engagement with the public and expressed the view that it was important that the public engaged with Members on the issues that were important to them and it was equally important that they received a considered response.

Resolved

That Cabinet endorses the proposed changes to the Council's Petitions Scheme as set out at Appendices 1 and 2 to the report and recommends them to Council for adoption.

9. Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service: HMICFRS Inspection Overview

Councillor Andy Crump, Portfolio Holder for Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety explained that this report was presented following Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service's (WFRS) most recent inspection and sought endorsement for the action plan addressing the issues raised in that Inspection Report. He went on to explain that the report summarised the findings of the Inspection Report and the areas in which significant improvement had been made since the previous inspection. WFRS had one Cause of Concern and 26 Areas for Improvement which were outlined in the report. Much of the report explained the improvement that had taken place since the previous Inspection, with two out of three Causes of Concern being addressed and the number of Areas for Improvement reducing from 41 to 26, almost a 40% reduction. The report detailed the progress made.

Councillor Crump commended the measured response from the Service which had acted positively to criticism from HMICFRS and had either made adjustments in those areas or had a robust plan in place to do so, acknowledging that reaching the standards might take further time but once changes were embedded, the Service would not only be fit for the present but will also continue to keep the county safe well into the future.

Councillor Sarah Boad, a member of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Assurance Panel, noted that the Inspectorate was now engaged with the Panel and peer support had also been provided by Justin Johnston, Chief Fire Officer at Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service, who was skilled in those areas which WFRS was required to improve upon and she was pleased to see that this was resulting in good progress.

Councillor Crump confirmed the engagement with the CRMP Assurance Panel referred to by Councillor Boad and added that he was pleased with the progress that had been made to date and the direction of travel as a result of the hard work that had taken place.

Resolved

That Cabinet notes the HMICFRS Inspection Report for Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS) (Appendix 1 to the report) and confirms its support for the Action Plan returned to HMICFRS regarding the Protection Cause of Concern (Appendix 2 to the report), and the internal action plan developed to address the Areas of Improvement identified during the Inspection (Appendix 3 to the report).

10. Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service Resourcing to Risk Proposals

This report was introduced by Councillor Andy Crump, Portfolio Holder for Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety who thanked the public speakers who had engaged earlier in the meeting. Councillor Crump explained that the report set out a proposal to enter into a meaningful consultation over a 13 week period. Whilst there was speculation regarding station closures and budget cuts, this was not part of the proposals and it would, therefore, be important to ensure that accurate information was provided as part of the consultation.

Councillor Crump explained that the HMICFRS Inspection Report, considered at item 9 of the agenda, was a key driver for the proposals as it highlighted the need for Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFS) to make the best use of its resources. Councillor Crump quoted from the report, emphasising that the workforce model did not allow WFRS to carry out its core functions effectively and efficiently and that the Inspectorate welcomed review of the mix of crewing and duty systems, including analysis of its response cover. Councillor Crump went on to explain that there were two further key drivers for the proposals, one regarding on-call availability and attendance times. Statistics regarding these two points were set out in the report.

Councillor Sarah Boad considered that it was important for the Fire Service to look at the best way to serve its communities and the issues that the proposals were seeking to address had previously been raised at overview and scrutiny. She had been clear as part of her position on the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Assurance Panel that a full consultation was crucial, involving public meetings for communities to ask questions. She hoped that all County Councillors could engage in the consultation activities to talk to their residents about the proposals.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe also stressed the importance of ensuring that the consultation was as user-friendly as possible to avoid any misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse sought clarification on the commencement and length of the consultation.

Councillor Crump advised that the communication strategy would ensure that there was no ambiguity in the consultation and that legal advice would be sought on the proper length of the consultation. Councillor Seccombe indicated her understanding that the consultation would commence in December 2023 and end in March 2024, with the main body of engagement taking place in the new year.

Councillor Heather Timms noted her experience working with the Citizens Advice Bureau which had developed a different way of attracting and training volunteers to deal with the additional demands of the cost of living and related this to the difficulties set out in the report. Councillor Crump agreed that there were potential opportunities to engage more volunteers and attract more diversity as well as improving availability.

Councillor Jan Matecki referred to the points made during the public speaking session and reiterated the need for meaningful data and statistics. He also noted that the safety of residents was a primary driver for improving the system. However, he acknowledged that Cabinet was being asked to approve a consultation and urged local residents to engage in that process.

Councillor Isobel Secombe recalled the tragic events in Atherstone 16 years ago and how volunteer firefighters were often drawn from several generations of a family. She recognised how blessed the Council was to be able to call upon these volunteers who sought to keep their communities safe but she also recognised that there were changing circumstances which meant that fewer volunteers were available and HMICFRS was asking WFRS to review the position in order to keep residents safe. A full and thorough consultation would take place and she urged people to keep an open mind and not just assume there would be fire station closures.

Councillor Andy Crump echoed comments regarding a reluctance for people to volunteer, not just because individuals were busy with work pressures, but also that their employers found it difficult to release staff to be on-call. He reiterated that there were not proposals to close fire stations and reflected on the changing climate and how that impacted on the requirements for a more reactive and efficient fire service. In proposing the recommendations, he emphasised that Cabinet was being asked to endorse a consultation on the plans in the paper and was not approving any of the options.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

1. Supports the adoption of the resourcing to risk model for Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service as set out in the report.
2. Supports proceeding to staff, stakeholder and public consultation on Delivery Model 2a and authorises the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety to take such steps as are necessary to undertake the consultation, and to report back to Cabinet in due course.

11. Reports Containing Exempt or Confidential Information

Resolved:

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items mentioned below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972.

12. Exempt Minutes of the 14 September 2023 Meeting of Cabinet

The exempt minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 12 October 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

13. Warwickshire Recovery Investment Fund (WRIF) Bid for Approval

Councillor Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property presented this exempt report

Resolved

That the recommendations as set out in the exempt report be approved.

14. Proposals for Investment Zone for West Midlands Combined Authority and Warwick District

Councillor Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property presented this exempt report.

Resolved

That the recommendations as set out in the exempt report be approved.

The meeting rose at 3.43pm

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Chair