

County Council

Thursday 8 February 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Christopher Kettle (Chair), Councillor Jo Barker, Councillor Brett Beetham, Councillor Margaret Bell, Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi, Councillor Sarah Boad, Councillor Barbara Brown, Councillor Peter Butlin, Councillor Jonathan Chilvers, Councillor Jeff Clarke, Councillor John Cooke, Councillor Andy Crump, Councillor Yousef Dahmash, Councillor Piers Daniell, Councillor Jackie D'Arcy, Councillor Tracey Drew, Councillor Judy Falp, Councillor Jenny Fradgley, Councillor Sarah Feeney, Councillor Peter Gilbert, Councillor John Holland, Councillor Dave Humphreys, Councillor Marian Humphreys, Councillor Kam Kaur, Councillor Jack Kennaugh, Councillor Justin Kerridge, Councillor Sue Markham, Councillor Jan Matecki, Councillor Chris Mills, 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 Jill Simpson-Vince, Councillor Tim Sinclair, Councillor Mejar Singh, Councillor Richard Spencer, Councillor Heather Timms, Councillor Mandy Tromans, Councillor Robert Tromans, Councillor Adrian Warwick, Councillor Martin Watson and Councillor Andrew Wright

1. General

The Chair opened the meeting and invited Councillor Izzi Seccombe to make a statement regarding events surrounding the complaints received about comments made at the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 January 2024.

Councillor Seccombe acknowledged and expressed concern about the upset that had been caused by members of her Group and the repercussions on the Council, commenting on the damage to the Council's relationship with the SEND community and the confidence which Warwickshire children with SEND, and their families, had in the Council. She also expressed concern about the reputation of the Council. She added that in undertaking their role, councillors should not be fearful of threat or abuse. In her closing comments, Councillor Seccombe offered unwavering commitment to supporting children with SEND and their families and doing all she could to redeem the Council's relationship with the SEND community and to rebuild confidence between SEND families and the Council, setting out the steps that she intended to take.

The Leaders of each of the political groups were invited to respond.

Councillor John Holland (Labour) commented that he considered the best way to restore confidence in the Service was to deliver a good quality service with assessments of children's needs completed in a timely way and ensuring that identified needs were met. He expressed

the view that it was important to deal with the complaints that had been received in an open and transparent way. Councillor Holland shared the view of his group that mandatory training was essential for all councillors.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Liberal Democrat) expressed sadness and anger at the situation the Council found itself in and regret that the comments made at the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee had destroyed the hard work undertaken by staff which he found unacceptable. He expressed the view that the three councillors concerned should be removed from membership of the overview and scrutiny committee and felt that they should consider their own position and stand down. He urged the Leader to take swift action recognising that the volume of complaints was slowing down the investigation process. He commented on the need to support officers at this time and to reassure them of the Council's commitment to work together on SEND and pursuing an integrated care pathway.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers (Green) thanked parents from SEND groups for attending the meeting. He expressed his distress about the views that had been voiced in the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny meeting which had shown a lack of understanding and empathy for the SEND community. He stressed the importance of parents, officers and councillors working together to support children with special needs. In conclusion, Councillor Chilvers echoed calls for training and questioned whether Councillor Seccombe intended to suspend the whip from the councillors concerned.

Councillor Judy Falp (Independent) thanked the public for their attendance and stressed the importance of hearing parents' voices. She expressed her concern about the impact of the statements made at the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. She acknowledged the impact on staff and those many councillors who had worked hard to create a Child Friendly Warwickshire.

(1) Apologies for Absence

Councillors Richard Baxter-Payne, Bill Gifford, Clare Golby, Brian Hammersley, Andy Jenns, Sarah Millar, Jeff Morgan, Daren Pemberton and Ian Shenton.

(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 December 2023 were agreed as an accurate record for signing by the Chair.

(4) Chair's announcements

King Charles III

Following the news of the King's cancer diagnosis, the Chair sought support to send His Majesty a letter on behalf of the Council expressing best wishes for a swift recovery.

Budget

The Chair noted that this had been difficult budget round and thanked officers from across the council for their work towards delivering the budget. He also called for a polite debate and brief speeches.

2. 2024/25 Budget and 2024/29 Medium Term Financial Strategy

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property) introduced the item by thanking the finance team for their assistance and hard work in developing the budget. He noted media coverage of councils in financial difficulty and offered reassurance that Warwickshire County Council was not one of them. He drew attention to the Council's good performance on the Cipfa resilience index and the supportive views of the external auditors which were shared at the previous meeting. He then proceeded to set out the Conservative Group's budget proposals as contained in the appendix to the published report. In doing so he emphasised the following points:

- The difficult political and economic environment in which the budget was set and the uncertain timing and impacts of key national policy choices around adult social care reform, the broken children's social care market, home to school transport, climate change and the fair funding review of central government support for local authorities.
- Rising demand for services as a result of a growing population of older people, increasing numbers of children and families needing support and communities under pressure from the rising cost of living.
- Despite the uncertain environment, the budget proposals provided flexibility and a degree of resilience heading into an uncertain future. Difficult decisions had been taken and challenges were being met head on.
- Three areas were highlighted to underline the Conservative commitment to the most vulnerable in the community:
 - investment of over £28m to meet the growing numbers and cost of supporting elderly citizens and those vulnerable adults who need help;
 - investment of more than £8m into children's social care services to meet the increased cost and demand for children's placements; and
 - investment of almost £9m in home to school transport to ensure services to mainstream and SEND pupils were continued in line with policy whilst being able to respond to the increasing demand and cost of the service.
- Provision in the capital programme for £109m to support the delivery of the 2024 business plans of the Warwickshire Property and Development Group and the Warwickshire Investment Fund. The capital programme would invest at least £125m over the next five years making sure Warwickshire had a thriving economy with the right jobs, training, skills and infrastructure.
- Investment of over £36m each year to maintain Warwickshire's infrastructure with over half of this funding invested in roads.
- The focus for the next year would be:
 - Making SEND a key priority and investing in helping many more children and young people receive the education they need within mainstream settings and investing in support for children with education, health and care plans to improve their communication, confidence and life chances;

- Driving cost reductions through investment in digital, data and automation technologies, adopting more commercial approaches to investments and continued support for investment that enabled buoyant business and household taxbases;
 - Opening more children's homes;
 - Commence development of the Top Farm site providing additional housing and enabling a new school;
 - Progressing the Transforming Nuneaton regeneration programme; and
 - Driving the Home to School Transport programme of change.
- The reserves strategy provided a clear framework for making sure this money was managed effectively
 - 86% of the planned budget reductions over the last ten years had been delivered (£122m total) and a further £64m was planned over the next five years as set out in the budget proposals bringing the total reductions to £186m in fifteen years.
 - Managing the demand and cost increases facing services meant an increase in council tax was unavoidable. In the absence of other funding options, it was proposed to use the opportunity provided by the Government to levy additional council tax of 4.99% (2.99% core council tax plus up to 2% adult social care levy), which was equivalent to an increase of £1.59p per week for a Band D dwelling.

Councillor Butlin summarised that the proposed budget strategy would deliver for those who lived, worked in, and visited Warwickshire, difficult decisions and choices had been made which sought to address the short-term challenges faced whilst retaining a commitment to delivering medium-term financial sustainability. Flexibility had been retained, as far as possible, to handle most challenges that were foreseen.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

Amendments

Labour Group Amendment

Councillor Sarah Feeney highlighted the following points in the amendment:

- The national context of local government finance and the need for the government to step up and support delivery in key areas in particular housing support, public health, adult social care and SEND.
- In terms of developing the budget proposals, it had been necessary to take some challenging decisions. The previous year, the Labour group had proposed a higher increase in council tax which would have delivered more funding for service delivery. This year, the amendment proposed removal of what she considered were the worst cuts.
- The need to deliver a balanced budget. There were no proposals for new services but the group would have liked to see provision for children's centres, school meals, and better service provision for the elderly. She considered proposed savings on children's residential care to be risky. The Council needed to maintain its own children homes but she was not convinced that this could drive the savings required.
- The rural services post had been retained in the amendment due to the disparity of services in rural areas.
- The group would also prefer not to make cuts to housing support and hoped the next government would address the pressures of social care.

Councillor John Holland seconded the amendment and reserved the right to speak.

Liberal Democrat Group Amendment

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse thanked Officers for their support in preparing the amendment. He recognised that there were some financial challenges to address in the year ahead and that there was some work to be done nationally to resolve issues around funding for home to school transport and children's social care. He noted that these were demand lead services and consideration needed to be given to addressing that demand. The Liberal Democrat Group sought the introduction of services providing palliative care for children in Warwickshire as they considered that there was insufficient outreach with families having to travel to Birmingham. He noted that the proposals were dependent on support from the Integrated Care Board but as children and families were a key priority he considered that this could be delivered over a three year period. He considered that the SEND strategy required integration into all other strategies with a clear pathway from conception to adulthood.

Councillor Sarah Boad seconded the amendment and reserved the right to speak.

Green Group Amendment

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers also thanked officers for their support to develop the budget proposals. He noted that the Council was facing another single year settlement from government and considered it was an abdication of responsibility for the government not to provide certainty in terms of funding in light of the impact it had on planning for service delivery. He echoed the comments of the other group leaders about the difficulty in putting together budget proposals, and the difficulty being faced in terms of savings. He hoped that the comments of Councillor Feeney regarding the long term deliverability of savings in relation to residential care and those of Councillor Roodhouse would be taken on board and considered further. The Green amendment highlighted extra support for schools and young people, with pilot funding for the provision of youth workers in schools, and additional investment in the sustainable futures fund since early investment in climate resilience was needed.

Councillor Tracey Drew seconded the amendment and reserved the right to speak.

Debate

Members of Council made the following points:

Councillor Yousef Dahmash – Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation:

- The ICT Strategy had supported cross-Council transformation in 2023/24, with successful launches of the Council's customer platform and new telephony systems. The focus of 2024/25 would be continued development of the new Customer platform and as a result there was no material change in ICT Strategy operational budgets.
- The ICT Delivery Team had absorbed significant additional demand in 2023/24 for their services and, whilst the proposed budget remained largely unchanged, ongoing additional funding of £68k had been secured to increase on-call capacity in the Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Services team, as well as an additional £172k to support a specialised Synergy Team to support the core education system.

- There were £1m of digital roadmap savings built into the MTFs, plus a further £0.95m of process redesign savings in business support and finance.
- The Customer Contact Centre continued to exceed delivery targets in 2023/24 and their proposed budget remained largely unchanged in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24. Post-pandemic, time-limited funding for additional posts had come to an end, however, the budget had been supported with a time-limited increase of £190k per annum for a period of two years to manage additional demand in the Adult Social Care front door and Customer Relations teams.
- The WCC Warwickshire County Council headcount and general demand for the HR & Organisational Development service continued to increase and the recruitment market remained challenging. It was proposed to support the Recruitment service in the 2024/25 budget with additional temporary funding of £161k to support the demands of social care recruitment. Additionally, £151k of existing temporary funding had been made permanent allowing the service to secure the provision of the Specialist Recruitment Team which provided support to senior appointments and particularly difficult to fill posts.
- The work of the library service in 2023/24 was highlighted (including the online library service offer, continued development of support for home education, the launch of the 'You Can' online project, and Warm Hubs) and the budget proposals so an ongoing commitment to this service area.
- Legal Services continued to perform strongly and made a significant contribution to the Council's MTFs plans through its external trading which continued to grow from strength to strength.

Councillor Kam Kaur – Portfolio Holder for Education:

- A new Senior Leadership Team had been recruited to drive the change and transformation needed in the education department
- Notwithstanding the statements made at the commencement of the meeting, relations with the SEND Parent/Carer forum had been improved with face to face meetings across the County
- There had been significant investment in the MTFs for the next five years on top of increased allocations over the last five years.
- The proposed budget saw investment in home to school transport, driven in part by SEND and pressure on school places.
- Proposed savings in SEND over 2024/25 and 2025/26 would be delivered from a home to school improvement programme, with mainstream savings in 2025/26 – 2027/28 being achieved by applying the lessons learned from SEND to mainstream transport. These savings would be achieved from a number of operational efficiency improvements and not from cuts to eligibility.
- Capital investment would support a more inclusive education system, increasing the percentage children with SEND receiving their education in mainstream settings
- In terms of education sufficiency, 13 new education capital projects had been delivered for September 2023 providing 1587 more places in the sector when they were filled over the coming years (approximately 10%, 158, were for SEN places in special resource provisions) and the team had delivered over 10,000 new permanent school places in the last 10 years.

Councillor Jan Matecki – Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning:

- The volume of schemes that had been delivered over the last year, including 21 miles of resurfacing works (63 schemes), 44 miles of surface dressing (64 schemes), 10 km of footway reconstruction schemes (53 schemes) and continued investment in road safety schemes. Over the course of the year over £70m of capital works across the county was delivered. The National Highways and Transport Survey ranked Warwickshire 4th out of 30 other shire councils in terms of public satisfaction with road and road repairs.
- Investment in public transport continued with £2m of bus subsidies and a successful Demand Response Transport pilot with the innovative Indie-Go Service.
- £4.8m additional funding was being put into Home to School Transport to ensure quality transport provision for over 10,000 children each day.
- Over £7.5m of BSIP Plus funding had been secured from the Department for Transport and £3.3m had been secured for Warwickshire through the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund which would help facilitate the switch to low- and zero- emission vehicles.
- The authority's ambition around Active Travel had been reflected in the previous year's assessment of English local authorities' active travel ambition and capability carried out by the Government's Executive Agency, Active Travel England. Only five authorities received a higher rating than Warwickshire, resulting in an award of £428,000 revenue funding which was being used to develop a pipeline of active travel schemes that would feed into future programmes of work.
- Capital funding had also been secured for cycling schemes in Warwickshire, including £4.76 million from the Active Travel Fund of which £2.5 million was being used extend the popular Lias Line scheme.
- Improvements at Leamington Spa station's forecourt were recognised in the CIHT's regional awards, with the scheme being highly commended in the 'Best Small Project' category.
- Warwickshire's first School Street scheme at Eastlands Primary School in Rugby, a joint effort between Safety Education, Active Travel Team, and Road Safety Engineering, had been delivered and this pilot scheme had been well received by the residents and the school.
- The Road Safety Education team continued to deliver successful educational programmes across the county to pupils aged 4 - 18 years and in the previous year over 18,500 children and young people received live educational input, with an additional 5,500 receiving cycle training.
- The Local Transport Plan (LTP4) had been adopted in July 2023 providing the strategic vision for sustainable transport across Warwickshire for the next decade. Further information about the Government's Local Integrated Transport Fund was awaited which it was anticipated would provide the Council with access to new capital investment to support the delivery of the Local Transport Plan.
- Despite financial pressures, the proposed budget would support the continuation of the work that had already been outlined.

Councillor Sue Markham – Portfolio Holder for Children and Families:

- In 2023 Ofsted completed a focussed visit of Leaving Care & Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) Services and had described the authority's practice and service for UASC as exceptional.
- 2023 also saw the opening of the council's first Children's Residential Home which had been judged as 'good' in all areas by Ofsted. The provision of Council owned Children's Homes was better for Warwickshire children as they were able to remain in their own

communities, closer to family members, and also provided more value for money for the council.

- In the year ahead, the main areas of focus would be to open a further four Children's Homes in Warwickshire, continue to support a strong workforce, and increase the number of children receiving Early Help Support.
- Over the previous 12 months over 6,000 parents had completed online or in person parenting support, the Family Group conference team had been expanded to support families in crisis and the Lifelong Links programme for children in care was being implemented which sought to provide a positive support network for children in care and leaving care.
- In January 2023 there had been a service redesign to increase resources and support in early help where requests for support had incurred a 146% increase since April 2020. The support and intervention to help families make changes and keep children safe was working and figures showed a reduction in the number of children in care for the second consecutive year, putting Warwickshire below the statistical neighbour average for Children in Care, including UASC.
- Over the previous 12 months, there had been continued provision of free or discounted sessions to schools utilising immersive theatre from Loudmouth to prevent exploitation of children and domestic abuse. In one year over 12,000 children had benefited from this programme. The programme would continue in 2025/26.
- Together with district and borough partners and voluntary and community sector groups, a warm Warwickshire welcome and ongoing support had been provided to refugees from Ukraine and Afghanistan.
- The Voice, Influence and Change team had supported 358 children and young people in a variety of opportunities, with a total of 27 apprenticeships taken up by care experienced young people, of which 21 young people have completed successfully and secured employment. In the current year the ICB had also made a commitment to create a further 25 entry level roles within the Health Sector for care experienced young people.
- There was continued investment in new ways of working and the recent success in becoming a Sector Improvement Partner for the Department for Education highlighted the Council's commitment to fostering improvement across councils.
- Services were under review and plans were being finalised with a strong focus on work to implement changes from the new Stable Homes Built on Love Strategy and the Council had applied to become a Pathfinder.
- Inflation and the resulting problems with cost-of-living for all residents and communities was significantly increasing the need for children and their families for services and there was uncertainty about the costs of residential care in a broken market.
- The Children & Families Service forecast was just under £15m overspent in 2023/24. The majority of this spend was due to significant increase in the cost of residential children's homes. The strategy highlighted above to register and open council-owned homes would be more cost effective and better for children.
- The proposed budget would see direct investment of £8.3m in children's social care services and an increase in foster carer allowances. The proposed savings related to external foster care and residential care were due to a proposed increase in the number of the council's own foster carers and the opening of council-owned children's homes.

Councillor Martin Watson – Portfolio Holder for Economy:

- Warwickshire's economy remained relatively strong and resilient, despite the challenges experienced over the previous 12 months. Business confidence, as measured through the Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Economic Survey, was back to pre-pandemic levels, unemployment remained lower than the national average (3.3% compared to 3.7% for England and 4.5% for the wider West Midlands), and there was a strong demand for labour, although businesses were highlighting the challenges of finding candidates with the right skills as a key barrier to growth.
- Warwickshire continued to be a strong location for inward investment and had been awarded runners up for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Strategy in the annual 'European Cities & Regions of the Future' rankings which reflected continued success in attracting FDI into the county.
- In the previous year's budget an additional £300,000 per annum had been allocated to support the growth of apprenticeships and help address the lack of skilled employees that businesses were highlighting resulting in the recruitment of a Future Skills Advisor to work closely with businesses across key sectors to better understand future skills needs and help shape provision across our education and training provider networks, investments to support businesses take on apprenticeships, contracting with Goodwill Solutions to deliver a range of Inclusive Apprenticeships, and a series of Future Careers and Apprenticeship Fairs being organised for the next financial year.
- The value of new UKSPF programmes was £4.6m. Since December 2023 nearly 300 businesses have been engaged and over the period to March 2025, the Council would have engaged 2,000 businesses with support, and provided intensive, tailored support to 500 of those.
- The Warwickshire Investment Fund (WIF) had seen strong interest in its Loans for Smaller Businesses (LCE) and the Property & Infrastructure Fund (PIF) pillars although, for a variety of reasons, the level of demand for the larger loans that were possible through the Business Investment & Growth (BIG) element had not been seen.
- There would be a major broadband upgrade for Leicestershire and Warwickshire, benefitting over 38,000 rural homes and businesses after a £71m contract was agreed under the government's national Project Gigabit rollout.

Councillor Andy Crump – Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety:

- Responses to consultations relating to the county's flood risk areas, ordinary watercourse land drainage consents and HS2 specific consents had been submitted in 100% of cases.
- Work had been completed on flood protection schemes in Fenny Compton and Broadwell and phase 2 work was taking place in Fenny Compton, Lower Brailes and Clifford Chambers, The Flood Risk Management team had provided improved flood risk information and support for residents following Storm Henk.
- There had been active year in Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service (WFRS) including undertaking an independent Cultural Review that had shown that the service was in a good cultural position, undertaking an independent financial assessment in relation to value for money, discharging two out of three HMICFRS Causes of Concern as well as reducing the number of HMICFRS Causes of Concern from 41 to 26, commencement of building the Breathing Apparatus Hot Fire Minerva Hot Fire Training Facility at Payne's Lane in Rugby, delivering thousands of Safe and Well checks and school visits, completing a significantly increased number of Fire Safety Audits in high-risk businesses, delivered station open days, continued the Hospital to Home service, procured a new Fire Control Mobilisation System with Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service, embedded the NFCC Core Code of Ethics

within the service aligned to the Council's values and behaviours, undertaken a Resourcing to Risk review (which was out for consultation), and worked in partnership through the Local Resilience Forum

- The Community Safety Team continued work with partners to generate £1m additional income over the next 18 months and improved street safety across the county.
- Working with partners, the Trading Standards Team had removed over 1.5m illegal cigarettes and more than 20,000 illegal vapes from the marketplace.
- The Safer Warwickshire Partnership Board Serious Violence Prevention Strategy had been presented to Cabinet in January 2024, and the Council's Community Safety Team had led on this work.

Councillor Brett Beetham

- Highlighted the proposed investment in SEND and the need to ensure that the funding was targeted in the right areas to support families and provide a user-friendly and efficient system. The need to continue to embrace partnership working through the Working Together Charter and work with the Department for Education to build a better value programme to focus resources on direct support, tailored interventions and tangible outcomes for SEND children at an early stage.
- Stated there had been a record amount of investment in the current year, with just over £100,000 in capital funding going towards SEND facilities, specialist nurture provisions at SEND schools and keeping SEND students local.
- Noted that there had been a reduction in waiting times for autism assessments from over 242 weeks to circa 22 weeks.

Councillor John Holland (Seconder of the Labour Group Amendment):

- The proposed budget considered the needs of Warwickshire residents, the current economic climate and national political landscape with a general election looming. The Labour Group was happy to work with colleagues to smooth any transition to a new government.
- All Groups agreed that government constraints were causing problems in service delivery.
- Savings made in previous budgets (eg to Sure Start, Health Visitors, School Nurses, etc) would all have negative impacts in the future.
- The recommendations in the latest Director of Public Health's Annual Report, to be discussed at a future Council meeting, were welcomed and supported by the Labour budget proposals.

Councillor Sarah Boad (Seconder of the Liberal Democrat Amendment):

- Urged elected members to attend WFRS Resourcing to Risk Consultation meetings.
- Welcomed the WFRS Cultural Review
- Noted the national political landscape and looked forward to change due to the pressure and strain on service delivery and budget. In particular, she noted that a significant percentage of funding needed to be allocated to adult social care and SEND due to service demand, which made it difficult to bring forward new proposals or initiatives to improve life for Warwickshire residents.
- Welcomed the announcement regarding broadband delivery.

Councillor Tracey Drew (Seconder of the Green Amendment) had no further comments to add.

- Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Seconder of Motion) thanked the chamber for the contributions that had been shared and commented on:
- The challenges in setting this year's budget and the time and engagement that members of her Group had taken to develop the proposals.
- The Conservative proposals sought to address overspend in four key areas of demand pressure: Childrens Services, Home to School Transport, Adult Social Care and SEND.
- Highlighted that 70% of the budget was spend on adult social care and SEND due to the demand pressures of just over 10,000 people. There was a danger that vital universal services could be lost and the Group was doing all it could to do more with less. The Council had limited control on spend on adult social care and children's placements and whilst the Council wanted to look after children and improve their life outcomes, it also wanted to provide library, waste and country park services, and it was a difficult balance to achieve. It was an unsustainable system and whilst the Council was financial robust, the impact on the budget was apparent and something needed to be done to improve the system.
- In line with the Council Plan, the budget proposals sought to provide for those who needed support from the Council and particularly commended the partnership working in adult social care.
- She concluded by thanking councillors for their work supporting residents and expressed recognition for the work of officers across the Council.

Councillor Sarah Feeney (Mover of Labour Group Amendment) replied that:

- Single year grant funding settlements from government were not helpful and local authorities needed more certainty to better plan service delivery.
- Spending on Home to School Transport was a key area of demand and more work needed to be done in this area, providing options to parents about self-provision.
- She asked for a commitment to easier diagnostic pathways for SEND and predicted timescales for ADHD.
- She noted that whilst there was a commitment to green policies, there remained limited access to EV charging for many residents.
- Flooding across the county was a significant issue and more awareness among residents of the risks and mitigation was required.
- Residents were concerned about WFRS Resourcing to Risk proposals but she believed that these concerns were being heard.
- In conclusion she thanked officers for their work on behalf of residents and noted that all groups had had to make difficult decisions in developing their budget proposals. Going forward there needed to be an increase in government funding that provided proper settlements to properly fund services.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Mover of Liberal Democrat Group Amendment) replied:

- Acknowledged the heavy burden on local government but its resilience to deliver on the ground.
- Whilst all the groups had differences, it was important to focus on the message that the Council wanted to deliver. For the Liberal Democrat budget, one of these messages was about palliative care for children and families, particularly those with complex care needs and further thought needed to be given to the strategy in this regard. There were also pressures on mental health for young people.

- Echoed sentiments from the debate that a multi-year settlement was needed from government and the broken systems around SEND and increasing pressure in adult social care.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers (Mover of the Green Group Amendment) replied that:

- Green proposals had not reduced funding for Trading Standards as it was considered they were already working to protect the community with limited funds
- Building a more resilient Warwickshire in terms of the climate could not wait and the Green budget prioritised this through Green Shoots 2 and sustainable futures.
- Funding for more youth workers would provide additional support for young people, keeping them healthier and happier in schools.

Councillor Peter Butlin (Mover of the Conservative Group Motion):

- The budget process was about making better lives for residents of Warwickshire. There were funding challenges and the differences between the submitted budgets had never been closer as a result.
- A three year government settlement would be welcomed but with a looming general election this had not been possible. Clear guidance in terms of major issues effecting councils in terms of legislation around the delivery of SEND and adult social care was also needed. Permanent solutions were needed to the challenges being faced in these key areas. Without these measures, every group had had to draft a budget as fairly as possible. Warwickshire had a strong economy which allowed the Council to grow its tax base.
- Emphasised the belief that the provision of council-owned children's homes would bring down costs in a broken market.
- Emphasised the Council's green credentials in terms of funding for EV charging, maintenance of recycling points and waste management, and improving the commercial offer at country parks.
- A substantial investment in SEND provision in mainstream schools from the CIF was proposed. Good partnership working was essential to the success of this investment.

Votes:

Vote on Labour Group Amendment

A vote was held on the Labour Group amendment. The results were 13 for and 35 against.

The amendment was defeated.

Vote on Liberal Democrat Group Amendment

A vote was held on the Liberal Democrat Group amendment. The results were 13 for and 35 against.

The amendment was defeated.

Vote on Green Group Amendment

A vote was held on the Green Group amendment. The results were 13 for, and 35 against.

The amendment was defeated.

Vote on the Conservative Budget

The Conservative budget became the substantive motion. A recorded vote was held. The results were.

Votes for

Councillors Jo Barker, Brett Beetham, Margaret Bell, Parminder Singh Birdi, Peter Butlin, Jeff Clarke, John Cooke, Andy Crump, Yousef Dahmash, Piers Daniell, Judy Falp, Peter Gilbert, Dave Humphreys, Marian Humphreys, Kam Kaur, Dale Keeling, Jack Kennaugh, Justin Kerridge, Christopher Kettle, Sue Markham, Jan Matecki, Chris Mills, Penny-Anne O'Donnell, Bhagwant Singh Pandher, Wallace Redford, Isobel Seccombe, Jill Simpson-Vince, Tim Sinclair, Mejar Singh, Rik Spencer, Heather Timms, Mandy Tromans, Rob Tromans, Adrian Warwick, Martin Watson, and Andy Wright(36)

Votes against

Councillors Sarah Boad, Barbara Brown, Jonathan Chilvers, Jackie D'Arcy, Tracey Drew, Sarah Feeney, Jenny Fradgley, John Holland, Caroline Phillips, Will Roberts, Kate Rolfe, and Jerry Roodhouse. (12)

Resolved:

That Council agrees the 2024/25 Budget and authorises work to continue on ensuring the 2024-29 Medium Term Financial Strategy is aligned with and supports the delivery of the Council's ambitions as set out in the Council Plan.

3. Treasury Management Strategy and Investment Strategy

Councillor Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property introduced and moved this report, noting that both strategies were statutory documents that full Council was required to approve on an annual basis before the start of the financial year. The documents were long and technically complex but the content was fundamental to the Council's financial control framework and set out the rules and guidance within which the Council intended to operate and monitor performance against.

Councillor Adrian Warwick seconded the proposals and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor John Holland drew attention to fees and charges for services, noting his view that increasing fees could lead to a surplus which was in effect a tax. In terms of estate management, he noted that there were no credible proposals for the use of the Barrack Street office which continued to stand empty.

Councillor Adrian Warwick noted that these were important documents setting out the Council's appetite for risk and how investment would be made. He thanked the team for their work which

had contributed to work on the budget and welcomed cross-party oversight of the Warwickshire Property and Development Group and the Warwickshire Investment Fund.

Councillor Butlin noted that fees and charges were not necessarily aligned to the treasury strategy and offered to discuss this point with Councillor Holland outside the meeting. He also noted that proposals for Barrack Street were being formulated and would be shared with Councillor Holland as the local member in due course.

Vote:

A vote was held. The motion was agreed unanimously

Decision:

Resolved that:

1. The Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25 (Appendix 2 to the report) be approved with effect from 1 April 2024;
2. The Investment Strategy for 2024/25 (Appendix 3 to the report) be approved with effect from 1 April 2024;
3. The County Council requires the Executive Director for Resources to ensure that gross borrowing does not exceed the prudential level specified (Appendix 2 to the report, Section 3.13, Table 12 “Authorised Borrowing Limit”);
4. The revised lending limits for the Warwickshire Property Development Group (WPDG) (Appendix 3 to the report, Annex 7) come into immediate effect;
5. The revised lending limits for the Warwickshire Investment Fund (WIF) (Appendix 3 to the report, Annex 7) come into immediate effect;
6. The County Council requires the Executive Director for Resources to ensure that gross investment in non-Treasury investments does not exceed the prudential levels specified (Appendix 3 to the report, Annex 7);
7. The County Council delegates authority to the Executive Director for Resources to undertake such delegated responsibilities as are set out in Appendix 2 to the report, Annex 7, and Appendix 3 to the report, Section 2.5; and
8. The County Council requires the Strategic Director for Resources to implement the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy (Appendix 2 to the report, Section 2.11-2.26).

4. Any Other items of Urgent Business

None.

The meeting rose at 1.14pm

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Chair