

Cabinet

Thursday 9 May 2024

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 Sue Markham
Councillor Jan Matecki
Councillor Heather Timms
Councillor Martin Watson

Others Present

Councillor Sarah Feeney
Councillor Bill Gifford
Councillor Tim Sinclair

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillors John Holland and Jerry Roodhouse

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 11 April 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

(4) Public Speaking

None.

2. Additions to the Education Capital Programme 2024/2025

Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education, advised that this report sought approval, or onward recommendation to Council, for several projects to be added to the Education Capital Programme, as detailed in the report, in relation to Lighthorne Heath Primary School, Shottery St Andrew's CofE Primary School, Myton Gardens Primary School, Stratford upon Avon School, George Eliot Academy, Coleshill Learning Pod, and delivery of the safeguarding and security block header.

Councillor Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property drew attention to the financing of the projects and noted the inadequacy of existing Section 106 Agreement funding due to high inflation levels and the need to add inflationary guarantees in future.

Councillor Bill Gifford welcomed the proposals and associated SEND provision which demonstrated that the Council was preparing for the future.

Councillor Sarah Feeney supported the proposed provision but commented on the geography of the projects. Councillor Isobel Seccombe noted that this report formed part of a wider programme of provision to meet increasing demand for places.

In response, Councillor Kam Kaur noted that an increase in exclusions, with the majority in the north of the county, had led to the proposals being presented for alternative provision at the Coleshill Learning Pod. The Council continued to explore other sites and were in talks with the Department for Education. The investment would support much needed provision.

Resolved:

That Cabinet

1. Approves the proposals relating to Lighthorne Heath Primary School as follows:
 - a. Relocate the school to a new school site and increase the capacity from 91 places to 420 places (two form entry)
 - b. Establish specialist resourced provision for up 14 learners with SEND;
 - c. **Recommends to Council** the addition of £16.467m to the capital programme to deliver the scheme at Lighthorne Heath Primary School which will be funded from developer contributions, the School Condition Allowance and the Department for Education (DfE) Basic Need Grant;

2. Approves the proposals relating to Shottery St Andrew's CofE Primary School as follows:
 - a. Relocate the school to a new school site and increase the capacity from 105 places to 420 places (two form entry);
 - b. Establish specialist resourced provision for up 8 learners with SEND.
 - c. **Recommends to Council** the addition of £15.573m to the capital programme to deliver the scheme at Shottery St Andrews CofE Primary School which will be funded from developer contributions, the School Condition Allowance, an education capital receipt and the DfE Basic Need Grant;

3. **Recommends to Council** the addition of £5.347m to the capital programme to deliver the scheme at Myton Gardens Primary School. This will be funded by developer contributions and the DfE Basic Need Grant.
4. Approves the addition to the capital programme of £1.500 million to deliver the scheme at Stratford upon Avon School and £0.310 million to deliver the scheme at The George Eliot Academy. Both schemes will be funded by developer contributions.
5. Approves £0.600 million for the delivery of the disability and access block header and £0.163 million to deliver the scheme at the Coleshill Learning Pod. Both schemes will be funded be funded from the High Needs Capital Grant.
6. Approves the addition to the capital programme of £0.400 million to deliver the safeguarding and security block header, to be funded from the School Condition Allocation.
7. Subject to Council's agreement to the required additions to the Capital Programme, the Executive Director for Children and Young People is authorised, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property, to invite tenders and enter into the appropriate contracts or (where the scheme is school led) to make the necessary funding arrangements for these schemes on terms and conditions considered acceptable to the Executive Director for Resources.

3. Establishment of Specialist Resourced Provision

Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education, advised that this report sought approval for four projects to be added to the Education Capital Programme, as detailed in the report, in relation to Park Hill Junior School, St Paul's CofE Primary School, Briar Hill Infant School and Nicholas Chamberlaine School. The projects would see specialist resourced provision increased across the county.

In response to questions from Councillor Sarah Feeney regarding the provision of specialist nursery provision, Councillor Kaur explained that the Council was working through an early years strategy and there was a need to work with providers to identify need and develop the necessary provision.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the establishment of specialist resourced provision and approves the following addition to the capital programme to deliver the prescribed alterations required:
 - a. For Park Hill Junior School, Kenilworth an addition of £0.113 million to the capital programme to be funded from the Special Provision Fund;
 - b. For St Paul's CofE Primary School, Nuneaton, an addition of £0.013 million to the capital programme to be funded from Developer contributions;

2. Approves the establishment of specialist resourced provision at Briar Hill Infant School, Leamington Spa at no additional cost to the Council;
3. Supports the establishment of specialist resourced provision at Nicholas Chamberlaine School, Bedworth and in order to deliver the alterations required approves an addition to the capital programme of £0.090 million to deliver the scheme at Nicholas Chamberlains School, Bedworth. This will be funded from the High Needs Capital Grant and to be drawn down subject to the Department for Education approval of the required change application; and
4. Authorises, the Executive Director for Children and Young People, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property and the Portfolio Holder for Education, to invite tenders and enter into the appropriate contracts on terms and conditions considered acceptable to the Executive Director for Resources.

4. SEND Delivering Better Value Programme

Councillor Kam Kaur explained that Warwickshire was one of 55 local authorities that had taken part in the Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme, commissioned by the Department for Education, which aimed to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND and to optimise the use of finances. The programme was for local authorities with an overspend on their High Needs Block and the Council had been allocated £1m funding, to be spent in 2024/25 to deliver the programme. Four specific projects were identified through the DBV Programme which were detailed in the report and Cabinet endorsement was sought. Additionally, Councillor Kaur explained that the introduction of the DBV programme, together with a changed financial situation, had altered the landscape since a previous consultation in relation to SEND had taken place in 2023 and approval was sought for the projects and approaches set out in this report to supersede the proposals which had emerged from the previous consultation.

Councillor Gifford raised questions regarding how the Council ensured best value in relation to independent provision and particularly queried the use of unqualified staff in those settings. In response, Councillor Seccombe explained the inspection regime that existed for independent schools and the role of parental choice in school placement particularly in relation to Education Health and Care Plans. She expressed views regarding the benefits of placing children in schools in their own communities.

Councillor Sarah Feeney made comments regarding funding for the establishment of more SEND resourced provisions outlined in paragraph 1.5.1, managed transfers into secondary resourced provision, and the design of a workforce development programme.

Councillor Peter Butlin explained that due to increasing need for SEND provision, there was an accumulative deficit in the budget in relation to SEND and that it was important to bring spending in line with the provisions made. He drew attention to the provision that had already been supported in the previous two reports on the agenda which would go some way towards bringing the overspend under control and which also linked to the wellbeing of children by reducing travel times at the start and end of the school day.

Councillor Kaur responded to questions raised regarding managed transfers by explaining the presence of officers in schools and the role of the Fair Access Protocol.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Endorses the four projects proposed in the SEND Delivering Better Value Programme;
2. Agrees that the projects and approaches arising from the Delivering Better Value Programme work and set out within the report, should supersede proposals put forward in December 2022 on the local SEND Offer.

5. Warwickshire Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Plus Funding for 2024-25

This paper was introduced by Councillor Jan Matecki, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning, who explained that the report sought approval of revenue-funded measures to be funded through the Phase 2 BSIP Plus allocation for 2024-25, in the context of an additional Phase 3 Network North BSIP revenue grant being allocated to the County Council by the DfT, and thus, creating a two-year revenue funding programme sum of £5.466million (2024-25 to 2025-26). The report also provided a general update on progress made by the Warwickshire Enhanced Partnership.

Councillor Margaret Bell, Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care & Health, supported the report and explained the positive progress that had taken place with regarding to improving access to the George Eliot Hospital for staff and patients through the provision of direct bus services, real-time information screens and timetabling changes to support shift patterns. She expressed thanks to those officers involved in these achievements.

Councillor Tim Sinclair, a member of the BSIP Working Group, added his endorsement and welcomed delivery of a plan to support the economy and enrich the lives of the community.

Councillor Sarah Feeney, also a member of the BSIP Working Group thanked Councillor Sinclair for his work to promote services.

Councillor Bill Gifford noted that his bus journey to attend this meeting had been on time with a high level of patronage. However, he noted that the journey from Leamington to University Hospital Coventry & Warwickshire was a somewhat gruelling experience and the comments of Councillor Bell were therefore encouraging. He further noted commentary in the report regarding net zero objectives and electric vehicle use and highlighted bus use as a sensible and acceptable way to travel.

Councillor Heather Timms, Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate and Culture, supported demand responsive transport for rural areas. She suggested that Community Transport and Demand Responsive Transport could be brought under a single umbrella to reduce administration costs.

Councillor Matecki thanked Members for their constructive comments which he would feedback to officers.

Resolved:

That Cabinet

1. Approves a two-year programme (2024-25 to 2025-26) of revenue funded measures as set out in Appendix C to the report at a total cost of £5.466million aligned to the Warwickshire BSIP, which will be fully funded by a combined £3.394million Network North BSIP Plus for 2024-25 and £2.072million BSIP Plus for 2024-25 revenue grant allocations to the County Council awarded by the Department for Transport (DfT) in 2024-25; and
2. Approves the addition of the revenue-funded measures into the Warwickshire Enhanced Partnership (EP) Scheme.

6. Educational Attainment Working Group Report

Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education, introduced this final report from the Educational Attainment Working Group which followed on from an interim report presented in February 2023. The Working Group was set up in response to a Council Motion with the remit of examining the causes of disparity in attainment and to make suggestions on the initial stages of an action plan to reduce those disparities. There were four recommendations detailed in the report:

1. Lobbying for legislative change
2. Enhanced scrutiny of education strategies
3. Enhanced promotion of opportunities for pupils
4. Continued progress of the Warwickshire Education Partnership Board

Councillor Kaur tabled a revised recommendation which added the words “subject to alignment with current budget, governance and policy”.

In response to a question from Councillor Sarah Feeney regarding disadvantaged pupils and pupils from deprived backgrounds, Councillor Margaret Bell (who had been a member of the Working Group) explained that the Group had looked at these issues throughout its work. She noted that disadvantage was not and should not be a driving factor in attainment and was pleased to see some schools proving an outlier to trends. During its discussions, the Group had been reassured that policies were in place to address attainment issues identified.

Resolved:

That Cabinet endorses the recommendations of the Educational Attainment Working Group, subject to alignment with current budget, governance and policy.

7. 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.

8. Exempt Minutes of the 11 April 2024 Meeting of Cabinet

The exempt minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 11 April 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

9. WIF Bid for Approval

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader of the Council) introduced this item and summarised the exempt report.

Resolved:

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

The meeting rose at 2.50pm

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Chair