

Cabinet

Thursday 12 December 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

Officers

David Ayton-Hill, Director of Economy & Place
Amy Bridgewater-Carnall, Senior Committee Services Officer
Sarah Duxbury, Director of Strategy, Planning and Governance
Monica Fogarty, Chief Executive
Becky Hale, Executive Director for Social Care and Health
Andrew Harper, Head of Strategic Finance
Purnima Kandula, Director of Finance
Nigel Minns, Executive Director for Children and Young People
Rob Powell, Executive Director for Resources
Steve Smith, Director of Strategic Infrastructure & Climate Change

Others Present

Councillor Sarah Boad
Councillor Sarah Feeney
Councillor John Holland
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse
Councillor Tim Sinclair

1. General

The Chair welcomed everybody to the last Cabinet meeting of the year and thanked them for all contributions. Graduates to meeting.

(1) Apologies

There were no apologies for absence received.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 14 November 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

(4) Public Speaking

There had been no requests received.

2. 2025/26 Budget and 2025-30 Medium Term Financial Strategy - Background Information and Options

Councillor Peter Butlin introduced the report which updated on the Council's financial position and provided options prior to the full Council budget decision being taken in February 2025.

Councillor Butlin reflected on the challenges encountered over the past few years and the increased demand on services resulting in the need for the Council to enter into spending controls.

He advised that the draft capital strategy would be brought to Cabinet in January 2025, recognising that further updates would be given once details of the Local Government Settlement were known. It was noted that this was the first budget from the new Government and concerns remained regarding SEND funding, National Insurance contributions, the National Living Wage and increased social care allocations. A list of risks and challenges were included at paragraph 2.2 of the report.

Councillor Butlin recognised that budget setting would not be easy for Local Authorities across the Country and the assumptions being made in relation to Council Tax flexibility did not leave a lot of room for financial movement in terms of addressing areas of concern. He was thankful that the Council was able to present a revenue budget position that was balanced over the five-year period by drawing on reserves but reiterated that this was challenging. He also referred to the risks surrounding Business Rates reset, National Insurance contributions and the Devolution White Paper due out shortly.

Councillor John Holland agreed that the finances were not easy to manage, reiterating that future generations should not pay for expenditure incurred now. He referred to previous government's management of finances and the challenges faced with National Insurance Contributions. He felt that cost effectiveness and productivity had to be improved.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse also recognised the challenge with the finances, stating there may be a change when the Local Government settlement was known. He felt the biggest concern was the dedicated schools grant, with numbers increasing. He noted that the Liberal Democrat group would look through the numbers and propose amendments at the Budget meeting in February.

Councillor Butlin reminded the meeting that the Council had a statutory responsibility to set a balanced budget and he signposted Members to paragraph 5.6 of the report which gave detail on the Statutory Override. He reiterated that there was very limited flexibility due to the pressures, context, risks and the recent, and planned changes, to how funding would be allocated.

Councillor Butlin proposed the recommendations as written.

Resolved

That Cabinet

- 1) Develop its draft 2025/26 Budget and 2025-30 Medium Term Financial Strategy, taking into account the information, options and advice of Corporate Board, as presented in this report and noting the remaining uncertainties about the final Local Government Settlement expected later this month; and
- 2) Authorise Corporate Board to begin any preparatory work necessary to deliver the budget options, prior to the final full Council decision on the budget on 6 February 2025.

3. SEND & Inclusion Strategy 2024-2029

Members received a report outlining the Warwickshire SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-29, attached as Appendix 1.

Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education, introduced the report and advised that this was a five-year plan designed to help meet the key challenges, especially for children and young people with SEND. The strategy had been co-produced with key partners, drawing on their experience, including Parent Carer Voice, IMPACT, head teachers, SENCOs, health and social care partners and Department for Education representatives.

Delivery of the strategy would be overseen by the Warwickshire SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board and was consistent with the Education Strategy approved earlier this year. Councillor Kaur reiterated that delivery of the priorities was reliant on a long-term solution for the funding of SEND being found by Government.

The Leader requested that the logos of all partners involved be displayed on the front page, to make it clear that it was a partnership document.

Councillor Sarah Boad highlighted some of the challenges being faced with more children requiring EHCPs and difficulties finding, and retaining, qualified teaching assistants. She queried what difference the strategy would make to schools on the ground and referred to the 14 month wait for a speech and language appointment.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse welcomed some of the actions in the report and noted the increased number of children being home schooled. He felt greater awareness of this was required, suggesting a national register of home-schooled pupils. He emphasised that delivery of the strategy was key.

Councillor Sarah Feeney also highlighted the challenges schools were facing with EHCPs not being routinely completed and the need to reduce waiting lists. She queried if enough was being done around communication with parents as this could reduce anxiety levels and asked for more information on the communications plan.

In response to the queries raised, Councillor Kaur outlined the work undertaken in the transformation programme for education, including revision of the letter sent to parents when an EHCP was applied for, detailing expectations. She agreed that this could be shared with Councillors.

She also advised that the teams managing EHCPs had been reformed and were trying to balance clearing the backlog whilst dealing with new applications. With regard to the home-schooling query, Councillor Kaur explained that there were currently 1400 students being home schooled post Covid and all parties were mindful of the safeguarding issues that this raised. She was happy to supply a briefing to Councillors about the work being undertaken around this.

Members noted that the Council was trying to work with schools to develop bite size training packages and assist with workforce development. This was a critical pathway and Councillor Kaur would share further details about this.

Councillor Kaur asked Cabinet to approve the recommendations as detailed on page 67.

Resolved

That Cabinet

- 1) Approves the Warwickshire SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2029 as set out in Appendix 1, and
- 2) Authorises the Executive Director for Children and Young People to finalise the Local Area Inclusion Plan in partnership with the SEND & Inclusion Partnership Board.

4. Approval to reprocore Home Care services and Residential Care

Councillor Margaret Bell introduced the report which requested approval to commence procurement of Domiciliary Care (Care at Home) and Residential Care (Care for Older People, Disabilities and Mental Health) Services.

Councillor Bell outlined the current position relating to contracts with providers for both Domiciliary Care and Residential Care, which were due to end on 31 October 2025 and 31 August 2026, respectively.

Councillor Bell gave further detail on what each service provided with Residential Care delivering 24 hour, 7 days a week care to adults. Domiciliary Care, often known as Care at Home, supporting some of the County's most frail and vulnerable citizens to receive care at home. The aim for both contracts was to seek an initial five-year term with the option to extend for a further five years. The Council would have the right to terminate or amend contracts if required.

Councillor Bell advised that the ICB had agreed to work with the Council to procure jointly using a single procurement vehicle whilst being mindful of new regulations which made this challenging. The Community Recovery Services, which assisted patients being discharged from hospital, was also referred to as this utilised the Domiciliary Care contract to source that service as well. Councillor Bell signposted Members to the financial projections on pages 98 and 99 of the report and advised that this approach had been discussed with finance and legal colleagues.

Councillor John Holland asked if there was merit in undertaking a scrutiny review, prior to going out to tender and asked if working with the ICB could offer up opportunities to improve integration with NHS care.

Councillor Roodhouse referred to the funding which had been discussed at a recent Health and Wellbeing Board meeting and the challenges being experienced at University Hospital Coventry & Warwickshire. He also raised concerns about increasing market costs for residential care and nursing care, which were difficult to control or plan for. He agreed that there may be a role for scrutiny to monitor progress.

Councillor Bell gave assurances that scrutiny were involved and would continue to be. It was important for the Council to work with the ICB and continue ongoing discussions around health. She also clarified that the Community Recovery Service (CRS) had been overspent this year, noting that this was not Council owned, but held on behalf of the system. The criteria for the CRS was being looked at to try and make it clearer. In relation to the residential care market, Councillor Bell recognised that this was difficult to manage but a lot of work was being undertaken to try to meet cost pressures.

Councillor Bell outlined the recommendations on page 95.

Resolved

That Cabinet

- 1) authorises the Executive Director for Social Care and Health, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health, to commence procurement of Domiciliary Care (Care at Home) and Residential Care (Care Homes for Older People, Disabilities and Mental Health) Services and to enter into any agreements necessary to implement the services on terms and conditions acceptable to the Executive Director for Resources; and
- 2) authorises the Executive Director for Social Care and Health to oversee the procurement process for the Community Recovery Service (CRS), noting the interdependencies with the Domiciliary Care tender and the fact that CRS is system discharge funded and subject to receiving confirmation of funding for the financial year 25/26.

5. Leamington Town Centre Vision

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning, Councillor Jan Matecki, introduced the report which outlined the draft Leamington Town Centre Vision 2024.

The Vision had been refreshed by The Leamington Transformation Board, who were made up of the three tiers of Council: Warwickshire County Council, Warwick District Council and Royal Leamington Spa Town Council.

Councillor Matecki referred to this report being deferred from the previous Cabinet meeting in November 2024 as he had been unable to attend. He explained that the refreshed vision focused on the strategic ambition of future regeneration plans for the town centre. Public engagement had taken place and a summary of comments was attached to the report along with the full survey analysis. Three new themes or pillars had been consulted on, Healthy People, Healthy Place and Healthy Planet, and the top three issues of importance to respondents were outlined at 4.5 of the report.

It was hoped that the strategy would guide new development and regeneration activity and support the area to become an exemplar of a thriving town centre.

Councillor Sarah Boad was pleased to see the report presented, recognising that the Town Council and Warwick District Council had already endorsed the vision. She advised that she was a County Council representative on the group and referred to a future meeting which would discuss the parade master plan. Councillor Boad hoped this work would help to revitalise the Parade with the three authorities working together.

Councillor Matecki referred to comments made about his non-attendance at some meetings. He provided reassurance that he attended the delivery group for the board as often as he could, reiterating that the Council had some excellent officers also involved in this work. He gave particular recognition to Catherine Marks and Sarah James for their work and who ensured he remained fully briefed on progress at all times. He therefore proposed the recommendations as laid out on page 103.

Resolved

That Cabinet endorse the draft Leamington Town Centre Vision 2024.

6. 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.

7. Exempt Minutes of the 14 November 2024 Meeting of Cabinet

The exempt minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 14 November 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

The meeting rose at 2.30pm

.....
Chair