

County Council

Tuesday 17 December 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Chris Mills (Chair), Councillor Andy Jenns (Vice-Chair), Councillor Jo Barker, Councillor Richard Baxter-Payne, 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 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 Bill Gifford, Councillor Clare Golby, Councillor Brian Hammersley, Councillor John Holland, Councillor Dave Humphreys, Councillor Kam Kaur, Councillor Justin Kerridge, Councillor Christopher Kettle, Councillor Sue Markham, Councillor Jan Matecki, Councillor Sarah Millar, Councillor Jeff Morgan, Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell, Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher, Councillor Daren Pemberton, Councillor Wallace Redford, Councillor Will Roberts, Councillor Kate Rolfe, Councillor Jerry Roodhouse, Councillor Isobel Seccombe OBE, Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince, Councillor Tim Sinclair, Councillor Richard Spencer, Councillor Heather Timms, Councillor Mandy Tromans, Councillor Robert Tromans, Councillor Adrian Warwick, Councillor Martin Watson and Councillor Andrew Wright

1. General

(1) Apologies for Absence

Councillors John Cooke, Peter Gilbert, Marian Humphreys, Dale Keeling, Jack Kennaugh, Caroline Phillips, Ian Shenton, and Mejar Singh.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-pecuniary Interests

Councillor Tracey Drew declared an interest in item 8(1) on the agenda (Conservative Motion – Protecting British Family Farms and Preserving Rural Communities) due to her family background and parents' landownership.

Councillor Christopher Kettle, an active farmer, declared an interest in item 8(1) on the agenda (Conservative Motion – Protecting British Family Farms and Preserving Rural Communities).

Councillor Peter Butlin declared an interest in item 8(1) on the agenda (Conservative Motion – Protecting British Family Farms and Preserving Rural Communities) as an ex-farmer with a number of family members involved in farming.

Councillor Jo Barker, coming from a farming background, declared an interest in item 8(1) on the agenda (Conservative Motion – Protecting British Family Farms and Preserving Rural Communities).

Councillor Heather Timms, a part-time farmer with family members also involved in farming, declared an interest in item 8(1) on the agenda (Conservative Motion – Protecting British Family Farms and Preserving Rural Communities).

Councillors Sarah Boad, Andy Crump, Sarah Feeney, John Holland, Sarah Millar, and Adrian Warwick declared an interest in item 4 on the agenda (Warwickshire Pension Fund Accounts 2023/24) due to their membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

(3) Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 24 September 2024 were agreed as an accurate record for signing by the Chair.

(4) Chair's announcements

(a) Death of Former Councillor Don Jacques

The Chair announced the recent passing of former County Councillor Don Jacques, from the Conservative group, who had served as a Warwickshire County Councillor for Nuneaton St Nichols between 1993 and 1997. The Chair stated that he had been honoured to attend the funeral and extended condolences to Mr Jacques' family and friends.

Councillor Jeff Clarke spoke in tribute to Mr Jacques, recalling his service in the army and his career as a teacher, as well as his tenacity serving local residents as a politician.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse noted Mr Jacques had been known as “Mr Nuneaton” due to being the voice of his community and he expressed his condolences to the family.

Councillor Rob Tromans explained that Mr Jacques had been his role model, the first recipient of an aldermanship at Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, and had been honoured with a BEM award. He would be much missed.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe noted that Mr Jacques would be well-remembered and valued and that his contribution to politics had been the essence of public service; even in retirement he had been a part of his community.

Councillor Sarah Feeney paid tribute to a pillar of his local community with an impressive record. She suggested colleagues should follow Mr Jacques' example and remembered him with gratitude.

(b) Councillor Sarah Boad

The Chair informed Council that Councillor Sarah Boad had reached the milestone of serving on the County Council for 30 years. Councillor Boad had been first elected to represent Leamington Crown division at a by-election in 1994, succeeding the late Tricia Wilson, and now represented Leamington North.

The Chair presented Councillor Sarah Boad with a certificate of long service.

Councillor Kate Rolfe applauded Councillor Boad's achievement.

Councillor Sarah Feeney extended the Labour Group's congratulations and gratitude for her service.

Councillor Judy Falp reflected on the supportive relationship she had enjoyed with Councillor Boad and extended her congratulations.

Councillor Bill Gifford applauded Councillor Boad for her effectiveness as a local representative, considering her to be part of her community's DNA.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe thanked Councillor Boad for her service.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers thanked Councillor Boad for her approach and relentless championing of the causes close to her heart.

In response, Councillor Boad noted that her length of service extended to almost half her current age and reflected on the impact she had had since her election in 1994, commencing with preventing a Labour administration by winning the by-election (by 124 votes) and introducing baby-changing facilities at Shire Hall. She reflected on the changing landscape of the council structure and the different financial perspective.

(c) John Bridgeman

The Chair noted that John Bridgeman, Independent Member and longstanding Chair of the Audit & Standards Committee had retired following the last meeting of the Committee on 28 November 2025. Noting his impressive CV, he extended best wishes to Mr Bridgeman in his future endeavours.

Councillor Bill Gifford shared his memories of working with Mr Bridgeman during the last 11.5 years of his more than 20 years' service, praising his virtues as a Chair, particularly ensuring that all members of the Committee felt heard whilst ensuring that the business was dealt with in a timely way. Mr Bridgeman was always polite and well-researched on the topics to be discussed in order to ask pertinent questions. Councillor Gifford considered that the work of the Audit & Standards Committee, led by Mr Bridgeman, had assisted the Council to its positive financial position. He concluded by extending best wishes for a long and happy retirement.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe considered that the Council had been blessed to engage the services of Mr Bridgeman for almost 25 years and thanked him for all he had done during his tenure.

Councillor Sarah Feeney also recorded her thanks and expressed the privilege she felt from serving with him. She welcomed his chairing style and generosity as an inclusive Chairperson and whilst she considered his retirement to be a great loss to the Council, she also considered that there was a wealth of talent to step into the opening created by his leaving.

(d) Award Winners

The Chair notified Council that Warwickshire Property and Development Group (WPDG) had won the Newcomer of the Year Award at the Insider Media Midlands Property Awards 2024. He applauded WPDG and Council teams for their efforts and extended thanks to the consultants, solicitors, contractors and development partners who had contributed to the work.

(e) Engagements

The Chair provided an update on the engagements he had attended since the last meeting including remembrance events and honours presentations.

(5) Petitions

None.

(6) Public Speaking

Charles Goadby, a local farmer, was invited to speak in relation to the motion “Protecting British Family Farms and Preserving Rural Communities” (item 8.1). Mr Goadby explained that he farmed in partnership with his brothers and father and described the history of the family business which had commenced in 1960 and, whilst it was a substantial business, they had reinvested everything into it with no other source of income or pension savings and with profit margins decreasing. This meant when Mr Goadby Snr died, the family would be left with a large tax bill and forced to sell the land to pay the bill. Mr Goadby informed Council that since the autumn statement, seven farmers had taken their lives and he feared his own father would join those statistics. He believed that the changes would have the opposite effect to that planned, costing more than it would raise. He pointed to the lack of figures relating to business property relief on agriculture and questioned how a policy could be drawn up without a strong evidence base. Mr Goadby considered the policy to be not just an attack on farming and food production but on local communities and questioned what value could be placed on the food on our plates and the service to businesses both directly and indirectly.

Adam Quinney, also a local farmer, was also invited to speak in relation to the motion “Protecting British Family Farms and Preserving Rural Communities” (item 8.1). Mr Quinney explained that the tax was unfair and whilst farmers were happy to pay their taxes, it was important for those setting policy to obtain their understanding of the business and structures from a professional source. He advised that farming was a complex business involving multiple individuals, multiple landlords and the involvement of extended families and the change did not take account of this complexity and the choices that would now need to be

made on a farmer's death. Mr Quinney noted his own children were now doubting their future in farming as they would not be able to invest sufficiently in the farm following the payment of the new level of inheritance tax. He therefore considered that the policy was self-defeating and he hoped the Council would support the farming community to allow ongoing investment in family businesses.

2. External Auditors' Annual Audit Report 2023/24

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader of the Council) moved the motion and introduced this report, noting the improved position since the previous year. Councillor Christopher Kettle seconded the motion and commended the efforts of the finance team.

There being no questions or comments on the report, Councillor Butlin also thanked the finance team and looked ahead to the challenge of budget setting.

Vote:

A vote was held. The recommendation was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council

1. Notes the Annual Audit Report of the External Auditors, attached to the report at Appendix A; and
2. Requests that Audit and Standards Committee review the delivery of the management actions in response to the recommendations in the Annual Audit Report.

3. Warwickshire County Council Statement of Accounts 2023/24

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader of the Council) moved the motion and introduced this report, observing that it presented a comprehensive balance sheet. Councillor Adrian Warwick seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Andy Crump, noting his experience as an accountant in local government, thanked the Council's finance officers and expressed his long-held view that local government accounting was overly complicated and in order to make the accounts understandable for the general public, the government would need to remove some of the associated bureaucracy.

Councillor Adrian Warwick echoed thanks to the Finance team and applauded the recent appointments within the team which provided continuity and confidence. He noted that local authorities were operating in a difficult environment, with more uncertainty following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper. He was encouraged to see the results of some council projects but noted that change was needed in terms of the funding model in order for local authorities to meet increasing pressures.

Councillor Butlin noted comments that local government finance and accounting systems were complicated, but he welcomed the team's efforts make them more accessible whilst working within the restrictions. He congratulated those involved in delivering services and noted that the role of the authority was to balance the books, not make a profit.

Vote:

A vote was held. The recommendation was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council approves the Warwickshire County Council Statement of Accounts for 2023/24.

4. Warwickshire Pension Fund Accounts 2023/24

Councillor Christopher Kettle moved the recommendation set out in the report, particularly noting the challenging market conditions and investment challenges that had been faced to manage the portfolio in line with its mandate of paying the pensions of members and to bring the fund into surplus. Councillor Kettle noted the government's 'Local Government Pension Schemes: Fit for the Future' consultation and expressed the view that the Fund was managed by experts and should not be mandated to deliver investments for any purpose than for the benefit of its members.

Councillor Bill Gifford seconded, also noting that the Fund was in a healthy position and expressing the view that the government could learn from local government pension schemes.

Councillor Sarah Millar thanked the Pension Fund Investment Sub-Committee members and the advisors. She also noted that the Fund was performing well and able to discharge its functions. However, she challenged the views of Councillors Kettle and Gifford noting that the government was consulting on proposals and expressed her support for investing in projects at home and abroad that also allowed the Fund to meet its bottom line.

Councillor Kettle responded that the Fund Managers sought to generate returns to pay the pensions of the Fund members and that should be the Fund's only mandate. Whilst it was good to invest in opportunities in the UK, it should only be into projects that would deliver a return. Councillor Kettle thanked the Team for their work.

Vote:

A vote was held. The recommendation was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council approves the 2023/24 Warwickshire Pension Fund Statement of Accounts.

5. Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

Councillor Yousef Dahmash, Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation, moved the motion and introduced this report, which presented the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement for consideration by the Council. The motion was seconded by Councillor Peter Butlin. There were no questions or comments on the report.

Vote:

A vote was held. The recommendation was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council approves the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement.

6. Appointment of Independent Members to Audit and Standards Committee

Councillor Yousef Dahmash, Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation, introduced and moved this report and recommendation. Councillor Jo Barker seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

Councillor Bill Gifford shared his experience of sitting on the selection panel and his impressions of the successful candidates which he considered to be excellent choices.

Councillor Sarah Feeney, who had also been a member of the selection panel, considered that the appointments offered an excellent balance of experience and enthusiasm and was happy to support the recommendations.

Councillor Barker strongly supported the selection panel's recommendation to appoint two independent members which would provide an element of futureproofing.

Councillor Dahmash considered that the appointments would provide another level of robustness to the Audit & Standards Committee, and he had been reassured that the successful candidates were the right people for the role.

Vote:

A vote was held. The motion was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That Council

1. Approves the appointment of Martyn Burke and Sandip Shergill as Independent Members of the Audit and Standards Committee; and
2. Appoints Martyn Burke as the Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee.

7. Developer Funded S278 A452 Europa Way - Gallows Hill / Harbury Lane / Heathcote Lane (The Asps 1D) Roundabout - £3.7m

Councillor Jan Matecki, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning, introduced and moved this report and recommendation. Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor John Holland noted that development at this site had been opposed by local representatives due to the inability to produce an appropriate traffic management scheme, a decision which had been supported by the Planning Inspector but overturned by the Secretary of State. He further noted that roundabouts presented challenges for pedestrians and, as the Local Transport Plan prioritised pedestrians, this scheme was contrary to that. Councillor Holland did not support the recommendations.

Councillor Jonathan Chilvers also considered that the scheme was not in line with the Local Transport Plan 4, or its predecessor and did not believe this was the right scheme.

Councillor Birdi noted that the scheme was located in his division where there had been a lot of new homes built and there needed to be a solution to the increase in traffic. He welcomed the investment, considered that the scheme was reasonable in the circumstances and looked forward to working with the developers to deliver a scheme that worked for Warwick.

Councillor Matecki emphasised that, despite any reservations that had been expressed, there was a need to deal with the planning conditions that had been imposed. The proposals included a 'park and ride' car park, a new footway and cycle way and crossing points to improve safety at the junction.

Vote:

A vote was held. The motion was agreed by a majority.

Resolved:

That Council approves the addition of £3.7million to the Capital Programme in relation to the section 278 highways improvement scheme at the A452, Europa Way - Gallows Hill/Harbury Lane/Heathcote Lane Roundabout (The Asps 1D), which will be fully funded by developer contributions.

8. Notices of Motion

(1) Conservative Motion - Protecting British Family Farms and Preserving Rural Communities

Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell moved the following motion, which was seconded by Councillor Isobel Seccombe who reserved her right to speak:

This Council notes with concern the proposed changes to inheritance tax announced by the Government in the recent Autumn budget, which would see major changes to the Agricultural Property Relief (APR) regime.

APR has been instrumental in allowing British family farms to remain intact across generations, supporting food security, sustaining rural communities, and aiding environmental stewardship.

In Warwickshire this tax is estimated to impact over 1,700 family holdings, managing 144,400 hectares, leaving the average farming family with a tax bill of at least £240,000, which will force many to sell portions of their land or close entirely, paving the way for corporate ownership over family ownership.

The Council believes that this tax will have severe impacts for:

1. **Food Security:** British family farms are critical to ensuring a steady supply of homegrown food. The total income from farming in Warwickshire is estimated to be £57 million.
2. **Rural Community Stability:** Family farms are the foundation of rural Britain, contributing to local jobs, schools, and essential services. In Warwickshire circa 4,800 work on farms with 1,000 being casual labour.
3. **Environmental Stewardship:** Farms cover approx 70% of the UK's land, with family farms playing a leading role in nature recovery, biodiversity, and sustainable land management. Farmers in Warwickshire manage circa 6,500 hectares of farm woodland and help maintain approx 1,750 miles of public rights of way.

This Council resolves to:

1. Write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs expressing this Council's opposition to the proposed changes to inheritance tax under the Agricultural Property Relief regime which would have a significant impact on Warwickshire's family farms and expressing support for the introduction of an exemption for such farms
2. Urge all Warwickshire County Councillors to stand with Britain's family farms, to support our rural communities, and to protect the environment by voicing their concerns about the proposed changes to Agricultural Property Relief and by signing such petitions as are available.

In moving the Motion, Councillor O'Donnell thanked Mr Goadby and Mr Quinney for addressing the meeting during the Public Speaking session earlier on the agenda and also expressed gratitude to Nick Watt of the NFU for providing statistical information regarding the impact on Warwickshire Farmers and the regional economy.

Debate:

During the course of the debate, several Members illustrated their support for the motion by reflecting on their own personal experience with farming and family farms, noting that farming was a poorly paid vocation and that the economics of farming was not simple. Further comments were made as follows:

- Examples were given of farming families being asset rich but cash poor which, on the death of parents, it was claimed would leave children with a large inheritance tax bill and there would be little option but to close the farms to pay it resulting in loss of jobs.
- Farmers managed their land for future generations but the proposed changes to

inheritance tax would make this impossible.

- It was considered that there would be a likelihood of developers withdrawing from land sales due to the increase in the value of the land and the additional capital gains tax payable.
- The lack of reference to this policy in the Labour Manifesto was noted together with the position of local Labour MPs to support it and the combined impact of new policies on the country's economy.
- The evidence for the thresholds the government had set was questioned.
- Figures from Defra were quoted that suggested that 66% of family farmers would be affected and it was suggested that consultation with Defra would have resulted in a better evidence base for more appropriate changes in the taxes relating to this industry.
- It was noted that alternative uses for farmland, including solar farms, would threaten food supply and the loss of farms would also result in the loss of associated small businesses and farm shops as well as increase the need to outsource food production and import food, impacting on net zero targets and the wider population as well as introducing more pesticides into the UK food chain.
- The wider impact of the new government's policies was also raised, particularly noting the impact on small businesses and schools.
- The high suicide rate among farmers was acknowledged and it was considered that the impact of the changes would do little to alleviate this.
- The social value of local farmers was noted through their contributions to flood alleviation projects, support to the fire service following storm damage, snow clearance, assistance for stranded vehicles, provision of land for local events, and charity fundraising efforts.

Conversely, arguments against the motion were raised as follows:

- It was observed that absentee landlords, who had purchased land to avoid inheritance tax, had unfairly exploited the current system and the motion failed to address this key issue.
- Previous changes to government policy which had been detrimental to the farming industry and other communities were cited together with the government's budget plans to provide funding for farmers over a period of two years and address poverty and escalating mortgage costs.

Reassurance on the accuracy of the figures set out in the motion were sought and in response it was noted that whilst this was a complex calculation, beyond the preamble of the Motion, the proposed resolution was simple and supportive of the community and simply sought change.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Seccombe thanked the public speakers, Mr Goadby and Mr Quinney, together with the wider farming community for their contributions. She noted the environmental value that farming brought to local communities including looking after hedges, verges, winter gritting and food security. She noted in comparison to other industries, farming was fraught with risk and was a hard-fought livelihood. She urged Members to not get lost in the figures but to show solidarity with the farming community.

Councillor O'Donnell thanked Members for their supportive comments and understood

confusion and concern regarding the figures but mooted that if sufficient consultation had taken place, there would be more clarity. She feared the impact of this change would be the loss of the industry in the UK for generations to come and she urged the Chamber to stand with local farmers and support the motion.

Vote:

A recorded vote was held. The results were:

For (43):

Councillors Jo Barker, Richard Baxter-Payne, Brett Beetham, Parminder Singh Birdi, Sarah Boad, Peter Butlin, Jonathan Chilvers, Jeff Clarke, Andy Crump, Yousef Dahmash, Piers Daniell, Tracey Drew, Judy Falp, Jenny Fradgley, Bill Gifford, Clare Golby, Brian Hammersley, Dave Humphreys, Andy Jenns, Kam Kaur, Justin Kerridge, Christopher Kettle, Sue Markham, Jan Matecki, Chris Mills, Jeff Morgan, Penny-Anne O'Donnell, Bhagwant Pandher, Daren Pemberton, Wallace Redford, Will Roberts, Kate Rolfe, Jerry Roodhouse, Isobel Seccombe, Jill Simpson-Vince, Tim Sinclair, Rik Spencer, Heather Timms, Mandy Tromans, Rob Tromans, Adrian Warwick, Martin Watson, and Andy Wright

Against (5):

Councillors Barbara Brown, Jackie D'Arcy, Sarah Feeney, John Holland, and Sarah Millar.

Abstentions (0)

Resolved:

That Council:

1. Writes to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs expressing this Council's opposition to the proposed changes to inheritance tax under the Agricultural Property Relief regime which would have a significant impact on Warwickshire's family farms and expressing support for the introduction of an exemption for such farms; and
2. Urges all Warwickshire County Councillors to stand with Britain's family farms, to support our rural communities, and to protect the environment by voicing their concerns about the proposed changes to Agricultural Property Relief and by signing such petitions as are available.

The meeting adjourned at 1.09pm to 1.24pm.

(2) Liberal Democrat Motion - National Bus Fare Cap

Councillor Sarah Boad moved the following motion:

Council notes:

1. Buses are the most accessible, affordable and sustainable mode of public transport;
2. The £2 maximum single fare ticket has been fundamental to the success in growing

the use of buses;

3. Buses are relied upon by many who don't have access to a car - to go to work and medical appointments;
4. The work of the Bus Services Improvement Plan working group which has been in place since July 2021 and is working to improve bus services in Warwickshire;
5. Warwickshire's successful 'Two Squid' campaign to encourage bus use via the £2 fare cap;
6. The Government's decision to replace and increase the £2 cap on single fares from January 2025 to a £3 cap representing a 50% increase in one go.

This Council resolves that:

The Leader of the Council writes to the Prime Minister expressing the Council's concern that the increase from £2 to £3 for a single capped fare will undermine Warwickshire's success in growing bus patronage, negatively impact disadvantaged groups in the County and have a negative effect on attempts to increase modal shift away from the car to the use of buses.

In moving the Motion, Councillor Boad talked about her passion for improving bus services and how usage had increased since the pandemic. She wanted people to continue to use bus services but considered the 50% increase to the single fare and the fact that bus companies had to sign up to the scheme would have a detrimental impact on patronage.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse seconded the motion, thanking the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Working Group for their work to improve bus patronage. He considered that the Motion was aligned to the aims of the Local Transport Plan and modal shift.

Debate:

Some Members spoke in support of the Motion, making the following comments:

- The Motion was in the spirit of the Local Transport Plan;
- More investigation into bus franchising was encouraged although it was pointed out this was an issue for the Combined Authority;
- The bus fare cap made a difference to all travellers, particularly to pensioners who wanted to travel before 9am and car-less households who did not have a choice of transport, and the increase therefore felt like a further tax on the poorest in society;
- As a rural community, the impact of the increase on residents and the potential to exacerbate isolation was noted.

Conversely, there were also points made in opposition to the motion:

- Extra funding had been received from the government to support bus improvement which removed the need to write to the Prime Minister;
- Prior to the introduction of the cap, single bus fares on some routes were greater than the single fare cap and it therefore still made financial sense;

Councillor Boad thanked Members for the debate and, echoed comments regarding the limited transport options of some residents and the potential to alleviate isolation. She expressed her view that it was important to take a strong stance.

Vote:

A vote was held. The motion was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That the Leader of the Council writes to the Prime Minister expressing the Council's concern that the increase from £2 to £3 for a single capped fare will undermine Warwickshire's success in growing bus patronage, negatively impact disadvantaged groups in the County and have a negative effect on attempts to increase modal shift away from the car to the use of buses.

(3) Labour Motion - Bus Service Improvement Funding

Councillor Sarah Feeney moved the following motion:

This Council notes that the Government has announced an additional allocation of £8.9 million (comprising capital and revenue) to Warwickshire in support of the county's Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Warwickshire County Council strongly believes that local bus services are vital to the wellbeing of residents across the county, particularly those who have no access to their own private transport. Bus services are vital as a means to travel to work, school, appointments, shops and to meet friends and family.

This Council resolves to:

1. re-affirm its support for the delivery of improved local transport services with residents' needs placed at the heart of decision making.
2. bring forward for approval at the earliest opportunity a mechanism for guiding the use of BSIP revenue funding allocations towards maintaining and improving bus services and
3. in so far as the grant conditions allow, seek to encourage activity that
 - promotes the resident voice in route planning
 - influences the market to provide bus routes that link with key sites such as hospitals given the changes to the way health services are managed; and
 - encourages sector led research into passenger safety

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Sarah Millar who commented on the need to improve bus usage, noting that patronage was around three quarters of the pre-pandemic level and even a small difference in patronage would have an impact on viability.

Debate:

Some Members considered that the Motion was already being fulfilled by the work of the Bus

Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Working Group and further comments were made as follows:

- More work with public sector partners was needed to provide an integrated rail-bus service.
- Some local bus services were not reliable.
- Service user consultation had been undertaken as recently as 2021, the results of which had been shared with the BSIP Working Group.
- The source of the funding was questioned in light of other government policies impacting winter fuel, adult social care grant funding and national insurance.

Councillor Feeney welcomed comments regarding bus-rail integration and stated she would have welcomed an amendment to this effect. However, she was disappointed by the way the Motion had been received and stated that the Motion had been brought to celebrate the bus service and ensure that routes were safe and reaching the destinations residents needed. She added that the BSIP Working Group was made up of a small number of councillors and she considered that the motion would have given voice to a wider section of the community.

Vote:

A recorded vote was held. The results were:

For (14):

Councillors Sarah Boad, Barbara Brown, Jonathan Chilvers, Jackie D'Arcy, Tracey Drew, Judy Falp, Sarah Feeney, Jenny Fradgley, Bill Gifford, John Holland, Sarah Millar, Will Roberts, Kate Rolfe, and Jerry Roodhouse

Against (33):

Councillors Jo Barker, Richard Baxter-Payne, Brett Beetham, Margaret Bell, Parminder Singh Birdi, Peter Butlin, Jeff Clarke, Andy Crump, Piers Daniell, Clare Golby, Brian Hammersley, Dave Humphreys, Andy Jenns, Kam Kaur, Justin Kerridge, Christopher Kettle, Sue Markham, Jan Matecki, Chris Mills, Jeff Morgan, Penny-Anne O'Donnell, Bhagwant Pandher, Daren Pemberton, Wallace Redford, Isobel Seccombe, Jill Simpson-Vince, Tim Sinclair, Rik Spencer, Heather Timms, Mandy Tromans, Rob Tromans, Martin Watson and Andy Wright

Abstentions (0):

None

The Motion was declared Lost.

9. Member Question Time (Standing Order 7)

(a) Councillor Judy Falp asked Councillor Sue Markham the following question:

Our schools know their children and families well. So, I have no objection to Early Help and from January Child in Need being delivered in schools.

BUT we cannot expect our already stretched school staff to deliver these or schools to find funding to deliver them. Can the Portfolio Holders reassure me, our families and our schools that trained

professionals for example Social workers and Family Support workers will lead on this support in schools and that if funding is needed that it does not come out of school budgets.

Councillor Markham responded that schools were not being asked to take on any additional responsibilities. The Families First for Children pillars focussed on four areas: family help, supporting families early, strengthening multi-agency partnerships and improving family decision making. The Council's focus in the Families First Pathfinder was about delivering locality based family help teams on a multi agency basis. Schools had a clear part to play in this but were not being asked to take on any additional work. Indeed, the changes would mean there were county council funded roles that were education support in the locality family help teams along with multi-agency professionals like domestic abuse workers, and substance misuse workers, etc. The Council was also expanding the mental health early support framework by £100,000, which was a fund that lead professionals, including schools, who were providing early support and intervention to children and young people could access. Therefore, the support for schools would be expanded around the early support work that would be completed with them.

(b) Councillor Sarah Millar asked Councillor Kam Kaur the following question:

Given the Director of Public Health's recommendation in the 2022 Annual report that the Health and Wellbeing Board explores the feasibility of free school meals because children are better able to learn if they have a full stomach, what communication or encouragement has the County Council had with schools in Warwickshire about the Government's free breakfast club, launching in April 2025, with open applications for up to 750 schools to join the "early adopter" roll out?

In response, Councillor Kaur advised that all schools with primary age children were eligible to apply and they were all contacted directly by the Department for Education regarding this opportunity. The guidance made it clear that interested schools must apply directly and neither local authorities nor academy trusts could apply on their behalf. The Council's engagement with schools had indicated that they were aware of the Breakfast Club initiative and the opportunity to be involved in the early adopter rollout. Some schools were known to have submitted an application. The Council was not aware of how long the Early Adopter Trial would last before the funding was available to all schools or funded breakfast clubs that included meal provision. To be sure that everyone was aware of the initiative, schools had been reminded of the opportunity in the latest 'Heads Up' newsletter.

(c) Councillor Jonathan Chilvers asked Councillor Jan Matecki the following question:

The WMCA investment board of 11 November 2024 considered the publicly available report which stated that Warwickshire County Council were responsible for funding all the overspend on the A46 Stoneleigh Junction project. Has Warwickshire County Council potentially exposed itself to unlimited financial liability in the way it agreed to underwrite this project?

Councillor Matecki responded that the delivery of infrastructure on this scale had been funded from a number of sources, the majority coming from sources other than the Council. Under the construction contract, the inherent risk of ensuring delivery lay with the Council and in doing so the potential for any additional cost. This was a normal contracting risk. However, the contract did not govern where different liabilities lay between the parties to the contract for meeting additional spending.

Councillor Chilvers asked a supplementary question seeking confirmation that the West Midlands Combined Authority Board was correct and that in underwriting the contract, the Council had potentially been exposed to unlimited liability.

Councillor Matecki indicated that this was a sensitive issue for discussion in exempt session and declined to make further comment.

(d) Councillor John Holland asked Councillor Peter Butlin the following question:

At the September Council I asked for a feasibility study on setting up a banking hub in Shire Hall. I received a positive response. Can I have a progress report?

Councillor Butlin advised that there had been progress and officers were working on the detail for the first banking hub at Kenilworth Library. This would provide a template for feasibility through which to consider other sites, including Shire Hall. Councillor Butlin agreed to share further updates as the project progressed.

(e) Councillor Sarah Feeney, on behalf of Councillor Caroline Phillips asked Councillor Jan Matecki the following question:

Can the Portfolio Holder for Highways please inform me of how much has been spent on Active Travel over the past four years in the Borough of Nuneaton and Bedworth. How does this compare with other districts and boroughs?

Councillor Jan Matecki advised that the authority was committed to developing a sustainable and integrated transport system in which an expanded network of high quality active travel infrastructure would play a key role in enabling and encouraging more people to walk or cycle. This would benefit the local economy, the environment and residents' health. The Council's achievements were reflected in the Level 2 Active Travel Capability Rating, awarded by Active Travel England following an assessment of the Council's local leadership, network planning and track record in delivery. Only six local authorities had a higher rating than Warwickshire. Councillor Matecki indicated that he understood how important it was to deliver active travel infrastructure, particularly in Nuneaton and Bedworth, where levels of car ownership were the lowest in the county (nearly 20% of households did not have a car) and recently published data showed that, based on the percentage of inactive population (taken from the Active Lives survey by Sports England), Nuneaton and Bedworth was the sixth most inactive local authority in England (out of 296). Recent investment in active travel in Nuneaton and Bedworth had included infrastructure delivered as part of Bermuda connectivity and by developers as part of access arrangements. Councillor Matecki had not been able to apply a value to active travel infrastructure delivered as part of wider transport schemes in time for this meeting, which made comparing levels of investment between districts difficult. However, £6.4 million funding from a range of sources was committed to active travel schemes in Nuneaton and Bedworth and a further £1.4 million of developer Section 106 contributions were due to be received for active travel schemes in the borough. These figures excluded committed funds for wider highway and public realm schemes which were also delivering important active travel connections and improvements including the Transforming the Nuneaton project.

(f) Councillor Sarah Feeney, on behalf of Councillor Caroline Phillips asked Councillor Kam Kaur the following question:

Can the Portfolio holder for Education give me her reassurance that this Council is committed to retaining its Maintained Nursery Schools?

Councillor Kaur responded that the Council remained committed to its maintained nursery schools and continued to work closely with them.

However, in order for them to be sustainable over the long term, the government would need to change the arrangements which committed them to school levels of expenditure while only allowing childcare level funding.

(g) Councillor Jerry Roodhouse asked Councillor Kam Kaur the following question:

Can the Portfolio Holder please provide a public update as to the timetable for completion of the much-delayed £6 million expansion of St John's Primary School and provide reassurances that there will be no increase in costs, no reduction in spec of the facilities and that lessons have been learned from the highways problems encountered when the new Kenilworth school opened to ensure that no such parking and highways safety problems occur outside St John's Primary School?

Councillor Kaur advised that regarding the St. John's School expansion, a data collection exercise had been undertaken through the form of a road safety audit. This was due on 10 January 2025 when the Council's teams would assess the outcome of this work and ultimately, this would identify if a traffic regulation order was required. From that point it would be possible to reassess the timeline for the scheme.

In terms of the planning application, this could not proceed until the scope of highways works were fully understood and this would also inform where any further costs were required to complete the project. There would be no deviation from the specification of facilities required from the original schemes and designs.

In conclusion, it was not possible to provide assurances until the appropriate feasibility work had been carried out.

(h) Councillor Jerry Roodhouse asked Councillor Jan Matecki the following question:

Could the Portfolio Holder please give an undertaking to make a public statement in regard to the A46 Stoneleigh Junction, in order to reassure Council Tax payers in Warwickshire.

Councillor Matecki advised that there were dedicated pages to the A46 Stoneleigh Junction project on the Council's website which explained the current position. This had been updated following Cabinet in November 2024, and not only set out a statement but also provided a set of frequently asked questions to reassure the public of ongoing efforts to complete this project. The pages would continue to be updated until the project was complete.

(i) Councillor Bill Gifford asked Councillor Jan Matecki the following question:

It is almost exactly two years since I first asked Councillor Redford about the replacement of the faulty parking meters in Leamington Spa. At that meeting the Council was told they were expected in the spring of 2023. In the meantime you have explained they will now be replaced in

January 2025. I am now told by a fellow Warwick District Councillor that the replacements are not due now until March 2025. Is that correct? And how far will the driver have to walk to a meter that takes cash as an alternative to Ringo?

Councillor Matecki explained that the original approval to go out to procurement was in summer 2023. From autumn 2023, the authority started the procurement exercise and looked to award the contract to a successful supplier. Unfortunately, the procurement exercise had to be aborted due to a technicality in the specification. The Council went straight back out to the market - the new procurement exercise was coming to a close and best and final offer bids were awaited by 6 January 2025. Once the final evaluation had completed the Council would be able to award and firm up the installation plan and timelines across the county but hopefully it would be in early 2025. The Council would endeavour to keep existing machines working while this procurement process was being undertaken and were proactive in undertaking repairs once a fault was noted. Councillor Matecki added that it was very rare that all Pay and Display machines on a street were not working and where possible, service users would be signposted to the nearest working machine which would be in close proximity. All machines would take card payments so service users would not have to use Ringo. Not all machines would take cash, but there would be a cash option at every location. How far a driver would need to walk to a machine that took cash would of course depend on where they parked relative to the machine. However, they would all have the option to pay by card. Machines which took cash would be clearly identifiable and all machines would have the built in flexibility to take cash if needed in the future.

By way of supplement, Councillor Gifford sought confirmation of an installation date.

Councillor Matecki indicated that once the contract had been awarded, the roll out would commence as soon as possible but it was not possible to give an exact timeframe.

(j) Councillor Will Roberts asked Councillor Heather Timms the following question:

Ash dieback is serious disease killing thousands of ash trees across the country. Over time infected trees become unpredictable and more dangerous and can pose a threat to people, wildlife and property, especially on the side of the highway. Please could you let the council know if there is a strategy to deal with this problem in the county and do you have estimate of how many ash trees are on county land and the potential cost for removing infected trees, including replacing them?

Councillor Timms responded that the forestry team held data on the amount of ash trees with this disease and they were being monitored and included in the usual tree inspection regimes. Work with regard to the Warwickshire Tree Strategy was ongoing and would include a policy with regard to ash dieback once it had been adopted.

10. Any Other items of Urgent Business

None.

11. Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved:

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining item of business 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. A46 Stoneleigh Junction Update

Councillor Jan Matecki, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning, introduced this exempt report which provided an update on the A46 Stoneleigh Junction project.

Vote:

A vote was held. The recommendation was agreed by a majority.

Resolved:

The recommendations as set out in the exempt report were agreed.

The meeting rose at 2.40 pm

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Chair