

# Cabinet

Tuesday, 29 September 2020

## Minutes

### Attendance

#### Committee Members

Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Chair)  
Councillor Peter Butlin  
Councillor Les Caborn  
Councillor Colin Hayfield  
Councillor Kam Kaur  
Councillor Jeff Morgan  
Councillor Jeff Clarke  
Councillor Andy Crump  
Councillor Heather Timms

#### Officers

#### Others Present

Councillors Adkins, Barker, Boad, Cooke, Dirveiks, Gifford, Golby, Holland, Jenns, Kondakor, Pandher, Parsons, Roodhouse and Webb.

### 1. General

#### (1) Apologies

No apologies were received.

#### (2) Members' disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of interest made.

#### (3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting of 10 September 2020 were agreed.

#### (4) Public Speaking

There were no public speakers

## **2. Devolution and Local Government Reform**

Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Leader of Council and Chair of Cabinet) reminded members of the process followed to date. The outcome of the 22 September meeting of Council had been reported to the Secretary of State Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick MP on the 23 September. The Secretary of State had, in turn, indicated that the White Paper is likely to be published in October. He accepted that he had yet to receive the County Council's case for change report but agreed that once he received it he would place it before the Prime Minister. Members were reminded that the decision of whether or not to submit the Case for Change rested with Cabinet.

Councillor Seccombe submitted that the principal concern must be to achieve the best outcome for all residents and communities. Without change it was probable that taxes would need to be increased or services reduced. The third option was to consider organisational changes which would lead to greater efficiencies and cost savings.

Recognising that the Pandemic has led to the situation where people are losing their jobs and houses, the responsible solution is to ask the Secretary of State to invite all councils in Warwickshire to make a submission. Councillor Seccombe closed by stating that she favoured a single unitary council model but acknowledged that this would require testing. Only when the Secretary of State had invited that submission could consultation commence.

Councillor Helen Adkins (Leader of the Labour Group) stated that the County Council was attempting a "power grab". The desire for consultation was being ignored. Councillor Adkins requested sight of all correspondence on the matter between the Council's leadership and government. This was agreed to by Councillor Seccombe.

Councillor Keith Kondakor recognised the need for reform of local government in Warwickshire but stated that whilst pace would be required so too would a degree of care. It was stressed that there are some services that should not be forgotten. For example, council housing in Nuneaton and Bedworth is very important. Councillor Kondakor added that staffing especially at district and borough councils is a major problem. In Nuneaton there are not enough staff to undertake air quality or biodiversity work. The staff in councils work very hard but there is not enough of them. A wholesale move to Warwick would be inappropriate he stated. Finally it will be very important to get the democratic structures right.

Councillor Jeff Morgan (Portfolio Holder for Children's Services) reminded members that the Conservative election manifesto 2019 gave a clear statement on devolution. The White Paper will expand on this. The case for local government reform was clear with overspends in key children's services areas. Unitarisation would bring economies of scale and greater empowerment to town and parish councils.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) asked whether the Resolution from Council would be sent to the Minister and whether, following the invitation to district and borough councils to make a joint submission, any responses

had been received. He observed that at some point it will be necessary for council Leaders to sit around a table and have a sensible discussion on future models of local government in the county.

Councillor Seccombe confirmed that the Resolution of Council would be sent with the report. She informed Cabinet that one response had been received that being from the Leader of Warwick District Council.

Councillor Dave Parsons (Deputy Leader of the Labour Group) stated that Matt Western MP had contacted the office of Robert Jenrick MP but they had no record of a conversation between him and Councillor Seccombe. The reason he raised this was more out of concern that the Minister's office did not appear to have kept a record. Councillor Parsons raised concerns that the timetable for progressing the matter is tight. He agreed with Councillor Kondakor that people are concerned that power will be focused on Warwick and felt that more needs to be known regarding double devolution. The Council, he concluded, had been facing financial challenges for ten years. This had been increased by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Regarding consultation, Councillor Seccombe observed that the process requires that this should occur after the submission. This had not been the case with Warwick District Council and Stratford on Avon District Council.

Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Heritage and Culture) stressed that if a unitary council is created the County Council also will cease to exist. Any consultation exercise needs to be well informed and include local debates with residents. She closed by observing that efforts to address climate change will require significant resources which may only become available if local government reform goes ahead.

Councillor Jeff Clarke (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) argued that Warwickshire Councils need to display leadership to continue to provide services to the people of Warwickshire. He agreed that this was not a power grab adding that pace is required if quality services are to continue to be delivered.

Councillor Clare Golby expressed her concern that many people did not appear to understand the process. Location is an irrelevance. It had been shown that governance can occur remotely from people's houses. It was important that she should be able to be part of the conversation to represent the interests of her constituents.

Councillor Seccombe observed that the reorganisation debate had commenced in June. Three months had already passed. The longer it takes to submit the longer it will be before financial challenges can be addressed.

Councillor Colin Hayfield (Portfolio Holder for Education and Learning) suggested that the matter should be put into the hands of the Secretary of State as soon as possible. He recognised that change could be uncomfortable for many, but it was inevitable owing to the financial situation currently being faced by councils. Commencing the process now will provide ample time to find the best solution.

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader – Finance and Property) reminded members that Council had discussed the two-tier system and found it to be broken. There was now a need to progress the matter. As soon as the Minister extends his invitation so then can consultation commence.

Councillor Les Caborn (Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health) stated that initiatives around integrated health had been very successful; illustrating the benefits of joined up working. Residents he had spoken to supported the concept on unitarisation.

Councillor Kam Kaur (Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation) recognised that although the County Council had not started the unitarisation debate in Warwickshire, it is now having to lead on it. She observed that during the Pandemic all tiers of local government in Warwickshire had worked well together as had those in Heath. The focus should be on the customer and finding what is best for them.

Councillor Andy Crump (Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety) observed that Covid-19 had presented the greatest challenge to the Country since WW2. There is a need to invest in localism, he added. One unitary council is favoured as among other things two unitary councils would complicate the operation of the Fire and Rescue Service. Residents only see one council but some services that are divided between different councils (eg grass cutting) are inefficient and expensive as a result.

Councillor Sarah Boad (Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) expressed her regret that the County Council and the Warwick District Council/Stratford on Avon District Council reports were unlikely to be submitted at the same time. She was pleased to see reference to the town and parish councils, due to her soon needing to Chair a meeting of parish councils to discuss devolution.

In response to a question from Councillor Boad, Councillor Seccombe informed Cabinet that a request made by the Leader of Warwick District Council to speak at Cabinet had been rejected. Cabinet was informed that an exception had been made for him to speak to Cabinet in August.

Councillor Seccombe continued that she had been disappointed not to have been asked to engage in the proposals put forward by Stratford and Warwick District Councils. Joint engagement would arguably produce the best outcome for Warwickshire residents and consideration should be given to the establishment of one or two unitary authorities.

In consulting, people need to be clear on the implications of different models. For example, a two unitary council model would result in children's services being run by an arm's length trust.

A vote of Cabinet members was held. The recommendations were agreed unanimously.

## **Resolved**

That:

1. Having regard to the decision made, and the views expressed, by the Council at its meeting on 22nd September 2020, the Strategic Case for Change should be submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in order to seek from Government an invitation to enter into conversation and consideration of the future local government structure for Warwickshire
2. The Chief Executive is required to submit the Strategic Case for Change to MHCLG before close of business on 30th September 2020.

### **3. Exclusion of Press and Members of the Public**

The resolution was agreed.

### **4. Consideration of the Exempt Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 10 September 2020**

The exempt minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

The meeting rose at 11.01

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Chair