

Cabinet

Thursday 13 February 2025

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Isobel Seccombe OBE (Chair)
Councillor Margaret Bell
Councillor Peter Butlin
Councillor Andy Crump
Councillor Kam Kaur
Councillor Sue Markham
Councillor Jan Matecki
Councillor Heather Timms
Councillor Martin Watson

Officers

Amy Bridgewater-Carnall, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Benjamin Brook, Chief Fire Officer
Monica Fogarty, Chief Executive
Nigel Minns, Executive Director for Children and Young People
Mark Ryder, Executive Director for Communities
Benjamin Brook, Chief Fire Officer
Becky Hale, Executive Director for Social Care and Health
Rob Powell, Executive Director for Resources
Jayne Surman, Head of Communications

Others Present

Councillor Sarah Boad
Councillor Sarah Feeney
Councillor John Holland

1. General

Councillor Isobel Seccombe welcomed everyone to the meeting.

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Yousef Dahmash and Councillor Jerry Roodhouse.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2025 were taken as read and signed by the Leader as a correct record.

(4) Public Speaking

There was none.

2. Determination of Admission Arrangements, Co-ordinated Scheme and In Year process for school admissions for the 2026-2027 Academic year

Councillor Kam Kaur introduced the report which set out the Admission Arrangements, Co-ordinated Scheme and In Year admissions process for school admissions during the 2026/2027 Academic year.

The report highlighted that all schools must have admission arrangements that clearly set out how children would be admitted, including the criteria that would be applied if there were more applications than places at the school.

Councillor Kaur advised that admission arrangements needed to be determined by 28 February 2025 and there was a duty to consult if changes were made. She also referred members to proposed changes to the Published Admission Number (PAN) at Boughton Leigh School in Rugby, reducing numbers from 120 down to 90 following changes in the local area.

Councillor Sarah Boad asked for clarification on the Pupil Premium details on page 22 of the report which stated that no more than 14% of the places available would be allocated. She queried how decisions would be made if applications totalled more than the 14% specified.

Councillor John Holland expressed concern relating to the information stating that having secured a place at the school, overseas students were not turning up and displacing a Warwickshire child from the school. Councillor Kaur confirmed that instances of this had occurred on occasion but this was mainly reflected in the report to ensure the rules were tidied up.

In response to Councillor Boad's technical question, Councillor Kaur explained that it was always preferable to secure the parent's first choice of school, however, if that was not possible, officers would work with the family and schools to look at in year places. Councillor Kaur confirmed that she would respond to Councillor Boad with a definitive answer after the meeting and proposed the recommendation as detailed on page 15.

Resolved

That Cabinet approves the Admission Arrangements, Co-ordinated Scheme and In Year admissions process for school admissions during the 2026/2027 Academic year, as outlined in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 to the report.

3. Supported Employment Services & Connect to Work Funding

Councillor Martin Watson, Portfolio Holder for Economy, introduced the report which proposed that the Council act as the accountable body on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to deliver Connect to Work Employment Support Programmes across Warwickshire and enter into a series of grant funding agreements.

Councillor Watson highlighted the positive work taking place in Warwickshire, citing the Get Britain Working campaign. He advised that the DWP had chosen Warwickshire to help drive a number of support services, including encouraging adults with learning disabilities, autism and those struggling to overcome mental health barriers to access employment. The model had been proven to work well with the financing hoping to support up to 700 people, with 50% accessing paid sustainable employment.

Councillor Watson explained that funding was currently in place to 2027 but it was hoped this could be extended to 2029.

The Leader shared Councillor Watson's excitement and recognised some of the fantastic opportunities available. She hoped this report would help to spread the word and enable more people to engage with employment and encouraged the Council to lead by example in this area.

Councillor Kaur welcomed this good news story, advising that a new Intern Coordinator had been recruited with an aim to support internships across Warwickshire. She felt these opportunities were particularly positive for individuals with SEND.

Councillor Watson thanked Members for their comments and support and proposed the recommendations in the report.

Resolved

That Cabinet

- 1) Authorises the Council to act as the accountable body on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to deliver Connect to Work Employment Support Programmes across Warwickshire;
- 2) Authorises the Council to enter into a series of grant funding agreements with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) enabling the Council to develop and deliver the Connect to Work Programmes from April 2025 and for such period as the Programmes continue to be funded; and
- 3) Authorises the Executive Director for Communities to enter into grant agreements with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) related to the Programmes, including any extensions thereto, on terms and conditions acceptable to the Executive Director for Resources.

4. Council Plan 2022-2027 - Integrated Performance Report Quarter 3 2024/25

Councillor Peter Butlin introduced the report on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation, which provided a summary of the Council's performance at Quarter 3, April to December 2024. These measures had been taken against the strategic priorities and Areas of Focus as set out in the Council Plan 2022-2027.

Councillor Butlin advised that the paper set out a combined picture of performance across the County and reminded Members that they had access to all details via the performance portal which was a useful tool. He explained that the Council's Delivery Plan had started in April 2024 with Quarter 3 seeing a further project completed; the Minerva training facility, part of the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service two year improvement plan. The position since Quarter 2 was summarised with only 10% of the measures marked as At Risk and the strongest performing Key Business Metrics (KBM's) carrying forward to Quarter 3.

Some of the positive areas for performance were outlined including the National Highways Transport survey ranking, the percentage of children with an EHCP attending mainstream school had increased and 86% of WCC owned children's home placements were occupied. In addition, Councillor Butlin noted that two children had also been successfully supported to return home to their parents' care.

Councillor Butlin addressed the challenging metrics reported in HR, noting the levels of sickness absence had increased. This measure remained over the tolerance of plus or minus 1 day against the target of eight days. He highlighted that targeted activity continued to focus on teams with particularly high levels of stress and anxiety. Work would continue to delve into the reasons for absence, with managers looking to see how staff could be supported.

Finally, Councillor Butlin referred to Risk Management advising that the strategic risk profile had remained stable in quarter 3, with all director leadership teams involved in a 'deep dive exercise'.

Councillor Boad highlighted paragraph 3.4 of the report which detailed the performance challenges this quarter including only 30% of EHCP's being completed within 20 weeks and SEND Home to School Transport costs. She was also concerned to see that all of the Climate Change activities listed on page 87 were marked as 'at risk'. In response, Councillor Heather Timms, Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate and Culture countered that 67% of activities detailed were on target, reminding the meeting that securing funding was key to delivering proposals. She advised that progress was being made to decarbonise buildings with solar panels being installed at Ryton Pools and Kingsbury Water Park.

Councillor Sarah Feeney asked if any other interventions were planned to help manage the levels of sickness absence. Councillor Seccombe explained that information recording was being looked at, with a view to understanding the reasons for long term absences. Councillor Kaur highlighted that there was a lot of detailed contained in the annual report submitted to the Staff and Pensions Committee.

The Chief Executive, Monica Fogarty, gave assurance that officers understood the need to do more than monitor the reasons for staff absence. She agreed that Covid continued to have a legacy impact, resulting in different patterns of working and recording of absence. She felt that a 'deep dive' into the reasons was needed to understand the different natures of sickness absence

and, whilst there was some excellent work underway in terms of wellbeing, there was more that needed to be done.

The Leader welcomed the suggestion from the Chief Executive and suggested this be discussed at the next Leaders meeting.

In response to the queries raised by Councillor Boad, Councillor Kaur advised that SEND processes had been reviewed through the transformation work and, whilst demand had not lessened, it was hoped that a slight improvement would be demonstrated in quarter 4. With regards to Home to School Transport, the admissions team continued to work hard and had managed to reduce the number of late applications substantially compared to the year before, freeing up officer time as a result.

Councillor Andy Crump spoke about the training fire facility at Rugby which would help to improve the way Fire Fighters were trained, was more cost effective and reduced mileage out of the County. He reiterated the positive work ongoing, with funding identified for years four and five of the Resourcing to Risk proposals. Councillor Crump acknowledged the two measures not on track a detailed on page 97 of the report.

Councillor Butlin proposed the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Resolved

That Cabinet

- 1) Considers and comments on the Quarter 3 2024/25 organisational performance, and
- 2) Agrees to refer the report to Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs) to consider, in detail, the information relevant to their individual remits.

5. Approval to Procure Highways Maintenance Contract

Councillor Jan Matecki, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning, introduced the report which sought approval to commence a procurement exercise to secure a replacement Highways Maintenance Contract. The existing contract was due to expire in May 2026 and covered all highways maintenance functions.

Councillor Matecki explained that the new contract would incorporate the existing functions along with additional elements including opportunities to use Artificial Intelligence and digital enhancements. In addition, consideration would be given to move the gritting fleet from Council owned to the contractor, if it was shown to be financially beneficial.

Members were advised that the new contract would include bespoke specifications for Delegated Budget delivery and would operate on a similar financial basis, with no fixed annual spend. If the decision was approved, procurement activity would start later this month with a tender issued in June 2025. It was hoped to award the contract at the end of the year which would allow five months for the contractor to mobilise.

Councillor Matecki advised that Legal were looking into how Local Government Reform would impact but any contracts would transfer over to the new entity by process of law. There was no option to extend the existing contract, and it was not considered financially suitable to enter into a short-term contract.

Councillor Boad thanked Councillor Matecki for the report and stated that she felt the delivery of Highways Delegated Budget schemes had improved substantially. She raised a concern that there were ongoing frustrations relating to repairing potholes, with residents noticing that temporary fixes were not always substantial enough. She queried if this resulted in higher costs in the long term.

Councillor Margaret Bell queried if moving the gritting fleet to the contractor would result in less control by the Council. She felt that residents may be concerned about their areas not being covered.

In response to Councillor Boad's question, Councillor Matecki explained that temporary fixes to potholes only occurred when it was an emergency repair or when weather conditions required it. He advised there was data available but assured that quick fixes should only happen if really needed. Addressing Councillor Bell's concern, Councillor Matecki advised that other local authorities had moved their gritting fleet to contractors, as a way to reduce purchasing and maintenance cost. Contractors were often able to access bigger buying power and could use the vehicles for other purposes, avoiding them sitting idle for long periods of time.

Councillor Matecki proposed the recommendations as laid out.

Resolved

That Cabinet

- 1) authorises the Executive Director for Communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning to commence a procurement exercise to secure a replacement Highways Maintenance Contract (HMC26); and
- 2) authorises the Executive Director for Communities to award the contract for HMC26 and to enter into all agreements and other documents necessary on terms and conditions acceptable to the Executive Director for Resources.

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 28 January 2025 Meeting of Cabinet

The exempt minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 28 January 2025 were agreed as an accurate record.

The meeting rose at 2.25pm

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Chair