

WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Warwick District Council held at Shire Hall, Warwick, on Wednesday 20 March 2024, at 6.00pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Syson (Chairman); Councillors Aizlewood, Armstrong, Barton, Billiald, Browne, Chilvers, Cron, Davison, Day, K Dickson, R Dickson, Dray, Falp, B Gifford, Gorman, Hales, D Harrison, J Harrison, Kenndey, King, Kohler, Luckhurst, Margrave, Matecki, Milton, Noonan, Payne, Phillips, Redford, Roberts, Rosu, Sinnott, Tangri, Williams, C Wightman, P Wightman and Yellapragada.

87. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Boad, Collins, C Gifford, Russell and Sullivan.

88. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

89. **Minutes**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 21 February 2024 were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following changes:

- 1) The title of minute number 31, be changed from "Abbey Feilds" to Abbey Fields;
- 2) In minute number 81 the sentence which started "This was due to a number of factors." be changed to "This was due to the sub-contractors' quotes being higher than expected, perhaps due to a number of factors such as bidding fatigue and high inflation in the construction industry locally."; and
- 3) a note be added to the minutes stating that it was a Planning condition that the Tennis Courts be resurfaced within three months of the opening of the swimming pools, this would either be funded by unspent contingency, or the money would need to be found from elsewhere.

90. **Communications & Announcements**

The Chairman thanked Katie Hunt for her time as a Warwick District Councillor, she had resigned.

The Chairman reminded Council that the Director of Public Health would be presenting the annual report at the next Council meeting in April.

The Chairman stated Warwick District Council (WDC) would turn 50 on 1 April 2024 and informed Council of the following plans to commemorate:

- a) 50 WDC places and projects- promoting 50 pieces of WDC projects and places that's one a week for the year, allowing for two weeks off for Christmas;
- b) a 50th Birthday gift for all staff, either a seed infused card or a seed ball to encourage people to plant and grow, this will be funded from the bio-diversity budget;

- c) on 1 April the Chairman would deliver birthday cake to the staff that would be working at CCTV, Lifeline and Parking;
- d) the staff EXPO this year would focus on the change in service over the last 50 years, illustrating how the Council was in 1974, where it is now, and where it might be in the future;
- e) award five or six people honorary freemen or women of the District. This would be combined to mark the move back to the Town Hall from Shire Hall. To enable this a Working Group should be established comprising of the longest serving male and female Councillors, a Portfolio Holder, myself the current Chairman, and the incoming Chairman and Vice-Chair of the Council. A process seeking nominations for these positions from across the District and then recommendations would be brought to Council;
- f) a brand tweak to include 50 in WDC's logo for the year; and
- g) an event to commemorate housing tenants who have been with WDC since 1 April 1974.

The Chairman informed the Council that there would be no business to consider under Item 5 – Petitions, Item 6 - Notices of Motion or 9B Cabinet report from 20 March 2024, as that meeting had not taken place.

91. **Leader and Portfolio Holders' Statements**

The Portfolio Holder for Arts and Economy, Councillor Billiald, informed Council that

there had been comments on social media regarding the Kenilworth Carnival and Funfair which was due to take place at the end of June 2024. An annual carnival took place in Kenilworth and a Funfair usually ran alongside this. Unfortunately, the scale that the Funfair was currently operating meant the Abbey Fields site was no longer suitable due to environmental factors such as the growth of trees over many years. If allowed to go ahead on this site, WDC would be in breach of its guidelines of management and care of Abbey Fields which was an ancient monument that WDC had a duty to protect. Funfairs provided the opportunity for communities to come together, they provide excitement for children and warm memories for the older generation. WDC officers and Councillor Kennedy, as Leader of Kenilworth Town Council) met with the Carnival Committee and Funfair Operators and had agreed in principle a new home for the carnival within Abbey Fields, which was less sensitive than the current site, subject to obtaining the required approvals from Historic England and minor works to increase access to the area. A report would be taken to Cabinet with further details to be agreed on 10 April 2024.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood and Assets, Councillor Roberts, informed Council that:

- (1) The latest A46 cleanse started on Monday 18 March 2024 and would run until the evening of 28 March 2024. This was dangerous and unpleasant work and asked that anyone who used the A46 take home their waste.
- (2) Members had received a briefing paper regarding the pesticide reduction pilot which would be taking place in six areas across the District and would start April 2024. The aim of the pilot was to understand the impact of reducing the amount of pesticides sprayed by reducing the number of sprays per year from two to one.
- (3) Grass cutting across the District would start on Monday 25 March 2024 and WDC would take part in No Mow May again, but in a reduced number of

areas. This was to allow grass and wildflowers to grow unbothered for a month to create habitats and food sources for early season pollinators. The No Mow May initiative would have a different approach this year, a lot more planning had occurred based on the lessons learnt from last year, input from residents, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Members. A briefing paper would be emailed to all Members by the end of the week summarising the new approach and communications would be sent to all residents.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Leisure, Councillor Sinnott, informed Council that:

- (1) The Sports and Leisure Manager and their counterpart at We Do Tennis received awards from the Law and Tennis Association for Warwickshire's Park of the year, for providing affordable and free Tennis lessons at Victoria Park, Christ Church Gardens and St Nick's Park.
- (2) The persistence nuisance of odour and flies in the Heathcote area were still under investigations. It was important for residents to continue to report incidents. The evidence building might be slow, but it needed to be correct and to evidential standards.
- (3) The Abbey Fields Swimming Pools building work had started, this was an investment into our residents, and it supported Council's vision of creating vibrant, safe, and healthy communities.

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership, Councillor Davison, informed Council that Councillors received notice of an additional Cabinet meeting on Tuesday 12 March 2024 prior to the Cabinet meeting which would have been held 20 March 2024 to approve a report concerning the West Midlands Investment Zone (WMIZ). The WMIZ was complex and involved many levels of government, business partners, Birmingham Knowledge Quarter, and Wolverhampton Green Innovation Corridor.

The proposed gigafactory, that formed part of the WMIZ, on the site of Coventry Airport, could create thousands of jobs and be a major step towards national reduction in carbon emissions.

There are tens of millions of pounds at stake for this Council, the project started by the previous administration and was due to last for a further 25 years.

The WMIZ was due to go live 1 April 2024 which included a huge financial investment in a battery gigafactory on the Coventry airport site.

The report, published with the agenda for 20 March, set out WDC's support for the principle of the gigafactory, except if there was unreasonable financial detriment to the Council's finances. This Cabinet meeting was cancelled as negotiations with West Midlands Combined Authority had not yet concluded. Councillor Davison thanked all Members and the Director of Public Health for their patience on this matter, including the Overview and Scrutiny Committee who were due to have an additional meeting 19 March 2024. He also thanked Group Leaders for their support and helping to provide constructive challenge despite attending many meetings. He also highlighted to Council that further additional meetings would need to be called at the time decisions needed to be made.

92. Questions to the Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holders

Councillor Falp asked the Portfolio Holder for Arts and Economy, if the Events Team insisted on the same criteria for every event, even small or medium sized events. If they could explain why what was required for events constantly changed and why volunteers were required to have lower levels of certification of which they already held a higher level, for example you had to hold a basic DBS check even if you held a more detailed certificate. Finally, Councillor Falp asked if WDC managed any events and if so which.

In response, Councillor Billiald stated that each event was unique and required different levels of management. The team tried to ensure that levels of paperwork were proportionate to the event and worked their own processes and best practices within the event industry's purple guide which was frequently updated. A recent update had been made to qualification levels for first aiders at public events, some events might require more marshals to ensure safety, the team worked closely with Warwickshire Police Tactical Planning Department and a team who advised on safety at outdoor events. The events team were happy to support individuals with documentation. The Warwick District Council's Licensing Team required all Street Trading Consent Applicants to hold a basic DBS which was less than six months old, applicants outside of this window needed to apply for a new basic DBS check which costed £18 via the Gov.uk website. The Events team organised and ran Ecofest, the Warwick Victorian evening, the Royal Leamington Spa big light switch on, and both Kenilworth light switch on events. Additionally, the small events team oversaw a busy programme of 157 events in 2023 held in Parks and Town Centres across the District.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Falp, Councillor Billiald stated that the Events Team would do their best to provide support for any events, including Whitnash Christmas lights switch on, which might be organised.

Councillor Day asked the Leader of the Council if he would be prepared to widen conversations around the WMIZ and consider all contacts within the West Midlands combined authority in order to achieve the best outcome possible.

In response, Councillor Davison thanked Councillor Day for his question and explained negotiations were ongoing with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and hoped to agree a deal which was fair for all current residents. Councillor Davison stated that WDC was currently an observer of the WMCA and there were ongoing discussions to become a non-constituent member.. The Chief Executive had been flexible and had offered to work around schedules to ensure a meeting took place, both Councillor Davison and the Chief Executive had been at meetings with the WMCA in the last few weeks. Andy Street, Mayor of West Midlands, had been even-handed on the issue. There had been many conversations with Warwickshire County Council, also discussions had been had with MP Jeremy Wright, and finally conversations were had with Coventry City Council, so the discussions were being had with all contacts in order to achieve progress.

Councillor Day asked the Leader to hear a statement from all Portfolio Holders at every Council meeting and and if he could make the Tachbrook Country Park a priority and ensure that there were public benefits for residents of Tachbrook who had been waiting for eight years for these facilities.

In response, Councillor Davison stated he would look into the Portfolio Holders statements and that he was mindful that the statements did not take too much time at each meeting. The Tachbrook Country Park project was underway, however there were hurdles. Councillor Davison stated he would arrange an update meeting on this if needed.

Councillor Phillips asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood and Assets if WDC sought advice from Brighton & Hove City Council regarding their five-year trial of no pesticides and if so, what was the advice given.

In response, Councillor Roberts stated WDC had not spoken to Brighton & Hove City Council directly but a consultation with the Pesticide Action Network who had worked with them and had worked with numerous Councils across the Country to reduce their pesticide use. WDC had also consulted with WCC Highways Team and contractor Idverde, who were supportive of the trial. WDC had reviewed case studies from other local authorities as well. All of the above factors were considered when the approach for the pilot was created. WDC was aware of the situation at Brighton and the contractors had agreed to monitor the situation accordingly and remove any necessary unwanted growth.

Councillor Phillips then asked Councillor Roberts if he knew how the team would measure the success of the trial and how long the trial intended to be.

Councillor Roberts confirmed the trial would last for a year and it would be monitored closely. There would be different sprays, three areas would be sprayed in April/ May time and three would be sprayed in September/ October. Contractors and officers would attend the areas weekly to ensure they were managed properly.

(Councillor J Harrison arrived during this item and the Chairman asked her to submit her statement to Council before returning to Questions to the Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holders)

93. Leader and Portfolio Holders' Statements

The Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Councillor J Harrison, informed Council that:

- (1) Riverside House was due to close 28 March 2024. The Royal Pump Rooms would open after Easter, this had been delivered under budget and precise numbers would be shared at the next Council meeting.
- (2) The Change Programme had been agreed at Cabinet 6 March 2024. The first board meeting would be held in April.
- (3) The Customer Relation Management system had been agreed at Cabinet 6 March 2024 and Councillor Harrison hoped to have further information around this, including a date in which it would become live at the next Council meeting.
- (4) Members had been briefed around how the new values would be embedded into the Corporate Strategy and how staff had engaged at the conversation café meetings. Councillor Harrison passed her thanks to colleagues in HR who were involved in the conversation café's.

94. Questions to the Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holders

Councillor Payne asked the Portfolio Holder for Place, Arts and Economy how the data around the number of vacant retail properties in Royal Leamington Spa would be utilised and would it be enough to assure the business owners in the Town Centre.

In response, Councillor Billiald stated that the latest count was taken at the end of January 2024 and showed that out of 680 units, 66 were vacant. This was 9.71%, compared to October 2023 there were 56 vacant units at 8.3%. In Warwick out of

268 units 27 were vacant which was 10.07% compared to 22 units in October 2023 at 8.37%. In Kenilworth, out of 168 units 13 were vacant which was 6.54% and this had remained the same compared to the count in October. She stated work was ongoing with the transformation board and Business Improvement District (BID) Leamington to reimagine the town centre and the Parade and this was mentioned at the last town assembly meeting.

Councillor Payne asked a supplementary question in regard to the possibility of increasing the funding to the Business Improvement District (BID) Leamington if the business levy did not raise enough.

Councillor Billiald confirmed that the Council did not provide "top up funding". BID was funded from a bid levy calculated as a percentage of business rates. WDC did support them in a number of ways, such as collecting the levy from businesses, provided additional grant support, paid levies for WDC premises, and provided joint initiatives particularly lighting artwork trails and street artwork trails.

Councillor Kohler asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood regarding the reduced pesticide pilot, why were only six wards selected for this could you inform Council why wards that had been proposed were not selected for the trial and how would it be judged as a success and when would it be expanded.

In response, Councillor Roberts stated originally the proposal looked for three wards across the district and when the decision to split when the sprays would be happened it made sense to expand the trial. Unfortunately, it was deemed too extensive to expand the trial to all 12 wards, so six wards were selected. Whitnash had not been selected as the Town Council needed to be consulted and this had not been completed in time. Feedback from residents after the first year would help decide if the trial had been successful, as well as feedback from Warwickshire County Council's Highways team. Feedback from Contractors and WDC officers would also be important when looking at successes of the trial. Once the results had been confirmed, a plan to expand would be created but Councillor Roberts could not confirm how it would be expanded as it was dependent on feedback received.

Councillor Kohler asked a supplementary question asking why the reduction of sprays was difficult and why more areas could not be included.

Councillor Roberts stated that the trial was being done by ward and contractors did not work by ward, therefore detailed instructions had to be provided street by street of where the trial was occurring. To expand this across 12 wards, a lot of extra work would need to go into this, so six wards was agreed instead of the original three.

Councillor K Dickson asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets as the Housing team prepared for the evaluation of WDC's housing stock under the new housing standards and gathering evidence for the Asset Compliance Committee ensuing plans were in place to retrofit older assets. Was the team big enough to carry out these tasks and what was being done to support them.

In response, Councillor P Wightman stated it was challenging times and Members were familiar with the Pennington's report and the challenges that presented. The Council and the team could be proud of the strong start that had been made to this. Hard work had already started and that had been proven by the robust action plan that had been made. WDC were not unique in this situation, there were increased expectations on social landlords up and down the Country through asset

compliance and new consumer standards. WDC had secured interim specialist resources covering building and fire safety and additional project management capacity. WDC would work with the Housing Quality Network on the new consumer standards. Councillor Wightman assured Members that senior officers were working on proposals for resource requirements moving forward and the Asset Compliance Committee would be updated.

Councillor R Dickson asked the Portfolio Holder for Place, Arts which Members of the WDC Cabinet were present at the CW Champions meeting today, at Kenilworth School and what was learnt about local businesses.

In response, Councillor Billiald stated the Cabinet would have all liked to attend. However, there had been other priorities such as the Kenilworth Funfair. This was something that Cabinet would like to do, and some were working directly with business owners either themselves or through BID to support them with their individual needs. If required, they would then be referred to the CW Growth Hub.

Councillor R Dickson thanked the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Leisure for circulating the monthly activity update from the Safer Communities, Leisure, and Environment Team. Could you update Council regarding the most recent data about level of satisfaction of local victims of crime about the way in which the crime they had suffered was handled.

In response, Councillor Sinnott stated he did not have the answer presently so he would ensure a full response in writing in due course.

Councillor R Dickson asked a supplementary question, in the papers provided for March's Police and Crime Panel it was stated that in December 2023 the rolling six-month experience satisfaction trend for domestic abuse, vehicle crime violence, burglary, and hate crime were all below target. Could you commit to finding more areas for joint working between the District Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner, Warwickshire Police and the local voluntary community to improve the disappointingly low crime satisfaction figures.

Councillor Sinnott stated that he would look at the figures and confirmed WDC were actively engaged with such partners. A fuller response would follow in writing in due course.

Councillor Matecki asked the Leader of the Council following the resignation of former Councillor Katie Hunt due to no longer living within the District, would she have been able to legally remain as a Councillor regardless of not living in the area.

Councillor Davison stated he did not know of the reasons Katie Hunt stepped down so he would not be able to comment. The legal position was that a Councillor had to attend at least one meeting every six months.

Councillor Matecki asked Councillor Davison a supplementary question, at the meeting of Council 13 December 2021 there was a debate around joining with Stratford District Council to make a South Warwickshire Council. Councillor Matecki read quotes from Councillor Robets within that meeting. Would the leader make the moral and honourable decision to resign like all other Councillors who had moved out of the area to allow the people of Warwick District make the decisions for Warwick District residents.

Councillor Davison stated that this question had been raised by Councillor Matecki last spring and his response had not changed. There were four criteria by which you

could become a Councillor, one of which was where you live. If there was an issue with the criteria it should be raised with the Electoral Commission.

95. **Cabinet Reports**

- a) The recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6 March 2024 in respect of Treasury Management Minute Number 97 were proposed by Councillor Chilvers and seconded by Councillor King.

Councillors Chilvers, Milton and King spoke on this item.

Resolved that recommendations contained in minute number 97 headed "Treasury Management 2024/2025" as set out in the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 6 March 2024, be noted, and approved.

- b) the recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6 March 2024 in respect of Revisions to the Constitution Minute Number 98 were proposed by Councillor Davison and seconded by Councillor Harrison.

Councillors Davison and Chilvers spoke on this item.

Resolved that recommendations contained in minute number 98 headed "Revisions to the Constitution" as set out in the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 6 March 2024, be noted, and approved.

- c) The recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6 March 2024 in respect of "Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Review 2024" Minute Number 99 were proposed by Councillor P Wightman and seconded by Councillor Chilvers.

Councillor P Wightman, Milton, Kennedy, and Chilvers spoke on this item.

Resolved that recommendations contained in minute number 99 headed "Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Review 2024" as set out in the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 6 March 2024, be noted, and approved.

96. **Employment Committee Report**

- a) the recommendations from the meeting of the Employment Committee held on 19 March 2024 in respect of the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24 were proposed by Councillors Sinnott and seconded by Councillor Harrison.

Resolved that the Pay Policy Statement attached at Appendix 1 to the minutes be approved, and its publication for the 2023-24 financial year, be agreed.

- b) Councillor Sinnott informed Council that following the Employment Committee meeting on 19 March questions had been raised in respect of the Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap Reporting as at 31.3.23 report and these would be reviewed with officers before bringing it back to Council.

97. **Common Seal**

It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor J Harrison and

Resolved that the Common Seal of Warwick District Council be affixed to such documents as it may be required for implementing decisions of the Council arrived at this day.

(The meeting ended at 7.25pm)

CHAIRMAN
17 April 2024