

Pre-Scrutiny Questions and Answers – Cabinet Agenda 8 February 2024

Report Title: General Fund Revenue and Capital Budget 2024/25

Report Author(s): Andrew Rollins

Councillor Russell:

Item 5, paragraph 1.26 which states 'An additional £0.045m Cost of Living Support' budget has also been included from 2024 for 3 years.' Apologies if I have missed any further info around it, but just to aid my understanding of the rationale behind what is being done, please could you respond to the points below.

1. How was the sum of £0.045m arrived upon?
2. What is it envisaged use?
3. How will this money be allocated/Who will be eligible to access it?

Response:

Awaiting

Councillor Milton:

Could confirm the actual progress that has been made on the MFTS deficit since last year please? With all the moving parts it's difficult to unpick. In particular I'd like to know how much the Change Management programme has contributed.

In terms of reserves is it possible to see the level of reserves historically please - over the last 3-5 years? I think it would be helpful for members to be able to see the rate of change.

Response:

Awaiting

Councillor R Dickson:

Much of the content of this report has already been explained in previous Councillor briefings. However, I can't recall

- 1) What staff vacancy rate is assumed in the budget for 2024/25?
- 2) What are the terms of the repayment of the Kenilworth School Loan of £5.3 million?
- 3) Does the budget for 2024/25 assume no extra capital/grant funding for a possible move of Kenilworth Wardens to Castle Farm?

Response:
Awaiting

Report Title: Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) Revocations

Report Author(s): Frances Taylor and Jack Clifford

Councillor Milton:

I understand that this isn't really discretionary, but could you outline how we will continue to monitor air quality in these areas in future? They have been longstanding issues in both these locations, and I would like to ensure that we don't risk a reoccurrence.

Response:

We will continue monitoring in all locations that have been revoked and ensure that ongoing trends continue to improve.

We can reinstate an air quality management area if there was a reoccurrence. However, the decision to revoke the AQMA's is because the trend of air quality improvement is consistent, and projections indicate continued improvement.

Councillor R Dickson:

Given that WDC is working closely with Clean Air Warwickshire and Kenilworth Town Council to organise a Clean Air Day in Kenilworth in June 2024, is this really the most strategically logical time to remove the two AQMAs in Kenilworth? Doesn't this send a very mixed message to residents?

Response:

Ultimately, we have little choice in the timing of when to remove the AQMA's.

They have been below the air quality objectives for the required time to indicate confidence with staying below the target. In addition, DEFRA has directed us to remove them.

It is important that we continue to make actions across the district to improve air quality, even where they meet the regulatory objectives.

As an organiser of the event, I will be working on messaging for the event and the removal of the AQMA's will be included.

Councillor R Dickson (follow-on question to response above):

If WDC decide to keep monitoring Air Quality in Kenilworth, on the grounds that local residents are concerned about it (which they are), what would DEFRA be able to do about it?

Response:

DEFRA have no restrictions on where we monitor air quality. We do not need an AQMA in order to monitor air quality. We have many locations outside of our AQMA that we monitor air quality.

However, if we were to retain the air quality management area on the grounds that local residents are concerned. The Secretary of State would likely direct us to through DEFRA.

Report Title: Complaints Policy

Report Author(s): Graham Leach

Councillor Milton:

To help members consider this effectively is it possible to provide some stats about the number of complaints the council receives please and the trend? At the moment it looks like data is split down by portfolio and aggregate data would be helpful.

Response:

Purely on a numerical basis does the information below show the information you after.

Complaints received by year:



Complaints upheld each year.



Complaint investigations not completed on time.



The last one in my view being the critical one that that Officers are seeking to address with the new role for stage 2 complaints and revising process and emphasis for stage 1.

Councillor Syson:

On page 7 of Appendix A under Stages of the Policy it says "Upon receipt of the complaint, the relevant service will look at the issues contained within the complaint."

Who will look at it? Who decides where the complaint should be forwarded to from the website? Is this currently the Deputy Monitoring Officer, will it be the Policy Performance and Complaints Manager, will they be allowed to delegate to others?

Also on page 7 "We will look at whether we need to start a full investigation" Who is the 'we'. Is it just one officer?

On page 8. under Review it states

"In the review, at Stage 2, consideration will be given to the adequacy of the Stage 1 response, as well as any new and relevant information not previously considered. It will not be a detailed investigation of the complaint as this detailed investigation will have

occurred at Stage 1.”

How do you know that there has been a proper detailed investigation at Stage 1? It is the adequacy of the investigation as well as the adequacy of the response that should be queried. In my opinion there are complainants who will never be satisfied, those who appear to be the sort who will never be satisfied but underneath do have a genuine complaint, and those who have a genuine complaint which sometimes is not investigated properly so they do have to come back a second time.

The following comments are not questions but just typos that will need to be corrected in due course:

Page 6 : The Council **the Council** has a Policy, Performance & Complaints Manager who **will be responsible for assigned to take responsibility for** complaint handling,

Page 7: What **cannot deal with** under this policy

Response:

With this Policy I have tried to move away from combining procedure and policy together as this created a much longer document.

The procedure for all complaints at present is they are received centrally by the Corporate Support Team who pass it to the relevant Head of Service for them to determine if is a complaint. There is an exception to this where within Housing we are trialling a different approach to speed up the process. The plan is also to change this with improved process through using a system to manage more of the complaint handling to automate a number of points.

Thank you for flagging the “We” within the Policy I need to change that to the Council”, but the “We is explained above”.

The proposal for stage 2 is based on the proposed Complaint Handling Code from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman. The key will be the quality and consistency of investigations which the Council is looking to improve through the use of a single officer for stage 2 complaints (so can monitor and provide more direct feedback and support for stage 1 complaints).

Thank you for the typos I had picked those up late last week.

Report Title: Refurbishment and Improvement to Existing Paddling Pools

Report Author(s): Sally Watts

Councillor R Dickson:

The appeal of free outdoor paddling is acknowledged; as well as a benefit to residents it's also an important factor in the district's visitor proposition.

Noting the results of the Victoria Park Survey (paragraph 2.5), what plans are there to introduce more shade?

With regard to Equality (Paragraph 7.1), what provision will there be in the pools for access by disabled children that's consistent with the 'let's play fair'/Accessibility Improvements In Parks initiative?

Response:

Here are the responses. If you need further information or clarity, please let me know.

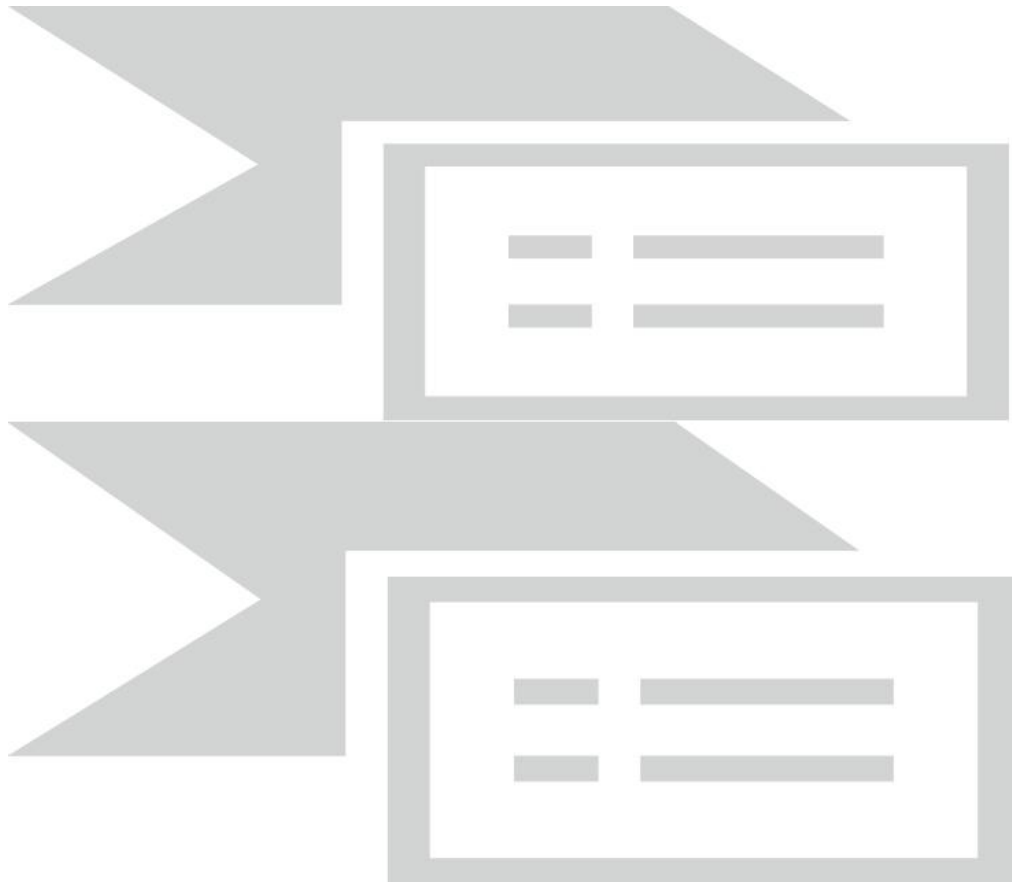
Shade

The proposal includes :

- Provision of shade with removable sails or free-standing shade structures (2.3 of the report).

The plan is to introduce this is for a galvanized steel powder coated structure with heavy duty shade cloth or waterproof fabric, (type of fabric will depend on requirements). The intention is to have 3 in Victoria Park and 2 in St Nicholas Park, both with an 8-metre span. Given that there is a larger footprint in the area around the pool in Victoria Park whereas St Nicholas Park is more constrained.

Below are some examples of the types of shade structures. The free standing one with the centre support is preferred as it would allow for seating to be underneath the sails for larger areas of shade.



Equality

The 'let's play fair'/Accessibility Improvements In Parks initiative relates largely to play areas and play equipment and there is limited information in regard to providing accessible paddling pools that my research provided.

We are undertaking a project to improve accessibility in the parks and in the next couple of months we will collating information from Evergreen School to better understanding how children use the parks and what they most enjoy and what barriers are that they face. Feedback regarding the paddling pools can be an area we can consider in the design of the paddling pool areas, from access to colours used in the design for example, however we will be restricted by a tight timeframe.

Both pools have level or ramped access to the surrounding areas of the pool.

The paddling pools will be areas where there will be many sensory opportunities for children who wish to use them with senses of touch, sound, sight and the feel of the water being key areas and of significant benefit to a range of children who may benefit from a more sensory experience.

The intention for seating and seating in shade will allow for areas of regulation as rest period for children who need it. The areas are already contained with fencing around to ensure all children are safe and will remain so as well as being away from roads which is promoted for accessible play area, this is of particular importance for children with ADHD or learning disabilities. There is an obvious social benefit which is key in designing accessible play spaces with all children to enable interaction to help break down barriers.

Report Title: Packmores Community Centre Update

Report Author(s): Bernadette Allen

Councillor R Dickson:

The opportunity for WDC to provide financial help to a facility providing community centre operations seems entirely appropriate. To help put this proposal in context, to which other community centres in the district, and to what extent, is WDC providing direct financial support, either by way of project grant or contract-based core funding?

Response:

WDC has quite a record of supporting a range of community centres - both in construction and ongoing. Largely this focuses on construction than on revenue support. Recent examples include Warwick Gates; Chase Meadow; Bishops Tachbrook; Norton Lindsey; Whitnash; Sea Scouts, Warwick, and Barford Youth/Community Centre which is about to start.

Revenue support had been given to Chase Meadow for a time to stabilise it. Revenue support is given via SLAs to a number of community groups of the Gap is one. The SLAs had been awarded via a competitive process.

The proposed governance structure seems a little complicated. The possibility of grantfundors wanting separation is acknowledged but is there evidence of this?

Response:

The structure reflects the experience of those involved especially from the voluntary/community sector. This includes those who have experience of bidding for funds.

When CIO trustees are hard enough as it is to recruit and retain (The Gap/William Percy Estates Community Projects appears currently to have only five), is creating another new trustee board, with all the necessary governance, banking and financial frameworks, really very practical? Is it proposed that WDC will have a nominated trustee or observer on the new CIO Board?

Response:

There is a need to have some localised governance so the board issue can't be set aside to sit under a wider body. There are already a number of local people who are committed enough to help establish the governance arrangements and so a small number of trustees should be possible to attract and retain. We could have a nominated trustee if the Council felt it appropriate but this also has challenges about roles.

What will be the KPIs used to measure the community benefit achieved by WDC paying for a full-time CDW at The Gap?

Response:

This is already part of an SLA that the Council already has with the Gap.

Is this new structure in Warwick going to be the same blueprint used for operating the proposed new community facility at Kenilworth Gate?

Response:

Not necessarily as we have found that each situation is different and so requires a bespoke approach.

Report Title: Protection of Ground Nesting Birds, St Mary's Lands, Warwick

Report Author(s): Chris Elliott

Councillor D Harrison:

(Responses from the report author to Councillor D Harrison's questions are in blue.)

Thank you for the opportunity to read the report "Protection of Ground Nesting Birds, St Mary's Land, Warwick" and having read it with interest I would like to ask the following questions, some specific to the report and others regarding the wider context of this proposal :

While supportive of the proposal to extend the trial of the fencing and protection measures, particularly given the recent upturn in ground nesting bird numbers, I would have liked the report to have covered some of the concerns raised by Friends of St Mary's Land (Their concerns were last expressed 2 years ago before this report was undertaken and they were brought up at the Cabinet at that point in time), and highlighted as a result of a separate Ecologists Report they had commissioned (it was not commissioned i.e. paid and tendered – it was a piece of work undertaken at least 2 years ago by someone living locally associated with the FoSML but who by their own admission were not experts in this field – they were more botanists. By the same token I have not referred to the work also undertaken by a local wildlife group – who are bird watchers.), and perhaps you could provide comment on the following points that they have brought to my attention :

- 1.They expressed concern that the signage posts installed provided a perch for raptors who have sought out the chicks and fledgling skylarks. Did the WDC appointed Ecologists Report recognise this threat and has it been considered and/or mitigated? Our own Green Spaces team have identified this as an issue wherever a post is positioned in the vicinity of the nesting birds. The mitigation is about height of the post since to give advantage for raptors some height is required. Posts heights are kept to the same height as fence netting heights as far as possible.
- 2.The FOSML believe that if the grass is allowed to grow above 600mm, which apparently happens in the protected area by mid-summer, it is no longer suitable nesting habitat and therefore they believe further broods later in the year are no longer possible. This is challenged by our own Green Spaces Team and we have no evidence on this site to support that view. There are in any case shorter grass length areas throughout the summer where birds can nest again so this is not an issue.
- 3.The report indicates that no surveys were undertaken after June in 2023 ; is this something that could be addressed for this forthcoming year by requesting surveys over a longer duration of the year to give a wider picture of the extent and numbers of nesting birds over the full breeding season? Yes, we can.

Also, I noted that Appendices 3 – 5 have not yet appeared on the Cabinet Agenda. [These appendix references refer to the decision made back in 2022 they are not appendices to this report.](#)

If I could ask more generally, would it be possible to reconvene the FOSML [\(To note - \(the Working Party it is not the Friends of St Marys Lands Working Group – they are but one organisation involved and since they have refused to share their governance arrangements and offer their Committee’s details, they have not been part of the Group. This can of course change if they wish to share that information\)](#) Working Group as a priority to provide wider input to the ecologist’s work planned for 2024, and to address the views of residents now that the protection measures trial for 2024 and the start of the nesting season will be shortly underway. As previously mentioned, I can see the benefits of extending the trial and the opportunity of gathering data on the effects of the protection measures, however more involvement with the Working Group councillors regarding the work programme would be welcomed, which would also help in our conversations with residents. This would have also given us the opportunity to have sight of a draft of the report and to consider the contents prior to it going to Cabinet. [That is the intention going forward behind the recommendation to give more time to properly consider the way forward for this aspect and others relevant to this area.](#)

Report Title: BetterPoints "Choose How You Move" Sustainable Travel Incentive – Contract Extension

Report Author(s): Graham Folkes-Skinner and Chloe Wiltshire

Councillor Armstrong:

Thank you for the BetterPoints paper - details and data very much appreciated. Looking at it in advance of scrutiny I ran some numbers which I'd like to both confirm with you and ask a question on.

1. If I understand the report correctly, there are 400-600 active users (defined as once per month) of the app, varying a bit by month? In which case, the cost of the extension appears to be £29-43 per active user, plus VAT. The cost since inception is much larger, in the hundreds per person. Is that correct? If so, how many users would you consider 'enough' to be value for money?

To be clear, I really appreciate the initiative, and I think encouraging sustainable travel is excellent, but I'm struggling with the cost-benefit analysis here.

Response:

Thank you for the opportunity to answer your question: -

As the report shows there are 400-600 active users per month and over the course of Year 2, this equated to 41% of participants being active users. As referenced in the report, this level of engagement is much higher than the industry standard for longstanding app interventions, whose average percentage drops to 5.7% after 30 days. Our engagement also compares favourably with one of BetterPoints main competitors within Warwickshire, namely Love2Ride. BetterPoints do not report on the cost per active user because people's engagement with the app will vary from month-to-month i.e. sometimes they will be active, then not, then they might re-engage, so the figures cited cannot be used fairly to determine the value. However BetterPoints can look at the cost of mitigated carbon. In 2023 the carbon saving delivered approximately £20,930 of value. This is based off government benchmarking. [Valuation of greenhouse gas emissions: for policy appraisal and evaluation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/valuation-of-greenhouse-gas-emissions-for-policy-appraisal-and-evaluation)

Councillor R Dickson:

Thanks for this report. I must declare an interest in having signed up to BetterPoints more than 12 months ago.

This is the 3rd extension of the BetterPoints contract and again the evidence to justify its retention, even if at relatively modest cost, is not very strong.

Whilst the opportunity to promote the Scheme at a range of summer events should not be missed, is there any more recent data available than that to July 2023 in Figure 4 in Appendix 1? It's also seems disappointing that take up by 14-24 year olds appear

lower than expected. Without wishing to make an operational suggestion, how can we get secondary school students and Warwick University students to sign up?

Response:

Thank you for the opportunity to answer your question: -

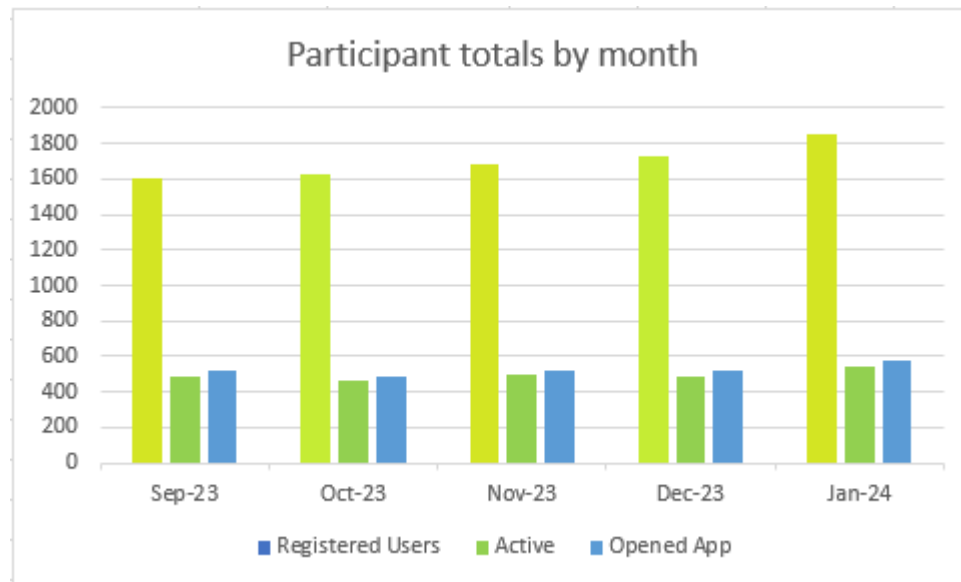
I would counter the argument that there isn't much evidence to justify an extension. In the report it shows: -

- Car journeys and car miles dropped by 8% and 19% respectively amongst users that reported driving 3 or more days at baseline.
- There was a 10% reduction in 2-mile journeys amongst users that were identified as regular car drivers from the tracking data.
- Amongst other outcomes we saw a 19% increase in average train journeys per engaged user versus the previous month in our All-Aboard campaign in partnership with Chiltern Railways.

Although reported extensively in the evaluation report, owing to the challenge being a transport/climate focused programme there are many health benefits to incentivising active travel activity.

I understand that the proportion of users in the 14–24-year-old bracket is in line with other local authority programmes. Priority can be given to this audience, if considered appropriate. The University of Warwick had their own BetterPoints rewards programme, up until recently and we had cross-promotion in both our challenge and theirs. There are a number of staff and students already taking part in our initiative and now that their programme has ended, we can more actively look to recruit people from the university.

The more recent data from July 2023 to extend the information in Figure 4 in Appendix 1 can be found below.



Councillor D Harrison:

Thanks for the opportunity to read the report which provided a great update on the progress of the scheme and the wider engagement with schools , businesses and the community.

While supporting the initiative and the 6-month extension, as we conduct a fuller review later in the year prior to a decision on a new longer-term contract , questions will be asked about whether this is representing “value for money”.

In this respect I appreciate that the benefits of the app and any increase in active travel choices are less tangible and not monetary related, such as improving community feel, greater well-being from a positive rewards scheme, etc. However, do you have any thoughts whether the reduction in car use the BetterPoints scheme has delivered could be given a financial benefit , even though I recognise it is incredibly difficult to measure, from effects such as improved Air Quality (health benefits, saving NHS costs) , improved health from healthier travel choices, reduced traffic congestion . I would be interested in how other Councils have attempted to quantify the benefits , but I am aware of the difficulties in measuring well-being / lifestyle initiatives in financial terms. Will the proposed KPI’s help in this? It would be useful to have a target figure for take-up so that we would know at what point it reaches the “value for money” threshold – not easy , I appreciate that !

Response:

Thank you for the opportunity to answer your question: -

If permission is given to extend the initiative through to November, I plan to speak to my counterparts in other Councils for exactly that reason and to discuss what, if any KPI's, other Councils use. As you mention, it isn't the easiest thing to quantify, but if successful with getting the extension I will do my best to show "value for money" going forward. I have touched on the subject of value for money above in response to Cllr Armstrong's question above.