

WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Warwick District Council held at Shire Hall, Warwick, on Wednesday 17 April 2024, at 6.00pm.

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

98. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dray, C Gifford, Hales, D Harrison, Margrave, Milton, Redford, Tangri and Yellapragada.

99. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

100. **Minutes**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 March 2024 were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

101. **Communications & Announcements**

The Chairman informed Council that a former Chairman and District Councillor, Joe Short had sadly passed away. He was a District Councillor for Whitnash from May 1991 – May 2007 and was Chairman of the Council from 2000-2001.

The Chairman thanked all Members who attended the Volunteer's Breakfast event that was held on Saturday 6 April 2024. There were over 80 attendees present and over 35 different organisations which operated across the District. The Chairman also thanked Committee Services Officers for the support received in organising the successful event.

The Chairman informed the Council that there would be no business to consider under Item 5 – Petitions and Item 6 - Notices of Motion.

102. **Director of Public Health for Warwickshire - Annual Report 2023**

The Council received a presentation from Dr Shade Agboola, the Director of Public Health Warwickshire, on her Annual Report for 2023.

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

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

- (1) work was progressing at the former Stoneleigh Arms pub, Clemments Street which aimed to provide a new space for artists and makers as part of the support for the creative economy. The derelict building had been demolished and work would start soon on its replacement along with the

- restoration of the Old School House, Court Street Car Park. Officers were working to identify occupiers for the new buildings;
- (2) contractors were to be appointed for Phase 1 of the works on the Royal Leamington Spa Town Hall and were due to be on site for June 2024 with an aim to finish by the end of the year. The works would increase access to the building and update facilities, including an accessible lift and toilet. Officers were in regular contact with tenants and were keen to reduce any disruption to the Peregrine Falcons nesting site situated within the tower. As the works were due to start in June, the main breeding season for the Falcons would be avoided;
 - (3) Kenilworth Carnival was due to take place in June 2024, an alternative, more suitable site within Abbey Fields had been identified and Members agreed to support this at the Cabinet meeting held on 10 April 2024. As Abbey Fields was a historic monument, WDC needed to liaise with Historic England to enable them to determine the application. Councillor Billiald thanked the WDC Events Team, Green Spaces Team, and Councillor Kennedy, as Leader of the Town Council for all the work they had done to ensure the project was moved forward in a short space of time; and
 - (4) the heavy rainfall had an impact on the Royal Pump Rooms over the last six months, in order to protect the art works the flood barriers had to be installed and the Royal Pump Rooms closed on several occasions.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Councillor Kennedy, informed Council that:

- (1) as part of the low cost, low carbon energy strategic priority WDC aimed to reduce carbon emissions from public buildings by improving energy efficiency and introducing renewable energy generation capacity where possible. The Council's new Building Climate and Energy Manager had now started, within the Assets Team to lead on this objective. Proposals for extensive retrofitting for WDC buildings would be brought forward and this would help to achieve return on investment, both in terms of reducing costs to the Council and reducing carbon emissions. The first projects of this included Jubilee House in Kenilworth and The Temperate House in Jephson Gardens; and
- (2) he had decided to step down as Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and thanked officers for their support over the past year.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets, Councillor P Wightman, informed Council that:

- (1) the Members of the Asset Compliance Committee had briefing on 10 April on internal systems used by the Assets Team and progress on the action plan remained positive;
- (2) the current housing repairs contract with Axis is scheduled to end in March 2026 The team were in the process of hiring consultants to scope this project, for a new contract to start from April 2026. The work would be undertaken in conjunction with the resident's involvement group; and
- (3) Councillor Wightman congratulated the Housing Team following the recent internal audit regarding the handing of Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO's), there were no recommendations made and the internal team were able to offer reassurances regarding the systems in place.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood and Assets, Councillor Roberts, informed Council that WDC were taking part in No Mow May this year. A press release providing the details had been issued following the briefing paper that was

previously circulated to Members. To support this there was a webpage which gave detailed information regarding the plans. He also explained that due to the wet weather there had been a delay in the first grass cutting this year and crews were working hard to cut all areas by the end of April.

The Portfolio Holder for Place, Councillor King, informed Council that:

- (1) the inspectors report following the public examination into the net zero carbon DPD had been published. The inspector stated that the plan was sound, subject to a number of modifications which he had previously made WDC aware of and had been consulted on. Significant weight could now be attached to the amended DPD when making decisions on planning applications;
- (2) work was continuing on the South Warwickshire Local Plan. Following the Member briefings which took place in February 2024, requests had been received from Parish Councils for similar work to be done at Parish level and this was being arranged;
- (3) following the approval of the University of Warwick draft campus framework master plan at Cabinet; WDC, Warwick University and Coventry City Council were working together to co-ordinate a consultation, which was due to start May 2024;
- (4) work towards updating the guidance for windows in listed buildings was ongoing. Officers were aware they should embed sustainability credentials as much as possible; and
- (5) as previously reported Building Control officers were undergoing a rigorous period of competency reaccreditation and assessment which was co-ordinated by the Building Safety Registration Unit. Almost all officers were registered, and most had taken examinations. It was expected most officers would be qualified by the accreditation date of July 2024 allowing the service to continue uninterrupted.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Chilvers, informed Council that:

- (1) work was ongoing under corporate strategy priority 1, delivering sustainable services and this included work towards the West Midlands Investment Zone business rate retention agreement;
- (2) the first Procurement Champions meeting had taken place; and
- (3) the in-depth fees and charges review, was due to start shortly as part of the Transformation Programme, the fees and charges timetable would be published so Members were aware when decisions would be made.

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

- (1) the Safer Communities, Leisure and Environment Team had won Lawn Tennis Association Park venue of the year for the Midland's region, this would progress to the national award finals; and
 - (2) the issue with odour and flies within the Heathcote area had unfortunately got worse and the investigation was still ongoing. Councillor Sinnott urged residents to report all incidents to aid this investigation and added he was aware of a trade association meeting scheduled 29 May 2024 but advised WDC had not been invited.
- He concluded by thanking the Chairman for the volunteer's breakfast event.

Councillor P Wightman read out a statement on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Councillor J Harrison, and informed Council that:

- (1) the Change Programme Board had met today, and the next meeting would be held in June 2024. Councillor Harrison requested that Group Leaders emailed her to confirm the appointed representatives for this group;
- (2) Cabinet had approved the move of Waste Services calls from Stratford-on-Avon District Council to WDC. This was in line with Corporate Priority 1.3, which was to achieve and demonstrate high quality services;
- (3) the relocation project of Council Services from Riverside House had been completed and Councillor Harrison passed her thanks to the team for the hard work over the last few months. Riverside House was now closed, saving the Council £58,000 per month in running costs; and
- (4) the Royal Pump Rooms site opened 9 April 2024 and feedback regarding accessibility had been excellent. Artist's work was now on display again, but it was still a work in progress as WDC had hoped more artworks be displayed. The build had been completed within the anticipated six-month window and the delivery was achieved for £330,000 which was £80,000 less than originally anticipated.

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership, Councillor Davison, informed Council that:

- (1) an additional Cabinet meeting would be held on 15 May 2024 to consider a number of specific reports (including the Net Zero DPD, pausing proposals for a £G Pitch at Newbold Comyn, an opportunity to buy land for woodland use and potentially West Midlands Investment Zone.); and
- (2) Councillor Kennedy would be in post as Cabinet Member for Climate Change until after the aforementioned meetings had taken place, and after which Councillor Williams would be appointed.

104. **Questions to the Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holders**

Councillor Barton asked the Portfolio Holder for Arts and Economy if, like Kenilworth Carnival Committee, Whitnash Fun Day Committee would be entitled to a grant of £2,000 to help fund the volunteer led event which currently cost £4,000 to run.

In response, Councillor Billiald explained the support, which Cabinet recently agreed, to provide to assist the Kenilworth Carnival Committee was in response to a particular set of exceptional circumstances. These related to the well-publicised financial difficulties that the Kenilworth Carnival Committee had been facing in organising this year's event and the Council's desire to regularise the relationship between both the Council and Carnival Committee. In doing so, it was recognised that WDC imposed an additional and unbudgeted burden on the Kenilworth Carnival Committee which had not previously existed. The offer of support was in recognition of that fact. The community projects reserve supported a range of local initiatives, and the team would ask those who administer the scheme if the Whitnash Fun Day or other similar local events would qualify for additional support. Councillor Billiald added that the Council funded a service delivered by Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action (WCAVA) who supported community groups to access funding amongst other things, so it might be worth contacting them to see if they could offer any further support or help to identify other funding sources. In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Baron Councillor Billiald agreed to send him the details of WCAVA.

Councillor Barton asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood and Assets why did Whitnash still suffer from the free and easy use of the use of pesticides and weed killers around street furniture items and in respect of No Mow May, Whitnash public

space grass had not yet been cut, could you confirm this would not be the case for Whitnash given the already tall growth of grass in the area.

In response, Councillor Roberts thanked Councillor Barton for the photographic evidence of pesticide use in Whitnash which had been taken in March 2024. Councillor Roberts confirmed that contractors had not yet started to spray pesticides and were not due to start this work until 22 April 2024. He continued the spray had possibly been completed by a rouge resident and he would work with Councillor Barton to see what could be done to prevent this in future.

Some grass areas of Whitnash had started to be cut, however there had been delays due to adverse weather. The aim was to ensure all areas involved in No Mow May would be cut before May, and if not, they would be prioritised to be cut first at the end of May. The main issues faced from No Mow May last year were due to equipment failures, however these issues had already been addressed this year. The more WDC participated in No Mow May, the more WDC would learn and would be able to plan a more targeted approach. This year, WDC had decided to create several meadows which would only be cut annually and would help to increase biodiversity within the District.

Councillor Barton asked the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Leisure if Warwick District Council had been invited or would be attending the open day held at Berry Pollimers in conjunction with the trade association. Various businesses had been invited to attend as well as various Councils.

In response, Councillor Sinnott stated to the best of his knowledge Warwick District Council had not been invited and would not be attending.

Councillor Barton then asked the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Leisure why WDC refused to answer a Freedom of Information (FOI) request regarding specific complaints about Fortress and Berry Pollimers, when the same FOI had been given a comprehensive answer from the Environmental Agency.

In response, Graham Leach the Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer asked Councillor Barton to share the details of the request with him and he would consider this in line with information request handling procedures of the Council.

Councillor K Dickson asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets if as this Council's housing stock was under scrutiny, were the customers being heard and were these voices being used when the plans and strategies were being made regarding WDC's future housing.

In response, Councillor P Wightman stated that it was important to take account of the tenants and the people living in WDC properties. In September last year a residents engagement strategy was introduced which set out five priorities to deliver and improve residents' engagements and offered housing tenants a range of ways to have a say in what WDC delivered. Councillor Wightman stated it was difficult to measure, but WDC were committed to getting resident engagement and listening to it. The introduction of this strategy saw the creation of the Resident Influencing Group which had a direct influence on design and scrutiny of the service. This group had met three times since its conception, and it was supporting improvements in relation to tenant satisfaction measures. There was also a dedicated customer involvement team who sent surveys to new tenants and worked alongside other housing teams to deliver projects such as community events. Estate walkabouts in which housing staff survey a local area for visible repairs or fly tipping would be organised and residents would be invited to these.

Councillor Wightman continued that the update to the WDC repairs contract would also ask for resident involvement and aim to develop contract specification which asked for service which benefits residents and tenants. Members should also be aware that the Asset Compliance Committee had tenant representation to ensure customer perspective on the work which the Committee oversaw.

Councillor R Dickson asked the Portfolio Holder for Place, following the hosting of the community engagement event alongside Atkins Global 15 months ago, where local residents in Kenilworth could find out more about the planned housing development on the Kenilworth Sixth Form site could you update Members when the scheduled development plans would be brought forward for consideration and when would the next round of public consultation take place.

In response, Councillor King stated that he would provide a full response in due course.

Councillor R Dickson asked the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership regarding the internal Audit report heard at Finance and Audit Committee in October 2021 which drew Members attention to the delays which had been identified in the Council responding to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. In January 2024, the Information Commissioner issued an audit report regarding Warwickshire Police which stated the completion rate of FOI requests within the statutory guidelines was below the required standard and the persistent backlog of requests needed to be addressed as a priority. Could you confirm that as of the 31 March 2024 WDC was up to date on all FOI, Subject Access Request (SAR) and Environmental Information Regulation (EIR) requests and that there had been no re-occurrence of the problems reported in October 2021.

In response, Councillor Davison confirmed there had been ongoing issues. As stated in Cabinet reports from April 2024, there had been issues with the shared post with Stratford-On-Avon District Council. Councillor Davison continued there had been a rapid turnover of staff which had also affected the efficiency. The Information Commissioner's office expected 90% of requests to be returned on time, this was currently not being met. Performance was currently at 84% for FOI requests and 78% for SAR's. This was something the team were hopeful that the changes implemented following the report to Cabinet would resolve. The first job adverts for the approved roles would be live from the end of this week.

Councillor Matecki asked the Portfolio Holder for Place if, following the introduction of the Net Zero Carbon SPD Policy, former Councillor, Alan Rheed who had stood down in May 2023, should be thanked for all the hard work he did towards getting this to the position it was in now and the lasting legacy he had made for this Council.

In response, Councillor King stated that he understood at the next Council meeting the formal adoption would be announced and an acknowledgement would certainly be made. Councillor King added that officers were working on an SPD to help both officers and Councillors understand the complexities and the implications of enabling the DPD.

Councillor Syson informed Council she would be inviting, former Councillor, Alan Rheed to the Annual Council meeting scheduled for 15 May 2024 in order to acknowledge his contribution.

105. Cabinet Reports

- a) The recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 10 April 2024 in respect of Parks Exercise Permit Minute Number 115 were proposed by Councillor Sinnott and seconded by Councillor King.

Councillor Sinnott spoke on this item.

Resolved that recommendations contained in minute number 115 headed "Parks Exercise Permit" as set out in the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 10 April 2024, be approved.

- b) the recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 10 April 2024 in respect of Revisions to Fees for Markets in 2024 Minute Number 116 were proposed by Councillor Billiald and seconded by Councillor Sinnott.

Councillors Billiald and Chilvers spoke on this item.

Resolved that recommendations contained in minute number 116 headed "Revisions to Fees for Markets in 2024" as set out in the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 10 April 2024, be approved.

106. Common Seal

It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Davison 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 7.20pm)

CHAIRMAN
15 May 2024