

# WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 24 January 2018, at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillor Boad (Chairman); Councillors Ashford, Bromley, Mrs Bunker, Cain, Mrs Cain, Cooke, Cross, Davies, Davison, Day, Doody, Edgington, Mrs Falp, Gallagher, Gifford, Gill, Heath, Hill, Howe, Illingworth, Mrs Knight, Mobbs, Morris, Murphy, Naimo, Parkins, Phillips, Quinney, Mrs Redford, Rhead, Shilton, Mrs Stevens, Thompson, Weed and Wright.

## 61. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barrott, Butler, Coker, D'Arcy, Mrs Evetts, Miss Grainger, Grainger, Margrave, Noone and Whiting.

## 62. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

## 63. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 15 November 2017 were taken as read and were duly signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

## 64. **Communications & Announcements**

The Chairman encouraged all Councillors to attend his charity concert on 9 February at the Town Hall in aid of his charities for the year.

The Chairman informed Council that there was no business to be conducted under Item 5 Petitions; Item 6 Notices of Motion; and Item 7 Public Submissions.

## 65. **One World Link**

The Council received a presentation on the recent work of One World Link.

## 66. **Leader's and Portfolio Holders' Statements**

Councillor Mobbs, the Leader:

- congratulated Councillor Coker on his MBE;
- explained the work on redeveloping the museum layout had progressed well and exhibitions had been arranged on the mezzanine floor about WW1 and the local suffragette movement ahead of the celebration of 100 years of women being able to vote in general elections;
- explained the income on the Panto had increased and it was hoped to have more shows next year;
- highlighted the talks with MacGolf were ongoing and it was hoped a resolution could be found;
- raised concern about the ongoing misinformation being published by one party and the MP for Warwick & Leamington. There was the public comment that planning officers "leaned on the Planning Committee" to get applications approved. He explained this statement about persons who do

not have the ability to answer back was unacceptable and the Chief Executive would be raising this matter directly with the MP. The Leader expressed his complete support for the Planning Officers of the Council and reminded members that the Planning Committee was an independent body that determined each application on its merits. He therefore expressed his further disappointment that in stating they were leaned on was bad, to imply the Committee adhered to this was worse.

- expressed concern that the MP for Warwick & Leamington had stated that the Council's budget for housing stock repairs had run out before Christmas. This statement was not true, the Council believed that all homes should be fit for living in and of good quality. The Council had adopted an investment plan to achieve this and if required a reserve had been established. The Council undertook action against private sector landlords, where it was required, to ensure they provided the safe living requirements that was expected of them;
- informed the Council that in the three and a half years up to September 2017 there had been 941 social housing properties completed, with a further 1363 consents for development in place. The Council had also worked with its partners W2 to develop the Station Approach site that would deliver a new car park for the Council as well as 75% affordable housing from the 212 properties being developed; and
- informed Council that if there was a meaningful surplus from the sale of the Riverside House site this would be used towards the provision of affordable housing within the District.

Councillor Rhead, Portfolio Holder for Development, informed Council that:

- further to the discussions he had had with a developer, it had been confirmed the developer would develop a house, and a further five if this was successful, on the fabric first basis, include electric car charging points, water butts, lighting and heating automation. To support this the Council would work with the developer to promote the work; the details of the developer would be circulated to all Councillors once they could be shared;
- a new supplementary planning document for parking standards had been developed, including student accommodation parking needs, and would be considered by the Executive in the near future ahead of public consultation;
- the audit of Development Services had concluded with a substantial assurance;
- the appeal decision had been received on Radford Road and this would be circulated to all Councillors; and
- Dave Barber had been appointed as Head of Development Services.

## 67. **Questions to the Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holders**

Councillor Gifford asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing what action was being taken regarding the 112 properties within the District that had been empty for over five years; and would he ask the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to set up a Task & Finish Group to look into the issue?

In response, Councillor Phillips, Portfolio Holder for Housing explained that he was aware of the request for information which had led to this question, which was one of 150 requests under the Freedom of Information Act the Housing Team had received last year. He reminded Council that that it had an interest in returning empty homes into use to increase the available stock, which would

assist both those looking to buy or rent properties. 85 long term empty properties had been brought back into use last year within the District.

He reminded Council, that it had taken proactive measures to encourage properties to be brought back into use, for example from 1 April 2017, unoccupied and unfurnished properties would no longer receive any council tax exemption. The Council had applied the full levy of 50% on properties that had been empty in excess of two years, meaning 150% council tax was charged. In addition, officers monitored Council Tax data and made contact with the owners of long-term empty properties encouraging them to bring the properties back into use. The Council had achieved some good successes through these methods however some properties had been empty for some time, it was important to note that there was not a significant problem with empty properties in any sector of the housing market and the Council was in-line with regional trends.

The Portfolio Holder accepted that the Council should look at how more could be done and that was the reason there would be a refreshed approach to empty homes in 2018. Therefore, the suggestion of initiating a task and finish group to consider this matter could be premature at this stage and it would be prudent to allow this refresh work to be completed. Once this was completed it could be reviewed by the Housing Advisory Group and if they were minded the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Davison, asked the Leader, in the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, if it was possible to have an update on the pigeon mess problem, under the Network Rail owned bridges in south Leamington?

Councillor Mobbs, as Leader, explained that he shared the concerns raised by Councillor Davison and during the last few months meetings had taken place with Network Rail representatives to explain the issues and highlight that the deterrents were not in place. Inspections were due to take place in October 2017 but these did not take place and this has been followed up with Network Rail. Network Rail had confirmed that on all existing structures they would only use netting. Officers were taking further legal advice on this matter.

Councillor Naimo, asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing, if he could provide a timescale for the Student Housing Strategy as an agreed recommendation from the HMO Task & Finish Group report?

In response, Councillor Phillips, Portfolio Holder for Housing, explained that there appeared to be some people who felt that HMOs are for students and students are bad, when in many cases HMOs were not let to students but to the younger single person/couple who could not afford to buy or even rent a self-contained house.

In August, with the support and agreement of the Executive, officers submitted a bid to the LGA Housing Advisers' Programme for consultancy support to develop the strategy. This was successful and the LGA confirmed the appointment in the second half of November. Since then the consultant had been gathering and assessing the available data to enable him to produce an in-depth analysis of the situation and build a model for option appraisal.

Using an external adviser with expertise in housing market analysis ensured that this was a rigorous, robust and independent study that could be used with confidence for strategy and policy development.

The consultant was drawing data from a range of sources and assimilating this. Inevitably, this was taking some time as not all organisations kept the data in the required form. Exact timescales were dependent upon getting data out of the universities meaning that Councillor Phillips could not commit to timing at this stage. Once the data had been provided, it would be only a small number of days to complete the modelling which would then allow analysis of the various scenarios.

Overall though, the policy was likely to have the following parameters:

- welcome and support a vibrant student community within our District. Welcome housing provision for younger single people/couples who were not students but still needed housing;
- be mindful that some parts of the District were feeling that they had reached a saturation point of too much student accommodation and so the Council would like to examine whether it needed to introduce Section 4 in other parts of the District rather than just in parts of Leamington;
- that developments such as Station House appeared to have worked well and if priced at the right level, were in high demand. Therefore, the Council would need to decide to seek to encourage more such purpose built accommodation with the eventual aim of freeing up some of the HMOs from use as student accommodation.

Therefore, it was anticipated that the student housing strategy would assist the Council with the development of policies that impacted across the wider HMO market and not just the student subset of the HMO market.

Councillor Naimo asked the Leader that following the appointment of a partner for the creative quarter development, would there be consultation on proposals, including with local residents and would there be cross party member involvement?

In response, Councillor Mobbs, as Leader, confirmed he was pleased the Council would be working with CDP and a first phase master plan could be ready before the May 2019 elections. CDP were starting a consultation phase that would be wide ranging and rigorous and there would be a cross party group including the relevant Ward Councillors, along with involvement from relevant Town and County Councillors. CDP had also proposed a regular forum to keep everyone informed. Once the master plan had been developed the Council would need to take a decision on its land. There would be a report to the Executive in February looking for approval of the purchase of some further land to enable the development of the creative quarter.

Councillor Naimo asked the Leader if there would be consultation on the parking displacement policy?

In response, Councillor Mobbs, as Leader, explained that there had been wide ranging consultation along with conversations with BID Leamington, Town Council and other bodies. In response to a supplementary question, the plan would be made public and the Council would listen to views from interested parties, including the public.

Councillor Bromley congratulated the Portfolio Holder for Business on his responses to the Friends of St Mary's Lands and in leaving the door open to them. However, had any lessons be learned on how to engage with groups and ensure their views were heard?

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Business the Leader, Councillor Mobbs, thanked Councillor Davison for his positive words and recognised that it had been challenging and it was disappointing when the organisations we worked with would not be as transparent as the Council.

Councillor Bromley, asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing if his team undertook quality assurance work on the repairs undertaken by contractors and were there any known issues with contractors undertaking repairs?

In response, Councillor Phillips, Portfolio Holder for Housing, explained that his teams closely monitored the work of contractors. The contractors welcomed feedback and new ideas were being trialled to improve the quality of work further.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Bromley, Councillor Phillips explained that the Housing Stock report was being considered by officers and this would be reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in due course and the budget for the works would be detailed in the appropriate report to the Executive in February.

Councillor Weed asked the Leader, if he was aware of the increasing problem of drug taking with needles being disposed of in parks, streets and gardens and human excrement in public open spaces, which were problems associated with homelessness and drug addiction but impacted on public health, therefore could a working party be set up with the relevant agencies to find solutions for this?

In response, the Leader, Councillor Mobbs, explained that he was not aware of this issue and asked for details to be shared with him and relevant officers so they could be investigated and responded to.

Councillor Parkins, asked the Portfolio Holder for Health & Community Protection if they could provide an update on the STP action plan?

In response, Councillor Thompson as the Portfolio Holder for Health and Community Protection, explained that reports had been made to the Health & Wellbeing Board and he would share the links to these with Councillors.

Councillor Parkins asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing, what plans were being considered to deliver more social housing?

In response, Councillor Phillips, the Portfolio Holder for Housing, explained that the Council was working hard to deliver sites to meet the need within the District and for example Sayer Court, Station Approach and the Print Works in Warwick. The Council was aware of some privately owned sites coming forward with levels of affordable housing higher than 40%, for example the Soans site in Sydenham.



He highlighted that in Sayer Court the Council built the first council housing in years and work continued with a number of Registered Providers to encourage the development of new affordable housing across the District. In the last financial year, 284 new affordable homes had been completed, with a further 240 completed in the first three quarters of 2017/18. In addition, as highlighted by the Leader earlier, through the joint venture with W2 the Station Approach in Leamington would deliver 212 homes of which 160 would be affordable, a new Council owned 100 space car park and an improved cycle-path to the station via the underpass off Avenue Road. W2 was also on site at the Print Works in Warwick delivering a further 39 affordable homes. However, Councillor Phillips explained that he had asked officers to consider how more affordable housing could be delivered and for reports to be prepared on this.

Councillor Mrs Falp asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing, that if the Overview & Scrutiny Committee agreed to look at the Private Sector Housing issue, as he highlighted earlier, would he agree to attend the meeting along with relevant officers?

In response, the Portfolio Holder agreed he would.

Councillor Mrs Falp asked the Leader if the Council Chamber would have a new PA system before the Council moved to its new HQ?

In response, the Leader agreed to press the matter further.

Councillor Mrs Knight asked the Leader, that in light of the bad week that Carillion had just had, what work had the Council undertaken to ensure the Council would not get caught out in this way when outsourcing services?

In response, the Leader, Councillor Mobbs, explained that the Council did not have any contracts with Carillion or their suppliers. There were procurement champions in place to promote and improve procurement performance.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Mrs Knight, the Leader explained that in any multi million pound business there would be issues and the Council was continuing to look for improvements, for example the proposed procurement partnership with Warwickshire County Council.

Councillor Quinney asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing that in light of the good work by this Council to resettle five Syrian refugees with no cost to the Council, would the Council look at helping further refugees into the community?

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Phillips, agreed this was something the Council should explore further.

Councillor Quinney asked the Leader, that as the pay negotiations were likely to see a settlement in the region of 2% with those lower paid members of staff receiving a higher payment, therefore protecting the differentials, could the Council revisit its position with regard to the living wage foundation payment?

In response, the Leader, Councillor Mobbs, explained that the position had not changed because the pay settlement needed to be agreed before it would be possible to see the impact of the settlement across the differentials and therefore before any final decision could be taken.

Councillor Quinney asked the Leader that in light of the MacGolf contract would a report be brought to Members detailing the problems that had arisen, how these were reported and details of any monitoring arrangements?

In response, the Leader, Councillor Mobbs, explained that the key factor was that participation in golf was declining. He was not happy with the position the Council was now in, but monitoring had been explained in the previous report to the Executive. The Council would need to determine what was not just best for the course but for the whole of Newbold Comyn. He understood that at the time MacGolf left Newbold Comyn, the course was playable.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader confirmed that there would be a report in due course on the way forward for the site which would include consultation.

Councillor Quinney asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing that in light of the delay for universal credit, which was now due to arrive with this Council in October 2018, was the Council making appropriate budgetary provision for this because of potential arrears from tenants and also additional staffing to support this?

In response, the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Phillips, confirmed that this was being budgeted for. In addition, the Council had a financial inclusion plan to respond to these issues along with a working group to further support this work in partnership with Citizens Advice for support in specific areas. There was a dedicated plan in place for responding when universal credit arrived and in addition, in partnership with other members of ARCH the Council was lobbying for further improvements in the operation of Universal Credit, most importantly direct payment to landlords of rents.

68. **Report of the Executive**

The reports of the Executive meetings were proposed was duly seconded and

**Resolved** that the Executive reports as follow, were approved:

- (1) 1 November 2017 (excluding minutes 64 to 66 that were considered by Council on 15 November 2017);
- (2) 15 November 2017;
- (3) 29 November 2017; and
- (4) excerpt of 4 January 2018 (Minutes 93 to 94)

69. **Common Seal**

It was

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

(The meeting ended at 7.44 pm)

Signature redacted

Signed on 21 February 2018