

Executive

Excerpt of the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 31 May 2018 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa, at 6.00 pm.

Present: Councillor Mobbs (Leader); Councillors Butler, Phillips, Thompson and Whiting.

Also present: Councillors; Mrs Falp (Chairman of Overview & Scrutiny Committee); Councillor Naimo (Labour Group Observer) and Quinney (Chair of Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Coker, Grainger and Rhead, along with Liberal Democrat Observer Councillor Boad.

1. **Declarations of Interest**

Minute 3 – Student Housing Strategy

Councillor Thompson explained, for the sake of clarity, that in the report it mentioned the HMO Task and Finish Group, which he was a part of; and it also mentioned the University of Warwick, which until recently he had worked for. However, while there was no requirement to declare this under the Code of Conduct it was appropriate to make the Executive aware of this and that before voting on this matter he wished to consider the views of others at the meeting.

Part 1

(Items on which a decision by Council was required)

3. **Student Housing Strategy**

The Executive considered a report from Housing that outlined the work undertaken so far and the suggested forward strategy.

Following concerns in 2016 and 2017 about the impact of student numbers and the transient nature of the population in concentrated areas, particularly in South Leamington, the Executive resolved to develop a strategy to assess and respond to these issues and set out a longer term vision for the District in respect of student housing.

The first phase of the work was to carry out an in-depth analysis of the data about student numbers within the District, in particular Kenilworth, North Leamington, South Leamington and Whitnash. This would provide a fact-based grounding for formulating the student housing strategy.

Housing market analysis was a specialist area of work and the Council did not have the resources in-house to undertake this type of work so a bid was made for external funding from the Local Government Association (LGA) Housing Advisers' Programme, which was successful in securing

initial funding. The LGA then procured and paid for an independent external housing market analyst to carry out this task.

The analysis required gathering data from a wide range of sources and included investigating the influence of Coventry University and student housing trends in Coventry, as well as Warwick District.

Phase one had involved gathering data from diverse and sometimes conflicting sources and had taken longer than was desirable, and on one level it could be perceived as “nothing new”. However, it was essential that policy was evidence-based and could withstand scrutiny, particularly where planning policies were involved which were subject to inspection, intensive scrutiny and always open to the potential for challenge at appeal. For this reason, officers had taken the view that time should be invested to ensure that the report should be guided by the empirical evidence as to the next steps, and in consequence had resisted laying out further plans prior to the conclusion of this phase.

The analyst and their analysis were completely independent of the Council and the universities. They were commissioned by and paid for by the LGA and had used data from a whole range of sources, including data obtained by local residents through Freedom of Information requests.

The findings of this research were attached as appendix one to this report. The most important points were as follows:

- Student households did not represent the majority of private rented households even in those wards with high numbers of students in them.
- Warwick District contained high concentrations of students in specific local areas (Leamington Brunswick, Clarendon, Milverton and Willes). While students’ contribution to the local community and economy was welcome, there were other implications for these areas, particularly those with large numbers of HMOs. Forecasts provided by the University of Warwick indicated they were seeking to grow their student numbers in future years. This would increase demand for student housing in the district, putting further pressure on existing housing and communities.
- Warwick District was not a self-contained student housing market. It was closely linked with Coventry. Any changes to student numbers at Coventry University and student housing supply in Coventry would impact on student housing demand in Warwick District.
- Published forecasts suggested Coventry University was looking to continue their recent robust growth in student numbers. These increases were being met by the substantial development of purpose-built student housing in the City. Therefore, despite the increase in student numbers, the demand for beds in the private rented sector was falling and this looked set to continue. It was likely

that this “surplus” private rented housing would be occupied by other non-student private renters or sold to home-owners.

- Warwick District remained an attractive place to live for many students and the Council should seek to benefit from any increase in student numbers. Based on recent trends in areas where University of Warwick students lived, available forecasts for student numbers, and estimates of student housing supply, there was the need for available student housing in Warwick District to increase by 120 beds per year over the next three years (360 beds in total).
- Meeting this increased student housing demand in the private rented sector via HMOs risks increasing the pressure on everyone in the community, including students. Alternative approaches should instead be actively promoted and include:
 - Encouraging the University of Warwick to increase housing provision directly on campus; and
 - Supporting the provision of purpose-built student accommodation to cater for the additional student housing demand and to reduce the extent of the use of HMOs for student accommodation. Relying on the purpose-built sector was not without risk but it could help accommodate more students and reduce the pressures if planned for appropriately.

The analysis was broadly in line with the anecdotal comments about student numbers. Had the data been more equivocal, or had it shown that the reality was in fact different to the perception, the next stage would have been an option appraisal to consider what the Council’s policy should be and how the district in the wider sense should respond to the new evidence. However, given the findings, this was no longer considered necessary.

The findings demonstrated that an option appraisal was not necessary and phase two of the development of the strategy could now be proposed with clarity. There were two aspects to this: influencing the future provision of student accommodation and assisting community integration. These could proceed simultaneously and the next steps would be:

- Preparing a Student Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) setting out our planning policies towards the design and location of purpose-built student accommodation; and
- Working with the University of Warwick to promote further on-campus provision and a more dispersed distribution of the student population across Warwick District to enable the district to positively integrate the student and settled populations.

The Planning Policy team had undertaken some preparatory work on the SPD and could utilise the findings of the research from phase one of which would help this piece of work to move forward efficiently. Once a draft SPD had been prepared it would be brought to Executive for approval to then go out for public consultation.

With long lead times in Planning Policy approvals, influencing the housing market in the manner required would inevitably take time to have an effect so the Council needed to support all local people, including students, in the meantime. It was proposed to consult with people in areas with high student numbers about the support services that all sections of the community needed to help maintain a cohesive community.

A successful bid for additional LGA funding had been made to continue with the Student Housing Strategy project and this would be used to procure external communications specialists to design and undertake the consultation process. As with the data analysis work in phase one, the use of independent experts should give residents and students confidence that their views would be reflected and taken into account.

Expressions of interest would be invited shortly with a view to having the findings available and producing a responsive action plan in the autumn.

The Executive had previously resolved to take forward work on a Student Housing Strategy. The data had shown that action was required so a "do nothing" option was not appropriate.

An option appraisal exercise was considered but rejected because it would take time and would delay actions when the data was unequivocal and pointed in the direction of the strategy proposed.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee welcomed and supported the Policy in general and welcomed that some of the recommendations from the HMO Task & Finish Group were included within the document.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee expressed concerns that the aims did not specifically address the concerns about over-concentration of students in some areas through a dispersal strategy.

The Executive thanked the Scrutiny Committee for the debate and consideration of this matter and reminded them that, as set out within the report, one of the next steps would be to work with the University of Warwick to promote further on-campus provision and a more dispersed distribution of the student population across Warwick District to enable the district to positively integrate the students and settled populations.

Recommended to Council that it adopts the following policy statement and aims:

Background: The student population is diverse with, for example, Warwickshire College students, University of Warwick students who move to the area for a limited three or four years and local part-time students who are long-term residents in the area.

Policy statement: Warwick District Council welcomes all students to our District and recognises the important social and economic benefits that they bring. The Council also understands that having a large student population can place stress on the settled community and has an impact upon housing demand. Our goal is to support local people while positively integrating the student population among local communities, and encouraging students to remain in the area for employment after graduation as permanent long-term residents.

Our aims are:

- To attract students to live in the district, during and after their studies, throughout the academic year.
- To encourage the provision of purpose-built student accommodation of an appropriate type and quality in sustainable locations thereby encouraging students to move from HMO style accommodation.
- To ensure that the necessary support services are in place for the whole community to ensure community cohesion and integration across all the generations.

(The Portfolio Holders for this item was Councillor Phillips)

4. **Minor Amendments to the Members' Allowances Scheme for Warwick District**

The Executive considered a report from Democratic Services that brought forward two minor clarifications to the Members' Allowances Scheme and proposed provision for Councillors to reclaim the fee for registering as a Data Controller with the Information Commissioners Office.

While responding to a question on the allowances scheme, it was identified that at present Councillors were not entitled to claim for parking expenses incurred when attending an event outside Warwick District. This was considered unreasonable as the cost incurred would directly relate to their role as a Councillor.

It had also been identified that the subsistence rates did not provide clarification that Councillors were intended either as a maximum value or an indicative rate. After checking with the Council's IRP for Members' Allowances, they confirmed this should be a maximum level, in line with the subsistence rates for officers.

The proposed inclusion of the Data Controller registration fee with the Information Commissioners Office (ICO), allowed for only those who needed to register to claim for the fee rather than a set sum being provided to all Councillors.

The registration fee was a cost imposed by legislation/regulation and there would be no obligation for the individual who was a Councillor to register as a data controller unless they were a Councillor. Therefore, it was reasonable that they should be able to reclaim this expense.

The Councillor would, where they considered appropriate, need to register themselves with the ICO, because they would be individually accountable to the ICO and therefore had to make sure their registration was correct each year. Thus, it was more appropriate for them to make the payment, then claim it back.

The ICO had provided guidance that Councillors who were elected to more than a single authority would only need to register once. In addition, the Executive was mindful that potentially the need to pay a registration fee would cease from 25 May 2018 with the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation, however, at this time this looked unlikely to happen.

In line with legislative requirements, the Council's Independent Review Panel for Members' Allowances had been consulted on the proposed changes and they were in agreement with all of them.

The Council could consider continuing with the current arrangement but this was considered not appropriate as it did not allow for reimbursement of costs incurred by Councillors in their role.

The Council could decide to vary the amounts allowed to be claimed but any proposals would need to be referred to the Council's Independent Review Panel (IRP) first. This was because the Council must be mindful of the IRP's view before altering the Members' Allowances Scheme.

The Council could pay for all Councillors in one go, but this was dismissed because the responsibility lay with the individual and not with the Council as a whole. In addition, it could be problematic when an individual had already paid the fee in line with their membership with another authority (e.g. WCC).

Recommended to Council that

- (1) the Members' Allowances Scheme for Warwick District is amended to enable Councillors to claim for car parking fees when attending events outside the District;
- (2) the Members' Allowances Scheme for Warwick District is amended to confirm that the subsistence values within the scheme are the maximum amounts that can be claimed; and
- (3) the Members' Allowances Scheme for Warwick District is amended so that it reads "*That*

where a Member is deemed to be a data controller under either the Data Protection Act (or subsequent regulation/Act) and required to pay an annual fee, on submission of receipts they can reclaim this fee from Warwick District Council”.

(The Portfolio Holders for this item were Councillors Mobbs)

(The meeting ended at 6.40pm)