

# Executive

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 5 January 2017 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa, at 6.00 pm.

**Present:** Councillor Mobbs (Chairman); Councillors Butler, Coker, Grainger, Phillips and Whiting.

**Also present:** Councillors; Boad - Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee & Liberal Democrat Observer, Mrs Falp - Whitnash Residents Association (Independent) Observer, Quinney - Chair of Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee and Weed – Labour Group Observer.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cross and Shilton.

## 73. **Declarations of Interest**

### Minute number 81 - Visitor Information Review

Councillor Grainger declared a Disclosable Pecuniary interest because she was a Warwick Town Councillor and left the room while this item was considered.

### **Part 1**

(Items on which a decision by Council is required)

## 74. **Local Council Tax reduction scheme 2017**

The Executive considered a report from Finance that provided the results of the consultation in respect of the proposed changes to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) that ended on the 6 November 2016 and recommended changes to be agreed by Council to be implemented from 1 April 2017.

The Government had made changes to other national welfare benefits, including housing benefit and to the pension age Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The changes proposed would ensure that Warwick District's Council Tax Reduction Scheme remained aligned with other means tested benefits. Failure to align with other Benefits would increase the amount a new claimant could receive in council tax reduction.

Universal Credit was gradually being introduced nationally and replaced a number of means tested benefits. The way that the reduction was currently calculated needed to be amended so that it remained fair to all working age claimants, and did not favour those claiming Universal Credit any more than those who were not. The majority of respondents to the consultation agreed to this proposal.

The family premium was removed from the calculation of other welfare benefits in May 2016, including council tax reduction for pensioners,

however, the Council's local working age scheme had not changed. This proposed change ensured this Council's scheme remained aligned to other welfare benefits. The majority of respondents did not know whether this should be removed or not, however, this would only be applied to new claims made after 31 March 2017.

It was proposed that a person claiming welfare benefits, including pensioner council tax reduction, would no longer receive an increase in those benefits for any third or subsequent child born after 1 April 2017. This change would ensure the scheme remained aligned to other welfare benefits. There was a mixed response to this, but the majority of claimants agreed with the proposal.

The amounts used to calculate reduction for pensioners were prescribed annually by Government. It was proposed that in future, the applicable amounts, premiums, allowances and non-dependant deduction would be amended annually to align with those used in the Government pensioner council tax reductions scheme. This would ensure the Council's working age scheme remained aligned with the pensioner scheme. The majority of respondents agreed with this proposal.

The proposals suggested reducing the maximum period a claim could be backdated from three months to one month, however, the majority of respondents did not think the Council should reduce this. Consequently this original proposal was not being recommended as a change to the Council's LCTRS.

The Council could decide to reject the recommendations and retain the scheme in its current form.

**Recommended** that Council approves the following changes to the Council Tax Reduction scheme:

- (1) to amend the rules which will ensure that people with the same level of income will be treated equally whether they receive Universal Credit or other means tested welfare benefits from 1 April 2017;
- (2) to remove the family premium in the calculation of Council Tax Reduction for all new claims made from the 1 April 2017;
- (3) to remove the child premium in the calculation of Council Tax reduction for any 3<sup>rd</sup> or subsequent child born on or after the 1 April 2017;
- (4) to review the applicable amounts, premiums, allowances and non-dependant deductions annually so that they reflect those prescribed

by the Government in the prescribed –  
pensioner scheme from 1 April 2017; and

- (5) to maintain the maximum three month  
backdate period.

**75. Council Tax empty property exemption period**

The Executive considered a report from Finance that provided details of a proposal to remove the council tax one month exemption period in respect of empty properties that were unoccupied and unfurnished.

The proposed change, if approved, would take effect from 1 April 2017 and as a consequence would mean that council tax would be payable regardless of whether a property was occupied or empty. The liable person for the charge would be the person entitled to possession of the property which in many cases would be the owner/landlord but on occasions would be a tenant who had vacated or not yet taken up occupation but still held the tenancy.

The current policy which allowed a one month exemption period once a property was unoccupied and unfurnished led to confusion with taxpayers as the exemption related to the property and not the taxpayer. Inevitably, this could lead to repeated enquiries leading to disputes over occupation/vacation dates and often the Council could become involved in lengthy wrangling between landlords and tenants.

It would make it a lot simpler for the council tax payer to understand and would remove the number of enquiries about policy on this matter. It would also remove the many administrative difficulties in establishing exemption start and end dates and determining the person entitled to the exemption.

In addition, the removal of the exemption from empty properties provided an incentive to owners to reoccupy or bring properties back into use as quickly as possible and reduce the number of empty properties.

At any one time there were, on average, approximately 165 properties in receipt of the current exemption. Based on the assumption that they were band D properties, the Council could raise an additional £267,000 (of which an estimated £27,000 would be for WDC) in revenue from removing the exemption.

As an alternative, the Council had the discretion to award any exemption between 0 and 100% for any period up to 6 months. However, retaining an exemption period of any period of time would lead to the kind of administrative problems currently being experienced and whilst the existing period was only one month, it could be a factor in slowing down the turnover of property as well as lost opportunity to raise additional revenue.

The Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee accepted the recommendations in the report and noted that there were appropriate exemptions in place for; reductions in Council Tax to enable major renovation works to be undertaken; or for second homes.

The Executive thanked the Scrutiny Committee for their comment and agreed that it was welcome that other appropriate exemptions were in place to enable major works/renovations to take place.

**Recommended** to Council that it approves the removal of the council tax one month empty property exemption period in respect of empty properties with effect from 1 April 2017.

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Whiting)

**76. Pre-application charging regime for development proposals**

The Executive considered a report from Development Services that updated them on the introduction of the pre-application advice scheme which started in February 2016, and sought minor amendments to this.

The purpose of the trialling of the scheme for a period of a year was to monitor its effectiveness, particularly in terms of the income received relative to the costs of providing the service, in order to consider whether it could be operated on a permanent basis through the provision of an additional Planning Officer role within the Development Management team.

To enable the monitoring of the scheme during its trial period, an additional temporary Planning Officer post had been created within the Development Management team, recruited through a specialist agency.

Since February 2016, over 190 non-householder, pre application requests had been received, of which approximately 25% were exempt from the payment of a fee as per the exemptions set out in the current charging schedule.

Over that period, the cost of providing the service on a permanent basis, through the provision of a permanent member of staff rather than a temporary member of staff recruited through an agency, would be £37,215 whilst the income received was £42,725.

At this stage, whilst the income received on an on-going basis remained variable, the evidence was that it exceeded that required to fund a permanent Planning Officer post to provide an appropriate level of resource to deliver this service in an effective manner on a permanent basis.

The pre-application scheme had been designed to operate by making a charge for the provision of advice on a one-off basis by means of either a single meeting or a written response. Whilst at the outset, it was not

possible to design a scheme to address all possible combinations of circumstances, officers had reflected on the experience of running the scheme to date, particularly in respect of the way in which the exemptions to the making of a charge had operated but also to other circumstances which had arisen.

Revisions to the way in which those exemptions were applied were set out within section 8 of the report.

It was considered that the operation of this aspect of the development management service in the manner prior to the introduction of a charging regime, did not provide an appropriate level of customer service or contribute as effectively as it could to the delivery of increasingly good development across the District. For that reason, in such circumstances, the only alternative to charging would be to cease providing any pre-application advice as there was no capacity to offer a free service. Offering lower charges was not appropriate either since it would not generate sufficient financial resource to cover the cost of providing the service.

The Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendation in the report and noted that the wording would be revised so the exemptions were amended to apply to schemes of 90% affordable housing or greater.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee felt that this was a good scheme and appeared to be well worth pursuing, provided that full cost recovery was achieved at a minimum.

The Executive thanked the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for their comment and agreed with the concerns of the Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee.

It was for this reason that the proposed scheme, as set out at Appendix 1 should be amended so that only schemes that proposed 90% affordable housing or greater were exempt from pre-application charges.

**Recommended** that Council approves the introduction of the pre-application charging scheme as set out in Appendix 1 to the minutes, on a permanent basis from 1 February 2017.

(Councillor Phillips arrived during this item and while he asked a question about the scheme did not vote on this matter)

**Part 2**

(Items upon which the approval of Council is not required)

**77. The Rental Exchange Project**

The Executive considered a report from Housing & Property Services which sought approval for the full implementation of the Rental Exchange Project.

In March 2016, the Executive approved stage one of the Rental Exchange project. The Rental Exchange was a national initiative developed by Big Issue Invest and Experian.

Following Executive approval for stage one, officers had passed information to Experian relating to Council tenants. Experian had then assessed the data sent and advised the Council of the results.

The Warwick District Stage One results were set out in detail at Appendix 1 to the report, but were very promising indicating that:

- *71% of WDC tenants would improve their credit score*
- *26% of WDC tenants would not be affected as they were in receipt of full housing benefit*
- *3% of WDC tenants would have their credit score reduced*
- *95% of WDC tenants would establish a satisfactory digital footprint*

These results indicated that a significant proportion of our tenants would be able to access cheaper forms of credit as a result of them paying their rent.

Following the approval to join the Rental Exchange scheme, tenants would be notified formally of the Council's intention to join the scheme. Tenants would be given clear information about the sharing of their information, how it complied with the Data Protection Act and how they could then opt out of the scheme should they wish.

There was currently no alternative to this scheme which could provide the same benefits to the Council's tenants. If the Council chose not to explore joining the Rental Exchange, it could miss out on an opportunity to help reduce the cost of credit and increase the payment options for services for its tenants.

The Overview & Scrutiny supported the scheme and looked forward to receiving information about the potential opportunity with Credit Union in the future.

The Executive thanked the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for their comments and welcomed their understanding of the need for a separate investigation into a potential opportunity with the credit union.

**Resolved** that

- (1) the outcomes of Stage 1 of the Rental Exchange Project be noted; and
- (2) the Council joins the Rental Exchange project and progresses to full implementation of the scheme.

78. **Consultation on the draft Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule**

The Executive considered a report from Development Services that sought approval of the refreshed Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Schedule prior to public consultation.

The Council was committed to introducing a CIL Charging Schedule which, in addition to other funding mechanisms such as Section 106, would support the delivery of the infrastructure required for the level of growth proposed in the Local Plan. It was intended to compliment rather than replace other funding streams and to promote development rather than hinder it.

The Council consulted on a Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule (PDCS) in June 2013. A summary of the consultation on the PDCS had been prepared, along with responses to the points made, and was brought before Council on 28 January, 2015. After the 2013 consultation was undertaken, the Council reviewed the CIL viability study to ensure the viability evidence was up to date (reflecting for instance increased residential sales values and increased build costs), concluding that the originally drafted rates were still applicable. This Draft Charging Schedule was subsequently consulted upon in January 2015, with the intention of bringing adoption forward in tandem with the Local Plan.

However, the progress of preparing the Council's finalised CIL submission was subsequently halted by delays in the Local Plan. As such, the Draft Charging Schedule had fallen out of date and a viability refresh was commissioned to ensure the evidence remained robust and up-to-date. This refreshed Draft Charging Schedule was detailed at Appendix 1 to the report. The charges within the draft schedule would be index linked, in accordance with regulation 40 of the 2010 CIL Regulations.

The Viability Refresh was prepared on behalf of the District Council by BNP Paribas. The refresh was conducted using the same industry-standard methodology as the original 2013 Viability Study; testing charging models against both hypothetical developments and a sample of live strategic sites, ensuring that the level of CIL proposed was demonstrably viable. The Key Findings of the report detailed the capacity to absorb CIL charges in the range of possible development types, and these findings were presented in table 1.6.1 of Appendix 1 to the report.

It should be noted that the proposed charges in the Draft Charging Schedule (DCS) were less than the maximum possible capacity for developments to absorb. It was important that the CIL rates were set at such a rate that they did not force developments to become unviable. The CIL regulations stated that in setting its CIL rate the Council must:

*"... aim to strike what appears to the charging authority to be an appropriate balance between:*

- *The desirability of funding CIL and the actual and expected costs of infrastructure required to support development and*
- *The potential effects of the imposition of CIL on the economic viability of development across its area."*

There were some changes to the proposed DCS when compared to the one consulted upon in 2015. Critically, the charge that was considered to be viable level to be levied on strategic sites had reduced. This was primarily due to an increase in assumed underlying development costs. For example, the viability model included contributions of £13,000 section 106 payments per dwelling and £12,000 on-site infrastructure costs per dwelling. As noted earlier, CIL was complementary to other funding streams such as s106 and the viability assessment was obliged to take these into account when assessing what might constitute a viable levy. It should be noted that by making an allowance for Section 106 contributions and onsite infrastructure provision, the Council could continue to use other forms of funding infrastructure alongside CIL. This enabled a flexible and pragmatic approach to be used to infrastructure funding and ensured that the approach was not over-reliant on CIL.

To adopt a CIL Charging Schedule, the Council had to demonstrate that there was a funding gap which exceeded the likely receipts from other sources. This would be set out in a live and evolving document called a Regulation 123 List. The list did not require consultation, and would be refined prior to submission to Council in April 2017. The Regulation 123 list was drawn from the Infrastructure Delivery Plan which was subject to the Local Plan Examination in Public that ended in December 2016.

Officers would consider the representations made in relation to the CIL Draft Charging Schedule consultation. As part of this, officers would consider whether any amendments were required to support the soundness of the Draft Charging Schedule.

A series of workshops would take place for Councillors in February that would explore the role of CIL, its relationship to other funding streams and its purpose in helping to deliver vital infrastructure.

Alternatively, the Executive could choose not to pursue a CIL Charging Schedule or could choose to delay the consultation process on the Draft Charging Schedule. The former course of action would undermine the options the Council had to provide the funding needed to deliver the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. This was particularly important in the



context of the CIL regulations which prohibited the pooling of more than 5 Section 106 contributions after 1 April 2015.

The Finance and Audit Scrutiny Committee had concerns about the proposed document as it was a technical document that was complicated and wished to ensure that the message was understood by the general public during consultation. They welcomed a further briefing/training session on CIL and the IDP for Councillors in the near future.

The Committee were assured that, prior to consultation, the table in Paragraph 3.4 would be amended to reflect that it was a cost per square metre and would ensure that Whitnash was referenced as being included within Zones B&D, along with the inclusion of the appropriate map demonstrating the areas A-D.

The Committee recognised there would be Section 106 agreements contributions as well and hoped the impact of these on strategic residential developments in particular would be clear in the consultation document.

The Committee welcomed the proposal, therefore, to include examples and scenarios within the consultation to show the true contribution from each development.

The Committee sought assurance that the Executive understood that this was for both Brownfield and Greenfield sites and that this also should be made clearer in the consultation document.

However, the Committee at this time recognised that the important issue was to get this out for consultation to move the matter forward.

Appendix 2 to the report had been circulated at the Scrutiny Committee meetings on Wednesday 4 January 2017 and was also circulated to the Executive during this item.

The Executive welcomed the circulation of the maps and colour appendices at the meeting. They did, however, share the concerns of the Scrutiny Committee that the final document needed to be clear and tidied up prior to consultation. The use of examples to illustrate points would be of value to all parties along with explanations as to why sites discounted within the local plan had been included in the revised assessment of CIL.

**Resolved** that

- (1) the CIL Viability Refresh Report, prepared for the Council by BNP Paribas, attached as Appendix 1 to the report be noted;
- (2) subject to officers ensuring the consultation document includes the suggestions from

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Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee and that the relevant Portfolio Holder & Leader confirm the final consultation version before it is published the CIL Draft Charging Schedule, as set out at paragraph 3.4 of the report and shown in full in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved for publication under Regulation 16 of the CIL Regulations 2010 to enable a four week period of consultation to commence, no later than 13 January 2017;

- (3) the Head of Development Services, is authorised, in consultation with the Development Portfolio Holder, to make minor changes to the CIL Draft Charging Schedule and associated documents following the consultation period, prior to submission to Council;
- (4) after the consultation has taken place and any subsequent amendments have been made, the CIL Draft Charging Schedule will be brought before Council, prior to submission to the Secretary of State; and
- (5) briefing sessions for Councillors will be offered during the consultation period to further explain the role of CIL alongside Section 106 agreements in providing funding for Infrastructure.

**79. Cloister Way Affordable Housing**

The Executive considered a report from Housing & Property Services that sought approval to purchase five affordable housing units on the Cloister Way development for retention as Housing Revenue Account assets.

The site of the former North Leamington School was partially developed a few years ago. A later phase of development was recently approved by Planning Committee on 13 September 2016.

The approval included an affordable housing requirement of five homes: two three-bedroom houses for social rent and three two-bedroom flats for shared ownership.

This was subsequently secured by a section 106 agreement, concluded on 8 November 2016, which also included "cascade provisions" setting out the process to be followed in the event of lack of interest from Registered Providers (RP aka housing associations).

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Briefly, this required the developer to try to find an RP and to conclude negotiations within three months. If they could not do this, they had to serve a "First Affordable Housing Notice" (FAHN) on the Council, who could, within two months of receipt, nominate another RP. The developer then had a further three months to try to agree a deal with the nominated RP. If the Council did not nominate another RP, or if the developer could not conclude a deal with a nominated RP in the timescales, then the developer must offer the properties to the Council for the price of £776,501. The Council must then confirm within 14 days whether it wished to purchase them.

Negotiations over the reserved matters planning application and the subsequent section 106 agreement were lengthy and the developer was taking soundings from prospective social landlords while these were ongoing.

Consequently, very quickly after signing the section 106 agreement, the developer's agent contacted the Housing Strategy & Development Team to advise that none of the partner RPs were interested in taking the properties because of the relatively small numbers. They were, therefore, requesting that they be allowed to serve the FAHN early.

It would be difficult to find an alternative RP because of the small number of units involved. This would also be undesirable given that all the RPs with a current management presence in the District, had declined to buy them so any other RP would not have local facilities for the tenants and shared owners.

It was highly likely that the next stage of the cascade would be triggered and the dwellings offered to the Council. A decision in principle was therefore required so that the Council could respond quickly, at the time when such an offer was made.

The Council had the statutory power to buy housing for rent or sale under Section 17 Housing Act 1985.

However, there were two other options available. Firstly, the Council could seek to nominate another RP to take on the properties. Although, as detailed in the report, this was considered to be both difficult to achieve and in any event, undesirable.

The other alternative was for the Council to decide not to purchase the properties. This would then result in the Council receiving a financial contribution equal to the build costs of the five affordable housing units. This would be available to the Council for up to five years to spend on affordable housing elsewhere in the District. If it wasn't spent after five years it would be repayable to the developer. This was a less attractive option because of the difficulty in finding somewhere to spend the money: onsite provision was always preferable.

The Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee welcomed the report and recommendations.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Property Services explained that officers had been emailed before 8.00am on 5 January 2017 to explain that three of the properties were leasehold and not freehold. The team had been surprised by this detail and that it had not been mentioned until this late stage. However, based on this it was necessary to propose amended recommendations so that it was clear the potential purchase was for freehold only and, if the properties remained as leasehold, a further report would be required back to the Executive.

**Resolved** that

- (1) the position with regard to the affordable housing units on the site at Cloister Way; be noted;
- (2) officers be given approval, in principle, to conclude negotiations with Spitfire Properties for the *freehold* purchase of five affordable housing units, two of which will be made available as social rent and three of which will be for shared ownership at a cost of £776,501 and stamp duty at 1% (£7,765);
- (3) subject to resolution (2), the Head of Finance, in consultation with the Finance Portfolio Holder, be delegated authority to confirm financing arrangements for this purchase as part of reviewing the financing of the overall Housing Investment Programme; and
- (4) in the event that a freehold purchase cannot be negotiated for the three flats, a further report be brought to Executive outlining the terms on offer for a leasehold purchase.

**Recommends** that subject to resolution (2) above, the Council approves:

- (1) a budget of £784,266 be made available for the purchase, from Right To Buy receipts, HRA capital reserves and potentially section 106 affordable housing funding;
- (2) a budget of £16,000 be allocated for administrative and legal costs for the administration of the purchase and the sale of the shared ownership dwellings; and
- (3) a contingency budget of £5,000 per property, £25,000 in total, be set aside for any

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improvements that may be considered  
necessary over and above Spitfire Properties'  
house type specification.

80. **Significant Business Risk Register**

The Executive considered a report that set out the latest version of the Council's Significant Business Risk Register for review by the Executive. It had been drafted following a review by the Council's Senior Management Team and the Leader of the Council.

The report was to assist Members to fulfil their role in overseeing the organisation's risk management framework. In its management paper "Worth the risk: improving risk management in local government", the Audit Commission set out clearly the responsibilities of Members and officers with regard to risk management:

"Members need to determine within existing and new leadership structures how they will plan and monitor the council's risk management arrangements. They should:

- decide on the structure through which risk management will be led and monitored;
- consider appointing a particular group or committee, such as an audit committee, to oversee risk management and to provide a focus for the process;
- agree an implementation strategy;
- approve the council's policy on risk (including the degree to which the council is willing to accept risk);
- agree the list of most significant risks;
- receive reports on risk management and internal control – officers should report at least annually, with possibly interim reporting on a quarterly basis;
- commission and review an annual assessment of effectiveness: and
- approve the public disclosure of the outcome of this annual assessment, including publishing it in an appropriate manner.

The role of senior officers is to implement the risk management policy agreed by members.

It is important that the Chief Executive is the clear figurehead for implementing the risk management process by making a clear and public personal commitment to making it work. However, it is unlikely that the chief executive will have the time to lead in practice and, as part of the planning process, the person best placed to lead the risk management implementation and improvement process should be identified and appointed to carry out this task. Other people throughout the organisation should also be tasked with taking clear responsibility for appropriate aspects of risk management in their area of responsibility."

More than six months ago there were three risks in the "red zone" (Risks 4, 6 & 16). Since then, as advised previously, following the introduction of additional controls and mitigations, Risks 4 and 6 had come out of the red zone. On the other hand, Risk 2 (Risk of Sustained

Quality Service Reduction') had moved into the red zone by virtue of the Likelihood of it occurring increasing. The other risk in the red zone was Risk 16: 'Risk of Local Plan being unsound'. Updates on these risks were set out within the report.

Finance & Audit Committee regretted that the Leader was not present for this item and asked for an explanation as to why the significant project that Members had been briefed on earlier in the week was not included in the Risk Register.

The Committee asked for a clear timescale as to when the review of Recruitment and Retention, as set out as the mitigation measures identified in Risk 2, would be brought to Members because this had now been raised for at least 11 months.

The Committee noted that the risk for the Local Plan was likely to reduce in light of the Planning Inspectors notification to the Council.

The Executive thanked the Scrutiny Committee for their comments and were reassured that the Chief Executive would write to them outlining the timetable for the review of recruitment and retention. They also recognised that, as a result of the letter from the Planning Inspector, the risks associated with the Local Plan were likely to have dropped significantly when this was next reviewed.

**Resolved** that

- (1) the emerging risks within the report be noted and that no further actions should be taken at this time to manage the risks outlined in the Significant Business Risk Register; and
- (2) the Chief Executive would write to the Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee regarding the timescale as to when the review of Recruitment and Retention, as set out in the mitigation measures identified for Risk 2, would be brought to Members.

**81. Visitor Information Review**

The Executive considered a report from Development Services that set out the outcome of the review of Visitor Information and proposed improvements for this service.

In November 2012, Executive had agreed to develop the 'hub and spoke' model for service delivery of visitor information in the District, which resulted in the granting of £40,000 p.a. to Warwick Town Council for the provision of the management of both the Warwick and Leamington Visitor Information Centre's (VIC's) along with other tourism activities.

The agreement governing the 'hub and spoke' arrangement would end in March 2017, and so a comprehensive review of the future options of the Leamington VIC had taken place to ensure that the Council could continue to provide a cost-effective solution to visitor needs. These options had been discussed with partners and offered several ways forward that would deliver the current and aspired-to levels of service.

Following the Executive approval of the Tourism Review in June 2016, a variety of models were explored for the operation of the Leamington VIC. This review was based on seeking improvement for visitors, especially around the quality of service delivery and the length of opening hours. The VIC currently operated over fewer hours than the rest of the functions in the Royal Pump Rooms, meaning that the space was secured by a large security shutter, whilst the building was still in use, ergo deterring visitors to the Art Gallery and Museum and café, and creating a negative impression. Furthermore, there was a desire to improve the value of interactions with visitors, offering a greater depth of knowledge and service where possible.

In seeking alternative models for the operation of the VIC service, the starting point was that the face-to-face visitor information service in Leamington was valued, that we would like to see the service extended and improved, but that budgets were constrained and that no additional funding was available. As a result, two models were proposed; one involving merging with other similar WDC functions, outlined in Appendix 1, and another involving extended opening hours through increased use of volunteers managed through the existing 'hub and spoke model', detailed in Appendix 2 to the report.

Both models potentially provided an improved service to visitors by extending the current opening hours. This would be of benefit to those wishing to access the VIC service in the Pump Rooms as well as those visiting the Art Gallery & Museum who could be deterred by the metal shutters that were used to segregate the closed VIC when the Pump Rooms remained open.

Appendix 1 to the report, proposed a model that brought the VIC delivery in-house and, following a redesign consultation, integrated the staff with those providing a similar function in the Art Gallery & Museum with the Box Office, currently located in the Town Hall. By integrating the teams and co-locating the functions, synergies would be produced that would provide the customer with an improved, more comprehensive service at first point of contact and over the desired longer opening hours. Given the much higher footfall in the Royal Pump Rooms compared to the Town Hall, there was reasonable expectation of opportunities to generate additional income above the current level.

Once the staff transferred in-house, a focussed service redesign and consultation would be undertaken in order to integrate the teams, with the intention to present to Employment Committee in June 2017. Given the requirement to bring the VIC staff in-house prior to consultation and



the creation of an integrated team, the extended opening hours sought for the VIC were unlikely to be able to be delivered until after the 15 June 2017 Employment Committee. However, once approved, the physical relocation of the box office and the amalgamation of the teams could take place. There would be the need to put training plans in place and ensure that the transition of the service was done as smoothly as possible and that staff were fully engaged throughout the whole process.

Appendix 2 to the report, detailed a proposed model that retained the current management arrangement of Warwick Town Council (WTC) managing the Leamington VIC, but utilising their established pool of volunteers to extend the opening hours without incurring additional costs. WTC had experience of successfully recruiting and managing volunteers having done so in the Warwick Visitor Hub. The model had the additional advantage of maintaining the existing and experienced management function, and would be able to deliver the extended opening hours immediately.

However on balance, the combination of increased opening hours, improved customer service and increased synergies between teams, the model proposed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the report was considered to offer the greatest benefits for both the Council and for the customer.

To relocate the Box Office and reception function, the communication infrastructure to both the customer facing and back office areas would require investment. Given that it would be inappropriate to award the VIC element of the Tourism Grant outside of the Council when the service was now being provided in-house, it was proposed to instead utilise this element of the grant to deliver the required improvements in 2017/18.

Warwick Town Council was currently in receipt of a Tourism Grant made up of two parts – a) £25,000 for tourism activities and b) £15,000 for the management of the Leamington VIC. Part b) of the grant would be repositioned as detailed in recommendation 2.5, and recommendation 2.6 allowed for the renegotiation and renewal of part a) of the grant to ensure future delivery of tourism activities in Warwick town.

Currently the visitor information was an unmanned stand in Kenilworth Library, Smalley Place. Officers would engage with stakeholders and end users to assess this provision and seek ways of improving its accessibility, relevance and prominence to the visitor within existing budgets. There had been a recent Visitor Audit for Kenilworth and associated action plan, attached as Appendix 3, and this would form the starting point of reviewing and improving the visitor information provision, with particular reference to Priority 4 – Optimising the Experience.

Alternatively, the Council could choose to shut the Leamington VIC without exploring alternative delivery models. This would offer up

savings to the Council in the region of £45,000, or the money saved could be used elsewhere to support Tourism. Closure would, however, be detrimental to the visitor experience, be reputationally damaging both within the community and within the tourism industry and have a negative impact on the other functions within the Royal Pump Rooms.

The Council could also choose to adopt the proposal detailed in Appendix 2 to the report. This proposal would deliver longer opening hours which would benefit visitors to the VIC and to the Pump Rooms. However, this would not deliver the service benefits of co-location with other elements of service delivery such as the Box Office and Gallery Assistants, as made possible in the recommended option.

**Resolved** that:

- (1) the proposed future model of service delivery as detailed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraphs 3.6-3.7 of the report, is endorsed;
- (2) the principle of Warwick District Council taking over responsibility for the Leamington Visitor Information Centre (VIC) on 1 April 2017, or as soon as practicably possible thereafter, be approved with VIC staff being directly employed by Warwick District Council with transfers of current staff employed by Warwick Town Council under the TUPE regulations as applicable;
- (3) the current grant arrangement with Warwick Town Council, for payment of £15,000 per annum, be ended in respect of the Leamington VIC on expiry of the current grant period on 31 March 2017;
- (4) the Royal Spa Centre Box Office is relocated from the Town Hall and, together with the Art Gallery & Museum reception is co-located with the Leamington VIC in the Royal Pump Rooms;
- (5) the Head of Development Services and the Head of Cultural Services are authorised, in consultation with the Business Portfolio Holder and the Culture Portfolio Holder, to utilise the £15,000 allocated for 2017/18 as grant to Warwick Town Council, to instead deliver ICT infrastructure upgrades to enable the Royal Spa Centre Box Office and Art Gallery & Museum reception to be co-located

to the VIC area within the Royal Pump Rooms;

- (6) the Head of Development Services, is authorised, in consultation with the Business Portfolio Holder, to re-negotiate and agree the payment of the Tourism Grant (additional to the £15,000 grant referred to above) to Warwick Town Council, up to a maximum value of £25,000; and
- (7) an additional phase of the Review be undertaken to examine the provision of Visitor Information services in Kenilworth, involving engagement with stakeholders on the recent Kenilworth Visitor Audit, with the intention of delivering improvements to the range and accessibility of information within existing budgets.

**82. Public and Press**

**Resolved** that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, as set out below.

Minute.	Para Nos.	Reason
83	1	Information relating to an Individual
83	2	Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual
83	3	Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

**83. Decision Made Under Chief Executive's Emergency Powers CE(4)**

The Executive considered a report from the Chief Executive informing them of a decision that had been taken, in consultation with Group Leaders, under delegation CE(4).

Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendations in the report. They raised two main questions and were assured that

future proposals would address one and a robust process including Group leaders was in place for such situations which addressed the other.

Full details would be provided in the Confidential minutes of the meeting.

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

(The meeting ended at 6.41pm)

**Warwick District Council Pre-Application Service  
Charges**

<b>Tier 1:</b> Self service advice via the WDC website: No charge.
<b>Tier 2A:</b> Request for a written response as to whether planning permission is required. Fee of £35 for a written response.
<b>Tier 2B:</b> Request for a written response as to the acceptability of a minor proposal: Fee of £50 for householders or £150 for other proposals.
<b>Tier 2C:</b> Provision of verbal advice at the Development Management/Building Control householder drop in session: free of charge.
<b>Tier 3:</b> Provision of pre-application advice for small scale non-householder proposals which do not fall within tiers 4 – 6: Fee of £150 per meeting or written response; or £300 for both.
<b>Tier 4:</b> Provision of pre-application advice for proposals which fall within the “minor” development category: i.e. residential proposals of 1-9 dwellings or involving a site area up to 0.5 ha; commercial proposals involving less than 1,000 sq m of floor space or a site area of less than 1 ha: Fee of £300 per meeting or written response; or £600 for both.
<b>Tier 5:</b> Provision of pre-application advice for proposals which fall within the “small scale major” development category: i.e. residential proposals of 10 – 199 dwellings or involving a site area of 0.5 - 4 ha; commercial proposals involving between 1000 and 9999 sq m of floor space or a site area of 1 -2 ha: Fee of £600 per meeting or written response; or £1200 for both.
<b>Tier 6:</b> Provision of pre-application advice for proposals which fall within the “large scale major” development category: i.e. residential proposals of 200 or more dwellings or involving a site area of 4 ha or more; commercial proposals involving 10000 sq m or more of floor space or a site area of 2 ha or more: Fee of £900 per meeting or written response; or £1800 for both.

1. All fees are exclusive of VAT and apply to all development proposals including those following both the grant of outline planning permission (i.e. prior to the submission of reserved matters applications) and the refusal of planning permission.
2. For any specific development proposal, a fee will not be charged for the first round of advice (provided by means of either a written response or meeting) relating to proposals which:-
  - are brought forward by small charitable organisations that are based within Warwick District where the proposal either falls within tiers 2 to 3 or where larger schemes falling within tiers 4 to 6 are proposed to directly benefit the users of the charity;
  - schemes that include at least 90% affordable housing within the District.
  - assist disabled people: for example, proposals involving modifications to make a house more accessible or user friendly.
  - require Listed Building consent (not including redevelopment schemes where the work to a Listed Building is part of a wider proposal).
  - are for employment development falling within the B use class.