

Cabinet

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 23 September 2021 in the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00 pm.

Present: Councillors Day (Leader), Bartlett, Cooke, Falp, Grainger, Matecki and Rhead.

Also Present: Councillors: Boad (Liberal Democrat Group Observer), Kennedy, (Green Group Observer), Milton (Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee) and Nicholls (Chair of Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee and Labour Group Observer)

42. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hales and Mangat.

43. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made

44. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 August 2021 were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Part 1

(Items upon which a decision by the Council was required)

45. **Service Integration and Joint Accommodation Work between Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council**

The Cabinet considered a report from the Chief Executive, which sought the continuation of the process of service integration and of joint accommodation, irrespective of the decision on a political merger by the two Councils or by the Government. It sought further approval of the timetable for proposed service integration between the two Councils over the period until March 2024.

Attached at Appendix 1 to the report was a report considered and agreed by the Joint Advisory Steering Group (JASG) in July. The report addressed the central fact that to progress joint work, a decision to proceed needed to be made regarding the service integration process. This was independent of the decision to proceed to a political merger.

A similar decision needed to be made in respect of the two Councils seeking joint accommodation. The report at Appendix 1 to the report set out the reasons for the recommendation. This was also independent of the decision to proceed to a political merger.

Appendix 2 to the report contained a report considered by JASG at its meeting in September and set out a programme at Table 1 for the proposed service integration process over the period to 2024. It was proposed that this timetable should be agreed, subject to Recommendation 1 being approved by Council. The report at Appendix 2 to the report set out the reasons for the recommendation.

In terms of alternative options, the Cabinet could decide not to agree recommendation 1 and wait until after a decision was made in December on the proposition of a political merger or after the Government has decided if it agreed to a merger. However, the service integration process needed time to be completed properly. If it was to be done by March 2024, delaying the start until a decision was made in December would reduce the amount of time available by two months. If there was a delay until the Government decided, that would mean a delay of over a year. Service integration could happen separately from the political merger and so would not be tied to a decision on the political merger.

In addition, as Members had seen from another report on the agenda for the 23 September Cabinet meeting (Minute Number 48) on Shared Legal Service for Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Warwick District Council, given that amongst the first services proposed for integration was the Legal Service, a delay would create a significant problem as notice was served by WDC to WCC, who were currently providing that service. The notice period expired at the end of March 2022. Starting the service integration process in January 2022 was not sufficient time to meet the notice period and delaying until a Government decision would make the Legal Services proposal impossible.

The Cabinet could have also decided to vary the proposed timetable for service integration. It was not possible to do everything at once and so choices had to be made. The proposed approach reflected the approaching deadline Legal Services and the greater readiness of the two proposed services which would act as in effect "pilots" from which to learn for subsequent integrations.

The Cabinet could decide to wait until a decision was made on the political merger before deciding on seeking joint office accommodation. However, a delayed decision would mean a delayed start and as both Councils were actively seeking to secure alternative office accommodation and both wished to seek savings as a matter of urgency, a deferral seemed contrary to both Councils interests and priorities.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendations in the report, but also requested that a further recommendation be made to produce a summary of risks through a risk register due to the size and complexity of the project.

The Committee also requested that regular service level performance data should be available to Councillors on the Service Area Dashboard, providing comparison between current service area performance levels against the merged service areas.

In response to a comment about the merger's inevitability, Councillor Day recognised that it was not inevitable, but that there were several successful mergers across the country, but the WDC/SDC merger requires a lot more political work.

In response to the comments from The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Chief Executive agreed with the need for a summary of risks. He also stated that we could provide a performance baseline report, but highlighted that Stratford did not record the data in the same way, therefore it would be difficult to draw direct comparisons.

Councillor Cooke proposed, Councillor Rhead seconded, that the recommendation from Overview and Scrutiny Committee, approved.

Councillor Bartlett proposed, Councillor Rhead seconded, the report as laid out and it was...

Recommended to Council that irrespective of the decision relating to the full political merger of Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Warwick District Council (expected in December 2021):

- (1) work progresses on the full-service integration of teams across Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils; and
- (2) work progresses on the identification of sharing civic and office accommodation between Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Warwick District Council.

Resolved that

- (1) the timetable for service integration, as set out in Table 1 in Appendix 1, be agreed; and
- (2) a summary of risks through a risk register due to the size and complexity of the project

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Hales)
Forward Plan Reference 1,243

46. **Adoption of revised Enforcement Policy and Business Charter**

Following further consideration by Officers and the Portfolio the report was withdrawn from the agenda.

A revised report would be circulated for consideration by Cabinet in November.

Part 2

(Items upon which a decision by the Council was not required)

47. **Q1 Budget Report**

The Cabinet considered a report from Finance, which provided an update on the current financial position as of 30 June 2021, both for the current year 2021/22 at the end of Quarter 1, and for the medium term through the Financial Strategy. Key variances and changes were highlighted to inform Members, with some recommendations also being put forward for their consideration.

Variations were identified by the Accountancy Team in conjunction with the relevant budget managers, giving a favourable variance of £69k as of 30 June, with a forecast favourable variance for 2021/22 of £440k. A summary of this was provided below:

2021-22				
Service	Variation Description	Q1 Variation £'000	Forecast Full Year Variation £'000	Rec / Non-rec
General Fund	Staffing	£223 A	£100 F	Non-rec
Assets	Delays to PPM works	£385 F	-	Non-rec
	Riverside House L4 closure savings	£48 F	-	Non-rec
	Bereavement Activity reduced	£50 A	£150 A	Non-rec
Cultural Services	Closure of Concessions	£11 A	£100 A	Non-rec
	Arts staff Furlough	£18 F	£24 F	Non-rec
Development Services	Development Control Income	£33 F	-	Non-rec
	Building Control Income	£54 F	-	Non-rec
Finance Housing Services - GF	FMS	£57 A	£57 A	Non-rec
	B&B Accommodation	£100 A	£200 A	Non-rec
Strategic Leadership	COVID-19 Other Costs - Cleaning	£28 A	£100 A	Non-rec
	COVID Contingency	-	£923	Non-rec
TOTAL		£69 F	£440 F	

As part of the budget setting for the year, a change in the process for forecasting salaries was introduced.

For the previous few years, salary budgets were set with a 'vacancy factor' of 2.75% built in, with the aim of reflecting reductions in salary spend as a result of gaps in establishments throughout the year occurring during the recruitment process.

An example of how this was implemented is below:

Post	Grade	Total Cost (Inc. Pension)	Vacancy Factor	Total Budget
Mr X	D	£45,219	£1,244	£43,975

As can be seen from the above, if the establishment remained complete throughout the year, there would be a shortfall in budget of £1,244. Conversely, if there was a gap due to a person leaving and their replacement not starting straight away, the vacancy factor might have been too small to reflect this effectively. This process worked best where there were larger teams, where turnover in staff was more likely to occur.

It was also found, having reviewed the data from the previous few years as part of budget setting, that 2.75% as a vacancy factor was low, with the Council averaging a 4% gap in their establishment year on year.

In order to reflect more accurately that there would be savings due to gaps in establishments throughout the year, but ensure that where establishments were complete, they were correctly budgeted for, officers moved to a centralised method of capturing these savings.

Vacancy Factor Budgets were established within each portfolio. These were set at 3.5% of the staffing establishment for each portfolio. For Q1, the following amounts were appropriated to the Vacancy Factor Budgets:

Portfolio	Vacancy Factor Budget 21/22	Budget Released Q1
Assets	-£48,600	£1,700
Benefits & Customer Services	-£66,300	£14,200
Cultural Services	-£56,600	£32,800
Development Services	-£109,300	£57,000
Finance	-£39,800	£500
Health & Community Protection	-£55,200	£6,200
Housing Services - General Fund	-£38,200	£0
Housing Services - HRA	-£77,400	£47,700
ICT	-£42,900	£6,500
Neighbourhood Services	-£58,800	£22,100
People & Communication	-£36,500	£1,000
Strategic Leadership	-£46,400	£3,100
Total General Fund	-£587,400	£145,100
HRA	-£77,400	£47,700
Total	-£664,800	£192,800

This enabled £145,100 (GF) and £47,700 (HRA) to be appropriated from Staffing budgets for months one and two as part of the new Salary Vacancy Factor process introduced for 2021/22. Overall, this equated to 25% of the GF Vacancy Factor budgets after two months, and 62% of the HRA Vacancy Factor Budgets.

Once the Vacancy Factor budgets were surpassed, additional budget that would be released would be returned to GF and HRA reserves made available to be used as necessary to meet other emerging challenges and opportunities.

Implementation of savings reviews was ongoing across services. Some reviews, notably Pest Control, Health & Community Protection Team and Sports & Leisure Team had their savings delivery forecasts changed. These could be seen in section 3.3 of the report and Appendix 1 to the report where the Budget Savings were discussed.

After the Vacancy Factor Adjustment was taken into consideration, salaries were £34k favourable against budget at the end of Q1. However, following the vacancy factor process and discussions with the relevant managers, it

was expected that this budget would be required to backfill where work was behind due to staffing, establishment, and recruitment issues.

The continued closure of parts of Riverside House, including level 4, resulted in further savings against a budget of £48k. It was expected that these costs would increase once the plan for Riverside House and its occupancy by more staff going forward was outlined and implemented.

There were delays to the Planned Preventative Maintenance (PPM) programmed works in year to date, resulting in a £385k Favourable variance. It was expected that the full allocation of budget would be used to meet the repairs necessary in order to maintain the corporate stock. It was expected that when the new Financial Management System went live in the Autumn, expenditure would appear in a timelier manner, as and when orders were raised, rather than only when they were paid. This would improve forecasting against the schedule agreed at Budget Setting in February.

Bereavement activity started to stabilise following a year of increased activity, with levels of burials and cremations being driven last year by COVID-19 related deaths, giving rise to additional income. Quarter 1 was £50k adverse against last year. The effects of the vaccination rollout programme, and other measures now in place would result in the service not running at maximum capacity, as it was for significant periods of the previous year.

Income from events and room bookings at sites including the Royal Spa Centre, Royal Pump Rooms and Town Hall was significantly down due to cancelled events as a result of the national restrictions. The income lost (£167k) was offset in part by a reduction in expenditure costs (£156k), such as bar supplies and Art booking fees, and also the receipt of Government grants. The Council continued to support casual staff through the closure, with the decision to furlough them from May 2020, resulting in WDC receiving Grant payments for Q1 totalling £18k. Furlough grants would continue to be claimed until August, from which point events and sites would start reopening / restarting as restrictions were eased. Heading into the Winter period, the number of events held typically increased, with the largest event each year being the Pantomime, so ticket sales would continue to be monitored over this period as part of the reopening plan.

A support package was agreed to support the Leisure Centre concession provider. As was the case in 2020/21, the concession fee, due to total £1.250m in 2021/22, was waived. In addition to this, up to a further £411k was agreed to support expenditure costs incurred by the provider, Everyone Active. Breakdowns of their accounts were to be provided to Warwick District Council on a monthly basis to support payments made.

The concession was not built into the 2020/21 budget, and the additional expenditure support package was supported through the use of reserves.

Development Control and building control income saw favourable uplifts (£33k and £54k respectively) in Q1 following sharp declines in 2020/21 due to the impact of COVID-19. It was anticipated that income should continue to show a positive contribution throughout the year as the sector returned to 'normal'.

Licence costs of running two Financial Management Systems (FMS) in parallel until the new FMS went live in the Autumn of this year were incurred, resulting in an additional cost of £57k.

Increased levels of temporary B&B accommodation were used since the start of the pandemic, to a cost of an additional £100k in Q1.

Car parks continued to see reductions in their use since the start of the pandemic. Restrictions continuing during Q1 saw income £293k below budget. However, at budget setting, it was projected that car parks would see a change in the level of their use going forward, driven by restrictions and also by the new ways of working adopted by many businesses in the District. Therefore, a contingency of £750k p.a. was incorporated to reflect the need to mitigate potential income reductions should restrictions continue as they did. While this contingency now had a reduced balance of £457k, it could be seen, even across the first quarter, that demand for car parking began to increase as restrictions were lifted and the Summer arrived. The requirement on this contingency therefore needed to continue to reduce throughout the year, with a current expectation that the initial forecast was met.

A number of other COVID-19 specific costs were incurred during the first quarter of the year, including the cleaning of a number of corporate sites, such as the Town Hall and Riverside House.

As part of budget setting for 2021/22, a COVID contingency of £923k was included. Based on initial forecasts, it was anticipated that this full allocation was not required, allowing for a surplus of circa £400k.

As it was early in the financial year, and owing to the fact that many external factors, predominately related to COVID-19 and the easing of restrictions were continually evolving, it was possible that the forecast outturn position could change substantially.

As the forecast favourable position was supported through the use of the in-year £923k COVID contingency budget, it was prudent to not reflect this in the updated strategy at this early stage in the financial year. Work was on-going by officers to continue to assess the impact of changes in their service areas.

Variations were identified by the Accountancy Team in conjunction with the relevant budget managers, giving a favourable variance of £1.035m as at 30 June, with a forecast favourable variance for 2021/22 of £30k. A summary of this was provided below:

2021/22				
Service	Variation Description	Q1 Variation	Forecast Full Year Variation	Rec / Non-rec
		£'000	£ '000	
HRA	Staffing (after Vacancy Factor Adjustment)	£39 F	£100 F	Non-rec
	Council Tax vacant properties	£24 A	£70 A	Non-rec
	Housing Repairs	£1,005 F	-	Non-rec
TOTAL		£1,035 F	£30 F	

There were a significant number of vacancies across the HRA, within Housing Strategy and Development, Business Development & Change, Landlord Operations and Lifeline services. Work was ongoing to ensure last year's Housing Restructure was established, with COVID-19 presenting further recruitment challenges.

There was a continued high level of void properties during the first quarter, as Housing Services were incurring delays in being able to re-let properties due to COVID restrictions. Work to ensure that properties were up to the necessary standard, or to ensure the properties were clean could not take place as promptly as previously expected. When a property became void, the HRA had to bear the cost of the Council tax until a new tenant commenced occupancy. It was expected that the increased precautions when completing work would remain in place even after restrictions were lifted as part of safeguarding both contractors, colleagues, and tenants. Therefore, the forecast for voids during the year would need to be reviewed.

Housing repairs, both major and responsive, due to the nature of the Finance Management System (FMS) and its integration with Active H (the Housing Management System), typically only appeared in the ledger when an invoice was received, which could be many months after work was completed. It was expected that the full allocation of budget would be used to meet the repairs necessary in order to maintain our housing stock. It was expected that when the new FMS went live in the Autumn, expenditure would appear in a timelier manner, as and when orders were raised, rather than only when they were paid.

A number of works had been delayed from 2020/21, due to issues with access and contractor availability as a result of COVID-19. Major and cyclical repairs were affected by this, specifically some of the ongoing fire prevention works. A new Fire Safety Works manager had been appointed to ensure all works were completed in the current financial year.

Many of the significant additional costs falling on the Council and reduced income were as a result of the ongoing pandemic.

It would be seen from the significant variances detailed, in paragraph 3.1.1 of the report, that the most significant drivers of the Council's shortfall in the current year were income reductions, mainly from fees and charges. This was in common with most District Councils.

While contingency budgets were included to support income losses and additional expenditure costs in 2021/22 at budget setting, a number of these were held centrally due to the difficulty in forecasting and predicting when restrictions would begin to ease, and the impact these would have on services.

The Government last year announced an income loss scheme, which was detailed below:

- The local authority would absorb the first 5% of the loss.
- The Government would fund 75% of the loss thereafter.
- The losses were in respect of sales, fees and charges that were not recoverable (including the concession fee from Everyone Active)
- Rents, commercial income, and interest receipts were excluded.

A Quarter 1 2021/22 return was due to be issued in September for completion.

Within the latest Medium Term Financial Strategy, estimated income in respect of this scheme of £600k was included for Q1 2021/22.

Whilst local authorities would undoubtedly continue to incur additional costs and reduced income as a consequence of the pandemic, the Government had not intimated that any further funding would be available beyond that already announced.

Managers provided updates as to expected delivery against the Budget Savings Proposals agreed in December 2020.

The updates resulted in a reduction in expected delivery of these schemes in 2021/22 of £437k, with further recurrent reductions of £8k in 2022/23 and £322k from 2023/24.

Key schemes where there was a significant reduction in expected delivery include the service reviews (as discussed in paragraph 3.1.3.1 of the report) totalling £114k recurrently, Digital transformation savings £125k, and WDC / SDC integration work, totalling £169k in 2021/22, increasing by £48k and £157k over the following years. Savings on the HQ were significantly reduced £225k, and lease income (£110k) from the hotel on Europa Way was pushed back by a year.

Within the savings, a £500k 'in-year underspend' was allowed for. Being early in the financial year, nothing was explicitly allocated to this. However, as part of the on-going Budget monitoring throughout the year, any projected savings would be allocated against this heading.

Appendix 1 to the report included full breakdown of the Budget Savings Proposals.

Many of these savings still required much work to be carried out, so a more prudent stance was taken in projecting the likely savings from some initiatives. These savings were reviewed monthly by the Management Team who sought to ensure their savings were duly progressed.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was last formally reported to Members in February as part of 2021/22 Budget setting. At that stage the profile of revenue savings to be found was as follows: -

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Deficit-Savings Req(+)/Surplus(-) future years	0	0	178	-30	-216
Change on previous year		0	178	0	-186

Sections 3.2 and 3.3 detailed the key changes to the strategy as at Q1: the inclusion of COVID-19 Sales Fees and Charges grant relating to Q1 income losses and updated budget saving scheme profiles.

Taking into account these changes, the savings to be found within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy were as follows: -

	2021/2 2	2022/2 3	2023/2 4	2024/2 5	2025/2 6	2026/2 7
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Deficit-Savings Req(+)/Surplus(-) future years	-163	448	938	715	515	241
Change on previous year	0	448	490	-223	-200	-274

It was noted that 2021/22 presented a surplus position of £163k. Beyond this year, the figures in the above table were the estimated level of additional savings that the Council needed to find out of its General Fund revenue account. It was noted that savings totalling £448k needed to be secured to enable the Council to be able to set a balanced budget for 2022/23, with further savings required beyond this.

It was also noted that there would be further changes to the MTFs reflected in the Q2 Budget Report, due to be presented in November. These would include the interest being paid over and above borrowing costs for the recently agreed Housing Joint Venture, and also the forecast impact of the fire at the Stratford Recycling Centre.

Within the 2021/22 Budget agreed by Council in February there was a Contingency Budget of £200k for any unplanned unavoidable expenditure. To date £39k was allocated, leaving a balance of £161k to support any future developments for the remainder of the year, such as the payment referred to in Recommendation 2.4 in the report.

As part of the local Boundary Review in 2017, an area of Warwick Town Council was "moved" to Bishops Tachbrook Parish Council (BTPC). This should have been effective in the Parish Tax Base for 2017/18 and subsequent years. Unfortunately, this was not reflected in the tax base nor the Council Tax system. This was recognised and rectified in time for 2020/21 Budgets and Council Tax. As a result of this, BTPC's tax base was understated for the three years from 2017/18 to 2019/20 by an average of 450 Band D properties. Had BTPC had the higher tax base, a higher precept would have been issued for those three years. This would have resulted in additional precept income estimated at £66,791 for the period in total. For BTPC, this would represent an increase in the precept income of 38% over the three years. BTPC sought due recompense.

With the properties not “moved” from Warwick Town Council (WTC), it might have been argued that WTC received too much Council Tax income. However, under the Council Tax and Collection Fund Regulations, there was no way to recover the income from WTC. It was likely to be met by opposition from WTC, especially as the Council had a reduction in its tax base as a result of the boundary change.

It was recommended that the Council should agree to compensate BTPC for the £66,791, funded from the 2021/22 Contingency Budget.

Appendix 3 to the report included further details on the use of delegated powers for these two matters, both relating to the request for financial assistance

Warwick District Council was committed to the ongoing sustainment of its tenancies whilst also recognising the importance of early intervention and a robust approach to rent arrears and debt recovery. Since 2017 rent arrears rose, with a sizeable increase as a result of the pandemic, arrears at the end of 2020-21 were 5.23% of the annual debit.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw substantial financial pressures on families and businesses, this resulted in our customers having less income and having to learn a new way to manage their money, and one of the outcomes of this situation was that rent arrears would increase if there was no intervention from officers.

Investment in the Mobysoft, RentSense solution, which used a series of complex algorithms and analytical applications which predicted which tenants would fall into arrears, provided an opportunity to target the approach to debt recovery, concentrating on those accounts which needed attention at an early stage, contacting the right tenants at the right time to reduce arrears and increase collection rates. It would add efficiencies to the current debt recovery process, reduce caseloads, meaning that officers would be able to complete arrears caseloads each week, contact the right tenants at the right time, address those accounts in arrears and reduce debt owed to the Council, and be in a position to provide more tailored support for those more vulnerable customers

The cost of entering into a two-year contract was £128,533 (Year 1 £70,635, Year 2 £57,898). The business case provided by Mobysoft anticipated a return on investment in year one of £310,406, without the need to increase staffing numbers, so became self-financing. It was expected that further savings would be made in the following year. However, the cost of the contract could be met from the HRA CIR from savings made in 2020/21. The contract was to be procured through the G-Cloud framework and was initially for 2 years with the ability to extend or end after the initial time period. This contract would need to be entered into with Mobysoft prior to the Rentsense software being installed.

RentSense could help mitigate further financial risk as failure to have a robust arrears management system which was able to predict and recommend targeted debt recovery actions would result in increased rent arrears. Officers needed to ensure that we they supporting customers to pay their rent and to clear arrears, and the ultimate sanction for customers was that legal action could be taken to gain possession of their home due to their non-payment of rent due.

If this course of action was taken, Part 2 of the Pre-Action Protocol for Possession Claims by Social Landlords Issued by the Ministry of Justice, required landlords to work proactively with tenants who fell into rent arrears to solve their arrears problems. This included, by making alternative payment arrangements, reviewing a tenant's financial circumstances and engaging with the Department of Work and Pensions (where appropriate) and assist with claims for financial support. The Pre-Action Protocol made clear that litigation should be a last resort. As such, any tools which could predict and/or identify tenants who might fall into arrears and enable the Council to take proactive steps to engage with those tenants would assist the Council in complying with its obligations under the Pre-Action Protocol.

In turn, this should lessen the number of rent arrears cases that might need to be progressed through the court and, of those that do go to court, improve the process for obtaining the necessary court orders for recovery of the rent arrears and possession of the property. RentSense provided a software solution that would increase cash flow, reduce arrears, create sustainable communities, reduce abandonments, and the need for court action and evictions. It would reduce caseloads for officers who would be able to concentrate their efforts on authentic debt cases without having to substantially increase staffing numbers.

There were no alternative proposals presented.

The Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

Councillor Matecki explained that the Housing team were aware of financial challenges faced by residents and there was software being introduced, which would ensure the most vulnerable are identified through improved use of data held by the Council

Councillor Day commended Councillor Hales for his hard work, and proposed the report as laid out and it was seconded by Councillor Rhead.

Resolved that the-

- (1) latest current year Financial position for both Quarter 1 (General Fund £69k Favourable and Housing Revenue Account £1.035m Favourable) and forecast for the year (General Fund £440k Favourable and Housing Revenue Account £30k Favourable), along with the key variations that drive these positions, be noted;
- (2) updated profile of Budget Saving schemes originally approved in December 2020, be noted;
- (3) impact that on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy due to changes detailed in the report, and how these changes are expected to be accommodated, be noted;
- (4) payment of £66,791 to Bishops Tachbrook Parish Council in lieu of the impact on the parish boundary changes for the period 2017/18 to

2019/20, funded from the 2021/22 Contingency Budget, be approved;

- (5) use of Chief Executive delegated powers as provided by CE(4) in the Scheme of Delegation in respect of matters relating to financial assistance with burial fees and site "clear-up", details of which can be found at Appendix 3 to the report and that the costs will be covered from the Council's Contingency Budget, be noted; and
- (6) use of Chief Executive delegated powers as provided by CE(4) in the Scheme of Delegation to enable Housing Rent arrears software to be procured and implemented, be funded initially in the HRA by the HRA Capital Investment Reserve, with a view of becoming self-funding during the year, be noted.

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Hales)
Forward Plan Reference 1,191

48. **Shared Legal Service for Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils**

The Cabinet considered a report from the Deputy Chief Executive (AJ) which explained the current arrangements for the provision of legal services to Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils and set out a business case for the creation of a single shared legal service for both authorities.

The proposal was part of the wider transformation programme across the two Councils, driven by a need to ensure that both Councils could deal with the financial challenges of current and future years.

Warwick District Council (WDC) did not have an in-house legal service, with legal services being provided by Warwickshire Legal Services (WLS), the in-house legal team of Warwickshire County Council (WCC).

The contract with WLS would expire on 31 March 2022, WCC had been advised that WDC would not be renewing its contract and instead would support the creation of an in-house legal service shared with Stratford-on-Avon District Council (SDC).

The sharing of an in-house legal service accords with resolutions relating to shared working was approved by both Councils. Full Council at WDC considered and approved the following on 5 August 2020:

That the principle of shared working with Warwick District Council be confirmed as part of the adopted policy framework; and

That agreement(s) be entered into with Stratford-on-Avon District Council pursuant to Section 113 of the Local Government Act 1972 and all other enabling powers so that employees can be placed at the disposal of the other Council as may be required, subject to the (Cabinet) endorsing business cases for any such services.

A full detailed Business Case for the shared legal service (which was exempt from publication) was attached in the confidential Appendix A to the report- Minute Number 55.

The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 provided that, subject to compliance with certain conditions, a contract concluded exclusively between two or more contracting authorities' as public/public cooperation fell outside the requirement to advertise and run a competitive procurement process. The Business Case was designed to ensure that these conditions were satisfied and therefore took advantage of the exemption.

The Head of Law and Governance and Legal Services Manager conducted meetings with WDC Heads of Service to ascertain their current and future demand for legal services, and the feedback received was instrumental in designing the new service.

The proposed size of the new shared legal team comprised a Legal Services Manager, two Lead Solicitors and 12 other lawyers (1+2+12=15). The team would be divided into two functional areas.

The current legal team at Stratford-on-Avon District Council (SDC) would need to increase in size to provide an effective service to both SDC and WDC. It was noteworthy, for example, that unlike SDC, WDC had its own housing stock. The work arising from this alone generated a significant demand for legal services.

Up to four members of staff at WCC were in scope for Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE) and could transfer to the new shared legal service. This would not be known for certain until closer to the 'go live" date of 1 April 2022. Even if four personnel did come across pursuant to TUPE, there would still be a significant requirement to recruit staff into the new legal team.

Several benefits arose from a shared District Council legal team. These included the ability to:

- Reduce the overall cost SDC and WDC pay for legal services.
- Build a critical mass of legal expertise dedicated to District Council functions by increasing opportunities to develop specialist knowledge.
- Build closer working relationships with clients. For example, WDC would obtain the advantages of an in-house service without concern that every contact with a lawyer was "on the clock".
- Increase development opportunities for legal team staff, leading to improved staff retention. In particular, the creation of Team Leader posts would create career progression opportunities.
- Increase efficiency and reduce duplication through standardisation of policies and procedures.
- Increase team resilience and flexibility. The absence of a member of staff in a small team like the SDC legal team was keenly felt and detrimental to client departments.

The proposals had been considered and supported by the Joint Arrangements Steering Group, which met on 23 August 2021.

In order to ensure that that the team was in place for 1 April 2022, staff recruitment needed to commence imminently. This meant that staffing and related costs would be incurred prior to the new financial year. A very rough estimate for this cost was £50,000, although it was difficult to estimate what this cost might be. It was anticipated that much of this cost would be able to be accommodated from WDC placing less work with WCC ahead of 31 March 2022, with SDC picking up this work where possible. To accommodate those costs, it was recommended that £50,000 from the Contingency Budget was utilised.

In terms of alternative options, WDC could continue to outsource its legal service to WCC or elsewhere. However, whilst WDC's experience of WCC Legal Services was positive, this option would not achieve the benefits to both Councils outlined above and nor would it contribute to the shared working commitments of both Councils, pending the long-term potential of a full merger.

Councillor Cooke proposed a motion of thanks to WCC Legal for their support to this Council. This was, seconded by Councillor Matecki. Councillor Day then proposed the report as laid out that was seconded by Councillor Cooke.

Resolved that

- (1) the creation of a single shared legal service serving Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils, as set out in the Business Case, be approved, subject to similar consideration and any necessary approval by Stratford-on-Avon District Council;
- (2) the release of funding from the Contingency Budget of £50,000 to ensure that there is a smooth introduction of the new arrangements, be approved; and
- (3) Warwickshire County Council legal services team be thanked for their work as legal advisors to Warwick District Council

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Day)
Forward Plan Reference 1,240

49. Events Manual / Events Review

The Cabinet considered a report from Development Services which provided an update on the action plan which arose from the Events review agreed by Executive in February 2018. Specifically, it addressed matters relating to the creation of an Events Manual and proposed a parks protocol and series of revised fees and charges for events on Warwick District Council land. It was intended to bring in these changes for the events taking place in 2022.

As part of the Events review, which was undertaken in 2017 and 2018, it was agreed that an events manual would be produced to assist event organisers and particularly signpost them to the correct steps they needed

to undertake to organise a successful and safe event. In doing so, the Business Support & Events Team were mindful that events could range in scale from very local community-based events which might only attract a relatively small number of people, to large commercial events which might attract many thousands of visitors. The production of an events manual was agreed by the Council following consultation with a range of stakeholders. Importantly, it was recognised that an events manual needed to:

- Set out deadlines for event’s organisers so that all proper documentation could be completed in good time to ensure that events can operate in a safe manner.
- Incorporate formal maps to identify specific areas within parks which could be used by event organisers.
- Include protocols (prepared in conjunction with the Council’s Green Space Team) that would govern the use of parks for events.

Substantial progress was made on the Events Manual prior to the pandemic. Since that time, the work of the Business Support & Events Team was focussed very much on supporting businesses through the pandemic, including supporting the re-opening of town centres and paying of business grants. Furthermore, since no events were taking place, the need for a published manual was less urgent. The Manual was completed as events began to take place again over the summer of 2021.

The final Events Manual was attached as Appendix 1 to the report. It covered a wider range of matters which event organisers would need to consider when organising events. These included the production of Events Management Plans, the need for traffic management plans, the role of safety stewards, premises licenses, environmental health, medical and food safety issues. Members’ attention was particularly drawn to the guidance on events in parks and open spaces which was drawn up by the Council’s Green Spaces Team. This included event site plans for Jephson Gardens, Pump Room Gardens, Victoria Park, St Nicholas Park and Abbey Fields, as well as specific requirements relating to trees and standpipes.

Members were asked to note and approve the charges for events set out in Appendix 1 to the report. These would update those agreed in November 2020 when Cabinet approved the Fees and Charges for 2020/21. The changes were as follows:

Event classification	Fees (£)	
	Nov 21	Events Manual (proposed)
Local Charitable/Community Events	By negotiation if ticketed	115 per day
Small/local commercial events	By negotiation if ticketed	230 per day
Large/national commercial events	By negotiation if ticketed	By negotiation
Funfairs and circuses (7 days)	2,127	2,130
Filming	By negotiation.	250 (1/2 day) 500 (full day)

The main changes introduced were to set a fixed charge for commercial events. Commercial events were defined in the Manual and constituted any event or activity that had a commercial benefit to a profit-making organisation. Warwick District Council was one of few Councils that did not charge event organisers for using Council land and this additional charge was considered to be both fair and proportionate.

By way of comparison, benchmarking with local authorities in the surrounding region was undertaken and the charges associated with events was shown at Appendix 1 to the report.

It was also worth noting that the decision not to charge for events in Warwick District was made as part of the Events Review in 2017/18. Members approved that recommendation in the Executive report in March 2018. The primary reason for that decision was to attract as many events as possible to the District so that the town centres would benefit from the economic impact of events and the additional footfall generated by them. Since that review, the number of events grew significantly, and the costs borne by the Council also grew in tandem with the increase in events. For this reason, it was recommended that the charges outlined above, and also in relation to waste collection in the following paragraphs, were implemented.

It was not felt that these charges would have any detrimental impact on the scale of events in the District. Warwick District was seen as an attractive location to hold events and initial discussions with some of the larger scale event organisers about the implementation of charges shows that this was an expectation given that most if not all other local authorities did impose fees and charges.

At this time, Warwick District Council paid all costs relating to the collection of waste at events. This was the agreed approach following the previous review of events in February 2018. At the time, the cost of this to the Council was estimated at approximately £3,000 per year. With the growth in the number of events since that time (setting aside the impact of the pandemic) this became as much as £11,610 (2019) per year and rising. In other local authorities, waste provision was something that event organisers expect to have to pay for, and budget for accordingly.

It was therefore proposed that the Council should adopt the approach as set out in the Events manual, which was that Warwick District Council could provide a waste collection service for events, including the provision of wheeled bins, however this would only cover public waste and would be supplied at a cost to the Event Organiser. It was proposed that if waste collection was needed for trader's waste, Event Organisers must provide this separately. The manual also made clear that event organisers were not obliged to use WDCs waste management collection service and were free to outsource this facility themselves.

In terms of alternative options, WDC could charge for the use of WDC land for events, but still provide waste provision for some community events. WDC could charge for the use of WDC land for events, but charge half of the cost to the event organiser for providing waste provision.

Councillor Cooke noted that the Council needed to further look infrastructure required to ensure local events are environmentally friendly. He also noted that the collection of waste after events would now be charged for. He then proposed the report as laid out.

Resolved that

- (1) the work to produce an Events Manual to enable the Council to work with event organisers to better support events across the District, be noted.
- (2) the Events Manual, attached as appendix 1 to the report, including the proposed approach to the use of parks and open spaces and the revisions to fees and charges for event organisers, be approved; and
- (3) Warwick District Council no longer pays for all waste services at events in the District, and the approach set out in Appendix 1 to the report towards waste management and recycling at events, be agreed.

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Cooke)
Forward Plan Reference 1,126

50. Royal Leamington Spa Town Centre Transformation

The Cabinet considered a report from Development Services. Given the challenges facing the town centre had accelerated as a result of the pandemic, and following the debate at the Council meeting on 28 July 2021 in response to a petition regarding the pedestrianisation of the Parade in Royal Leamington Spa, the report sought approval to note the current extent of investment planned or carried out, to agree that the existing Town Centre Vision be reviewed and updated, and note other funding bids and that a bid be made to the Levelling Up fund. It also sought to progress the formation of a Royal Leamington Spa (RLS) Transformation Board and associated governance structure to lead and oversee production of a Transformation Framework for the town centre and funding bids, including the Levelling Up Fund.

There were a significant number of projects and development activities taking place concurrently in and around Royal Leamington Spa (RLS) town centre. This included:

- the various elements of the Creative Quarter (Spencer Yard, Court Street);
- the Future High Streets Fund (Town Hall, Old Post Office, Sustainable Movement Network);
- the Kenilworth to Leamington cycle way;
- the Emscote Road/Warwick Road cycle scheme;
- the Development Brief for Riverside House consultation;
- the Bath Street Area Improvements (led by WCC Highways funded by WDC Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL));

- evaluation of the potential of creating a highline scheme on the old railway line from Leamington Station and a bus/rail exchange in Bath Place;
- the electric bus scheme to extend services out from Coventry to Leamington Town Centre;
- the park and ride scheme at Greys Mallory delivering (electric) bus services into Leamington Town Centre (and Warwick);
- the Commonwealth Games work which included the Improvements to Victoria Park (WDC led) and the Rail Station Forecourt Improvements (WCC led) as well as the Wayfinding Improvements (WDC led);
- the CIL scheme for the Commonwealth Park to relocate the athletics track and create a new open space westward toward Warwick;
- the agreed masterplan for Newbold Comyn and the cycle scheme recently approved and funding won for it.
- redevelopment of the Kwik fit site on Warwick Road for affordable housing by WDC;
- survey of car park structure and evaluation of Covent Garden car park site;
- painting/improvement of the rusty rail bridge over Princess Drive; and
- improvements to the roundabout to the junction of Old Warwick Road and Princess Drive.

In addition, there was also an extensive number of private sector interests on sites in the town centre which were at various stages of maturity. For example, The Hide on Oxford Row which was almost at the point of completion. There were also various planning permissions which had not yet been implemented and the Local Plan call for sites had also generated other sites to be identified by landowners/developers. There were in addition other public sector owned sites which deserved further consideration of their opportunity value.

The preceding paragraphs illustrated a significant picture of real and potential capital investment in the town centre. It raised the challenge though of how best to co-ordinate that investment to maximise the potential benefit for the wider business and resident community and to ensure that the investment contributed toward the vitality and viability of the town centre and helped to achieve the previously agreed vision.

Royal Leamington Spa Town Centre last went through a Visioning process culminating in the publication of A Vision for Leamington Town Centre, that was attached as, (Appendix 2 to the report,) in March 2018. This involved a Leamington Town Centre Forum formed of key organisations involved in the management of the town centre. The Vision set out six "big ideas" to drive change in the town centre. Much had moved on in the town centre since 2018 and the Vision now needed reconsideration and refreshing in light of the accelerated changes to the retail sector, other lifestyle changes that occurred because of Covid as well as other major considerations such as economic recovery, the ongoing impact of air pollution and the Climate Emergency. There had already been the start of a significant public debate about the future shape of the town centre where a petition was received by the Council from members of the public requesting the permanent pedestrianisation of the Parade. This was considered at the Council meeting on 28 July 2021 which unanimously voted to refer to WCC with wording defined via the Leadership Co-ordinating Group.

It was suggested that a 'Framework' process was needed to co-ordinate all this activity across the town centre. A Framework was a strategic level plan which collated all the activity to enable joined up decisions to be taken on town centre aspects. It was crucially not a masterplan and was therefore not fixed in the same way but was able to flex and respond as the conditions and opportunities in the town centre also flex and evolve over time. The on-going process was as important as the plan itself.

WDC officers researched current best practice via the High Streets Task Force which collated activity across all town centres who were also grappling with similar change and transformation. Oxford Street in London, as 'the nation's High Street', in February 2021 produced a Framework for the Oxford Street District. This set out a Vision for that District based on a greener, smarter, future, together and summarised what they would do. A Framework Plan set out an approach based on three centres to focus investment and activity within a partnership arrangement. A Delivery Plan then set out the high-level aspects that would be addressed by 2030. Such a 'Framework' was seen as a live document, to bring together stakeholders and inform the direction of travel of the area, inform bids/funding, and guide/attract external investors.

The area proposed to be covered by the Transformation Framework was envisaged to include the town centre area including Christchurch Gardens in the north and the Grand Union Canal in the south, the new proposed Commonwealth Park in the west and Jephson Gardens in the east. It encompassed all the town centre as identified in the current Local Plan but also the additional land to the west along the river for which proposals were emerging including those related to the Commonwealth Games and east to Newbold Comyn.

Initial scoping plans and an indicative draft structure for a Transformation Framework document were prepared to inform this process and would be shared with the Board once established. These showed that from this collation of activity across the town centre, strategic plans and concept approaches would be developed to bring aspects together, such as the north/south spine 'High Street' formed by the Parade, Bath Street and Clemens Street which complemented the east/west ribs of 'Parks and Gardens' and along the Grand Union Canal, together, these combined to form the main components of the 'Place' in Leamington Spa's town centre.

This conceptual approach enabled activities along these spines to be conceived and co-ordinated to deliver a holistic vision of how these areas could be used and developed as the town transformed in the future. Development sites in the town centre would then be influenced to seek to secure support from aspects such as Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to make funds available to support the public realm transformation. Key concerns such as accessibility for the elderly and restricted mobility, location of bus stops, reduction of pollution and noise, movement over the river and the role of markets, would be addressed in a place-led process. Highways works would enable this but not lead it. It was within this context that the "debate" about the Parade needed to be considered and not in a binary and narrow argument to pedestrianise or not. Funding was a key aspect of the implementation of the intended Framework for RLS town centre would address, but it was also significant that a Framework would help funds to be made and supported. Central

Government had various funds relating to town centre aspects which appeared at various times. In addition to the Future High Street Fund Bid, the Council had also supported bids by WCC for cycleways along Harbury Lane and Radford Road and for an Expression of Interest in a "Mini Holland" scheme around the town centre.

The town centre would therefore benefit from there being a plan in place to enable the thinking and collaborative working to be in place to be ready to respond to these funding opportunities as they arose and ensure that each funding bid contributed to delivery of the whole and that the right priorities were taken forward by each funding pot. The Levelling Up Fund for example was anticipated to be launching a Round 2 to be submitted in Spring 2022 and ideally Leamington would have a plan in place as context from which then to draw agreed projects from as part of that bid.

The Levelling Up Fund sought bids of up to £20m and which could be implemented reasonably quickly, which was where having the Transformation Framework in place helped as possible projects and their priority was already identified and had support. It was suggested that a bid to this Fund be progressed for Spring 2022 in tandem with the review of the Vision and the development of the Transformation Framework.

The Council had already proposed the deployment of CIL funds over several years to assist several of the projects listed in paragraph 3.1 of the report. This might have also been matching funds for some funding bids to be made, including the Levelling Up Fund. There would also be opportunity to use Section 106 funds as they arose and looking forward, if significant town centre residential schemes were anticipated then this would generate additional CIL above and beyond that already forecast; this could have been ring fenced to assist town centre infrastructure improvements and to act as a substantial source of match funding. Of course, the significant private sector interest would also lead to other investment that could in some cases also act as match funding.

To oversee the preparation of the Transformation Framework and to seek funding for its delivery, it was proposed that a Transformation Board was established as part of a governance structure, led by the three tiers of local government working closely together on these inter-related town centre aspects and involving local stakeholders in the process to inform decision making by elected Members. Appendix 1 to the report – Governance Structure set out the proposal for Cabinet approval.

It was suggested that Cabinet should determine the composition of who would serve on the Transformation Board. This would be in accordance with the following principles:

- There would be representatives from on the Board from Warwick District Council, Warwickshire County Council and from Leamington Town Council.
- The representatives from the District and County Councils would include at least one relevant portfolio holder who would have delegated authority.
- The representatives also reflected the political balance of the Council.
- An independent chair was selected, and this could be the Chair of the Advisory Group.

Given that it was recognised that the Transformation Board would need to work at pace, it was proposed that certain delegations were agreed to enable it to do so. This would need to be delegated to the appointed Cabinet Member and the other participants would in formal terms advise them, but in practice make a consensus decision. Insofar as these related to matters which would need to be otherwise reported back to the Council formally for approval, these included:

- Allocation of Welcome Back Fund monies;
- Commissioning of any consultants and advisers for specialist work (provided the funding of these did not require additional Council support);
- Approval of a draft Framework for public consultation;
- Agreeing how public consultation would be undertaken (provided this was accordance with, where appropriate, the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement);
- Approval of the Transformation Framework for recommendation to parent bodies;
- Agree funding bids in relation to the Transformation Framework, especially a Levelling Up Fund bid;
- Monitoring, review, and updates to the Transformation Framework and of successful funding bids (including the FHSF); and
- Reporting on progress of the Transformation Framework to parent bodies and the wider community.

The Council would seek to agree similar or other delegations with the County Council and Town Council to expedite any decision making of the Board. It could have been that the Board's constitution evolved over time, and what was set out here was a first stage given the timescales for the formation and progression of this transformation process were driven in the short term by the need to be ready for the next anticipated funding bid (Levelling Up Fund in Spring 2022). The governance remit and arrangements would require discussion and sign off with WCC and LTC and so the recommendations were subject to that process. Both organisations were engaged and the response, albeit informal, was positive.

It was, however, noted that this was a longer-term process to get the right framework in place for the town centre. In the medium and longer term, an on-going process was envisaged whereby the Transformation process was kept live and reviewed and updated regularly on a 6 month or annual basis as proposed by the Transformation Board in due course. This would enable the Transformation Framework to be up to date and ready to inform each subsequent funding opportunity that arose. An indicative programme from October 2021 to the end of March 2022 was in Appendix 3 to the report.

The programme set out actions over the six-month period to establish the transformation process and enable a Transformation Framework to progress sufficiently to inform the anticipated Levelling Up Fund as a priority action in the short term. This involved establishing the approval to proceed via this report to Cabinet 23 September 2021. It was envisaged that the Transformation Board would be established in October and meet monthly initially as the process was scoped out and set up. The Transformation Advisory Group membership would be approved by the Board as an early action in October, enabling the Group to meet in November and have an inception/scoping session. The Group would meet every two months or as

needed to inform the Transformation Framework in the short term. The Transformation Technical Group would be formed in parallel with the Transformation Board in October and meet fortnightly initially to collate and progress the various technical aspects at a pace.

It would be necessary to enable sufficient officer time to enable this transformation process to occur. It was envisaged that a member of the Place & Economy Projects Team would dedicate a significant portion of time to being the lead technical officer to coordinate and drive forward the necessary administration of the process, under guidance of the Projects & Economic Development Manager, Policy & Projects Manager and Head of Place & Economy. Other WDC and WCC officers would support the various technical aspects as needed.

Public Consultation on the Transformation Framework would be extremely important given the high level of interest in the Parade and the town centres future. It was envisaged that public involvement in the Transformation Framework would be undertaken as an ongoing process at regular intervals in the medium to long term. This would be annually or bi-annually dependent on the rate of change or as new large changes were forthcoming. In the short term, consultation to inform the initial shape of the Framework was needed and to support any Levelling Up Funding bid. This would take place early in 2022 subject to Board consideration and approval and would set out a range of options to glean views. Specific consultation on options for the Parade would follow in due course.

Support from external consultants was likely to be needed as the Framework process was progressed. This was likely to be on aspects such as baseline research to underpin some of the approaches (e.g., a movement study) and support in visualising the change to public realm areas such as the Parade or new squares at the Town Hall for example. Some technical town centre studies were being prepared as part of the new Local Plan and the Local Transport Plan and would feed in as they are completed. It was recommended that a budget of £50K was initially set aside from the Welcome Back Fund to support these elements and should this need changing then a process would be taken through the Board.

The Welcome Back Fund (WBF) was the new name for the old Re-opening the High Streets Safely Fund (RHSSF) which was funded from Central Government via Europe and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Warwick District was awarded £127,085 through the RHSSF and then the same again when it became WBF, so total £254,170. The rules were quite tight on what it can be spent on, so we have only spent around £54.5K to date. Further allocations were working through the process. Leamington had a budget remaining of around £80K total so £50K would be put towards the Transformation Framework leaving £30K for other items. Kenilworth were yet to deploy their remaining share of the allocation (around £50K). The fund ran until the end of March 2022 but would be extended further if the Covid response continues.

The status of the funding was that WDC pays for items within the WBF guidance (in agreement with the allocated Government Contract Manager),

WDC then make a claim to Government who check and approve payment, then Government in turn then claim it back from Europe (ERDF).

The fund was to support the safe re-opening of the high streets in relation to Covid. The fund could have been used for things like town centre information banners, bollard sleeves, flags, floor stickers and now for 'beautification' so things like planting, trees, benches (like in recently Warwick). It could have also been used to support preparation of medium to long terms plans for how the high streets were going to adapt, post-covid which was where the fund for Leamington could have come in to play.

In terms of alternative options, the Council could have chosen not to pursue the Transformation process, and this would have led to continuation of projects being undertaken without a strategic context in place and lacking the overall cross-coordination needed.

An addendum circulated prior to the meeting clarified the area of Leamington that would be covered by the proposals.

The Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee supported the proposals. Members expressed the view however that the Independent Chair of the Board should not also chair the Advisory Board given that each had different roles in the envisaged governance arrangements. The selection of the Chair and the members of the Board would be crucial to the success of the undertaking.

The Committee also welcomed the idea that the governance could evolve once the Independent Chair was appointed, and the work got underway and was therefore not set in stone. Members wished to also express the view that the groups represented on the Advisory Board should capture the breadth of expertise in Royal Leamington Spa, economic or otherwise and they therefore welcomed the fact that the groups listed were at this point examples and not exclusive.

In response to Councillor Grainger's concerns over sustaining momentum, Councillor Day stated that he saw no sense of diminution of momentum and enthusiasm for the project as the town was an asset to the whole District.

Councillor Cooke commended the Officers who worked on this and then proposed the report as laid out.

Resolved that

- (1) the significant number of projects underway across Leamington's town centre that need co-ordinating, as set out in paragraphs 3.1 of the report, be noted;
- (2) a review and update of the town centre vision using a Transformation Framework approach, as set out in paragraphs 3.4 to 3.9 of the report be agreed;
- (3) the bids/expressions of interest for various funding streams made recently, be noted and

that a Levelling-Up Fund bid by February/March 2022 to help to deliver the Framework, be prepared;

- (4) the formation of a Transformation Board to oversee the preparation of the Transformation Framework and the associated governance structure, as set out in paragraph 3.14 to 3.17 in the report and appendix 1 to the report, be approved;
- (5) Warwickshire County Council and Royal Leamington Spa Town Council are asked to join as partners on the Transformation Board;
- (6) the Composition of Councillors who will serve on the Transformation Board, as set out in paragraph 3.15 in the report, in consultation with WCC and LTC, be determined by the Cabinet;
- (7) the remit of the Transformation Board, as set out in paragraph 3.16 and 3.17 in the report (subject to discussions with WCC and LTC) and that authority be delegated to a designated Cabinet member to take decisions on this remit
- (8) the principle of engagement with key town centre stakeholders via the Transformation Advisory Group, as agreed by the Transformation Board, as set out in paragraph 3.19 in the report, be agreed; and
- (9) £50,000 from the Welcome Back Fund, to commission external support from consultants and for public consultation, be approved.

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Cooke)

Forward Plan Reference 1,241

51. Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme

The Cabinet considered a report from Housing which sought approval to accept the resettlement of up to 25 families in Warwick District under the Afghan Relocation Assistance Programme (ARAP).

Following the announcement that NATO military forces withdrew from Afghanistan, the UK government requested that local authorities help accelerate the pace of relocations under the ARAP, to provide a safe haven for those relocated through the scheme.

As the situation in Afghanistan worsened, officers within Warwickshire Districts and Boroughs had discussions to understand the help that could be given locally both in terms of housing provision and from the support which was provided by Warwickshire County Council. The escalation of events showed that the assistance needed to be accelerated and increased.

The Council's pledge to rehouse Afghan nationals would be increased from the original pledge of one family to up to 25 families who on arrival would be granted immediate leave to remain in the UK. This happily reflected the concerns and support offered verbally across the Council when this issue was considered in August.

Warwickshire County Council (WCC) received government funding for this work to ensure that they had sufficient resources to support all new Afghan family arrivals across the county.

In June 2021, the Council received a letter from Minister for Housing Communities and Local Government seeking support in the accelerated relocation of locally employed staff (LES) who were supporting the UK in Afghanistan. All Councils were asked to support the Afghan LES Relocation Scheme. Consideration was given as to whether support should be given or not. It was agreed that to refuse acceptance of a family for relocations was not a desired option.

The resettling of higher numbers of households was considered, however WCC had advised at that time their teams were at capacity and could not support additional families. WCC had received additional resources and therefore could support the increased number of placements across the county.

Councillor Matecki noted that the Council were limited to an extent by the support that WCC could actually provide. He reassured the Cabinet that peoples' places on the Housing Register would not be affected by this decision. However, he reminded people that the refugees were homeless and therefore would be treated like any other homeless person in the District. Councillor Matecki also noted that Stratford-on-Avon District Council had accepted this Council's challenge to match the number of refugees taken, so 50 families in total would be accepted into the area.

Councillor Day expressed a formal thanks to the Muslim community in particular for their help and generosity.

Resolved that

- (1) the decision to resettle up to an additional 25 families in the District via the Afghan Relocation Assistance Programme (ARAP), be approved; and
- (2) this commitment is dependent on the continuation of the properly funded arrangements from Home Office being in place to manage and settle the households via Warwickshire County Council resettlement support team, be noted.

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Matecki)

52. 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 paragraph of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, as set out below.

Minutes Numbers	Paragraph Numbers	Reason
53, 54, 55	3	Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)
56	1	Information relating to an individual

The minutes of the following Items will be detailed within the confidential minutes of the Cabinet

53. **Development Scheme Costs Associated Turpin Court, Royal Leamington Spa**

The Cabinet considered a confidential report from Housing.

The recommendations in the report were approved.

54. **Low Carbon Enabling Development**

The Cabinet considered a confidential report from the Chief Executive.

The recommendations in the report were approved.

55. **Confidential Appendix A to Item 7 - Shared Legal Service for Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils**

The Cabinet considered a confidential appendix from the Deputy Chief Executive.

56. **Minutes**

The Cabinet confirmed the confidential minutes of the meeting held on 12 August

(The meeting ended at 7:32pm)

CHAIRMAN

4 November 2021