

Council meeting: Monday, 27 February 2023

Notice is hereby given that a meeting of Warwick District Council will be held at the Town Hall, Parade, Royal Leamington Spa, on Monday, 27 February 2023 at **6.00pm**.

Agenda

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Declarations of Interest

Members to declare the existence and nature of interests in items on the agenda in accordance with the adopted Code of Conduct. Declarations should be disclosed during this item. However, the existence and nature of any interest that subsequently becomes apparent during the course of the meeting must be disclosed immediately. If the interest is not registered, Members must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days.

Members are also reminded of the need to declare predetermination on any matter.

If Members are unsure about whether or not they have an interest, or about its nature, they are strongly advised to seek advice from officers prior to the meeting.

3. Minutes

To confirm the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 14 December 2022.
(Pages 1 to 12)

4. Communications and Announcements

5. Petitions

6. Notices of Motion

To consider a notice of motion from Councillor Mangat and Councillor Day that reads as follows:

"The vulnerability of elected representatives has been at the forefront of the political sphere in recent years with high profile incidents like the horrific murders of Jo Cox MP and Sir David Amess MP. With local elections coming up this motion is very timely. As Councillors we stand at the heart of local democracy and form a vital link between the council and residents, it's a privilege and responsibility to be elected to public office. Unfortunately, a minority of members of the public think it's acceptable to abuse the local people elected to serve them. What will happen to our democratic process if people are put off standing for election because of the vitriol and threats?"

Part of life on all councils for Councillors often means dealing with and making difficult decisions on behalf of our residents. Debating and discussion in local democracy is healthy but abuse and intimidation are unacceptable. Councillors are here to represent their local communities and we want to continue to do that, but we need communities to support us in doing so. We as Councillors also need to set an example by treating each other with respect. Discussing things in a courteous and respectful way is always so much better than causing anger by shouting abuse. I am delighted that the Local Government Association (LGA) initiated the 'Debate Not Hate' campaign, although in 2023 such a campaign should not be needed.

According to the findings set out in the report of the LGA's call for evidence of abuse and intimidation (October 2021) A survey of all councillors in England which took place last year, found that seven in 10 respondents experienced abuse or intimidation in the last 12 months. Only 27 per cent reported to have never had any such experiences.

Anecdotally, the call for evidence found that some councillors were receiving targeted and personalised hate and abuse due to their protected characteristic. In particular, there is a perception that women, ethnic minorities, and LGBT+ Councillors will experience higher volumes of threatening and discriminatory abuse, reflecting a 2020 study of the 2019 UK general election which found that women received more sexist abuse whereas men received more general and political abuse.

Elected by our communities, we as councillors work to engage with and champion the needs of the communities in our decision making. Debate and disagreements are a healthy part of this democratic process and appropriate challenge is vital to hold elected members to account.

However, intimidation, threats and personalised abuse crosses the line into unacceptable behaviour and there is growing evidence that this is happening all too often. Social media has made it easier for this type of abuse to take place. The LGA said this is having a detrimental impact on the wellbeing of local councillors and their families, from their mental health to feelings of safety, with some reporting seeking medical advice for depression, anxiety, and others unable to leave their homes at all or unaccompanied for fear of an incident.

The support available to protect the safety and wellbeing of councillors is limited and inconsistent across the sector and can be uncoordinated between agencies. Some respondents shared examples of little action being taken against perpetrators of abuse, leading to a normalisation and acceptance of abuse by councillors, officers, and police. Increased participation in local democracy is something all councils strive for as broadening the diversity of people standing as candidates and of those engaging with the elected helps councils make better informed decisions for their communities. Healthy debate is the way we work together to achieve better things for our communities
Therefore, this Council resolves to:

1. Endorse the LGA Debate Not Hate campaign and call on all political group leaders to sign a public statement.
2. Support the LGA's proposal for a national working group to produce and implement an action plan that addresses the abuse and intimidation of elected members and candidates and ensures their safety while they fulfil their democratic roles;

3. The Council reaffirms its stance of a zero-tolerance approach (as made in 2019) to the abuse of its councillors and officers, and asks officers to review appropriate policies and promote these to Councillors and Officers;
4. Officers, in liaison with the Chairman of the Council, review the safety and wellbeing of its members in respect of preventing and handling abuse and intimidation and addressing the impacts of abuse on mental health and wellbeing and report back to Overview & Scrutiny Committee on this;
5. Officers work with Warwickshire Police and colleagues across Warwickshire to deliver for Hate Crime Ambassador training for all members to enable them to become hate crime ambassadors by championing awareness and increasing public confidence in reporting in their ward communities."

7. Leader and Portfolio Holders' Statements

8. Questions to the Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holders

9. Setting of the Council Tax 2023/24

To consider:

- (a) the recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 9 February 2023 in Minute Number 84 and **(To follow)**
- (b) the report of the Responsible Financial Officer. **(To follow)**

10. Housing Rents and Housing Revenue Account Budget 2023/24

To consider the recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 9 February 2023 in Minute Number 85. **(To follow)**

11. Cabinet Report

To consider an excerpt from the Cabinet meeting of 9 February 2022. **(To follow)**

13. Overview & Scrutiny Committee

To consider the report from Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 7 February 2023. **(To follow)**

14. Audit & Standards Committee

To consider the report from Audit & Standards Committee on 21 February 2022. **(To follow)**

15. Common Seal

To authorise the affixing of the Common Seal of the Council to such deeds and documents as may be required for implementing decisions of the Council arrived at this day.



Chief Executive
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