

WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Warwick District Council held at Shire Hall, Warwick, on Wednesday 10 January 2024, at 6.00pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Syson (Chairman); Councillors Aizlewood, Armstrong, Barton, Billiald, Boad, Browne, Chilvers, Collins, Cron, Davison, Day, K Dickson, R Dickson, Falp, B Gifford, C Gifford, Gorman, Hales, D Harrison, Kennedy, King, Kohler, Luckhurst, Margrave, Matecki, Milton, Noonan, Payne, Phillips, Redford, Roberts, Rosu, Russell, Sinnott, Tangri, Williams, Wightman and Yellapragada.

63. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dray, J Harrison, Hunt, and Sullivan.

64. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

65. **Minutes**

The minutes of the Council meetings held on 26 September 2023, 15 November 2023 and 6 December 2023 were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

66. **Communications & Announcements**

The Chairman thanked all District Council officers who helped respond to the flooding within Warwick District in early January and the monitoring work undertaken over the Christmas period.

The Chairman highlighted to Council that Helping Hands in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire Search and Rescue, Graham Fulford Charitable Trust and Veterans Contact Point Charity who received the Kings award for voluntary service.

The Chairman stated that in November, Raj Kang resigned as a District Councillor and wished to offer him thanks for his work on this Council and remind Councillors that on 18 January there would be a by-election for his replacement.

The Chairman confirmed that she had no business on the agenda under Item 5 Petitions or Item 6 Notice of Motion.

67. **Leader and Portfolio Holders' Statements**

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Councillor Kennedy, updated Council on the Council's proposed Net Zero DPD. On the 13 December the Government started a consultation on "the future homes standard for 2025" and on 19 December published its response to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill with reforms to the National Planning Policy consultation. It was understood the Net Zero DPD Inspector might want to consult on if, as a result of these documents, any changes were required in the DPD, thus the DPD could be further delayed.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Assets, Councillor Wightman, provided a detailed update in writing to all Councillors, as set out at Appendix 1 to the minutes. He also informed the Council that in respect of the Asset Compliance work, the Council awaited the decision from the Social Housing Regulator. The Council had held its first Compliance Board and first Compliance Committee in December with the agreed Action Plan in progress.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Roberts, informed Council that:

- (1) the Christmas waste collection had run smoothly and with normal collections resumed;
- (2) the first Fixed Penalty Notice for commercial bins stored on a highway had been issued and paid;
- (3) Biffa were collecting Christmas trees, without charge, up to 19 January 2024;
- (4) the 2024/25 garden waste permits would go sale from 16 January 2024; and
- (5) that on 15 January there was a presentation for District Councillors on the Biodiversity action plan.

The Portfolio Holder for Place, Councillor King, informed Council that:

- (1) he was working with officers to provide clarity in energy efficiency in old and listed buildings in respect of planning consents;
- (2) training had been provided for officers on the Net Zero DPD and training would be made available to all Councillors.
- (3) the Governments future home standards from 2025 would complement the building regulations but the anticipated gas boiler ban, for new homes, from 2025 had changed to views being sought within the consultation;
- (4) Both Warwick and Stratford were unhappy with the housing requirements for the South Warwickshire Local Plan HEDNA and therefore the appointed consultants had been asked to undertake additional work to review alternative models to the standard method and HEDNA used by other authorities; look at the new draft of NPPF published on 19 December to identify if this changed any calculations of housing need; review the HEDNA five and 20 years housing need projection including the underpinning data; and look at justification for WDC or SDC to take a different approach to the standard method and HEDNA of housing need.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Chilvers, reminded Council that it was due to set the Budget at its next meeting on 21 February 2024. He explained he was working with officers to make the report clearer for all to understand and including showing how the Business Rate Volatility Reserve provided support to the General Fund. The government settlement had not grown in line with inflation and this meant that there would be increased pressures for Councillors to consider. He thanked those who had attended the briefing on 8 January 2024 and highlighted the budget report would be considered by Cabinet on 8 February 2024.

Councillor Davison presented an update, set out at Appendix 2 to the minutes, on behalf of Portfolio Holder for Transformation, who had given apologies for the meeting. In addition to this, he reported that Levels 3 and 4 of Riverside House were now closed that would result in reduced business rate costs to the Council but that the full savings from Riverside House could not be realised until the sale to Homes England was completed which was subject to conditions including that planning permission for the site was granted.

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership, Councillor Davison, informed Council that:

1. he welcomed the initiative with Masters students from UCL using public information on how the Council reduce carbon emissions while improving sustainable well-being;
2. he had circulated to all Councillors, Appendix 3 to the minutes, the Response from Department of Energy Security and Net Zero in response to his letter to the Prime Minister regarding net zero pledge by the Government; and
3. the list of formal Council projects and Portfolio Holders for them would be circulated by the end of the following week.

68. **Questions to the Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holders**

Councillor Barton asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services if he could provide more detail about commercial waste being stored on council land without permission.

In response, Councillor Roberts explained that the penalty notice had been issued to a company using highway bins for commercial waste.

Councillor Barton asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Assets if he could explain what the Council was waiting for the regulator to come back to the Council on.

With the permission of the Chairman, the Deputy Chief Executive explained that the Council was waiting for judgement based on the evidence submitted, but the Council was not waiting for them before implementing action plan. A follow up meeting was due with the regulator on 16 January. Following this meeting the regulator could seek more information but once the decision had been made by the regulator, Councillors would be informed.

Councillor Barton asked the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, Leisure and Environment for update on the fly infestation in Whitnash.

In response, Councillor Sinnott explained that this was now an odour and noise issue in addition to the fly infestation. An update meeting with residents had taken place but the final source was not confirmed. The Environment Agency were the lead agency, and they had two sources in mind.

Councillor Falp asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Assets how much of the action plan was in the public domain.

In response, Councillor Wightman explained that the report from Penningtons was in public domain and the Council had written to all tenants to make them aware of the initial non-compliance. The action plan was on website as part of agenda for Asset Compliance Committee.

Councillor Falp asked the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, Leisure and Environment if the Council would be having a briefing from the Director of Public Health, on their Annual Report, which this year focussed on Breaking the Silence on Domestic Abuse; and also briefings on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) on aging population; and the new Lillington health hub.

In response, Councillor Sinnott agreed to invite the Director of Public Health to arrange a briefing and would look to get the information shared on JSNA and Health Hub.

Councillor Redford asked the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, Leisure and Environment if they could pass on thanks of the Council to team behind the flooding response; and if the District Council could look at holding a stock of sandbags that could be deployed to Parish/Town Councils as required during flood events.

In response, Councillor Sinnott explained that he would pass on the thanks for the Council. In respect of sandbags, including in response to a supplementary question, explained that there were a number of challenges with using these and District Council did not hold a stock but he was willing to have a discussion on the support that could be provided.

Councillor Redford asked the Portfolio Holder for Place, if he could explain what 20-minute neighbourhood design was, and what was the intention of protecting the existing identities of communities how will you do this.

In response Councillor King explained that 15 or 20 minute neighbourhoods were where all main services, for example shopping and other local facilities, were within 15 or 20 minute walk from housing, to help people engage in active travel rather than having to drive all the time.

In response to supplementary question on this point he explained that Kings Hill was under current local plan and not the future local plan, so it would be hard to make this requirement. However, going forward the aim was to do as much as possible.

In response to the question regarding retaining the identity of existing communities, Councillor King, explained this was about retaining current communities' identity, rather than merging them into urban sprawl.

Councillor Redford asked the Leader if the Covent Garden car park was one of the potential sleeper projects, and what the long-term plan was for the site.

In response, Councillor Davison explained that this site was at feasibility study stage and would come to Cabinet in due course. Covent Garden was not within the possible sleeper category because work needed to be done with its links to the transformation programme for Leamington Town Centre. An example of a possible sleeper project could be the proposed bridge over River Leam by the Pump Rooms to Spencer Yard but this was also subject to feasibility study.

Councillor Payne asked the Portfolio Holder for Resources if he could provide an update on the plans within the proposed budget to provide cost of living support for residents within Warwick District?

In response Councillor Chilvers explained there were three components in cost of living within the budget last year:

- (1) the Council tax reduction scheme, which was subject to public consultation, was proposed to remain;
- (2) the discretionary housing payment top up, that was previously included as a one off, had been brought forward in November as a recurring feature in the budget; and
- (3) then there were the one-off cost of living additional support grants. The Council supported community centres and hubs, as well as CAB, with a one-off grant to food bank. This one-off grant would need to be considered against the other competing priorities for the finance available.

Councillor K Dickson asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, if the contract with Biffa allowed for collection of sharps from pharmacies, because pharmacies in Kenilworth no longer accepted used sharps boxes?

In response, Councillor Roberts explained that the Council had contacted pharmacies to understand the position. They had responded to say they were not providing the service to customers, but contractors were ready on request and available to all pharmacies.

Councillor K Dickson asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Assets if he was aware that hotels in district were housing asylum seekers and that one was rumoured to be closing next week?

In response Councillor Wightman explained he was not aware and would investigate.

Councillor Boad asked the Portfolio Holder for Place that, with the changes to the NPPF including that if granted on appeal, when members have gone against officers recommendation, a sanction could be issued against councillors, was there going to be training for all Councillors on this?

Councillor King was not aware of the sanction, but officers were assessing the updates and assured he would follow this point up.

Councillor Boad asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Assets for how many sheltered housing units the Council had, and what Christmas entertainment provision was available there.

In response, Councillor Wightman did not have exact figure for the number of sheltered accommodation units, and would look into the details of entertainment provided.

Councillor Milton asked the Portfolio Holder for Place if he could provide an update on the marketing of the employment land allocated in east of Kenilworth development.

In response, Councillor King explained that the employment land was being marketed by the developer's land agents Savills. This Council and Warwickshire County Council were working with them to actively market site. The Council was aware offers had been made for the site and discussions were ongoing. In response to a supplementary Councillor King agreed to look into providing assurance that the employment allocated land could not be reallocated to use for housing.

Councillor Matecki asked the Portfolio Holder for Resources if he would like to revise his position from the previous Council and Budget Review Group because it was clear that WCC instigated conversation on parking fees and not WDC.

In response Councillor Chilvers stated it was important to work together on parking issues, and he was keen to facilitate these discussions. Councillor Chilvers recognised the efforts of WCC and its relevant Portfolio Holder, and that Councillor Roberts was looking to review parking costs and he looked forward to working as close as possible with WCC.

In response to a supplementary question, he explained he had tried to facilitate contact and this had not got as far as he would have liked.

Councillor Tangri asked the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, Leisure and Environment, if they could provide a brief overview of the WDC response to the flood event earlier this year; explain if the existing plans, including communications, were effective; if any changes need to be made to the plans; and if any additional money was required.

In response Councillor Sinnott explained the current plans were effective and this came through continual refinement and testing. He provided an outline of the formal response to the emergency explain the Council was now working on the clear up, including street cleaning and gulley cleaning, working with partners. For those properties that were reported as flooded, WDC were taking away bulky objects to aid in the recovery process. There would be a formal post incident debrief for lessons to be learned. There was additional expenditure but because there were over 50 properties confirmed flooded in Warwickshire, there would be some grant funding available to contribute towards the costs.

Councillor Cron asked the Portfolio Holder Housing & Assets, that in respect of Leyes Lane and Rouncil Lane housing developments, to inform Council if the houses on either these sites would include dwellings to be passivhaus standard and what percentage of these would be affordable. If not, how could the Council achieve the aims within its Corporate Strategy?

In response Councillor Wightman explained that the Cabinet were yet to determine the development approach for both Leyes Lane and Rouncil Lane sites. The Council was very ambitious with its Corporate Strategy in making new houses an exemplar of sustainable building and looking to increase affordable houses. These were two competing areas of Housing and Climate Emergencies. The administration was working on defining what an exemplar meant, and passivhaus was one of a number of models.

Councillor Day asked the Leader how the Council would look to address mitigation for climate change within the resources the Council had within the climate emergency fund.

In response, the Leader explained that in respect of adaptation, using flooding as an example, where no single body had responsibility for flooding, was one of the bits the biodiversity action plan being in place could support. For example, how the Council could support meadows and other similar habitats. There was good work that households and businesses could do to help mitigate flooding and he agreed to look at publicising this. The Leader also explained he was looking at holding a public engagement session around climate change or biodiversity in the next 12 months.

Councillor Noonan asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood if there was the potential for a temporary bridge to replace the closed bridge over the River Leam at Newbold Comyn.

In response, Councillor Roberts explained that the potential for a temporary bridge was not being progressed as this would require the same permissions to work in the river as a permanent solution. The Council was waiting for the Environment Agency to grant permission for works on a permanent solution, at the same time plans were at a design and planning stage.

Councillor Phillips asked the Leader why the WDC cyber audit was not completed and what action had he taken on this matter.

In response, the Leader explained he had received assurance by the Portfolio Holder that the audit would be completed by the next meeting of the Audit & Standards Committee and this would be more than just a tick box exercise with a briefing for Councillors. In response to a supplementary question, he provided assurance he would follow this audit up.

Councillor Phillips asked the Portfolio Holder for Place if he could confirm that consultation with Parish Councils would take place before the Council selected the preferred sites options for the Local Plan.

In response Councillor King explained he understood this was pencilled in and provided assurance the Council would consult with them.

69. **Cabinet Report**

It was proposed by Councillor Chilvers and seconded by Councillor Davison that the recommendations from the Cabinet, of 6 December 2023 in respect of the Quarter 2 Budget Update 2023/24. be approved.

Resolved that the recommendation from the Cabinet of 6 December 2023 be approved.

70. **Appointments to Committee & Outside Bodies**

It was proposed by Councillor Davison, seconded by Councillor King and

Resolved that Councillor Yellapragada be appointed to the Asset Compliance Committee.

71. **Public & Press**

The Chairman proposed, it was seconded by Councillor Davison and

Resolved that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

72. **Confidential Cabinet Report**

The Council considered the Confidential recommendation from the Cabinet meeting on 6 December 2023, that sought approval for the associated costs to enable the Purchase of Eighty Two Dwellings at The Asps, Banbury Road, Warwick.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Wightman, Seconded by Councillor Kennedy and

Resolved that the confidential Cabinet report of 6 December 2023, be approved.

73. **Common Seal**

It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Davison, and

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

(The meeting ended at 7.55pm)

CHAIRMAN
21 February 2024

Statement from the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Assets

Sheltered Schemes over the Christmas period

In the run up to Christmas the Lifeline Team Leaders along with the Sheltered Living Officers embarked on a weekly timetable of events for our sheltered schemes, one sheltered scheme is currently under refurbishment, so the residents were catered for and entertained by the contractor Seddons. On each scheme a 3-week programme was drawn up including a Fish and Chip lunch, Sandwiches and a raffle and a full Christmas dinner provided by Warwick District Council and the team who support the residents all year round to live independently. The residents enjoyed the variety of food and entertainment provided. The Team Leaders were the hostesses with the mostess assisting the Sheltered Living Officers serving the meals and running the raffle. Tenants enjoyed the meals and entertainment provided, some of the comments received were:

- 'Thank you so much, it was lovely to have a nice meal surrounded by people as it does get lonely on my own'.
- 'Could have done with a glass of wine but apart from that I have thoroughly enjoyed myself'.
- 'Food was lovely and the servers were even lovelier' (our own Lifeline Team Leaders)

A great job was done by the team to provide the meals, service, entertainment and the organisation in the background to provide our tenants with hopefully a lovely run up to the Christmas period. Each event was on average attended by 20 tenants from the scheme, so everyone was welcomed and included if they wanted to be.

Lifeline over Christmas period.

Lifeline continued going over the Christmas period whilst the Council as a whole was taking a well-earned break. Lifeline dealt with 1559 calls over the period answering 98% of them within 60 seconds whilst the council was closed, this includes calls from other council's out of hours services as well, so no mean feat.

Luckily Warwick District Council reopened before the flooding so that relevant departments were in place to deal with the flooding issues, however the team were on hand should they receive any calls. Lifeline continued to respond to emergencies and events as they happened over the period and in one afternoon one member of the team had to visit 3 emergency response calls including to assist the officer driving of one of our cars which was stuck in the mud, so he could attend to one of our customers. Luckily, we had the AA on hand to go and rescue him!

Lifeline do this work, day in and day out and our HEROS service is becoming more and more of a service that is a Unique Selling Point for our Lifeline control centre as we can go assist with low level interventions with customers or our own tenants within 1 hours drive of our offices at Acorn Court. This can sometimes save a call to the ambulance service for a fall with an uninjured customer or where we can simply provide reassurance and assistance saving calls to our control room and friends/family and comfort them whilst an ambulance has been called.

Lifeline is there 24 hours a day week in and week out to look after not only the most vulnerable in society but also to look after our own tenants and residents in other council areas out of hours and is very proud to do so.

SWEP

The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) has been activated on three separate occasions since the weather turned colder towards the end of November 2023. The temperatures are monitored twice daily and if the temperature is forecast to drop to zero degrees or less the SWEP is activated. When determining if SWEP is activated, we also

take into account the wind chill factor which even if the actual temperature remains above zero degrees, but the wind chill factor takes it below, the SWEP is activated. Once it is agreed to activate the SWEP, notification is sent to partners, agencies and relevant colleagues including the Out Of Hours service (lifeline), should someone present later in the evening.

The SWEP was activated on:
24th November to 3rd December – 6 nights
5th December 2023 - 1 night
5th January 2023 – on going.

Any approaches during SWEP are placed in B&B accommodation with providers we work with on a regular basis, so they understand the needs of this client group. In addition, the Night Shelter is open on Friday and Saturday nights where some Rough Sleepers will present.

We also work closely with P3 outreach service who do undertake visits to known locations of Rough Sleepers once SWEP is activated to ensure they are aware of the availability of accommodation.

In addition, a Winter Plan leaflet was put together. This contains extensive information on the support available from different organisations and was distributed to the agencies before the Christmas period.

Temporary Accommodation.

During the week leading up to the Christmas break 10 households were placed in TA of which 7 were single households and 3 were families. All families were placed in WDC stock, and the use of B&B accommodation was avoided.

Over the Christmas period there were 10 family households in Temporary Accommodation with a total of 12 children. Nine families were in WDC stock, and one family was placed in a self-contained furnished apartment. Again, no family households spent time in a B&B or hotel over the Christmas period.

For the period leading up to the Christmas break we were successful in moving seven family households out of temporary accommodation into more suitable accommodation.

Those clients housed in TA receive support from the Housing Support Workers based within the dedicated Temporary Accommodation team. They will normally visit on a weekly basis to support the clients, make referrals to other support agencies where needed and help to prepare the clients to move on to more appropriate accommodation.

Some of the comments received by the team:

"your officer has been so supportive, and I don't know how I would have got through this without her."

" We really appreciate all the support you have provided; we are very grateful for your help."

"Thank you for being there when things have been very difficult. We are so excited to be moving to our own home."

Statement from the Portfolio Holder for Transformation

1) Microsoft ESA

Following approval by cabinet, the procurement of a replacement agreement commenced as planned, using Crown Commercial Services eProcurement portal.

This involved an open competition where any provider on the framework capable of meeting the council's needs could bid – it's as close as possible to an open market tender, within the protections of a Crown Commercial Services framework.

We did have alternative direct award options available (which was utilised in 2020), but we believed the open competition was significant to ensuring we secured value for money on what is ICT's most expensive contract.

Bids we're evaluated on the basis of cost, technical capability and social value; the latter covering subjects such as tackling economic inequality, equality and diversity and environmental sustainability – all in line with the council's own objectives.

Responses were received and ICT have already evaluated these. We will shortly be notifying the companies involved who the winner is so at this point we can't disclose the name or price (an update will be provided in due course).

The winning provider does have the capability to meet all our needs and the procurement is within the budget envelope previously approved by cabinet. The contract will be fully operational before the existing agreement comes to an end, securing all services for the Council, as planned.

2) ICT Migration to SF1

Before Christmas, ICT successfully kitted out SF1 with workstations for staff and migrated most of our production server environment away from Riverside House. This resulted in zero downtime during the move, and no disruption to services for the public.

Levels three and four of RSH have also been completely cleared of ICT kit, allowing the Council to claim business rates relief on the unused part of the site.

There are still three significant projects for ICT to complete before RSH can be shutdown entirely:

a) The migration of Telephony

This is well underway and proceeding exactly as planned. It is expected that our telephone lines will migrate to the cloud within the next month, and on a day-to-day basis, staff and customers will see no difference.

Initially, staff will continue to use Jabber for telephone calls, but in time, after RSH has been closed, this will switch to Teams. The Council's contact centre telephony system is also being migrated to the Cloud and will be completed by the end of February.

The Council's legacy telephony hardware has already been migrated to SF1 as a contingency. This will ensure that no matter what happens, our telephony will not delay the full closure of RSH.

b) Physical Server Moves

There are a very small number of servers which are still at RSH and need to move to SF1. These are physical boxes that could not be moved without causing some form of disruption. Plans are in place to move them over a weekend in late January, so as not to delay the closure of RSH.

c) Strip Out

This cannot be entirely completed until after Customer Services move to the Pump Rooms. However, plans are already in place to ensure a swift and efficient strip out of all remaining ICT kit at RSH, as soon as the building is no longer needed.

3) Pump Rooms

Work at the Pump Rooms is progressing well. Our contractors have completely stripped out the old shop and work is underway on the refurbishment.

A week of delay was introduced to the programme whilst the outcomes of an asbestos survey were completed, but our contractors have tried to pull some of this time back by recommencing work after Christmas sooner than originally planned. The flooding around the Pump Rooms did impact on operations slightly but it is expected that the time lost will be recovered. Overall, we are still on track for completion in March.

The space has been completely boarded up by the contractors to keep the site safe and information hoardings have been prepared to ensure people know what is happening. The boarding has not significantly impacted on light levels within the Main Pump Rooms reception, as most of the illumination came from the artificial sources present.

The next major activity is to order the furniture for the centre, and work toward this is currently underway. We have made a small number of changes to the design to improve accessibility and flow, which ultimately will be of benefit to family groups or customers with accessibility issues. These include the creation of a semi-private meeting space and larger meeting pods which can accommodate more people and are more accessible.

We remain within the allocated budget for the project (without using the contingency) and there are no significant issues to report.

4) Customer Services at RSH

Customer Services remain at Riverside House following the move of most services to Saltisford. They are accompanied by a small number of staff from Housing, Human Resources and Assets.

The team are using this time to further develop and test their operating procedures as the situation they are experiencing is very similar to what they will see at the Pump Rooms. To date there have been no significant issues, but the absence has already highlighted a small number of operational tweaks that need to be made.