

WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 21 September 2016, at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.05pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Knight (Chair); Councillors Barrott, Boad, Butler, Mrs Cain, Coker, Cooke, Davison, Day, Edgington, Mrs Gallagher, Gill, Miss Grainger, Mrs Hill, Howe, Illingworth, Margrave, Mobbs, Morris, Naimo, Parkins, Phillips, Quinney, Mrs Redford, Shilton, Stevens, Weed and Whiting.

32. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ashford, Bromley, Mrs Bunker, Cain, Cross, Davies, Doody, Mrs Evetts, Mrs Falp, Gifford, Mrs Grainger, Harrington, Heath, Mann, Murphy and Rhead.

33. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

34. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 10 August 2016 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

35. **Communications & Announcements**

The Chair informed Council that John Haughton, a member of the Council's engineering team in Housing and Property Services, had passed away earlier this month after a long illness, and that she would be attending the funeral to represent the Council. Councillors paid their respects to John Haughton. The Chair led a minute's silence as a mark of respect.

The Chair informed the Council that there was no business to be considered under Item 5 Petitions, Item 6 Notices of Motion, or Item 7 Public Submissions.

36. **Leader's and Portfolio Holders' Statements**

The Leader, Councillor Mobbs, informed Council that he had received the unemployment figures for Warwick District and while they made for positive reading, the Council was working on getting everyone into work.

The Leader informed Council that he had held a meeting with Margot James MP to discuss the Whitley South Development, with a focus on the importance of the Local Plan and respecting its contents.

The Leader informed Council that he had attended a Sikh Ladies meeting and talked through the issues they had within the local community. The members had agreed to collate these and send them to the Leader, who would then pass them to the relevant Ward Councillor or Portfolio Holder. The Leader commented that he was pleased that the issues had related to tree and access issues rather than hate crimes.

The Leader informed Council that it was National Hate Crime Week from 8 to 15 October and that he would be sending them details of events taking place that week.

Councillor Phillips, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Property Services, reminded Council that it was a member of the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership, which administered the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme across the region. In March 2016, WDC made a commitment to the Partnership to support the resettlement of up to five refugee families in the district.

Since March 2016, the Council had been working in partnership with Warwickshire County Council, who would manage the funding on behalf of the Home Office, neighbouring Warwickshire authorities and other agencies, to prepare for the arrival of the families. This work had included:

- 1) Contacting local authorities that had already housed refugees to learn what had and hadn't been successful.
- 2) Identifying schools and GP surgeries with spare capacity.
- 3) Identifying suitable places of worship.
- 4) Mapping transport links.
- 5) Mapping support facilities such as language lessons, translation, counselling, advocacy and legal services, for families to access as appropriate.

A factsheet had been produced and translated into Arabic, which would help families to select the areas in which they wanted to live and provided them with further local information about the area to which they were being relocated.

The West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership had not, to date, called on Warwickshire councils to house any refugees, but that was about to change. A provisional request to find homes for a number of families arriving in November had been made to Stratford, Rugby, and Nuneaton and Bedworth Councils. It was expected that Warwickshire and North Warwickshire Councils would be approached for arrivals in January or February 2017.

Details of prospective families and their specific needs would be made available to the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership by the Home Office. The Migration Partnership would then work with each council to confirm the types of property available and the availability of schooling and medical provision.

This would allow families to be assigned a suitable home before they left Syria. If the conditions were not right for a family to be settled in a particular council area, the Migration Partnership would approach another council.

Families would only be allocated on the condition that properties had been secured six weeks prior to their arrival. If properties were not in place, the Home Office would not make any referrals.

Warwick District had started the process of seeking landlords who would be willing to help for the early 2017 resettlement, which had included:

- An article in the Landlords' Newsletter which has been published.
- A request for assistance sent out to all those on the Housing & Property Services landlord mailing list.
- The Landlords' Forum being used to promote our request for assistance.

- A meeting with Warwick Baptist Church to see if an offer of assistance could stretch to providing suitable accommodation.

Discussions were therefore at an early stage with landlords and it was currently too soon to be specific as to how many properties would be made available.

The programme was not just a tick box exercise, but aimed to fulfil a quota for the families to be as self-sufficient as possible, which was aided by them having a direct and potentially long term relationship with their landlord, and by making sure that any families relocated into Warwick District were fully supported and welcomed to homes, not just houses.

Councillor Coker, Portfolio Holder for Culture, highlighted to Council the recent travellers at Newbold Comyn, which had resulted in the Police attending the location on several occasions. He offered his thanks and congratulations to the officers at Newbold Comyn Leisure Centre for their professional approach to delivering the service during this time.

Councillor Coker informed Council that a member of the public had suffered a heart attack while playing Badminton at St Nicholas Park Leisure Centre, Officers had used the onsite defibrillator and the member of public had regained consciousness prior to the ambulance arriving. The Council had been informed that the individual was now recovering well.

Councillor Coker informed Council that the Spa Centre had reopened following the summer recess, and there was a wide range of events taking place over the next few months. He reminded Councillors that it was by selling tickets that we could continue to have this good facility.

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

Councillor Naimo asked the Portfolio Holder for Culture for an update with regard to Phase 2 Leisure Options. Councillor Naimo understood that Kenilworth Town Council had received information about this and that whilst the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had asked for information on this, it had come off the work programme. Councillor Naimo also asked if it was correct that the Council intended to let the management contract for the Leisure Centres before the Phase 2 plans had been agreed?

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Councillor Coker, explained that discussions had taken place with Kenilworth Town Council on what they thought might be acceptable. Proposals on Phase 2 would be brought forward in due course, but at present the Council was considering its own options. He reminded Council that it had approved the plan to let the management contract prior to Phase 2 being approved. In addition, Phase 2 would be dependent on a number of third parties and if the Council waited for these to conclude their plans it would significantly delay the contract being let. This did not provide a barrier to the contract but would form part of the negotiations.

In response to a question from Councillor Naimo, Councillor Coker confirmed that the firms bidding for the contract were aware of Phase 2 and the implications for this in negotiations.

Councillor Barrott asked the Portfolio Holder for Culture if the detailed papers on Leisure Options he had promised for Councillors were available?

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Culture confirmed that he did not know but would find out.

Councillor Barrott asked the Leader if, following a number of comments from people about the merits of unitary authority, including the Conservative MP for Warwick & Leamington, he could share his thoughts on such a proposal and agree to a debate on this subject matter at Council in the very near future?

In response, the Leader explained that the proposal was not on this Council's agenda. Other leaders in Warwickshire agreed with this, including Labour-controlled Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council and Ruby Borough Council. There was a need to look at the future of West Midlands Combined Authority in light of a new Prime Minister and the money announced for Dudley, Wolverhampton and Birmingham but not here. He concluded by explaining that his ambition was to make Warwick District one of the best Council's in the Sub-Region while maintaining a surplus and not reducing services.

Councillor Barrott asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services if he was aware of the continual work of Councillors in chasing officers in his service area, because the Landscape group were not fulfilling the contract they had been awarded. This included areas such as grass cutting and litter picking in destination parks such as Victoria Park. When officers were contacted, they had agreed that the contract was not being fulfilled. Therefore, he asked what action the Portfolio Holder would be taking to ensure that the Landscape Group fulfilled its obligations under the contract?

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Shilton, agreed with the issues raised by Councillor Barrott and explained that he had attended meetings with his Head of Service and the Managing Director of the Landscape Group. He informed Council that the Landscape group had already been fined for not meeting its obligations under the contract and they had been warned that if the service did not improve, there would be further fines. In addition, the Council had increased the level of monitoring, and he asked that Councillors report any issues with this contractor to him so that appropriate action could be taken.

Councillor Barrott asked the Leader (in the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Development) for an update on the proposed allocation of Gypsy and Traveller Sites within Warwick District. It was appreciated that as part of the Local Plan, the Council had stated that it would produce a DPD to allocating sites, and it believed this would be sufficient for the inspector.

In response, the Leader explained that the Local Plan had an allocated site and that the rules around this had been relaxed, but a more detailed statement on what this would be made once the position was clear.

Councillor Quinney asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Property Services if the detailed work he had outlined earlier in the meeting had provided opportunities for this District to house more than the five refugee families this Council had previously committed to?

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Housing & property Services explained that at this time it did not because the Council was only given six weeks' notice of their arrival.

Councillor Quinney asked the Leader (in the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Development) why he felt it was right that the Council should not adopt the DCLG minimum space standards for houses, because these could help ensure high quality standards of living and help prevent a problem that the area might or might not have, but the Council would not know if there was a problem if it did not measure against these standards? He also asked when it would be possible to have a response to the six questions he had asked Councillor Cross on this matter?

In response, the Leader explained that as he understood it/in his understanding, this was about measuring space within a house, which was not a consideration for planning applications. Therefore, to introduce this would require more resources and would increase the cost of service delivery. He agreed to talk to Councillor Cross about this issue and the outstanding reply to the other six questions.

Councillor Davison asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance at what stage the profit share for the Leisure Service provider would be confirmed?

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Whiting, explained his understanding that an agreement had been reached and anything above that level would be on a sliding scale to ensure increased income for the Council. He reminded Council that understanding the cost element of delivering the contract would be key and that this would be site specific. This was confirmed by Councillor Coker, Portfolio Holder for Culture.

Councillor Barrott asked the Portfolio Holder for Culture if he could provide an update on the potential funding from Sports England for improvements to the Leisure Centres?

The Portfolio Holder for Culture explained that he could not provide an update at this time, but even if an offer had been made the Council could only make an announcement once an agreement had been signed.

38. **Report of the Executive**

The confidential report of the Executive meeting on 27 July 2016 was proposed, duly seconded and

Resolved that the report of the Executive meeting on 27 July 2016, be approved.

39. **Statement of Accounts 2015/16**

Council considered a report from Finance that sought approval for its Statement of Accounts for 2015/16.

The accounts had been closed in respect of the financial year 2015/16 and the outturn duly reported to the Executive in June 2016. The unaudited Statement was presented to the Finance and Audit Scrutiny Committee in July 2016.

As part of their role in corporate governance, Councillors had an important role in overseeing the framework of internal control of the Council. There was a

statutory requirement to have the Statement of Accounts approved by 30 September 2016.

The Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee had recommended that the Statement of Accounts 2015/16 be approved.

The Head of Finance had circulated minor amendments and clarifications at the Council meeting. Subject to these, it was proposed by Councillor Whiting, duly seconded and

Resolved that the Statement of Accounts 2015/16, be approved.

40. **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 item by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the relevant paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

41. **Confidential Executive Report**

The confidential reports of the Executive meeting on 27 July 2016 were proposed, duly seconded and

Resolved that the Executive reports of 27 July 2016, be approved.

42. **Common Seal**

It was

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

(The meeting ended at 7.04 pm)

CHAIR
16 November 2016