

WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Warwick District Council held at Shire Hall, Warwick, on Wednesday 27 November 2024, at 6.00pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Margrave (Chairman); Councillors Adkins, Aizlewood, Armstrong, Barton, Boad, Browne, Chilvers, Collins, Cron, Davidson, Davison, K Dickson, R Dickson, Dray, Falp, B Gifford, Gorman, Hales, D Harrison, Kenedy, King, Kohler, Luckhurst, Matecki, Melrose, Milton, Payne, Redford, Roberts, Russell, Sinnott, Syson, Tangri, C Wightman, P Wightman and Williams.

45. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Billiald, Day, C Gifford, Phillips, Rosu, Sullivan, and Yellapragada.

46. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

46a. **Urgent Item – Minutes**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 2 October 2024 were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the amendment to Minute 37, in the recorded vote, to include Councillor Boad and Councillor Davison voting in favour.

47. **Communications & Announcements**

The Chairman stated that they had attended 11 functions since the previous Council meeting on 2 October 2024, including the Civic Reception at the Glasshouse for Parish and Town Councils. The events were well received and were useful for those who attended.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Melrose (previously Councillor J Harrison) and offered congratulations on behalf of Council for her recent wedding.

The Chairman thanked officers for providing the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) structure chart to all Councillors. The Chairman reminded Members that this was confidential and not to be shared externally.

The Chairman stated that there would be no business to consider under agenda Item 5 – Petitions.

48. **Notices of Motion**

The Council considered a Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Dray and seconded by Councillor Tangri that sought to ensure the Council continued to support its fair, equal, and diverse communities, along with its commitment to resolving hate crime.

Councillor Davison addressed the Council on this item on behalf of Councillor Billiald.

Resolved that

- (1) as part of the Events Strategy, officers consider further opportunities for promoting inclusivity and cultural awareness with its Event Organisers; and
- (2) Council continues to work with Community Leaders to promote cultural and religious events and demonstrate a wider understanding of the meaning behind them.

49. Leader and Portfolio Holders' Statements

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Councillor Williams, provided an update on the work which had been done by the Climate Change Team.

As part of the initiative to help households reduce their energy costs, soft market testing had been initiated to appoint a provider for a new retrofit lending and grant scheme which was a significant step forward in launching the new scheme.

Following Cabinet's approval in September 2024, a relationship with Heart of England Community energy had been developed to assist the installation of rooftop solar systems across Warwick District's corporate buildings. The detailed design and planning for this initiative had been progressing well. Delivery for this initiative was scheduled to commence in Spring 2025.

Work was underway to bring forward an exemplar housing scheme for sites at Leyes Lane and Rouncil Lane, in Kenilworth. The process of appointing consultants, to advise on possibilities, with expertise in house design with low carbon energy was underway.

A thermal imaging camera loan scheme had been launched which invited community groups across Warwick District to participate in helping private residents identify areas in their home where energy efficient improvements could be made.

A report was scheduled to be presented at Cabinet in December 2024 which would outline the next steps for public consultation on the proposed Abbey Fields cycle route.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets, Councillor Adkins, explained that there had been two key developments within the housing portfolio. Officers had worked hard on a housing safety action plan following the regulator's consumer grading of C3 (Complaint level three). The regulators, who had met with officers, had been closely monitoring this. The regulators were pleased with the progress that had been made and the continuing transparency of officers' work and focused efforts.

Councillor Adkins reminded Council of the new housing strategy that was being developed, significant work had been completed in relation to the housing development aspect of the strategy. The objective was to address the dual challenges of the housing crisis and the climate crisis. Cabinet was engaged in discussions focusing on the importance of achieving equilibrium between the housing and climate crisis as critical priorities.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood, Councillor Roberts, made Council aware that:

- a) in October 2024, WDC launched soft plastics collection in curb side recycling bins, and this had received positive responses from both residents and partners at Sherborne Recycling. Further detailed recycling figures would be provided once they were available;
- b) work had been ongoing to bring waste calls back in-house in 2024. This intended to save money and provide a better service for residents. This work was confirmed to be on track;
- c) there were upcoming changes to bin collection dates in line with the Christmas break. The changes had already been advertised on the WDC website and on WDC social media. It was noted that further communication would be provided on local papers, on bin tags, and leaflets for all households in Warwick District;
- d) the benefits of signing up to the WDC app included notifications being sent out for bin collections;
- e) Glendale play area, in Kenilworth, was set to be upgraded in the new year (2025);
- f) a report would be considered at the following week's Cabinet meeting to upgrade Mill Gardens and Castle Farm play areas with work looking to commence in 2025; and
- g) the footbridge connecting Radford Road to Newbold Comyn was scheduled to be installed as of 28 November 2024.

The Portfolio Holder for Place, Councillor King, explained that the drafting on the revised advice on windows in listed buildings and conservation areas was now complete. The final version of the leaflet was being prepared. The revised advice was to introduce increased flexibility into the consideration of proposals to replace windows, particularly on less prominent facades, for example, side and rear elevations. This would be subject to achieving criteria and the use of heritage style double glazing, there would be increased scope for the updating of windows within listed buildings and conservation areas.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Chilvers, made Council aware that:

- a) at the next Cabinet meeting, the new pre-Christmas budget would be presented. This was designed to give Members an early insight into the budget position and direction of travel in the general fund, as well as an MTFS update. This was not the finished article but was instead used to scope out some of the unknowns and the work still to be done;
- b) an all-Member meeting would take place on 13 January 2025. The finance settlement from central government would be received by this time. This would provide clearer understanding of how the Council would work towards financial sustainability;
- c) the 2022/2023 accounts were published in draft form on 31 October 2024. Thanks were given to the Head of Finance and the Finance Team for the work that went into this. The accounts for 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 would be put forward at the next Audit and Standards Committee meeting, scheduled for 12 December 2024;
- d) the accounts were recognised as disclaimed alongside other local authorities. The audit backstop dates would enable focus to start on more timely accounts with

the new auditor taking over in 2025. This would greatly assist with financial monitoring and offering greater assurances concerning WDC's financial position; and

- e) the Public Procurement Act would come into force in February 2025. This legislation was considered significant, local authorities would be required to publish more information about all aspects of the tendering and contract management process. It was part of WDC's corporate strategy to improve the planning of the Council's procurement cycle and management of WDC's contract. The changes in the Act were considered an opportunity to help provide part of the framework for the change that was desired.

The Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, Leisure and Environment, Councillor Sinnott, stated that:

- a) in the previous Council meeting held on 2 October 2024 he had addressed Councillor Matecki as simply 'Matecki' and not 'Councillor Matecki' which he recognised was incorrect and poor behaviour;
- b) Councillor Sinnott thanked the Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer for the guidance that had come to Committee Chairs in respect of naming protocols at meetings;
- c) the Chair or Vice Chair of a Committee were appointed by the respective Committee. If Councillors had concerns about the Member undertaking these roles, these could be directed to the Chairman of the Council, the Group Leader, or Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer;
- d) a video on social media had highlighted that there was a wastewater treatment tank that was open to the elements on the Berry Polymer site. The Environment Agency (EA) had advised WDC that the tank had no conditions associated with it as part of the EA Permit to operate. WDC officers had enquired with the EA if it should have been included and were currently awaiting a response. WDC officers had wrote to the site to enquire about the use and maintenance of the tank, including the removal of sludge and scum. Officers were also scheduled to visit the site again in early December 2024 to progress with these specific enquiries; and
- e) complaints about odours continued to be received, however, the odours witnessed were predominantly away from persons homes, e.g. on the street when driving or walking past. This meant the Council were unable to progress with statutory nuisance action. The Council could only act where a nuisance was substantiated as being a significant interference of someone's home, being able to detect odour in the street could only be progressed by the EA. The EA continued to monitor the situation regarding the odour but had identified no permit breaches. WDC had no authority over the actions of the EA but were continuing to work with the EA on this issue, supplying information that had been collected when patrolling the area.

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

- a) the main reasons and envisaged benefits for the redesign of service areas were agreed by the Employment Committee, these were shown on the printed sheet provided to all Councillors;

- b) the issues regarding management of Council housing highlighted by external consultants, had led to the Regulator of Social Housing issuing a negative judgement against WDC. There was a comprehensive consumer standards improvement plan, and the service reorganisation would provide strategic focus and joined up working to deliver sustainable change and improve outcomes for tenants. Asset management, such as repairs and maintenance, would move under the same 'roof' as the Housing service and this would enable housing to have the capacity to focus on the improvement plan. Community Health and Wellbeing would move to Customer and Digital Services. Also, Private Sector Housing would move to Community Protection (the new name for Safer communities, Leisure and Environment), and so joined several complementary regulatory services. Sports and Leisure, as well as Green Spaces joined Contract Services, Car Parking, and Bereavement Services to form a more joined up Neighbourhood Services area;
- c) the housing development programme would be led by the new Strategic Director, who would also take forward WDC ambitions for low cost and low carbon energy across Warwick District, the climate change programme, biodiversity, corporate assets as well as capital and investment projects. Combining major developments with climate teams would help to deliver low cost social and affordable housing and other infrastructure;
- d) the restructuring of the Council's Senior Leadership Team was a huge opportunity and that Cabinet was confident that the service redesign, along with the energetic work by officers and Councillors to implement the improvement plan, not only effectively addressed the regulatory judgement but further improved delivery of WDC corporate strategy priorities and greatly improved the service provided to Council tenants;
- e) there was disappointment that the Programme Director for Climate Change was planning to retire. However, Councillor Davison expressed gratitude regarding the Programme Director for Climate Change providing WDC with time to find a successor who would become the Strategic Director: the selection process had started with final interviews scheduled for February 2025. Similarly, WDC hoped to have a new Head of Neighbourhood appointed in January 2025;
- f) whilst it had been mentioned to Councillor Syson that the changes in Portfolio Holder responsibilities were to be announced, there were still a few details to finalise, and it would be too befuddling to read out an equally long list. It was confirmed that this would be done at the next Council meeting on 18 December 2024; and
- g) questions on service redesign were welcome, although it was more suitable for the Chief Executive to provide answers as he had made the final decisions.

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

The Chairman provided Council with clarification of the Council procedure rules and how the item would operate.

Councillor Falp asked the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change whether the Passive House initiative was intended for WDC properties, because, when this had been tried previously on private properties, mortgage companies were reluctant to loan extra money if it added costs to the house.

In response, Councillor Williams explained that WDC were engaging with expert consultants to advise on this concern. This advice was being taken on in respect of Leyes Lane and Rouncil Lane which would be a mixture of WDC properties and private properties. Passive Houses were considered to add a premium on the value of the property. No Passive House developments were announced, instead, Passive Houses were identified as one of the approaches that were being explored for WDC sites.

Councillor Matecki asked the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, Leisure, and Environment whether they agreed with the notion that a Councillor's purpose was to serve the people of Warwick District, regardless of party politics, therefore, when the highest standards were not upheld it was customary to make an unreserved apology. Councillor Matecki questioned whether Councillor Sinnott was prepared to make a public apology accordingly.

In response, Councillor Sinnott expressed an intention to dig deeper into the leak of confidential information to the press. Councillor Sinnott also referred Councillor Matecki to his Portfolio Holder statement in which he considered himself to have addressed this question.

Councillor Matecki asked a supplementary question, requesting a yes or no answer to whether a public apology would be made. Councillor Sinnott responded by referring Councillor Matecki to his Portfolio Holder statement.

Councillor Boad asked the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change what information would be provided to tenants of WDC properties regarding thermal imaging technology. He explained that the thermal imaging would not be carried out on Council owned housing and on private housing only.

In response, Councillor Williams explained that the scheme was still coming into fruition and the technology would be available to all residents in the District which would include WDC tenants in social housing. The thermal imaging technology was intended to help residents to progress with their understanding of their properties with regards to energy efficiency. There was a large programme incoming which related to decarbonisation of social housing.

Councillor Boad asked a supplementary question concerning their interpretation that thermal imaging was not to be used on social housing resulting from the ability to act on the identified areas of energy inefficiency being less likely when compared with private properties. The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets responded by explaining that they would provide clarification on whether social housing would be included in the scheme through a written response in due course.

Councillor Boad asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood what was happening to the foil and plastic wrapping that was being recycled and whether this was being incinerated.

In response, Councillor Roberts, explained that these materials were not being incinerated when they were received at Sherborne Recycling Centre and that he could provide Councillor Boad with further information on an end-to-end journey of where the recycled materials within Warwick District ended up.

Councillor Milton asked the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership how much the replacement of the Programme Director for Climate Change with a Strategic Director would reduce the level of climate change expertise in the Senior Leadership Team.

In response, Councillor Davison explained that they were hoping to select a candidate with expertise in this area. Council had changed focus, reducing carbon emissions now focused on buildings and properties which justified the replacement since the Strategic Director would be leading on projects relating to this.

Councillor Milton asked a supplementary question requesting clarification of whether the Strategic Director would be an expert on climate change.

Councillor Davison explained that this was a comparison between an existing member of staff and a hypothetical person, making a clearer response difficult. Councillor Davison further explained that they had made balances during the recruitment process when comparing the value of technical expertise with project management expertise.

The Chief Executive added that the team below the existing Programme Director for Climate Change would remain, despite the introduction of a Strategic Director, meaning the loss of expertise was less impactful. Despite the loss of the personal commitment to climate change held by the current Programme Director for Climate Change, the focus on buildings and houses meant that a Strategic Director, who could provide expertise on this area, was considered more beneficial.

Councillor P Wightman asked the Portfolio Holder for Place for an update on the WDC owned site at Linen Street car park which remained a derelict site.

In response, Councillor King explained that the demolition framework that was set out would also cover Linen Street car park in Warwick and the buildings on the Kenilworth Schools site once decisions had been made. Linen Street, which had been closed for safety reasons, was the subject of feasibility work to determine its future use, which was highly unlikely to be as a public car park. It was much more likely to be as a site for a specialised form of housing. It was a challenging site, so it was difficult to advise on the timeline for the outcome of the feasibility work.

The demolition work had been under consideration as part of a framework with two other projects. One of which was Christine Ledger Square. The framework that had been referred to for the demolition works at Covent Garden enabled WDC to use one contract for a number of sites and so gain economies for other planned demolition works. This included the demolition of Christine Ledger Square which was close to having contracts signed. This would be followed by the removal of asbestos (36 weeks) before the main demolition works occur later in 2025.

With regards to Covent Garden, Members were reminded that the Multi Storey car park was closed in early 2023 on safety grounds. The multi storey was now subject to a planning application for its demolition. If permission was granted, the Council let a contract via a procurement framework for a contractor to demolish it late spring/early summer 2025. The intention was that the two lower ground floors would be retained and reopened as a car park temporarily while the Council decided the future of the site.

The Council had commissioned a feasibility study for the future of the site but the work on re-imagining of the Parade and rerouting of buses and delivery vehicles had an impact. Until the way forward for the Parade was clearer, the Council would be premature in considering the future of the site.

Councillor Boad asked a supplementary question seeking an update on Upper Grove Street car park, Quick fit Building, and William Wallsgrove House as sites that were

not mentioned. Councillor King responded by explaining that all sites mentioned were receiving considerable attention and reports would be brought to the next Council meeting.

Councillor K Dickson made a request to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change that the project to deliver exemplar housing included exemplar assessments of housing needs, exemplar consultation and communication with local residents and with the Town Council and the rest of WDC Councillors, and exemplar quality and speedy delivery of suitable housing for residents in Kenilworth.

In response, Councillor Williams agreed that the last formal communication was some time ago. The Council did not have control of the sites yet, so there was nothing to report. Officers had been asked to prepare a more detailed communication update in relation to these sites and information would be shared widely once available. If any residents had queries, they should be raised to Councillor Williams who would provide a personalised response.

The houses with solar panels and heat pumps that were in view in the housing developments in Kenilworth were houses that WDC had contributed to. Houses which had been bought forward by developers, who were focusing on their own short-term profit, had installed gas heating which would need to be retrofitted in the future which was going to come at a cost to the taxpayers. There was a toxic paradigm of affordable housing and housing that took a longer time to be developed. Hard work was going on behind the scenes to address the difficult challenge of bringing forward the scheme which was both carbon friendly and which provided substantial levels of affordable housing.

A well-considered and ambitious scheme was being worked on between Councillor Williams and the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets which needed to fit within the financial capacity of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The process of appointing consultants with expertise in Passive Housing was underway to offer guidance on what was feasible. Schemes that had been developed elsewhere in the country and the opportunities that the local growth initiative funding had presented WDC provided encouragement for WDC developments.

As a Council that had declared a climate emergency, WDC recognised the need to develop new housing across Warwick District and had the ambition to provide affordable low carbon and low cost houses for as many people as possible.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets added that it was important that the project was ambitious, environmentally friendly, and delivered affordable and social housing at speed. This was part of the development strategy which was being developed as part of the overall housing strategy. Once this strategy was correct with regards to its requirements, similar sites could be rolled out quicker moving forwards.

Councillor Hales explained that the Council had taken ownership of Rouncil Lane and Lays Lane making them Council Owned and highlighted inaccuracy in Councillor Williams statement.

Councillor Williams added that he believed the lease was still in place between the Multi Academy Trust and Council and that there was some waiting for the Department for Education to release it, meaning the Council had not yet taken possession of the sites.

Councillor Hales asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets for dates on the timeline of the project. Councillor Hales additionally sought clarification on the costs per month that were associated with holding the asset of Kenilworth School sites that were forward funded on the books and the servicing of this loan.

In response, Councillor Adkins explained that the timeline dates would be provided in writing, in addition to the breakdown of the costs.

Councillor Williams set the ambition that the timeline would be set out and made available by January 2025. Councillor Williams agreed with Councillor Hales that there should be a sense of urgency yet maintained that it was crucial to not sacrifice the ability to do the right thing by doing so too quickly.

Councillor Armstrong asked the Portfolio Holder for Place to confirm whether greenfield, and particularly green belt, sites were only put forward into preferred options for local plans after all other alternatives had been exhausted. This was because only land identified as grey belt should be released for development and minimising the use of greenfield sites was set out in Warwick District Council's corporate strategy.

In response, Councillor King explained that the term grey belt did not currently form part of the national planning policy because the term was instead mentioned as part of a consultation in a National Planning Policy Forum (NPPF). The government needed to review the responses to the consultation before publishing an updated NPPF which would include the term grey belt. It was premature to consider the implications of grey belt land on the South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP) as the term did not form part of the national planning policy. The application of the term grey belt was not yet confirmed. Any updates to the NPPF would be considered in due course.

The SWLP was being set up in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. National policy required Councils to demonstrate that all alternative options had been exhausted fully, the SWLP would continue to be developed within the context of this principle. Reducing the use of greenfield site was fully under force. However, all options were to be considered, including greenbelt options. They were not to be immediately dismissed to enable sufficient sustainable development.

Councillor Armstrong asked the Portfolio Holder for Place to write to the combined authority to confirm that Warwick District did not support a dual carriage way A46 link road since it did not comply with the local plan and the hierarchy set out in Warwick County Council's plan.

In response, Councillor King explained that they had sought consultation on this question and prepared a response that would be shared with Council later.

Councillor Aizlewood asked the Portfolio Holder for Place what lessons had been learnt from the criticism received on the consultation from 2022 and what community engagement was planned for the new year (2025).

In response, Councillor King explained that they had sought consultation on this question and prepared a response that would be shared with Council later.

Councillor Aizlewood also asked the Portfolio Holder for Place whether the climate emergency previously declared had now passed since all developments under the new local plan were considered harmful to the environment. Councillor Aizlewood

also asked what mitigations to minimise the damage of the proposals to the local environment had been envisaged by the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership.

In response, Councillor King explained that all development did cause damage to the environment which had to be accepted. The baseline was that for a society to move forward, development was needed. The SWLP was being developed in the context of meeting Warwick District's housing and employment needs. Growth was considered to bring positive benefits and having no growth was not an option. The SWLP was cognisant of the climate emergency. It placed environmental considerations at its heart and was underpinned by five overarching principles, one of which was a climate resilient South Warwickshire. The Carbon Development Plan Document (DPD) and the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) were produced in response to the climate emergency. These documents were adopted by Warwick District Council in May 2024, placing WDC ahead of the national curve as one of the few local authorities nationwide with a net zero policy that had been found sound.

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership provided a response to Councillor Aizlewood's first question concerning the consultation of the local plan. Councillor Davison agreed that it was difficult for residents to respond to consultations. Councillor Davison therefore explained that officers were trying to make the navigation of the consultation easier without sacrificing the volume information which needed to be included.

Councillor Aizlewood asked a supplementary question requesting clarity for engagement events on the consultation being in place for the New Year which Councillor King responded to by explaining that there were some complications involved with the consultation that were being thought through to avoid similar issues to previous consultations. An email briefing would be sent out to Councillors regarding the plans for community engagement with the consultation.

Councillor Aizlewood asked a supplementary question relating to their second question in which they asked the Portfolio Holder for Place whether the effects of embedded carbon would be addressed since the DPD and SPD that Councillor King discussed did not address this. Councillor King responded by explaining that an answer could not be immediately provided but would be once available.

Councillor Russell asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood about replacement bins and associated costs. They sought to understand whether any data had been kept for replacement bins, who had been responsible for the cause of the damage, who was responsible for the cost of the replacement, whether WDC had covered the cost of the replacement and, if so, how much the expenditure had been so far.

In response, Councillor Roberts explained that they were waiting for data to become available, once available it would be circulated to all Members.

Councillor Russell asked a supplementary question requesting that data regarding this issue would be recorded and held going forwards to which Councillor Roberts responded by confirming this.

Councillor Kohler asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets for an update on what options were being considered for William Wallsgrove House and when the decision on its future was due to be made.

In response, Councillor Adkins explained that options were currently being considered regarding the layout of the building to offer quality facilities for service

users. Cost appraisals were being assessed, meaning timelines could be better understood in due course.

Councillor Kohler stated that it had been four years since the building had closed and therefore a sense of urgency was requested.

Councillor Adkins agreed with the necessary sense of urgency and reassured Council that it was a priority that was being worked on.

Councillor Kohler asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets for an update on the latest status of the issue concerning WDC being one of the landlords mentioned by the Housing Ombudsman for repeat complaint handling failures.

In response, Councillor Adkins stated she would provide a written response in due course

Councillor Kohler asked the Portfolio Holder for Transformation what data was being monitored to assess the effectiveness of WDC's use of social media, how frequently this was being reviewed, and whether there were any plans to review the mix of platforms that were being used.

In response, Councillor Melrose explained that performance across all marketing and communications was monitored monthly. The communication performance status could be circulated to all Councillors at their request. Each project had a bespoke campaign and therefore performance was assessed for projects individually. Areas that were assessed during the measurement of social media performance included the number of shares, reactions, views, and the amount of traffic driven to the website resulting from posts. Such analysis assists the marketing and communication team to identify frequently asked questions which could be answered on the website.

Councillor Melrose reminded Council of the social media platforms that Warwick District Council used which included Facebook, X (formally Twitter), Instagram, Threads, YouTube, and LinkedIn. The use of the different platforms was being reviewed based on their popularity and appropriateness for projects.

Councillor Kohler responded by requesting the option to occasionally opt-in to receive emails with the stats relating to social media performance. Councillor Kohler expressed his appreciation for the review of social media platforms as other government administrations had recently stopped using X. He requested an increased use of Instagram when attempting to contact younger members of the District, particularly students. Councillor Melrose stated that this would be taken into consideration.

Councillor Payne asked the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, Leisure, and Environment what funding was being provided at the two outreach positions at Citizens Advice Warwickshire and whether a criterion could be added to the existing performance criteria attached to the funding to better capture pockets of rural poverty. He explained that the people of Cubbington were struggling with the cost of living and requested that support should be flexible and adaptable to suit the needs of local areas.

In response, Councillor Sinnott explained that a paper would be coming to Cabinet in due course addressing this concern. There would be £200,000 over two years to continue to tackle the cost-of-living crisis. The purpose of the programme was to be

mobile; all areas were to be attended which would incorporate villages and thus pockets of rural poverty.

Councillor Payne asked a supplementary question, clarifying their request for an additional criterion to be added which was accountability to backbench Councillors.

Councillor Sinnott responded by explaining that the measure of success for the programme would be based on offering the widest possible spread of support. The project would follow needs where most wanted but ultimately be responsive to all communities.

The Chief Executive added that the additional criterion requested by Councillor Payne would not be possible. The service would be responsive to Councillors if they identified areas of particular need, but it would not be possible to hold accountability to Councillors as a criterion legally, this therefore needed to be addressed differently.

Councillor Kennedy addressed the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, Leisure, and Environment when requesting that asylum seekers assigned to Warwick District were kept safe and offered services and support.

In response, Councillor Sinnott recognised the importance of addressing concerns associated with asylum seekers and reflected on the Council being saddened by asylum seekers who had risked their lives to get to the UK. Councillor Sinnott acknowledged that although the main responsibility for asylum seekers lies with the Home Office, WDC were working alongside the police and National Health Service (NHS) to sufficiently play their full part in offering support.

With regards to concerns over safety, Councillor Sinnott explained that the Community Safety Team continued to liaise with the police concerning the alleged incidents reported by members of the public citing asylum seeker's involvement. The reports were proven to be false and unsubstantiated which added to the misinformation on social media. Community Wardens continued to patrol Warwick Town Centre and not the hotel which housed the asylum seekers, which provided visibility and reassurance that the public valued.

Councillor Matecki stated that a question regarding the failings of the planning department to issue documents on the planning portal, which could have affected the outcome of the appeal, had previously been asked to the Portfolio Holder of Strategic Leadership in Councillor King's absence. A reminder was provided that an official complaint was made and an investigation by a specialist firm of lawyers was therefore underway. Councillor Matecki requested that the Portfolio Holder for Place offered an update on when the findings from the investigation of this issue would be made available.

In response, Councillor King explained that on 4 November 2024, the complainant was informed that the investigator had advised that there was extra correspondence that needed to be considered as well as further questions which required responses from officers. Subject to these responses, if no further evidence was uncovered, the investigator hoped to deliver the updated report to the Council by 11 November 2024. However, officers had not provided this information due to demands on the service. This information would be provided to the investigator by Monday 2 December 2024. Once the final report was received, the report would be considered by the Chief Executive, Head of Place, Arts and Economy, and the Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer. Amendments would be sent to the

investigator to finalise the report. All Councillors would be notified both when the draft report was received and when the final report was issued to the complainant. Both the report and the cost of the investigation would be made publicly available. Councillor King had requested that officers provided an update to the complainant on this status.

Councillor Matecki expressed frustration over the length of time that had been spent on the investigation that had impacted public confidence. Following this, Councillor Matecki asked a supplementary question, requesting clarification of who 'both sides' were considered to be as part of Councillor King's alleged statement which read:

"it has been acknowledged by both sides that it wouldn't have made any difference to the decision on that application"

Councillor Matecki suggested that it was impossible to know if the omission of the document had not occurred, whether the outcome would have been different. He therefore also asked Councillor King what evidence he had that the omission of the documents would not have made a difference

In response, Councillor King explained that he had no recollection of making the statement and therefore could not provide an answer.

Councillor Milton asked the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, Leisure, and Environment what the plans were to resolve the well-founded concerns of local residents over the considerable problems with car parking at Castle Farm Leisure Centre in Kenilworth and when residents could expect to see an improvement.

In response, Councillor Sinnott agreed that there was an issue with car parking on Saturdays between 9.30am and 11.30am. Such issues were exacerbated by a variety of factors which included:

- the 2024/25 football season;
- Castle Farm Leisure Centre performing better than anticipated;
- Mid Warwickshire Saturday morning league extending their age groups, which now included under 15s as opposed to the previous under 12s; and
- a rising demand of football and sports in general post-Covid.

Councillor Sinnott explained that the demand for sports pitches as Castle Farm was at unprecedented levels. The options to address the car parking concerns related to this included reducing bookings taken for grass football pitches. However, doing so would result in a loss of revenue and a decline in the activeness of Kenilworth residents. Another option would be to send Kenilworth football teams to alternative venues such as Newbold Comyn. However, this was not palatable and unlikely to be so in the future, it was additionally considered an unreasonable move in a climate emergency.

The carparking issue was being mitigated by pushing the use of Square West car park. The extension of the carpark was not viable as it was too costly and would involve building over green belts. Parking enforcements were going to continue, and introduction of charges was a possibility, but this could be counterproductive. WDC were looking at options for marking the overflow carpark to promote it. WDC continued to reiterate the message that sports teams should park considerably. Patrolling of car parks to ensure compliance with this notion was underway.

Councillor Sinnott expressed that it was better to manage and mitigate the issues with car parking during the two busy hours on a Saturday morning as opposed to reducing the amount of activity that was taking place at Castle Farm Leisure Centre. This avoided the loss of sight of the aims to reduce obesity amongst children.

Councillor Milton asked a supplementary question regarding the same car parking concerns at Abbey Fields swimming pool and what was being done to get ahead of the problem. Councillor Sinnott responded by explaining that a consultation and parking strategy would address the problems across the whole District.

Councillor R Dickson addressed the Portfolio Holder for Resources and reminded Council that, to its credit, and with cross-party support, one of the early decisions of the previous Council administration was to put in place a more ethical investment strategy. This incorporated sound Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) factors as part of the Security, Liquidity and Yield (SLY) criteria that are applied by the Council.

After this change in approach, the Council successfully, and profitably, divested itself of certain investments especially those involved in the extraction of non-renewable fossil fuels and known abuses of human rights.

Given the potential destabilising impact on financial returns and capital values of the many violent conflicts in the world, e.g. in Myanmar, Sudan, the Middle East and Ukraine, Councillor R Dickson asked the Portfolio Holder for Resources whether they agreed that it would be both prudent and sound financial management to consider applying the Council's ethical approach to the direct and pooled investments and contracts which the Council had with suppliers of products and services to combatants in violent conflicts.

In response, Councillor Chilvers agreed that it was a good time to review where investments were made to minimise the risk of WDC investing taxpayers' money in unethical practices. Recognition was paid to Councillors and officers from all parties who had worked between 2019 and 2023 to divest from fossil fuels. Councils were required to follow Security, Liquidity and then Yield as the SLY acronym. Security had to come first. ESG factors were not always in opposition to SLY. Details on the investments in volatile areas of the world were already captured in WDC's treasury management strategy. There was a list of countries that WDC would consider investing in based on sovereign ratings. The list was made up of 16 countries that would be invested in, demonstrating the consideration for this issue already being in place. Notably, Israel was not on the list of countries that were considered suitable to invest in as it did not have the required financial credit rating.

There were tools at the Council's disposal that could be used to further analyse where invested money was ending up. Councillor Chilvers expressed an interest in making greater use of such tools, including ESG screening of investments. There might also be more opportunity for local investments which was a conversation opened recently by central government.

Councillor R Dickson addressed the Portfolio Holder for Place when stating that in the previous week, the Council issued a joint statement with Kenilworth Wardens & Sports Club to confirm the "difficult decision" to end the project to move to a new site at Castle Farm. The previous Council administration started a process that had seen Warwick Council invest £1 million in this project. This was secured by a legal charge on the Club's existing site on Glasshouse Lane. With the move no longer going ahead, there appeared to be little prospect of recovering this investment in

the medium term, the value of which was open to question. Councillor R Dickson therefore asked the Portfolio Holder for Place what advice the Council had received from its auditors as to what value it could now attach to this investment in the Council's accounts.

In response, Councillor King explained that a response had not yet been received and would be circulated upon receipt.

Councillor R Dickson addressed the Portfolio Holder for Arts and Economy and stated that in the spring of 2025 there would be a full closure of the A46 Kenilworth Bypass in both directions for up to three weeks. This would have a major impact on the economy of Warwick District. It had the risk of causing huge inconvenience for businesses, residents, and visitors to Warwick District. Councillor R Dickson therefore asked the Portfolio Holder for Arts and Economy what Warwick District Council had done, working with HS2 Limited, Balfour Beatty Vinci, Warwickshire County Council Highways, the Highways Agency, Town and Parish Councils and local communities, to ensure that the proposed traffic management plans during this period minimised the inconvenience as much as possible, disruption and possible chaos to be endured by all.

In response, Councillor Chilvers, on behalf of Councillor Billiald, explained that WDC were not the decision maker in this project and therefore, the role of Warwick District Council was one of support and facilitation. Warwick District Council were liaising with HS2, Highways England, and Warwickshire County Council to understand what alternative measures were being put in place. Balfour Beatty Vinci were working hard to minimise the inconvenience to be businesses, residents, visitors, and local communities. A list of the ways Balfour Beatty Vinci was to be circulated to Members, most of the strategies involved effective communication and the minimisation of issues to businesses. Businesses would be promoted to help mitigate any loss in trade.

Councillor Browne asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood to confirm that Aylesford Ward would be not included in the pesticide trial without consultation and prior agreement and that Warwick Town Centre would have weeds removed by other means to avoid the town centre looking unkempt during peak tourism.

In response, Councillor Roberts explained that the pesticide trails had been helpful for gauging feedback, identifying it was better to spray earlier in the year, and stopping the Warwickshire County Highways spraying in the trial wards. It was agreed that moving forward, if the pesticide trial were to continue, town centres would continue to receive the two sprays per year, alleviating recognised concerns from businesses and residents. Additionally, one authority would be spraying as opposed to both WDC and Warwickshire County Council Highways spraying as was the case. A consultation regarding taking pesticide spraying into Aylesford Ward was possible.

Councillor Dray asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood how much WDC were spending on street cleansing, specifically relating to the cleansing of pigeon droppings.

In response, Councillor Roberts explained that the cost of the methods of street cleansing associated with clearing pigeon droppings were covered within the existing street cleansing contract. Firmer action was being taken to successfully contact Network Rail and work collaboratively to address the concerns associated with pigeon droppings.

51. Cabinet Report

The recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 17 October 2024 in respect of:

- (a) Fees and Charges (Minute 56) were proposed by Councillor Chilvers, seconded by Councillor Melrose and

Resolved that recommendations contained in minute numbers 56 as set out in the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 17 October 2024, be approved.

- (b) Minor Revisions to the Complaints Policy (Minute 57) were proposed by Councillor Davison, seconded by Councillor King and

Resolved that recommendations contained in minute numbers 57 as set out in the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 17 October 2024, be approved.

- (c) Warwick District Council response to proposed changes to the NPPF and other reforms to the planning system (Minute 58), were proposed by Councillor Davison, seconded by Councillor Melrose and

Resolved that recommendations contained in minute numbers 58 as set out in the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 17 October 2024, be approved.

Councillors Milton, Matecki, and Chilvers spoke on this item.

52. Licensing and Regulatory Committee

The recommendation of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee of 18 November 2024, in respect of the Gambling Act Policy for January 2025 to January 2028.

It was proposed by the Councillor Gorman, seconded by Councillor Browne, and

Resolved that recommendations contained in minute number 22 as set out in the report of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee meeting held on 18 November 2024, be approved.

53. Appointments

It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Melrose that the following appointments as set out on the agenda be made, less:

- less Councillor Gorman to be named as a substitute as an appointed member of the Housing Scrutiny Committee; and
- less Councillor King as named substitute for Housing Scrutiny due to being a Portfolio Holder.

Resolved that

- (1) Councillor Phillips be appointed as Chair of Housing Scrutiny Committee; and

- (2) Substitutes be appointed to Housing Scrutiny Committee as laid out on the agenda, subject to the above changes.

Conservatives

Councillor A Day
Councillor R Hales
Councillor J Matecki
Councillor P Redford

Liberal Democrats

Councillor R Dickson
Councillor C Gifford
Councillor B Gifford
Councillor P Kohler
Councillor A Milton
Councillor J Payne
Councillor D Russell
Councillor S Syson

Green

Councillor K Aizlewood
Councillor D Armstrong
Councillor J Chilvers
Councillor L Cron
Councillor R Davidson
Councillor D Harrison
Councillor J Kennedy
Councillor M Luckhurst

Labour

Councillor D Browne
Councillor C King
Councillor G Rosu
Councillor C Wightman
Councillor P Wightman

Witnash Residents Association

Councillor J Falp
Councillor R Margrave

54. **Public & Press**

It was proposed by Councillor King, duly seconded by Councillor Davison that the Council move into Confidential Session to consider a confidential Cabinet report from 17 October 2024, 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.

55. **Confidential Cabinet Report**

The recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 17 October 2024 in respect of:

- (a) Lift Replacement Works and two high rise blocks (Minute 66); and
- (b) Kenilworth Wardens Sports Club Property Matter (Minute 67).

were proposed by Councillor King, seconded by Councillor Adkins, and

Resolved that recommendations contained in minute numbers 66 and 67 as set out in the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 17 October 2024, be noted and approved..

56. **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 8.06pm)

CHAIRMAN
18 December 2024