

WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Warwick District Council held at Shire Hall, Warwick, on Wednesday 24 July 2024, at 6.00pm.

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

24. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barton, Billiald, Browne, Davidson, C Gifford, Kennedy, King, Phillips, and Russell.

25. Declarations of Interest

Minute 29 - Questions to the Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holders

As part of this item, ahead of a question to the Portfolio Holder to Resources, Councillor Falp, made Council aware that she had personal association with Leamington Football Club as family members were either a shareholder, coach, or played for teams there.

26. Minutes

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 17 June 2024 were taken as read and, subject to the addition of Councillor Adkins to the list of Councillors present, signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

27. Communications & Announcements

The Chairman offered the congratulations of the Council to Councillor Luckhurst on the safe arrival of his and his partner's baby in June.

The Chairman informed Council that he had attended 14 functions on behalf of the District since becoming Chairman, including a number of WII / 80th anniversary of D-Day events, the Beacon Lighting, the opening of Fusilier Way, the annual Czech Fountain memorial event and the Armed Forces Day on the 29 June 2024. The Chairman invited Councillor Redford, as Armed Forces Champion, to say a few words about the Armed Forces Day event.

The Chairman stated that there would be no business to consider under agenda under Item 5 – Petitions and Item 6 – Notice of Motion.

28. Leader and Portfolio Holders' Statements

In the absence of Portfolio Holder for Arts & Economy, Councillor Roberts provided the statement to Council about this Portfolio. A summary of work within the Portfolio Area during the last 12 months was provided. This included the challenges of closing the shop in the Pump Rooms, to enable the customer service area to move in, delivery of a number of successful initiatives and projects. Work had begun on other initiatives which would be coming to fruition over the next few months. These projects included the continued work on the Creative Quarter &

Future High Streets Fund, with the Fold opening in the former United Reform Church. The second project, the redevelopment of the Stoneleigh Arms pub on Clemens Street and Old School House on Court Street, was now progressing and by early next year, this scheme would also be open. Both of these projects were enabled by the Future High Streets Fund grant from government. A third project which had benefitted from this funding was the Town Hall, the first phase of which was underway and would be finished by Christmas.

The Arts Team had had another successful and eventful year, including the 2023 pantomime at the Spa Centre which broke previous records for the ticket sales income. The Collections and Engagement team at the Pump Rooms continued to put on a varied series of events on display, including "Going Dutch" which featured 17th century paintings from the Council's collection. This year would see the exhibition "Leamington Spa and the Black Atlantic" explore Leamington's links with West Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas, including with enslavement, from the late 18th to the early 20th century. The Team had acted on several occasions, to protect the artwork from rising river levels. Work was due to start on the repairs to the roof of the building Pump Rooms, following funding of £2.3million from the Arts Council.

The Events Team had supported over 160 events in 2024. This included the significant work across Council departments and Historic England to enable the Kenilworth Carnival and Funfair to proceed in a new location within Abbey Fields.

Last November, the Council approved the South Warwickshire Economic Strategy, which was a joint project with Stratford-on-Avon District Council that included an action plan of priorities for the Council to support the local economy. Another significant area of work had been with Shakespeare's England and moved towards forming a new "Local Visitor Economy Partnership" covering the whole of Coventry & Warwickshire. Work was progressing on this with a governance structure agreed. The Enterprise Team continued to offer support to start ups and small businesses across the district. With the Creative Quarter, development at Spencer Yard now completed, the Council's Enterprise offices in Spencer Yard would continue to flourish.

The statement concluded with the Portfolio Holder thanking Officers for their enthusiasm and commitment, always looking into ways to solve problems and achieve success.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Councillor Williams, thanked the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the Group Leaders, and the Cabinet, for their support of the Low Cost, Low Carbon Energy Strategy which had been agreed.

The Strategy was an important step forward but there was a need to significantly accelerate progress on decarbonisation. To date, the Council had not made best use of Public Sector Decarbonisation Funds and, as a result, the decarbonisation of corporate buildings had been limited. There was much work to be done on Council housing along with a need to bring forward innovative, low cost, low carbon housing scheme for our Leyes Lane and Rouncil Lane sites.

Subject to the agreement of the programme board the day after the meeting, a programme of works was due to start on The Temperate House, including the installation of an air source heat pump, solar panels, LED lighting, and a smart energy management system. He looked forward to starting; works to introduce rooftop solar at Newbold Comyn Leisure Centre; a wider programme of roof top solar; and the installation of smart, LED lighting in all Council owned buildings.

These works would deliver estimated annual savings of £234k in running costs and 178 tonnes of carbon.

He would discuss these projects in more detail with the Programme Advisory Group and would bring forward: proposals for the decarbonisation of Council owned social housing; a time bound programme for Leyes Lane and Rouncil Lane; and an ambitious plan to help householders and businesses decarbonise their own assets.

He concluded by explaining that for transparency, it was planned to publish a 'carbon dashboard', so Councillors and residents could monitor the progress of the Council in decarbonising Warwick District.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets, Councillor P Wightman, explained that the Council had entered a new era for the Housing and Assets service which was robustly regulated. The new Consumer Standards introduced in April this year from the Housing Regulator were combined with stronger and wider powers for the Housing Ombudsman and a new Building Safety Regulator.

The regulator expected the Council to know who was behind every tenanted door and hold accurate up to date information on all households. But 14 years of cuts in local authority funding had left the Council with a lean service that would need to adapt to meet these challenges.

The first year in administration had involved a large degree of looking to see where the Council was and what changes were required to get the Council to where it needed to be.

Following the independent Pennington report, significant progress had been made on areas of compliance assurance. There was work to do and the focus on the core service would continue to ensure compliance with the new housing standards. Members would be briefed on the work needed to become fully compliant with these requirements and looked for cross-party support for taking the steps required.

The changing housing regulatory landscape meant there was an opportunity to consider how improved connectivity and alignment of core housing and HRA asset services to ensure the Council would be better placed to meet these challenges with the resources available. The work and commitment that this would demand from officers was significant, but the Council had a dedicated workforce who were up for the challenge and keen to make a difference.

In recognising the challenges to come, the Council had to not lose sight of some of its many achievements over the last year. In August last year, Cabinet approved a new Resident Engagement Strategy which led to the formation of the Residents Influencing Group (RIG), in December 2023, which comprised of tenants, officers and the Portfolio Holder for Housing. The RIG had met four times working on a variety of issues, including reviewing the Damp and Mould Policy.

Two newly revamped Tenant Newsletters had been sent out and the team was on course to save around £10k this year by sending out the tenant newsletter digitally via email.

A new programme of Estate walkabouts had commenced, from May to October, with positive feedback already received. Housing Officers, Estates Services Officer and officers from Assets attended as appropriate, and had also invited representatives from the grounds and maintenance contractors. The walkabouts

were for officers to attend places where the Council had homes and to be a visible presence where officers went to customers rather than the expectation that customers had to come to the Council. Local tenants and leaseholders talked to officers about issues affecting them where they lived with the aim of trying to resolve things whilst they were on site. It was an opportunity for customers to offer and discuss suggestions for improvements for the local area, or the services that were provided.

The refurbishment programme at Yeomanry Close, a sheltered scheme in Warwick, was nearly complete. The Council had worked in partnership with Seddon's to carry out a refurbishment project concentrating on improving the fire safety of the block for residents. The next 12 months would see work start on the external facades of some of high-rise buildings and also considering upgrading windows and roofs.

Since May 2023, the Council had: let 420 homes to applicants on the waiting list and thereby relieving their housing need; approved the acquisition of new high quality Council homes with over 20 of these coming into the service and being let to help relieve the pressure on the housing register; and brought 265 empty houses back into use creating valuable homes for local people.

Facing the pressures of a cost-of-living crisis and increasing operational costs, the service turned to innovative solutions to manage tenancy sustainment and reduce tenant arrears. This was achieved by partnering with a specialist software company, Mobysoft, and through their predictive income analytics tools, enabled remarkable results, showcasing a significant reduction in arrears and an enhanced ability to support tenants in financial distress. Over 150 tenants had been helped to no longer be in any arrears and the work had reduced arrears by such a significant amount that the current performance was the best it had been since records began. The innovation won the Real IT awards and was shortlisted at the LGC awards, and the Council was proud of the officers who led this work.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood, Councillor Roberts, reflected on his first year as Portfolio Holder. He congratulated the bereavement team on the inspection of the crematorium at Oakley Wood by the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities. The Inspector found an excellent level of service provision and made no recommendations for improvement.

The Parking Team continued an excellent job of managing off street carparks whilst responding to the challenges they came up against. At the last Cabinet, the development for a new parking strategy was approved. It was also agreed to join the new National Parking Platform which would provide more options for customers who wished to pay via an app, but would not replace the payment machines in Council carparks.

Last year, Council decided to change the charging structure for collection of bulky waste items, including lowering the charge of one item from £52 to £35. This service had seen 100% increase in its use.

The Contact Service Team also introduced new education and enforcement team for waste in October 2023. The traditional fly-tipping hotspots showed a decrease in fly tips and whilst there was still a long way to go to stop the blight of fly tipping, this was slowly being turned and starting to head in the right direction. The Biodiversity Action Programme was adopted in April. The first two actions undertaken as part of the programme were Plantlife's annual No Mow May campaign and carrying out a 'reduced pesticide' trial in select areas of the district. The Council had completed its second year of No Mow May and the results

of survey were being reviewed. The pesticide reduction trials had started and the Council would no longer spray harmful weedkillers around trees on WDC land.

Waste collections continued to perform well, with a low percentage of missed bins. However, one area which needed improving was the waste call service. Something which sat with Stratford as a legacy of the failed merger. These calls were being brought back in house as part of the change programme, meaning the Council would be able to offer a better service to residents. Recycling rate had increased from 53% - 59%, and the District had some of the highest quality recycleate out of all the authorities going into the new MRF.

The Green Spaces team continued to do a fantastic job with the resources they had, to provide the open spaces maintained by the Council, and hopefully they would be complimented by a further two officers later this year. Accessible play equipment and signage would be installed in play areas over the summer, and the Portfolio Holder thanked Evergreen School for their help with the development of bespoke communication signs. Last Wednesday, he represented WDC with Green Spaces officer Simon Richardson at the Green Flag awards in Coventry, where the Council won four Green Flags and for the second year running won two Green Heritage awards.

He concluded by thanking all the officers within his Portfolio remit for their continued hard work.

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Place, Councillor King, Councillor J Harrison presented his statement to Council.

Work continued on the development of the new South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP). The dedication of officers had been invaluable and crucial. Immense time and effort were required for this significant task. It was important to remember that, despite the decisions taken by Council, not everyone would be pleased, and it was Councillors' duty to explain and support their constituents. On 1 August, a Joint Cabinet Committee would consider important principles around likely levels of housing growth. These would underpin the choices on the Preferred Options draft of the SWLP which was expected for later this year. Despite the SWLP's target number of dwellings, a recent planning appeal revealed that the Council no longer met its five-year housing land requirement. This came from an interpretation in a planning appeal, which the Council could not challenge. Apart from any resultant actions which developers might take from this news, this served as a strong reminder that the Council had to accelerate home building and ensure allocated sites in the Local Plan were developed swiftly. This was all happening amid anticipated changes to the NPPF and home building numbers following the General Election.

Work was progressing on working out the future shape and use of the Parade area as part of the Transformation Board's work on the regeneration of the town centre.

The administration focused on increasing efficiencies and streamlined processes, which was supported by introducing new software for the planning service. This would enhance planning and building regulation applications, planning policy monitoring, Land Charges, s106, CIL, and Enforcement. This upgrade would significantly improve processes, helping officers handle applications faster and more efficiently, and providing better public access to planning systems and information, addressing past complaints. Residents, officers, and Councillors alike would benefit from a faster, more transparent system.

A challenging issue for this Portfolio was balancing the preservation of heritage buildings with modern need. Residents wanted to reduce energy costs and carbon footprints and during this Climate Emergency, it was morally unacceptable to issue blanket refusals for necessary upgrades. The Council had to have the courage to address this, or these buildings would deteriorate and be seen only as relics rather than living parts of the community.

The Council was also addressing Quality of Life issues regarding HMO licenses. While the Council waited national legislation or the new local plan to regulate room sizes, this authority had implemented the HMO Licensing Scheme which covered all properties occupied by three or more people living as two or more household to that they had to now have a HMO license to operate. This meant landlords needed to comply with a higher standard of safety and repair, greatly benefitting tenants and members of the wider community.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Chilvers, explained that his role was to ensure the organisation was aware of the financial constraints of the Council. This involved developing a strategy, to address the structural deficit of £2.5m by the end of 2027/8, including the launch of an organisation-wide change programme. dealing with the double think in the organisation that the deficit, did not matter because the Council always 'pull a rabbit out of the hat', usually driven by a positive core settlement received just ahead of budget, with benefits to use driven by delays to fair funding and business rate reform. The Cabinet struck a prudent middle ground by planning for a Business Rate reset in 2025/6 but recognising that even if this happened, the Council would get some income from central government.

This helped the Council to earmark reserves needed to support the deficit within the budget. This meant having a clearer view on how much reserves available and how much was needed by separating out General Fund volatility from Business rates volatility.

In negotiating a deal as part of the West Midlands Investment Zone that protected business rate growth within the zone, the Council had been able to achieve some financial stability that would enable it to plan investment in Local Growth over the long term.

In the quarterly budget update, it was reported that more work was being undertaken to separate out one-off costs and ongoing costs so that Council had a better sense of performance against the agreed budget.

The Council inherited an assumption that the total income from fees and charges would go up by 10% year on year for at least the next four years. That was an extra £3.8m for the General Fund a year by 2028. This was far more than any Council tax rise would produce. Council had commissioned a fees and charges review to look at income generation options and assess whether that year on year 10% was realistic or desirable to deliver, especially if inflation was low. The outcomes from the review would be presented within the Fees and Charges report to Cabinet in October, and any changes would be made to the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

In Year 1 a significant amount of focus was given to assessing the financial position in the General Fund and putting forward a plan for a longer-term financial sustainability, a similar focus was needed to be given to the Housing Revenue Account. Officers were working to scope out what revenue and capital funding would be needed to deliver on compliance, low cost-low carbon and building new

homes strand. Council would then be in a position to deliver capital schemes funded from a variety of sources, such as grants, Local Growth Initiatives and borrowing met by revenue. Scrutiny had already played a helpful role in this conversation and Cabinet would like to continue to actively involve all Councillors for their ideas and experience through a variety of routes on this vital area.

The Corporate Peer review talked about having a strong corporate core, covering areas like risk, procurement and financial controls. Progress had been made on procurement, with support of the Procurement Champions, and over the coming year, the Council would see more clarity on the procurement pipeline with a focus on making sure procurement started early enough to maximise choice and bargaining position to enable the best possible decisions. There were plans to better equip everyone across the organisation to have the skills required to get the very best value out of the whole procurement and contract management cycle. As part of this, Cabinet had also recently approved a new Risk Management Policy and updated Significant Business Risk Register.

The Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, Leisure & Environment, Councillor Sinnott explained that the first year of the Safer Healthier Communities portfolio had been one of moving forward and of stock taking. It had been tough, but officers had delivered against all of the challenges put before them with vigour and gusto.

The Sports and Leisure team won both Regional Tennis Parks Venue of the year and Warwickshire tennis parks venue of the year from the Lawn Tennis Association for the tennis offering by contractor We Do Tennis. Everyone Active and Council-owned leisure centres were awarded Quest Excellence standard for their services and offering. The CCTV and Community safety Team won a Neighbourhood Policing Award for their response to addressing community concerns following the tragic murder of Ben Daly. One CCTV Operator received the prestigious Warwickshire Police Chief Superintendents and Directors Award for their exceptional work during a rape incident. It was also noted that it was incredibly rare for external partners to receive such awards from Warwickshire Police. The Council's CCTV Service had received four of these awards, including the CCTV Team Leader who held two of these prestigious awards. The CCTV Service had also been recertified under the British Standard Audit for Public Space CCTV for the 19th consecutive year without a single non-conformance being raised.

The Food and Safety Team had removed 55 kg of illegally imported and 1,700kg of unfit food from the market. They used graduated enforcement practises, but 14 premises needed more serious courses of action to secure standards.

The Sports and Leisure Team operationally commissioned the new Castle Farm Leisure Centre, procured a new tennis operator, operationally opened the mountain bike trails, secured funding for solar PV on Newbold Leisure centre and in partnership with Bowls England, planned and delivered the National Bowls Championships. They also continued work in encouraging participation in activity from an early age building confidence, mental and physical health. The impact of this work was that Warwick District continued to have the lowest percentage of inactive people in the subregion.

Hackney Carriage fares had been reviewed and new fares were implemented.

The Community Partnership team was supporting the project for a new Packmores Centre and working to shape the service which would be delivered from the newly

build Lillington Health Hub which would provide services and an offering to increase health and wellbeing for residents.

A Night Time Economy Safe Space had been launched, which supported those who were vulnerable, from missing persons to victims of crimes. The Community Wardens continued this support of vulnerable persons and disruption of criminal activities both in the nighttime economy and during the day.

The Council, in partnership with Warwickshire County Council and Stagecoach Midlands, had been awarded a grant, from the Department for Transport (DfT) Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas 2 (ZEBRA 2), of £4.3 million to fund the rollout of electric vehicles in the County. This involved 27 buses serving a number of settlements in county. For Warwick District, this would fund the Route 1 buses serving Warwick Town Centre, Woodloes Park, Spinney Hill, Leamington Town Centre, Whitnash and South Farm. This Council had provided a sum of money from S106 contributions as match funding.

There were challenges and work to be done, which would require focus and energy. Abbey fields Lesure Centre was a bold investment for the district which would deliver a leisure facility the Council could be proud of. There was the issue into odour and flies in the Heathcote area attributed to an Environmental Agency permitted recycling facility. The Council was working to substantiate residents' concerns in order to support the Environment Agency in their actions.

The Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Councillor J Harrison explained that her portfolio continued to lead the Council as it navigated this transformative era. It looked to manage and support its staff, but also its approach to supporting the diverse communities in accessing services effectively and finally with the role in supporting the promotion of the Council's ambitious projects and initiatives across the district.

Following the Peer Review and the launch of the new Corporate Strategy, a Recruitment, Retention and Remuneration project aligned to the Council's People Strategy had been developed focusing on having the right people in the right place, with the right knowledge and skills, creating a positive and supportive culture resulting in a significant reduction in our turnover. A year-long engagement plan was rolled out for the new Corporate Strategy and Values. Over 400 staff attended café style workshops to understand and share the Council's values and ensure they continued to underpin service delivery.

The first year in administration had supported a great deal of change and it was heartening to witness officers not just rising to the challenge but embracing it with enthusiasm and commitment. The Council had: moved out of Riverside House; moved into Saltisford, Town Hall, Jubilee Square and other small sites; completed the new Customer Service Centre in Royal Pump Rooms; and introduced a Change Programme. These were all delivered under budget which was not only an achievement but also a testament to planning.

The change programme, at the heart of Corporate Strategy Priority One, was designed to revolutionise how services were delivered, ensuring they remained responsive and accessible to meet residents' needs. All ideas, from any officer or Councillor, had been welcomed and considered. The proposals from the Change Programme Board were innovative, tackling the fundamental question of how to deliver services better. In the streamlining waste process and bringing waste calls back in-house from Stratford this was a step towards greater localised and efficient service for our residents.

The Council had a Project Management Community of Practice where officers were diligently working to standardise and share best practices in project delivery.

The Council had to continue to foster an environment where continuous learning and adaptation were the norms at Warwick District Council. Officers were the Council's greatest asset, and their growth and development were paramount to collective success.

There were challenges ahead and the Council could not afford to proceed with business as usual. Unlike many councils, this Council was fortunate to have choices and time, but it had to continue at pace because delay was not its friend.

The Council had set ambitious targets for the change programme, and steady was being made progress. This was testament to the hard work and dedication of officers, but further work was needed to address the medium-term financial structural deficit alongside the rising demand and costs faced by the Council.

Local government had been operating in a challenging environment. The Council had to act to safeguard services and ensure it was not in a position where difficult choices had to be made. Commitment to service delivery excellence had to be unwavering and by exceeding targets, would not only secure current progress but also pave the way for sustained success in years two and three of our change programme.

The Local Land Property Gazette team had been awarded the gold quality every month for the last 12 months.

Warwick District Council had applied to participate in Warwickshire Pride, an event that began in 2013. This sent a powerful statement of solidarity with the LGBTQIA+ community. The Council's corporate strategy values were clear that the Council would respect and value everyone, support each other, and work objectively without bias or prejudice. This was the start and in the coming months, a hate crime statement would be brought to Council for adoption, and work would begin to incorporate the policy set out in the King's Speech. This would make Warwick District a more inclusive place to live, visit, and work.

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership, Councillor Davison highlighted that the Cabinet was taking this opportunity to look forwards as well as back over the first year of the administration. When he first spoke at Cabinet in his current role, the priority was to address the massive structural financial deficit. Consequently, Cabinet launched an ambitious change management programme. Officers continued to identify further problems due to inadequate structures, risk management, procurement practices etc. which were increasing the deficit. To improve Council finances, the previous administration decided to increase fees and charges income by 10% each and every year. Increasing charges for car parking, green bins etc, would not be easy for families struggling with the cost of living crisis, and Cabinet were undertaking a review to determine feasibility.

The Council had successfully negotiated hard for a fair deal from the West Midlands investment zone. This would help to finances and most importantly, through the secured £90.2m for local growth initiatives to benefit residents, whether constructing facilities or insulating to reduce heating bills.

Adoption of the new Corporate Strategy was the most important strategic action last year, with the vision "To make Warwick District a great place to live work and

visit by improving lives and the environment.” The primary focus was on delivering valued sustainable services, which was why independent reviews had investigated Council housing services. These reviews indicated longstanding issues that had to be addressed rapidly. The Council needed to increase focus on performance management, be more outward facing, and quickly adopt developments from across the sector. Consequently, top priority for now was to achieve and demonstrate delivery of high-quality services across the Council.

There were difficult cultural changes and professional development required in housing and assets, but he was delighted that many staff recognised the need for change. The Council’s leadership had to not baulk at the tremendous challenges, and embrace technological solutions, improved ways of working and cultural change, including inviting awkward questions, and stop cherished but non-essential projects. This would mean tough decisions to be taken, including redesigning how some service areas operated. The new structures had to encourage collaborative working and give officers at all levels enhanced opportunities.

The Leader thanked Group Leaders for constructive engagement on key challenges, particularly the Investment Zone which required many impromptu meetings. Similarly, the excellent scrutiny provided by the Asset Compliance Committee that had helped rapid improvement following the Pennington’s report. There was going to be further work for this Committee in the year ahead. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had asked excellent questions, for example, regarding the Housing Revenue Account, low cost low carbon energy and oversight of risk. The Leader looked forward to further detailed questioning in these and other areas such as change management and governance of performance data. The Leader recognised the great work of other committees and groups, as many including the Planning Committee and Local Plan Advisory Group were important and onerous.

Councillors had asked for greater transparency and Cabinet was working across the Council to ensure more information including performance data was publicly available and improving access to working parties' papers for all Councillors.

The decision was made to continue with the construction of the Abbey Fields swimming pools. The open meeting held in St Nicholas Church, Kenilworth provided the right balance between being transparent with residents and maintaining commercial confidentiality and proper decision-making processes. The Cabinet would look to hold similar resident meetings on key ways it was looking “To make Warwick District a great place to live work and visit by improving lives and the environment.”

He concluded by thanking officers, who delivered the General Election and maintained other services; and officers in all those service areas continued to efficiently making things happen to benefit residents.

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

Councillor C Wightman asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood if the annual number of mows would still take place as she had received concerns from residents that areas of the ward had not been mowed until five weeks after the resumption of mowing and that the initiative therefore ran into July.

In response, Councillor Roberts confirmed that the general mow cycle was three weeks, and it was hoped that the catch-up period would finish by the end of June. Unfortunately, at the end of No Mow May, the mowing team were slowed down by poor weather and staff absences. All mows had been completed by 17 July 2024,

which was an improvement on the previous year. A full review would take place in August following No Mow May, and a debriefing note would then be shared to all Councillors in September highlighting any changes made. Taking part in No Mow May was not meant to reduce the number of cuts that residents expected. Mowing had started later this year due to the changing climate, so contractual cuts would be reviewed to see if they could continue later in the year than usual.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor C Wightman, Councillor Roberts stated the intention from the outset of No Mow May was a four-weekly cutting cycle. A review would take place to see how the cutting period could become more regular, however, this was weather dependent. Responses from the online survey would also be considered as part of the review.

Councillor C Wightman asked the Portfolio Holder for Place if understanding the growing housing need within the district and that meeting the requirements for one bedroom, four bedroom and five-bedroom properties was a particular priority. She asked if there were there any imminent plans to address the issue with a new Supplementary Development Plan to require developers to make more such provision on new developments to reflect local housing need.

In response, Councillor J Harrison stated on behalf of Councillor King that the Council was reviewing the housing need through the local plan review and in doing so, preparing for the South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP) in collaboration with Stratford-on-Avon District Council. This would consider the housing need and more specifically, the breakdown of the size and property mix that should be achieved on development sites whilst setting out the policy for affordable housing. A key piece of evidence to support the SWLP was the Coventry and Warwickshire Housing Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) which identified the overall need for the district and set up the suggested mix of houses and sizes for the different types of affordable housing. At present, there were no plans to produce any further supplementary plan documents specifically for this matter, however, the local plan guidance document would be circulated to Members.

Councillor Boad asked the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change how he planned to encourage private homeowners to invest in Net Zero Carbon work.

In response, Councillor Williams stated that a plan would be brought to Council regarding a scheme to encourage both businesses and homeowners to invest in their own properties, including retrofitting. This should be linked to the West Midlands Investment Zone and work on this was ongoing.

Councillor Boad asked a supplementary question to Councillor Williams, if there was a plan to improve void properties first to ensure less disruption to existing Council tenants.

In response, Councillor Williams explained that the decarbonisation of Council properties would focus on getting energy ratings up to C and the logistical aspects of delivering this would be considered within this and the suggestion of focusing on void properties had been noted.

Councillor Boad asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets what would be done to address the wait times for single bed properties and how long had properties been void, because data indicated that 265 properties were out of use for 12 months.

In response, Councillor P Wightman stated he did not have the statistics to hand but would ensure a full written response be given in due course.

Councillor K Dickson asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets regarding the land at the old Kenilworth School buildings that had been empty for a year. Concerns had been raised by local residents about the state of the sites. It was understood that a large amount of the money needed to bring forward these sites for housing, was subject to a Government Housing Infrastructure Fund loan, whilst other funding would be secured by Section 106 monies. Could reassurances be given that the delays in bringing forward these sites for appropriate housing development would not jeopardise the Council's eligibility for these payments.

In response, Councillor P Wightman confirmed he understood the frustration of the delays and he would raise the security concerns of the site. These sites were in the heart of the community, and it was important that time was taken to ensure proper consideration was given to various options for the site. Councillor P Wightman gave reassurance regarding the funding and confirmed the team was aware of the deadline for this. Councillor P Wightman offered further assurances that the funding for housing was not at risk following a supplementary question from Councillor K Dickson.

Councillor Falp asked the Portfolio Holder for Resources if he would present the costs of the new location for the Leamington Football Club at the meeting of Cabinet scheduled for 4 September 2024, including the cost of purchasing the Covenant, the total cost of what had already been paid, the possible cost of the fit out, if the football club would receive any funding, and the value of proposed new ground. If a football ground was built, what the length of the lease would be, what the cost of rent would be and if the Council would receive income from any other activity on the site.

In response, Councillor Chilvers stated two reports had recently been discussed at Cabinet. One outlined the plan for the area and divided it into three phases: the footpath, the athletics and neighbourhood centre, and the community stadium. The more detailed Phase 2 and Phase 3 reports would be taken to Cabinet in due course. Cost estimates were last done around a year ago, so these would be looked at again and Councillors would be kept informed.

Councillor Aizlewood asked if it still was the intention, as set out at Council in January 2024, to meet with the Shrewley and Hatton Parish Councils to discuss the proposals, before the Preferred Option was finalised, and if so when would this be.

In response, Councillor Davison stated on behalf of Councillor King that work was progressing on the SWLP and the published timetable aimed for a preferred options document to be prepared by the end of the year for Members to consider. A wide-ranging public consultation would be conducted as opposed to many different consultations. The District Council encouraged Parish and Town Councils to engage, and updates would be provided to them throughout the process. However, the Hatton and Shrewley Parishes were unique in the sense of the new settlement proposals, so a meeting would be arranged with them after the summer holidays.

Councillor Collins asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood if there were any plans to help residents on new build estates across the district to manage the additional management fees or potentially adopt the green spaces on these sites.

In response, the Chief Executive explained that some of those spaces were effectively privately owned and therefore it was not within the powers of a District Council to amend the fees or adopt privately owned grounds.

Councillor Dray asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood if he agreed that further bin provisions and more frequent collection of bins were needed within Warwick Town Centre, especially when concerts or events occurred.

In response, Councillor Roberts stated that Warwick Town Centre was cleaned daily, including litter bins being emptied. Contract Services had developed a process to handle fly-tipping issues through education and enforcement. Installing and maintaining additional bins might be possible and Councillor Roberts would raise this with the Contract Team, however, there would be an increase of contract costs. In regard to events in the town centre, it was the responsibility of the event organiser to pay for management of any increased waste. The team was reviewing this to find out what support might be possible for any future events.

Councillor Dray then asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood why parts of Warwick, such as the Packmore area had not been mowed for around nine months. She asked if contractors were still being paid if contracts were not being fulfilled and if the delays were due to rain, should equipment be upgraded in order to cope with wet weather conditions.

In response, Councillor Roberts confirmed mowing did start later due to extreme wet weather and mowing wet grass would ruin the integrity of it. The number of cuts per year was being reviewed and if cutting started later, there might be potential to continue cutting later in the year. When machinery needed replacement, the equipment used would be reviewed to ensure its suitability.

Councillor Dray asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood if it would be possible to ensure residents had access to clean public toilet facilities and if gender-neutral accessible toilets could be provided so that everyone felt comfortable.

In response, Councillor Roberts stated that the current toilet blocks were old and suffered from regular misuse and damage. There was planned maintenance to repair public toilets, such as the roof of the toilets in Pagent Garden, Warwick, refurbished toilets in Market Place following a fire last year, and full refurbishment was planned for the toilets in St Nicholas Park, Warwick. These toilets were cleaned twice daily, except for St Nicholas Park which were cleaned three times a day. The team would look into the introduction of gender-neutral toilets.

Councillor R Dickson asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood if the Council could be provided with an update about the planned improvements of Glendale Avenue Park, Kenilworth.

In response, Councillor Roberts confirmed there had been delays with tendering and procurement, but it was due to go out to tender next week. The team hoped this would be delivered in November 2024.

Councillor Payne asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood if anything could be done to reduce tensions between pedestrians and cyclists around the Radford Road Bridge when it reopened.

In response, Councillor Roberts stated that the bridge was on track to be installed in October and was expected to be delivered under budget. The bridge would now

be three meters wide, and this would allow for both pedestrians and cyclists to use it at one time. Councillor Roberts stated the frustration of residents was understood and he explained the reasons for the delay. Communications would be provided to residents to keep them updated as the project progressed.

Councillor Matecki asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood if Parish Councils would be able to have their area opt out of No Mow May in future.

In response, Councillor Roberts stated he was aware of the particular Parish that wished to opt out and this would be reviewed following the results of the survey. It might be that some areas could be taken out rather than the whole Parish and the team were looking for the right balance of areas.

Councillor Matecki asked the Leader of the Council if he could assure residents that this administration would do everything they could to protect the greenbelt from inappropriate development, bearing in mind that there were three solar panel farms within the District which were classed as industrial development.

In response, Councillor Davison stated that planning decisions were separate from Cabinet decisions. Councillor Davison asked Councillor Matecki to clarify the role that Cabinet should be taking in this.

Councillor Matecki clarified that policy was the Council's responsibility and policies could be made to ensure that these areas were protected. There were different places where solar panels could be installed, such as factory roofs or areas which were not greenbelt.

In response, Councillor Davison stated that Cabinet did agree that rooftop solar panels were preferred.

Councillor Matecki asked the Portfolio Holder for Place regarding the planning appeal for a poultry farm in Norton Lindsey, the inspector referred to two documents that had not been made public prior to the inspector's decision. He asked what the administration would do to restore to the public's confidence and ensure this did not happen again.

In response, Councillor Davison stated a full written answer would be provided in due course on behalf of Councillor King.

Councillor Day asked the Leader of the Council if he had been attending the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) board meetings since the Council became a non-constituent member.

Councillor Davison stated that he had rarely attended the board meetings, he had received late notice of an upcoming meeting and therefore was unable to attend. Councillor Davison confirmed that he had asked for advanced notice of any meetings to ensure attendance and confirmed they were high priority.

Councillor Day encouraged the Leader to attend or find other mechanisms for the District Council to be represented as the WMCA presented opportunities for WDC for many of the issues that had been raised in this meeting. Councillor Day then asked the Leader when he would be able to confirm to the Leadership Oo-ordinating Group what arrangements would be put in place to represent the District Council at the WMCA meetings.

Councillor Davison stated he would ask who a substitute for the meetings could be. He stated that the Chief Executive could also attend and was able to identify which meetings were important.

Councillor Redford asked the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood if the review for No Mow May could ensure that visibility at crossroads and roundabouts was not affected by the initiative. Councillor Redford also stated that verges were relied on in rural areas so it was imperative that verges were cut to ensure prams could get through.

In response, Councillor Roberts stated that those issues would be considered in the upcoming review. The issue with roundabouts and crossings was in consultation with Warwickshire County Council (WCC) and the cutting of these areas had been extended from 4m to 5m. Some grass verges were the responsibility of WCC, so if the question referred to a particular verge this could be looked into to ensure that we raise this with the appropriate team.

30. **Cabinet Report**

The recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 10 July 2024 in respect of:

- (a) Low Cost, Low Carbon Energy Programme (Minute 162);
- (b) Authority to Amend Shared Ownership Leases (Minute 163);
- (c) Hazardous Substances Consents (HSC) (Minute 164);
- (d) Changes to the Parking Standards and Residential Design Guide SPD's and additional delegation to Head of Service (Minute 169); and
- (e) Authority to sell properties developed at The Paddocks Cubbington. Authority to sell further percentages of shared ownership properties up to 100% and to offer lower initial equity stakes for shared ownership homes (Minute 170).

Resolved that recommendations contained in minute numbers 162, 163, 164, 169 and 170 as set out in the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 10 July 2024, be noted and approved.

31. **Appointments**

Councillors Matecki and Davison spoken on this item.

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

Resolved that

- (1) Councillor Dray be appointed as a Substitute to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee;
- (2) the appointment, by the Leader, of Councillor J Harrison to the West Midlands Employers Management Board, be noted; and
- (3) the appointment, by the Leader, of Councillor King Local Visitor Economy Partnership Member Forum and Shakespeare's England Board, be noted.

32. **Common Seal**

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

Councillor Falp spoke on this item.

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 7.39pm)

CHAIRMAN
2 October 2024