

Title: Supporting our Communities

Lead Officer: Andrew Jones (andrew.jones@warwickdc.gov.uk)

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Andrew Day

Wards of the District directly affected: All

Previous Relevant Reports: Step Back Review Task & Finish Group on the Council's response to Covid 19 – February 2021

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## Summary

This report reviews the support the Council has provided to its communities over the past two years of the pandemic; recognises the work that both Councillors and Council employees have undertaken; and provides details of the work programme for the final year of the current administration.

## Recommendation(s)

- (1) That Cabinet notes the various interventions and initiatives that the Council has delivered following the declaration of a national lockdown in March 2020, and which continue in many aspects to this day. (Summarised at Appendix A.)
  - (2) That Cabinet notes that the Council's response could not have been achieved without Councillors and Officers operating as a team and regarding the Council's officers supports the Applause initiative (Appendix B) and delegates authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Council Leader to agree the final details.
  - (3) That Cabinet agrees the Council's programme of work for the municipal year 2022/2023 as detailed in the Service Area Plans at Appendices D-L, with any minor amendments agreed by the respective Portfolio Holders.
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## 1 Background/Information

- 1.1 All Members will be fully aware of the consequences of the pandemic through their own personal experiences, the testimony of family and friends and the general worldwide media coverage: The oft used adjective "unprecedented" is not hyperbole when viewed in the context of the pandemic's impact on us all.
- 1.2 Despite the pandemic, a multitude of service providers and industry-wide manufacturers had to keep working to ensure that the global economy and essential public services kept functioning. An essential part of the public service provision has been local Councils (of all tiers) and Warwick District Council has been no exception.
- 1.3 Members of the former Overview & Scrutiny Committee have already received a detailed report covering how officers ensured that they were able to continue to provide the services our communities relied on and full details can be referenced [here](#). However, it now seems apposite, in the context of a pandemic which through Government intervention and social responsibility is being

carefully managed, to provide Members with a concise picture of the work that they and their officers have undertaken over the last two years.

#### **1.4 Summary of work undertaken**

- 1.4.1 At Appendix A to this report, officers have sought to capture as many of the initiatives and activities as possible that have been undertaken by this Council during the pandemic. Members will appreciate that reams of prose could be provided for your consumption, along with facts, figures and detailed graphs and charts as so much work has been produced. However, it was felt that the most accessible way to capture all the work was through an infographic summary paper. This would give Portfolio Holders and all other Councillors, an opportunity for reflection and may encourage observation, comment and query at this and other meetings.
- 1.4.2 Members should note, however, that while this work was being undertaken, day-to-day activities such as dealing with benefit or planning applications; addressing tenancy management issues; and responding to noise nuisance disputes, continued. Whilst many of these services have been provided by officers from a remote environment, it has been remarkable that residents have been largely unaware of this as they have continued to receive, by-and-large, the standard of service that was available in pre-pandemic days.
- 1.4.3 The perceived success of the Council's response has been in no small measure to the teamwork displayed between officers and Councillors. Very early in the pandemic, the Council Leader established the Leadership Co-ordinating Group (LCG), consisting of the Cabinet and all the other Group Leaders. On a weekly basis, the Chief Executive would brief the Group on the latest pandemic position, its effects locally and more broadly, and from this the LCG would, through a collaborative approach and putting aside Party positions, set a clear policy direction for officer implementation. Furthermore, the rapid introduction of remote meetings for the various Committees and Councillor liaison enabled that essential Councillor-officer relationship to continue.
- 1.4.4 No sooner had the major impact of the pandemic started to relent than the Country seemed to move into what has become known as the "cost of living crisis". With surging inflation made up of energy, fuel, food and clothing costs to mention just a few, many residents are finding it difficult to meet their day-to-day needs. Whilst Government has responded with its own package of measures, the Council has continued with its mission of supporting local communities through the likes of a freezing of council tax, a hardship fund, a large grant to local foodbanks and promotion of various benefit and assistance schemes. At Appendix C to this report, details of the Council's response and signposting to relevant bodies and organisations is provided.

#### **1.5 Recognition for work undertaken**

- 1.5.1 The work detailed at Appendix A hopefully demonstrates the commitment of officers and Councillors to support our communities. This work has been delivered in a period of major uncertainty compounded locally by the now aborted attempt at a merger with Stratford-on-Avon District Council. Whilst a majority of Councillors agreed with the business case for merger, it would not be accurate to say that the direction of travel has not had a significant impact on the collective morale of the organisation's officers as many feared for their employment and/or their future employment terms and conditions. Despite this, officers have continued to deliver essential public services, although it is undeniable that the Senior Leadership Team has work to do in rebuilding trust and morale and explicitly recognising that all staff are appreciated for their

work.

- 1.5.2 The uncertainty caused by the potential merger has seen a record number of staff leave the organisation and this situation has been compounded by the difficulty many managers are experiencing in recruiting new staff with the necessary skills and competencies. This is particularly problematic in the technical professions such as planning and accountancy.
- 1.5.3 Therefore, to recognise the work of staff over the last two years, to help rebuild the morale of the organisation and to revitalise what has always been a successful organisation, the Council Leader and Chief Executive are proposing the Applause initiative which is summarised in the paper at Appendix B. Whilst the headline of this initiative will be the monetary element, Members should note that there is more than that with investment in the likes of staff career development; health and wellbeing; and team building.
- 1.5.4 Should Members support this initiative then it is proposed that the Leader and Chief Executive agree the final details.

## **1.6 Programme of work for Municipal Year 2022/2023**

- 1.6.1 Ordinarily, Cabinet would agree its programme of work for each municipal year through the endorsement of the Service Area Plans (SAP). Due to the impact of the pandemic and then the initial steps towards merger, SAPs have not been produced for the last two municipal years and Service Heads have been delivering their respective programmes of work through dialogue with their Portfolio Holders. Officers are now able to present SAPs for Cabinet consideration for the new Municipal Year and these can be viewed at Appendices D-L.
- 1.6.2 The Scrutiny Committees may wish to consider how they monitor the performance of the Service Areas. Officers now provide accessible performance information through a business intelligence portal and Members who wish to use this facility should contact the Democratic Services Manager.

## **2 Alternative Options available to (name of Committee/Cabinet etc.)**

- 2.1 The report asks in effect for two decisions to be made: Firstly, it seeks support for the Applause initiative. Members could decide not to support this or recommend variations to the set of proposals. Secondly, approval of the various SAPs is sought. Again, Members could not support these in full or in part or make recommendations for change(s).

## **3 Consultation and Member's comments**

- 3.1 Consultation has taken place among the Senior Leadership Team and in-principle, Cabinet is supportive of the contents of this report subject to reviewing the detail.

## **4 Implications of the proposal**

### **4.1 Legal/Human Rights Implications**

- 4.1.1 There are no legal/ human rights implications.

### **4.2 Financial**

- 4.2.1 It is estimated that the full financial impact of the proposals in this report will be circa £0.5m. The S151 Officer advises that this can be funded from the Council's balances. When the final details are agreed by the Leader and Chief

Executive, a future Cabinet report will spell out the cost and how it was financed.

#### 4.3 **Council Plan**

- 4.3.1 Warwick District Council has a Business Strategy which covers the period 2020-2023. There will be a new administration in 2023 and so the Business Strategy will need revisiting. In the meantime, the Service Area Plans address the Council's key elements of: People - Health, Homes, Communities, Services - Green, Clean, Safe, Money- Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment, People - Effective Staff, Services - Maintain or Improve Services - and Money - Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term.

#### 4.4 **Environmental/Climate Change Implications**

- 4.4.1 Not applicable.

#### 4.5 **Analysis of the effects on Equality**

- 4.5.1 Not applicable.

#### 4.6 **Data Protection**

- 4.6.1 Not applicable.

#### 4.7 **Health and Wellbeing**

- 4.7.1 It is hoped that the proposals contained in the Applause initiative are a major contributor to the Health and Well-being of the Council's staff.

### 5 **Risk Assessment**

- 5.1 The main risk highlighted in the report is the difficulty the Council is having in attracting and retaining officers. Officers will be presenting further reports to Cabinet and Employment Committee with proposals on how these issues can be addressed.

### **Report Information Sheet**

Please complete and submit to Democratic Services with draft report

<b>Committee/Date</b>	Cabinet 6 <sup>th</sup> July 2022	
<b>Title of report</b>	Supporting our Communities	
<b>Consultations undertaken</b>		
<b>Consultee *required</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Details of consultation /comments received</b>
<b>Ward Member(s)</b>		N/A
<b>Portfolio Holder WDC</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	Cllr Day
<b>Financial Services *</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	Andrew Rollins
<b>Legal Services *</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	Andrew Jones
<b>Other Services</b>		N/A

<b>Chief Executive(s)</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	Chris Elliott
<b>Head of Service(s)</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	Andrew Jones
<b>Section 151 Officer</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	Andrew Rollins
<b>Monitoring Officer</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	Andrew Jones
<b>Leadership Co-ordination Group (WDC)</b>		All
<b>Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee/Council?</b>		Recommendation to: Cabinet
<b>Contrary to Policy/Budget framework</b>		No/ <del>Yes</del>
<b>Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?</b>		No/ <del>Yes</del>
<b>Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?</b>		<del>No</del> /Yes, Forward Plan item – scheduled for 6 <sup>th</sup> July 2022
<b>Accessibility Checked?</b>		File/Info/Inspect Document/Check Accessibility