

Warwick District Council
5 August 2020

Item 7 Leader's and Portfolio Holders' Statements

Portfolio Holder for Business & Finance (Councillor Hales)

Would like to pay credit to the great work done by the council and its partners to reopen the High Streets, retail hospitality and leisure sectors has led to a significant increase in footfall and businesses opening up in the high 80% now. We continue to work very closely with all these sectors and also the tourism industry as green shoots start to appear.

Discretionary Grants – we have now launched our final scheme, and have opened it up to all businesses, whether they be based from offices or home, who have had their business income affected by Covid 19. The deadline for this is Friday 14th August at 12pm, and we are aiming to get all grants processed by 28th August. Can I pay credit to Gayle Spencer and her team for all their hard work so far.

Small Business & Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Grant Funds we now stand at 2,403 payments and a total of £31,175,000. Based on the original total grant received of £33,124,000, this equates to over 94.1% paid to businesses in our area. There has been a huge amount of work contacting businesses who qualify for this grant from Paul Town/Steve Marshall & their team & also the team processing all the grants and ensuring these businesses receive these grants into their accounts as quickly as possible, so my thanks to Jon Dawson and his team as well. Again this scheme is closing on Friday 14th August at 12pm.

Business Rate Relief as a Tool for Inward Investment – a policy designed to provide an incentive to new firms looking to locate into the District (with some qualifying criteria) which allows for up to 50% business rates relief for those new firms (or existing firms that expand to fit the policy criteria). This was approved at Exec earlier in the year but the pilot was suspended due to the virtual close down of business during the peak period of the pandemic. We are now working to launch this scheme in the next week to 10 days as business is starting up again.

Finance Systems Replacement Project - The Project Board, met last week with leadership representatives from TechnologyOne, the supplier of the new finance system. The meeting set out the objectives for the project including the implementation and reporting approach. This was the first of what will become regular meetings with the supplier so the Project Board can closely monitor the progress of the implementation and provide support in overcoming any challenges with the implementation itself.

High level planning has established a go live for the beginning of July in 2021. This will be confirmed when the business process workshops have been concluded later this year and the blue print for the implementation and the realisation of benefits agreed. My thanks to all the project board for their hard work & also Keith Eales for leading this and his hard work in making sure this important project has been kept on track.

Portfolio Holder for Housing & Property (Councillor Matecki)

I am delighted to tell you that the Application made by the Housing Team for permanent planning approval from the Council's Planning Committee, at William Wallsgrove, the Council's direct access hostel for the homeless in Leamington Spa, was successful. The hostel is now able to extend its provision of round the clock accommodation, support and care to the most vulnerable in our society, when it is safe to do so.

Opened in 2018 William Wallsgrove House has been providing a temporary home for around 11 people and is a major element of the Council's rough sleeping initiative which aims to ensure that nobody needs to be street homeless. Unlike the night shelters, those using the hostel are encouraged to stay during the day and access on-site support, care and counselling from specialist agencies and partners including P3, Warwickshire Police, Cyrenians, Warwickshire County Council and NHS Mental and Physical Health nurses.

Now that permission has been granted the Council can utilize the full capacity of the building and offer beds for 22 guests with this increasing to 30 during severe weather conditions.

Alongside the planning application is a robust management plan for the hostel detailing the hostel rules, use and occupation agreement and strict no drugs and alcohol policy.

In the past eighteen months more than 200 rough sleepers have been helped by the Council's service at William Wallsgrove House and many of these people have found permanent accommodation, reconnected with friends and family or have undergone rehabilitation programmes.

William Wallsgrove House has played a key role in the work that officers have been undertaking as part of the 'Everyone In' programme. This has seen the Council, with its fantastic Voluntary sector partners provide accommodation and support to our rough sleepers, providing them with a safe place to go and the support to help them adjust to their new situation. In various locations across the district, we are now accommodating over 60 people who were either former rough sleepers or at risk of rough sleeping. We are also grateful to local businesses including Aston Martin, Aubrey Allen along with Tesco, Morrisons, Asda, Marks and Spencer the Sikh community and Midland Langar Seva for providing goods and food which enabled the provision of hot meals and lunch packs during the lockdown period.

We are now focusing on finding more settled accommodation for all of these people and provide the support they need to make the transition. We have successfully brought everyone in all but one person who, despite being made an offer of accommodation, is not ready to make the move to come inside. So for the last 4 months, we have all but eradicated rough sleeping in Warwick District and we are very close to sustaining this going forward. Wouldn't that be a fantastic achievement and incredible legacy.

We know too well that many people have been hit hard financially by the pandemic. Some people are on reduced incomes, others have lost their jobs or businesses, many are still furloughed and face potential redundancy. This is already having an impact on the ability of households to pay their housing costs, and we forecast a new wave of homelessness as the governments ban on evictions is lifted at the end of this month. We are talking to our local Registered Providers to develop measures to prevent

tenancy loss, enabling people to remain in their homes and giving them a second chance.

We are also making strides on our commitment to climate change. Although yet to go before planning committee, the specification for our new homes planned at a site known as the Triangle will deliver zero carbon in operation. Properties will benefit from underfloor heating, air source heat pumps and Photovoltaic units. The U values are well in excess of building standards and Adam Sharpe, the Assoc. Pre-Construction Director from Vistry, our development partner, tells us that not many are building to this level. This work with Vistry and our consultants, Enhabit, have helped us to develop a specification for future Council homes which we consider will achieve an EPC of A.

Of course, a significant issue for us is improving the EPC ratings of our housing stock. To this end, officers are in the process of commissioning specialist consultants to survey property archetypes and make recommendations to improve the EPC rating of the existing housing stock to a minimum of EPC C to meet current requirements.

The work is being separated into various categories relating to the current EPC levels as those properties which are rated E, F and G will require a different approach to those with EPC levels of D, C or above.

We are also seeking recommendations for improving all property above EPC C as a separate piece of work to meet the Council's climate emergency agenda.

When recommendations and costings are available, we will be in a clearer position to understand the level of work required. We are also preparing to bid for any opportunities that may arise linked to this area of work.

Portfolio Report Development Services (Councillor Cooke)

Following the first few months of the lockdown the Planning department is becoming busier once again with 249 applications currently registered on the system. This is about normal for this time of year.

Progress has also been made on the Kenilworth School Project as the Department for Education has given conditional permission for the school to progress the purchase of the land required to build the new school. Once the school has completed the purchase of the land it will trigger the application for up to 99 homes to be built at Crewe Lane, South Crest Farm. However, progress on some of the other earmarked sites in Eastern Kenilworth is slow with a number of issues still to be resolved.

The Council are putting in place a policy for builders with a turnover below £40 million per annum which allows them to ask to defer their payment of CIL for up to 3 months. This will bring us into line with other nearby authorities. Each application would be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Most local building sites in the District are now fully operational.

Building Control is confident that despite the pandemic income should be between £700-£750K against a budget for the full year of £836K. However, we have maintained our market share at 69%. They are actively pursuing new business including providing their services for the new Kenilworth School