

COUNCIL - 2 February 2021

MINUTES

Present: Madam Deputy Mayor Cllr Nash in the Chair Councillors: A Adeyemo, M Allen, K Allsopp, S Ashraf MBE, K Blunt, M Brain, J Burn, J Butler, C Buxton-Sait, S Caudwell, D Cole, I Courts, S Davis, T Diccico, J Fairburn, M Gough, K Grinsell, R Grinsell, B Groom, J Hamilton, K Hawkins, A Hodgson, T Hodgson, P Hogarth MBE, Mrs D Holl-Allen MBE, R Holt, D Howell, A Mackenzie, A Mackiewicz, K Macnaughton, L McCarthy, M McLoughlin, K Meeson,, M Parker, J Potts, W Qais, A Rebeiro, T Richards OBE, A Rolf, J Ryan, R Sexton, G Slater, R Sleigh OBE, K Thomas, P Thomas, J Tildesley, Mrs K Wild, C Williams and M Wilson

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

2. COUNCIL MINUTES

Councillor Wilson requested an amendment to minute 7 Questions under Standing Order 8 to include his references to the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Report which stated that 6% of land in Solihull was currently committed for wildlife recovery compared to the regional average of 11% and 16% in Stratford-upon-Avon.

RESOLVED

Subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 8th December 2020 were approved.

3. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTING INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

Councillor Mackiewicz made a declaration of interest as a Director of AMPA Associates Ltd who provided contracts procured by Solihull Council.

Councillor Adeyemo made a declaration of interest as he was employed by a company who provided insurance to HS2 Ltd.

4. PETITIONS

Councillor Howell submitted a petition on behalf of local residents to oppose a proposed development on a greenbelt site at Albany Lane, Kenilworth Road, Balsall Common.

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Deputy Mayor announced that the LGBTQ+ Rainbow Flag would fly at the Council House as a mark of respect and to raise awareness. LGBTQ+ History

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month focused on the celebration and recognition of LGBT+ people and culture.

Councillor Rolf made a statement on the Winter Grant Scheme, which would provide families in the Borough with food, fuel and other household essentials through the use of a £566,000 funding allocation.

Councillor Mackiewicz announced to Council a vision for the creation of Arden Forest which would enable the Council to create a diverse and continuous green corridor through the Borough of Solihull and the Meriden Gap. Not only to provide vital green connectivity, but also to help to deal with air pollution, carbon capture and habitat creation through rewilding.

6. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 9 AND 12

No questions or deputations were received.

7. QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 8

Councillor Cole to Councillor Rolf, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Stronger and Safer Communities

“With the higher than normal numbers of deaths we are experiencing can you advise me on how many new burial plots (per cemetery) are left in the Councils cemeteries with an estimated time of when these plots will be exhausted.”

The Cabinet Member confirmed that there had been an increased number of cremation services and burials compared to the previous year. The primary focus of Solihull’s burial offer had been at Widney Manor and Woodlands. There were 200 spaces which remained at Widney Manor as well as 220 spaces at Woodlands these would both provide capacity for three years. In both cemeteries, options were being considered to significantly extend the life of the cemetery.

Councillor Ade Adeyemo to Councillor Alison Rolf, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Stronger and Safer Communities

“In recent weeks, the residents of Campden Green have suffered repeated anti-social behaviour by 4x4 drivers and quad bikers driving across the Green, doing doughnuts in mud and snow and generally making a mess of what is normally a nice peaceful area of Lyndon ward.

On one recent occasion, quad bikers doing doughnuts on wet grass covered houses in so much grass and mud that local volunteers had to help jet wash the houses to get it all off. The week before last, it was the turn of 4x4s driving at high speed across the snow-covered Green.

Similar incidents have also happened on the green areas next to St Mary’s Hobs Moat Church.

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Despite several reports to Solihull Police and the Council, nothing has happened and I am concerned that sooner or later, someone will be seriously hurt.

Will the Cabinet Member please tell me what is being done to prevent similar incidents from happening again and to protect local residents and our green spaces in Lyndon ward from irresponsible drivers and quad bikers?"

The Cabinet Member explained that they could not speak on behalf of the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner or West Midlands Police, but was aware that multiple agencies were focused on the issue of irresponsible drivers and off-road bikes. The North Locality Group had created a revised Off-Road Bike Action Plan which enabled a partnership response to emerging issues. Members of the public were encouraged to report off-road bikes to Solihull Community Housing who had a dedicated contact telephone and email address for reports of vehicles on parks and open spaces – Tel: 0121 717 1500; email: bikeissues@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk. Vehicle related nuisance should be reported to the Police via 101 or 999.

Councillor Brain to Councillor K Grinsell, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health

"I welcome the increased allocation of the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2021/22 to help to deliver the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2020-23) but I am concerned about how far this funding will go to address the shortage of suitable accommodation in Solihull including emergency and temporary accommodation. How many units do we actually need in Solihull and how much will it deliver for Solihull's homeless?"

The Council's report stated that the number of rough sleepers is less than 5*. Is this figure based on the Government's 'Rough Sleeping Snapshot in England - autumn 2019' which was just a count on a single night in autumn 2019? If not how has the number of rough sleepers been calculated?

Did the Council's very laudable action in ensuring that during the first lockdown rough sleepers were accommodated, manage to ensure the figure for the majority of 2020 was nil. The perception is that this figure is much higher.

The figure of 5* is on page 2 of the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2020-23)."

The Cabinet Member explained that Solihull Council had worked to increase the portfolio of temporary accommodation to meet the heightened demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of March 2020 there were 149 units of accommodation, which had been increased to 168 units by the end of December 2020. There remained a need to use hotel accommodation during the pandemic for short term placements. All of the costs of COVID-19 pandemic placements were met through government funding streams, which included £85,000 of additional funds to meet additional costs.

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The Cabinet Member also highlighted that the number of people who were sleeping rough at any one time in Solihull remained low at between one and six. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy referenced five people in this report, which was the average number and was informed by the annual rough sleeper count. Between 2016 and 2019, this figure ranged by two and six. There was additional work undertaken by the Council which informed the intelligence that they gathered.

Furthermore, the Cabinet Member noted that the rough sleeper count which took place in November 2020 identified one rough sleeper. This showed the focussed work to provide accommodation and ongoing support over the course of the pandemic had been successful. The individual included in the count was known to services and had been offered accommodation.

Councillor Brain asked how the reports of 125 rough sleepers, of which 46 people who were new to the service, aligned with the information presented. The Cabinet Member confirmed that between April and December 2020, there were 37 reports of rough sleepers, which included 14 individuals who were new to rough sleeping in Solihull. All of these people were offered accommodation, but it was a very complex situation. Pilots such as the Housing First scheme (in conjunction with the WMCA) aimed to house 24 people. The Cabinet Member requested that anyone who came across a person who was sleeping rough, to report this to StreetLink.

Councillor Brain to Councillor Courts, Leader of the Council.

“At one of our recent all member COVID-19 updates, Cllr Courts noted the incidence of people who have rigorously shielded for many months but have become infected with COVID-19, such as those living in Redwood House in Kingshurst. The Leader very reasonably questioned whether this may be due to transmission through the Postal Network or through paid deliveries, as is the practice of taxi firms and the like. Could I ask whether this observation is supported by current epidemiology and what actions can be taken to mitigate risk?”

The Leader explained that there were regular COVID-19 briefings for all Members, which provided an opportunity to ask questions of Officers. He was unaware of the comments that Councillor Brain referred to. He stressed that the epidemiology does not answer why the virus transmitted so quickly and was keen to highlight that more information was needed about transmission. Messages with information to help prevent the spread of infection continued to be circulated to the public. Councillor Brain apologised if he had misquoted Councillor Courts.

Councillor Wilson to Councillor Mackiewicz, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Planning and Housing

“Has the Cabinet Member liaised yet with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust regarding securing land fit for wildlife Conservation?”

The Cabinet Member stated that the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust were a key partner, and the Council aimed to work closely with them to generate benefits

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for the natural environment, such as through a new enhancement project in the Borough. The Council had been in touch with the Wildlife Trust to discuss plans to improve conservation and biodiversity enhancement in the Borough.

Councillor Wilson noted the Dasgupta Review and asked what projected percentage of land would be committed for wildlife recovery and what strategy would be used to achieve this. The Cabinet Member explained it would be difficult to confirm the percentage of land, and the benefits offered by the Arden Forest for biodiversity in the Borough, such as Site 13 and that the Local Plan had a 10% biodiversity net gain.

Councillor Caudwell to Councillor Hawkins, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways

“Whilst we can't predict when the worst weather will hit, we do know that this is likely to be a problem, so like many residents I was dismayed to hear that there would be no catch-up of the recycling services that were cancelled last week, and that I'd have to wait another fortnight before my recycling would be collected. For so many of us who try to recycle as much as possible, our brown bins are already full and we have nowhere to put another two weeks' worth of recycling. Why has it not been possible to put on additional collections?”

The Cabinet Member explained that the current contract mechanism ensured that if a collection service had been suspended, then all material presented at the next collection day would be collected. COVID-19 had impacted on resources and staffing levels, which had meant it was not possible to put on two additional collections to catch up on recycling collections.

Councillor Caudwell highlighted that staff shortages was not provided as a reason on communications channels and asked that if the Council continued to contract out essential services to the private sector, could there be assurances that the contract would prevent the problems of missed collections.

The Cabinet Member responded that under the current circumstances additional collections would not be possible, especially given the challenges of staff who were self-isolating, sickness levels and HGV driver statutory rest periods. It was regretful that the service had caused inconvenience to local residents and kept this area under consideration in the new contract.

Councillor Caudwell to Councillor Courts, Leader of the Council

“I am sure the Leader is aware of the concerning footage that was recently shared on social media of two West Midlands Police officers who stopped a young man on his way to work by Dorridge railway station, in the Leader's own ward.

We acknowledge the police have a vital role to play in ensuring public safety, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and my Group thanks them for their service; but it's equally important that policing in this borough remains demonstrably 'by consent', and that the public can feel safe and unthreatened in police presence.

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Will the Leader echo the wishes of this Group - and, I hope, the entire Council - that the policing response to the pandemic continues to follow the four Es of Engagement, Education, Encouragement and then - and only when necessary - Enforcement?"

The Leader of the Council thanked the police for their work throughout the pandemic and recognised that the police had apologised for the behaviour of the Officer. The Council and Police had worked together throughout the pandemic to engage and where appropriate enforce, with the four E's as the foundation of the approach.

Councillor McLoughlin to Councillor Courts, Leader of the Council

"Having seen the Leader viewing Scrutiny via WebEx, can I check he is aware that viewing of meetings is also possible from YouTube?"

The Leader explained that he attended the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board to respond to questions and offer clarification, and that the problem in question had been fixed.

Councillor McLoughlin asked for the Leader to confirm his support for the independence of the Scrutiny function within the Council. The Leader explained that it was important for Scrutiny Boards to retain their independence.

8. COUNCIL TOPIC OF DEBATE

No topic of debate was submitted.

9. NOTICE OF MOTION

No notice of motion was submitted.

10. RECOMMENDATION FROM CABINET - THE COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

The Leader of the Council introduced a recommendation from Cabinet on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme which Full Council was required to approve.

RESOLVED

Council agreed to the recommendation from the Cabinet meeting of 5 November 2020 that the current scheme continues and no changes are made to the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme from April 2021.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMITTEES

Remuneration Committee 26 January 2021 Minute 5 Pay Policy Statement 2021

The Chairman of the Remuneration Committee invited Members to consider the above report and the recommendations to Council.

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RESOLVED

Council approved the Council's Pay Policy Statement 2021.

12. REPORTS FROM CABINET

Councillor Courts – Leader of the Council

The Leader advised Council of the decisions taken at the Cabinet meetings 14 January 2021 and provided a summary of the meetings and activities he had been involved in on behalf of Solihull and the West Midlands, as well as an update on the economic strategy responsibilities of his portfolio.

Councillor Sleigh – Cabinet Member for Resources

The Cabinet Member advised Council of the decisions taken at the decision session on 12 January 2021.

Councillor A Hodgson queried what provision was in place for when the furlough scheme ends, which could lead to an increase in people who qualify for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The Cabinet Member confirmed he would provide a written response to Councillor Hodgson.

Councillor Rolf – Cabinet Member for Stronger and Safer Communities

The Cabinet Member advised Council of the decisions taken at the decision session on 8 December 2020 and 21 January 2021.

Councillor Mackiewicz – Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Planning and Housing

The Cabinet Member advised Council of the decisions taken at the decision session on 17 December 2020 and provided an update on the Local Plan.

Councillor McCarthy asked if ward Members would be consulted if any changes to the Local Plan in their area were introduced, specifically if there were changes in relation to the Household Waste Recycling Centre being moved to Damson Parkway. The Cabinet Member confirmed that any changes would be made available in the public domain, and would follow the relevant legal process.

Councillor McLoughlin questioned whether the 250,000 trees which the Council committed to planting would still take place, or would the Arden Forest scheme change this. The Cabinet Member explained that the Arden Forest scheme was a long term project which would be linked across the whole Borough.

A number of Members queried a consultation document which had been circulated by the Conservative Party which could have confused respondents thinking it was linked to the Council's Local Plan consultation and requested that the comments were included in the Local Plan consultation process. The Cabinet Member stated that the document was printed by the Conservative Party and did not relate to his portfolio.

Councillor Meeson – Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills

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The Cabinet Member advised Council of the decisions taken at the decision session on 11 January 2021 and gave further information on the decision to expand Cheswick Green Primary School. The Cabinet Member also thanked all those who had contributed to the OVOS Christmas collection. He was pleased to report that OVOS had surpassed the collection target.

Councillor K Thomas queried how the target of increased percentage of children walking to school would be met through the decision about Cheswick Green Primary School. The Cabinet Member explained that it would be expected that the children on the new housing development in Cheswick Green would walk to the school but there would still need to be capacity for parking facilities for those who would need to drive.

Councillor Hawkins – Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways

The Cabinet Member advised Council of the decisions taken at the decision session on 5 January 2021.

Councillor K Grinsell – Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

The Cabinet Member presented her report and the minutes of the Solihull Health and Wellbeing Board from 19 January 2021. The Cabinet Member provided an update on the local COVID-19 situation, and Members had the opportunity to make comments and to thank the NHS and care staff.

Councillor Sexton asked whether the pilot for the digital champions programme would be accessible for those with the most significant needs. The Cabinet Member explained that this scheme worked with Age UK, which enabled it to be accessible for a variety of people who may have different needs. Staff were trained to support all people to maximise the effectiveness of the scheme. Councillor Sexton questioned if this scheme could be made permanent. The Cabinet Member confirmed this would be considered.

Councillor Howell noted that there were 27 local COVID-19 vaccination sites, and asked how many were in Solihull and whether residents would be able to access a local site. The Cabinet Member explained that the majority were in Solihull but some were on the border with Birmingham, however there was good coverage across the Borough. If any issues were identified, it was requested that Members contacted the Cabinet Member.

Councillor Thomas asked how many people were housed in hotels currently and what does this cost the Council. The Cabinet Member confirmed that there were about 10-15 people housed in a hotel, and a written response would be provided regarding the cost.

Councillor Burn queried whether the Cabinet Member could work with partners to consider the creation of a simple website being created which provided information on when each priority group would be vaccinated in each GP surgery. The Cabinet Member noted that the NHS was independent of Solihull Council, but they continued to vaccinate each priority group. If there were concerns that a resident had missed a vaccine appointment, the NHS continued to monitor records to establish any potential problems.

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Councillor Richards – Cabinet Member for Growth and Infrastructure

The Cabinet Member advised Council of the decisions taken at the decision session on 21 December 2020.

Councillor Slater asked the Cabinet Member whether they had spoken to Councillors and Officers at Birmingham City Council about the Wheatsheaf Junction on the A45 which caused traffic problems in Solihull. The Cabinet Member explained that they had liaised with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways where the problems regarding this junction had been actively discussed, alongside colleagues from Transport for West Midlands and West Midlands Combined Authority.

Councillor Tildesley – Cabinet Member for Leisure, Tourism and Sport

The Cabinet Member advised Council of the decisions taken at the decision session on 15 December 2020.

13. MINUTES OF SCRUTINY BOARDS

The minutes of the following Scrutiny Board were presented for information:

- Health and Adult Social Care (7 January 2021)
- Resources and Delivering Value (11 January 2021)
- Children’s Services, Education and Skills (13 January 2021)
- Economic Development and Managed Growth (18 January 2021)
- Stronger Communities and Neighbourhood Services (20 January 2021)

Councillor Allen asked Councillor Gough, Chairman of Children’s Services, Education and Skills Scrutiny Board, about the roll out of laptops and 4g routers to vulnerable children, as she had attended a Governors meeting at Burman Infant School, where they had received no equipment. Councillor Allen asked whether this could be investigated and whether the criteria for vulnerable children included those who needed to share devices with siblings and parents. Councillor Gough stated a written response would be provided.

14. MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

The minutes of the following Committees were presented for information:

- Remuneration Committee (26 January 2021)
- HS2 Implementation Advisory Group (17 December 2020)
- Audit Committee (5 January 2021)

15. QUESTIONS BY LEADERS OF POLITICAL GROUPS UNDER SO5 (2) (T)

Councillor Adeyemo asked what the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Planning and Housing had done to support residents whose properties had combustible cladding or could not get a EWS1 certificate. The Cabinet Member explained that all SCH properties had non-combustible cladding on them, and he was unaware of private properties that had cladding in the Borough. If any

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properties were, it was requested that details of these were sent to the Cabinet Member.

16. CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORTS

The Leader's Scheme of Delegation to Officers was reported for information.

17. CHIEF EXECUTIVE URGENT MATTERS

There were no urgent matters.

18. QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 8

No questions remained.

The meeting finished at 8.05 pm