

Meeting of the Council

4 December 2023

Present: The Mayor (Councillor S Wright)

Councillors: A Abbey, V Allen, N Balding, B Barr, C Benson, R Bowden, M Browne, K Buckley, L Butler, S Carr, H Cooksey, K Critchley, D Ellis, S Emery, J Flaherty, G Friend, B Gallagher, U Gillham, G Gowland, S Hall, A Heaver, J Henshaw, T Higgins, M Hussain, T Jennings, M Jervis, W Johnson, J Kerr-Brown, C Lenihan, C Lloyd-Fitzgerald, W Maisey, I Marks, D Matthews, M McLaughlin, H Mundry, K Mundry, S Parish, H Patel, S Rydzkowski, H Speed, N Sudworth, R Tynan, P Warburton, L Watson, J Whalen, J Wheeler, S Zaman

C48 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors: Chapman, Creaghan, Hill, King, Milner, Mitchell, Tarr, Walker.

The following were noted as absent: Councillor Eastty, Fellows.

C49 The Minutes of the Council

It was proposed by the Mayor and seconded by the Deputy Mayor that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2023 be agreed as a correct record, subject the amendments circulated at the meeting.

Council resolved,

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

C50 Correspondence from the previous meetings

Noted.

C51 Code of Conduct

C56 – Adoption of Local Plan – Councillor Abbey declared an interest in this item and left the room.

C63 – Motion 1 – Councillor Abbey, Hussain and Watson declared an interest, they remained in the room but did not take part in the discussion or vote.

C63 – Motion 1 – Councillors Ellis, Emery, Friend, Gallagher, Gillham, Hall, Kerr-Brown, Matthews, H Mundry, Parish, Patel, Sudworth, Whalen, Wright, Zaman declared an interest in this item and left the room.

C52 Civic Mayor's Announcements

Noted.

C53 Announcements from the Leader

The Leader circulated his announcements as below in advance of the meeting;

Culture Warrington

Culture Warrington was awarded a £600,000 grant by Arts Council England as part of its 'Place Partnership Fund'. Warrington Borough Council committed significant match funding from the Town Deal Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and Warrington's Business Improvement District (BID) also made a match contribution, bringing the total to £840,000. This would enable Culture Warrington to create a vibrant two-year programme focused on developing the Warrington Contemporary Arts Festival to extend its scope and renew its focus on accessible large-scale, outdoor and family-friendly events.

The grant would enable the development of three new project areas: Community Engagement, Artist Development and Children and Young People. The aim was to develop an ambitious cultural programme for all ages and backgrounds that would unite the community, support the economy, bring performances and workshops into non-conventional spaces to break down barriers to the arts, engender a sense of pride of place and address wellbeing and social priorities in a deep and lasting way.

The whole programme would align with the redevelopment of the Pyramid Arts Centre, which was being funded by the Town Deal, bringing about transformational change to ensure that upon reopening the Pyramid would have a range of exciting, newly developed arts programmes and a wider range of audiences.

Four new job roles would be created by the end of 2023, with the programmes going live in January 2024. The reinvigorated Warrington Contemporary Arts Festival (WCAF) would then take place in spring 2024. The team would create a fantastic two-year programme, which engaged people of all ages, created new jobs and training opportunities, and continue to build Warrington's reputation as a place of cultural excellence.

A Cultural Christmas in Warrington

Warrington Weekend Wonderland

This festive town centre festival returned on 25th and 26th November. Led by Warrington's BID with support from Culture Warrington, Warrington Borough Council and UKSPF funding, the town centre was filled with markets, funfairs, street entertainers, craft stalls, choirs and a brass band. The Christmas

activities were spread across Time Square, Bridge Street, Golden Square, Queens Gardens, the Town Hall and Bank Park Pavilion.

Culture Warrington's traditional @ No.25 Christmas Installation returned but with a slightly different twist for 2023. Created by local artists Erica Wilkinson and Lauren Muir with support from Warrington and Vale Royal College students, Queens Gardens came alive with a Narnia themed Winter Wonderland installation accompanied by a live performance.

On Saturday, Katumba Drummers led a parade from Bridge Street to the Town Hall where visitors were treated to a magical light and sound show projected across the front of the Town Hall building. The bespoke animation produced by Culture Warrington was specially designed for Warrington by Double Take Projections, featuring a bespoke poem by local storyteller Flick Goodman, photos of Warrington's past and artwork by local children.

The Elf Who Forgot Christmas – Time Square

On Saturday 2nd and Sunday 3rd December, Time Square hosted a series of immersive trails and interactive theatre from The Bookworm Players, which led families to help the Jolly Elf find the true meaning of Christmas. Along the way, families were greeted by a charming Fairy, Simon the Snowman and finally got to take the Jolly Elf to see Father Christmas.

Walton Hall and Gardens

Santa's Grotto

From 25th November, Warrington Disability Partnership presented a spectacular, fully accessible, Santa's Grotto experience at Walton Hall and Gardens. Tickets included a visit to see Santa, a present and a reindeer puzzle trail.

Luminate

Walton Hall and Gardens hosted Luminate (24th November to 24th December), presenting trails full of wonder and intrigue. Complete with incredible lighting elements and ambient music, the trail weaves through the stunning grounds.

Land of Lights – Gulliver's World

Land of Lights was launched in November and would run until the end of February 2024, allowing visitors to explore 12 dreamworlds inspired by animal kingdoms, mega monuments, and seasonal celebrations. Each dreamworld was bursting with colour, energy, and illumination. The Jurassic zone featured 'living' dinosaurs.

Questions to the Leader and Portfolio Holder

Councillor Jervis to Councillor Patel

Given the national collective pay agreement for Waste Services, what are the outstanding points at local level? When did the council first hear about the issues? How is an ongoing strike in the town justified?

Councillor Patel advised that the council was informed of the concerns in September 2023. The main complaint was around national pay negotiations. Councillor Patel confirmed that there were mechanisms in place to consult with colleagues and meetings were undertaken regularly. Councillor Patel understood the request for laundry allowances, however as there were other uniformed members of staff within the council, any decision had to be in consultation with all unions, and it had to be affordable.

Councillor Balding to Councillor Patel

A number of residents have had difficulty accessing recycling centres, and on occasion were turned away if they arrived on foot. Is there anything the council can do to allow those on foot to access recycling centres?

Councillor Patel advised he had not been told of any incidents where this had occurred.

Councillor Barr to Councillor Bowden

What will you enjoy most about Warrington's cultural activities now that you have been relieved of your duties as Leader?

Councillor Bowden advised that he would continue to enjoy and support the wealth of cultural events in Warrington.

Councillor Maisey to Councillor Patel

Elements of the issues taking place with those staff members who are striking, could fixed by HMRC. What is Councillor Patel's stance on bins being emptied ASAP?

Councillor Patel advised that the workers felt they were being underpaid under the cost-of-living crisis. The relief received from HMRC is miniscule compared to the cost.

Councillor Wheeler to Councillor Hall

The national literacy reported that 1 in 12 children do not own a book, and this continued to rise. Following the Democratic Service team supporting the Christmas Toy Appeal, would Councillor Hall be interested in a 'donate a book' appeal for those children in the town who do not own a book.

Councillor Hall wholeheartedly supported this. She agreed that a 'donate a book' appeal would be a lovely idea and that it could coincide with World Book Day.

Councillor Critchley to Councillor Higgins

How much did the Council contribute to Culcheth Library's refurbishment and reopening? What was the percentage of the total cost represented?

Councillor Higgins advised that a private personal donation was given along with a donation from Friends of Culcheth Library and £140,000 was provided by Warrington Borough Council.

Councillor Critchley to Councillor Hall

In noting the decrease in Children in Care in Warrington, can you please confirm how many asylum-seeking children are in care in Warrington?

Councillor Hall confirmed there were 32 when the announcements were circulated, and there were now 33.

The Chief Executive gave an update on the ongoing industrial action taken by Waste Services staff.

C54 Questions Received from Members of the Public

Mr Cameron to Councillor M McLaughlin

Last Friday (1st December) marked World AIDS Day. Charities and organisations such as The Terrence Higgins Trust has been rightly putting pressure on the government to take the necessary steps to end HIV transmissions by 2030. HIV is sadly still a common occurrence in the UK LGBT+ community despite the major steps regarding its treatment and prevention with the advancements of schemes such as PrEP being rolled out across the UK. What steps can Warrington Borough Council take to increase the awareness and volume of sexual health services in town and in particular how can it best encourage Warrington's LGBT+ community to feel safe, get tested regularly and ultimately have the town do its part in hitting this 2030 target?

Councillor McLaughlin thanked Mr Cameron for his timely question and highlighted that within latest figures, there was a 5% reduction in HIV cases compared to last year.

Councillor McLaughlin noted that the Council lights up Warrington Town Hall each year to raise awareness of HIV and to remember those who have lost their lives to HIV.

Locally, following various campaigns targeted at sexually active young people at places like Chester University and Warrington and Vale Royal College, Warrington's own sexual health service has offered easily accessible HIV testing sessions.

It was noted that young people have been offered condom packs, with a QR code on the back that provided information on services. There were also plans in place for free testing schedules between 5 to 11 February 2024.

Internally, Warrington Borough Council is determined to make a difference to end HIV transmission once and for all. The Council will continue to raise awareness and reduce the stigma of HIV, through communications and will highlight the importance of testing and to ensure support is clearly signposted and available.

C55 Questions Received from Members of the Council

1. Councillor Critchley to Councillor Mitchell

I note that, whilst the Cabinet Member Responsible for Corporate Finance failed to fully answer the Question that I posed at the last Full Council Meeting regarding Birchwood Park, they clarified that the value of the business park on 31 March 2023 was £215M. It has now become clear, following the last Audit and Corporate Governance Committee meeting, that the total sum the Council had invested in the business park at this date was £243M.

This represents a potential loss of £28M of public money arising from the Council's investment in Birchwood Park. The business park seems like a money pit, with more capital having to be invested whilst the WBC receives a low net return.

Birchwood Park is currently producing a net return of less than 1%, even using the controversial annuity method for calculating MRP (see the external auditors' comments in their last audit findings report). I suspect that if the more prudent straight-line method were being applied then the net return would be zero or close to zero.

The Birchwood Park investment also has the perverse consequence of concentrating, not diversifying risk for the Council.

Could the Cabinet Member Responsible for Corporate Finance please confirm when the Labour Leadership will make the decision to exit this ill-conceived and poorly-performing investment and take the opportunity to reduce the £1.8Bn of debt that makes Warrington such a significant debt outlier amongst unitary councils as referred to in the damning Lee Rowley MP letter to the Council dated 21 July 2023.

A written response would be provided.

2. Councillor Wheeler to Councillor Patel

The bin strike has affected all residents to varying degree and has highlighted how much we take this invaluable and essential service for granted. It has impacted some residents disproportionately: those who don't drive; those who cannot afford or are not able to book online private collections; those who are full-time carers. Did WBC have any procedures in place to help such residents?

Councillor Patel noted that the Council fully recognised the challenges and difficulties residents and business faced as part of the Industrial Action taken by the Waste Service with respect to the 2023 National Pay Award. The Council had a small number of staff report for work during the dispute. Current legislation prevented the authority bringing in agency staff to cover the roles of those employees who were on strike.

As a result of the restrictions with respect to deployment of additional labour, it was very difficult to provide any residential waste collection service. When resources were available, they were prioritised to service residential properties with communal bin facilities.

Officers looked at support for vulnerable residents and those who generate additional waste via a medical issue (we had over 1500 assisted collections and red top residual bins), however given the potential risks and issues the Council was not been able to provide a residential collection service to these residents. I am sure Cllr Wheeler can appreciate the challenges a refuse crew would face if a Waste Vehicle arrived within a street to take 1 resident's bin. Neighbours would understandably expect their waste to be removed at the same time, resulting in potential conflict and stand-off. It would not be appropriate for the council to communicate with neighbours about why a particular house was receiving a waste collection service from the council, given the confidential nature of the arrangements.

Staff have looked at the potential provision of additional temporary CRC sites within the borough. The delivery of these additional sites, whilst appearing simple, present significant challenges for the council. Appropriate sites would need to be large enough to allow for traffic to safely queue, skips would be limited to a size of 20 cubic yards (taking approximately 200 black bags) to enable residents to load their waste safely into the skip. The skip would become full very quickly requiring a regular replacement from the contractor. The site would need to be manned during operational hours to ensure waste was disposed of properly, and only residential residual waste was disposed of. In addition, a risk of fly tipping at these facilities when they are closed. Any sites would need to be discussed with the Environment Agency given the potential environment risks. From Tuesday 5 December two temporary sites

would become operational, one based on the car park at Victoria Park and one at the Orford Park Car Park off Alder Lane.

Councillor Wheeler asked the following supplementary Question:

Has there been any communication to advise how Councillors can support vulnerable residents?

Councillor Patel noted that this issue no doubt affected Warrington's most vulnerable residents and on occasion, he had taken a resident's waste to alleviate the pressure. Councillor Patel felt that Councillors, and friendly neighbours should try to help where they can.

3. Councillor Carr to Councillor Henshaw

In April of this year the Council commenced an anti-idling campaign, working with some of our local schools. Do you have any updates on this?

Councillor Henshaw noted that schools that participated in the anti-idling scheme were chosen on the following criteria:

- Schools taking part in the WOW scheme (a programme where pupils are rewarded for walking to school a minimum of once a week)
- Pupil numbers and location
- Schools located in an area which was being considered as a low traffic neighbourhood area were discounted

The following schools took part in the project from Easter 2023 until the May half term holiday.

- Christ Church CE Primary School
- Callands Community Primary School
- Newchurch Primary School
- Woolston Community Primary School
- St Barnabas CE Primary School
- Evelyn Street Primary School
- Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School
- Ravenbank Community Primary School

Firstly, a meeting was held with a Police Community Support Officer to inform them about the project and to establish their support. Followed by a meeting with each school where a lead member of staff and a group of children to be air quality champions was identified. An assembly was then delivered to each school community about air pollution and the impact idling engines have on air quality and introducing the air quality champions.

We then went out on patrol with the air quality champions and a member of school staff to assess the number of vehicles which were idling and the length

of time their engines were running. Following the assessment, an awareness campaign was launched using banners outside schools and messages were sent to all parents using the school's communication channels.

The air quality champions patrolled outside the school at either school drop off or pick up time speaking to parents and the local community about the campaign and handing out information leaflets. 50 balloons were displayed at each school mainly to draw attention to the message but also to signify that for every minute a car idles enough harmful exhaust fumes to fill 150 balloons is sent into the air. In addition, to the impact on the air quality, cost of leaving a car engine running was highlighted and the legal requirement not to leave a vehicle engine running unnecessarily whilst a vehicle is stationary on a public road.

Next Steps:

- With the onset of the winter months, children were taken from each school out on patrol again handing out leaflets as a reminder and to raise awareness among the new parents of leaving their engine running. The schools would also be sending out a reminder to all parents via their communications channels.
- After following up, the project is likely to extend with the intention to deliver to a further group of primary schools and assess the possibility of including a high school.

4. Councillor Chapman to Councillor Mitchell

Can the Cabinet Member Responsible for Corporate Finance please confirm the net return that Time Square is making for the Council and can they please confirm the latest open market valuation of the £142M Time Square investment?

A written response would be provided.

5. Councillor Walker to Councillor Patel

Sandy Lane Recycling Centre has struggled to cope during the bin strike. This is partly due to its location, layout, and lack of investment for improvement. It only has a few years left to run on its current contract. No site appears to have been identified in the Local Plan for a replacement. Can we have a reassurance that South Warrington will continue to have a recycling centre?

Councillor Patel he confirmed that the Council was committed to delivering a new improved Community Recycling Centre within the south of the town to serve residents and that that current facility at Sandy Lane would not be closed until a new site is operational.

Officers within the authority were in discussion with relevant agencies about a suitable location as part of the discussions around the Southeast Urban Extension.

6. Councillor Lloyd-Fitzgerald to Councillor Hall

How can we help those families in Warrington at Christmas who currently struggle to eat or heat their homes?

Councillor Hall noted that the Council continued to lead a multi-agency team of critical partners to ensure that information was promoted to all households and that all available help, advice, and assistance was targeted to Warrington's most vulnerable residents. The cost-of-living directory continued to be well used by Warrington families and alongside this a targeted leaflet was developed which would be handed out to residents at all available opportunities, promoting sources of support.

The poverty action group created key workstreams, one of which was focused entirely on food and fuel poverty with direct support and advice to our residents.

7. Councillor Balding to Councillor Mundry

In January 2018 the final version of WBC's 2018-22 Highway Asset Management Strategy was signed off by the Executive Board Member for Highways, Transportation and Public Realm. This strategy included streetlights and noted the importance of reducing costs by using more energy-efficient light sources.

A FOI request recently obtained a copy of WBC's Self-Assessment Questionnaire 2022/23 for Highways Maintenance Capital Funding. When asked "Q1. Does your local authority have an asset management policy and strategy for its highway infrastructure?" To my surprise the Council replied "Yes".

I'm hoping that this current strategy includes an updated streetlight section which covers the replacement of the 200 non-LED streetlights in the Borough which are not only using more electricity but are also prone to failure and high maintenance costs.

Please can the Cabinet Member Responsible the Public Realm send me a copy of the current Highway Asset Management Strategy following on from the 2018-22 document, or if there isn't one then let me know when it will become available?

Councillor Mundry noted that some local authorities produced more minimalist Highway Asset Management Strategies which would require a complete re-write or more significant updating when required. The Warrington Highway Asset Management Strategy 2018-22 was a more comprehensive and detailed document. The Highway Asset Management Strategy for 2023-27 was being updated, however there was a number of factors which were awaiting confirmation before the refresh of the strategy can be completed. These included:

- The Council has been awaiting the LTP Guidance document from DfT for approximately eighteen months now which was still outstanding. The LTP document was a key document, as this was reflected through the highway maintenance strategy. Changes to this could impact significantly on the highway maintenance functions.
- The Council recently awarded the new term maintenance contract following a significant procurement exercise. A change of Term Maintenance Contractor would have impacted on the delivery of highway maintenance functions.
- The Council was waiting on confirmation of the additional £9m of funding from the Council's capital programme as part of the Highway Maintenance Investment Programme which was approved earlier in the year.

The council would also very much want to assure all that although the dates on the previous strategy was 2018-22, the core principles were very much still current.

Some of the outstanding information above was now known although unfortunately the LTP Guidance was still outstanding with no date given as to when it would be issued for consultation. The Highway Asset Management Strategy for 2023-27 was being updated to reflect any changes albeit without the LTP guidance. The intention was that once the updates were complete, it would be signed off, published on-line and released into the public domain.

However, as set out in the Council announcements, on the 4th October the Government announced the cancellation of HS2 Phases 2A (Birmingham to Crewe) and Phase 2B – Crewe to Manchester and published its revised plan, Network North which set out where it was intended to reinvest monies saved by not proceeding with HS2 apart from its first phase from London Euston to Birmingham. Part of this announcement was that additional monies for highways maintenance would be awarded to Highway Authorities. Details were announced on 17th November – this confirmed that Warrington would receive an additional £507,000 both for the current financial year 2023/24 and next year - 2024/25. This was in addition to the £3,989,000 of funding received per annum via the Highway Maintenance Block and Potholes Fund. Further to this it was confirmed that further Network North funding of £33.85m would be awarded for highway maintenance over the year and the following 10 years through to 2033/34. From a highways maintenance perspective this funding was welcomed. This funding would also now need to be reflected in the Council's Warrington Highway Asset Management Strategy to ensure compliance with funding criteria from the DfT set on the additional funding.

The Council's Street lighting was a valuable asset and was covered within the Highway Asset Management Strategy. Whilst the strategy did not specifically make reference to the 200 units indicated above, the policy included the management of the assets through life cycle planning and the need to take

advantage of new technologies to reduce both energy consumption and carbon.

There were a small number of highway street lights that were not LED, the replacement of these units was being phased to take account of other known schemes to ensure that no abortive works took place. In addition to this highway lighting along footpaths within parks that were not LED's were due to be replaced over 36 months as part of the continued asset replacement programme.

8. Councillor Gowland to Councillor Henshaw

The Environment Act 2021 introduces a 'biodiversity duty' on the council that requires us to produce a 'first consideration' of what action to take for biodiversity by the 1 January 2024.

We need to have considered local nature recovery, species conservation and protected site strategies, which will then shape relevant policies.

Can you please confirm where the council is on this journey? Are our site biodiversity management plans in place?

Councillor Henshaw noted that the Council included a Policy on the requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain in its new Local Plan and was intending to supplement this with additional guidance in the forthcoming update to the Council's Planning Obligations SPD.

The Council was still awaiting the publication of regulations ahead of the commencement of the statutory requirement in January 2024 before being able to finalise its policy approach in detail.

The Council commenced work with Cheshire West & Chester and Cheshire East on the preparation of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This would help identify areas of the borough where there was opportunity to enhance biodiversity and focus off-site net gain contributions from future development proposals. It was anticipated that initial consultation would be undertaken to contribute to the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy in the new year.

Councillor Gowland asked the following supplementary question:

Will Town and Parish Councils be included in any consultation?

Councillor Henshaw confirmed that any consultation would involve all stakeholders, including Town and Parish Councils.

9. Councillor Zaman to Councillor Warburton

What steps are being taken to ensure patients and those who are important to them are supported to receive quality end of life care in Warrington?

Councillor Warburton thanked Councillor Zaman for his question, which was an important issue for all.

Dying well was important to all. A good death was something that could provide comfort at a very difficult time and also help with the grieving process. Like many services, palliative care for people at the end of their life, often goes unseen until people need it. In Warrington, there was a collaborative approach to the planning and delivery of general, specialist and enhanced End of Life care that involved GP practices, district nursing, the hospital, the voluntary sector and of course, St. Rocco's Hospice.

Warrington also established a Palliative and End of Life Care Programme Board which met quarterly and was part of the Cheshire and Merseyside Palliative and End of Life Care Strategic Clinical Network that developed and shared best practice. Warrington Place had three workstreams that span the life course; these were called the Starting Well, Living Well and Ageing Well – and the Dying with Dignity work sat within Ageing Well. It was recognised that residents could sometimes experience challenges in accessing Palliative and End of Life Care due to a variety of reasons including increasing demand for services and the workforce pressures across health and social care. As death occurred across all life stages lots of debate had taken place about how best to highlight and improve end of life care in Warrington, including if there should be a separate 'Dying Well' workstream. However, it was to remain as part of the 'Ageing Well' programme.

The Dying Well workstream focused on:

- Improving access to end-of-life care; through raising public awareness and the early recognition of end of life
- The electronic sharing of end-of-life patient information across all care providers
- Improving the quality of care: through an educated, confident and skilled workforce and support for our carers, through the development and delivery of a collaborative education strategy

Some of the other work that was being done to improve End of life Care in Warrington:

- GP Practices were encouraged to proactively identify patients who might be approaching their last years of life using an Early Identification Tool, this gave the opportunity for people to be involved in advanced care planning.

- Every GP practice held multi-professional 'Gold Standard Framework' meeting to discuss known palliative patients to ensure advanced care planning conversations took place and the wishes of the patient and their family were known, documented, and shared electronically using the Electronic Palliative Care Coordination System.
- An Integrated Palliative Care Hub was introduced which was based at St Rocco's hospice and provided a coordinated approach to deliver a single point of contact for all palliative referrals and anyone who needed support or advice.
- Warrington successfully established the UK's first Palliative Virtual Ward. This enabled patients to stay at home with technology to monitor their symptoms along with ongoing clinical support from the Integrated Palliative Care Hub, St Rocco's medical team and the Warrington Palliative Care Consultants.
- Carers support was provided by Warrington Carer's Hub. The Integrated Palliative Care Hub screened referrals and referred carers to the Warrington Carer's Hub for formal and informal support and referral to Crossroads, who offer a sitting service to enable carers to have a break from caring.
- Warrington Bereavement Support service was commissioned who provide counselling sessions for those bereaved.

Councillor Warburton attended the 'Light up a Life' Christmas Celebration at St. Rocco's and joined hundreds of people whose lives were touched by St. Rocco's who were giving thanks for the lives of those they love and to support the work of the hospice.

Councillor Warburton also had the opportunity to visit St. Rocco's Hospice to hear about their vital work in Warrington, their innovative working, the strong links they had with the community and their continued commitment and motivation to share their specialist skills beyond the walls of the hospice. The doors were always open for a warm welcome to any councillors to visit and see the great work of this special place.

He noted this was a short insight into the ongoing work in Warrington that was improving the awareness of death and dying and helping to improve access and the delivery of high-quality Palliative and End of Life Care for our residents and those who were important to them.

10. Councillor Chapman to Councillor Mitchell

Incrementum Housing Development Company Ltd and Incrementum Housing Management Company Ltd were established by WBC in 2019. They are

described as commercial in nature and the principal purposes are to generate a long-term income to the Council. WBC has invested some £17M in ordinary shares. Could the Cabinet Member Responsible for Housing please confirm if the Incrementum housing companies are trading at a profit?

A written response would be provided.

11. Councillor Marks to Councillor Mundry

What sanctions does the Council have to ensure that Utility Companies and their sub-contractors reinstate roads, pavements, and verges to an acceptable condition, and remove associated signage, cones, sandbags etc once excavation works needed for repairs or improvements have been completed?

A written response would be provided.

12. Councillor Emery to Councillor Henshaw

The under occupancy charge, also referred to as the bedroom tax, was introduced in 2013 as part of the Welfare Reforms. How is this affecting residents in Warrington who need to find a suitable home with fewer bedrooms?

A written response would be provided.

13. Councillor Balding to Councillor Mitchell

I understand that costs for printing and posting Council papers such as the Local Plan can be high and I'm grateful for initiatives reduce costs where possible. Please can the Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources let me know the average cost per page to print WBC papers for Council meetings attended by Members.

A written response would be provided.

14. Councillor Allen to Councillor Mitchell

Bloomberg reported that Warrington Borough Council has been investing in Junk bonds. Junk Bonds are bonds with a lower credit rating than 'BB' (see comment below).

"S&P Global Ratings has a credit rating scale ranging from 'AAA'—excellent—to lower ratings of 'C' and 'D'. Any bond that carries a rating lower than 'BB' is said to be of speculative-grade or a Junk Bond. This should be a red flag to risk-averse investors. The various letter grades from credit agencies represent the financial viability of the company and the likelihood that the contract terms of the bond terms will be honoured."

Can the Cabinet Member Responsible for Corporate Finance confirm if the Council is still directly or indirectly, via funds such as the Altana Wealth Fund and the ASIP, investing in bonds below a 'BB' rating.

A written response would be provided.

15. Councillor Butler to Mitchell

Given that WBC is the owner of Warrington Borough Transport, can the Cabinet Member Responsible for Corporate Finance please confirm why a single share in Warrington Borough Transport was issued to the Managing Director, and the purpose of that single share.

A written response would be provided.

16. Councillor Tynan to Councillor Mitchell

In the Answers to Questions at the last Full Council meeting it was revealed that Camdor Global, the boutique advisory firm, had received over £1M in fees from Warrington Borough Council since 2017/18.

Can the Cabinet Member Responsible for Corporate Finance please confirm how much has been paid to the following advisors since the start of the financial year 2017/18.

CBRE Investment Management

Ernst & Young (professional services partnership)

Link Group

QC/KC advice

A written response would be provided.

17. Councillor Buckley to Councillor Higgins

The residents of Warrington who live south of the Manchester Ship Canal feel neglected as Broomfields Leisure Centre lags behind the standard of leisure facilities enjoyed by the rest of the Borough. Can the Cabinet Member Responsible for Leisure and Community please confirm when Broomfields Leisure Centre will receive the same multi-million-pound treatment as has been lavished on other areas of Warrington?

A written response would be provided.

18. Councillor Critchley to Councillor Mitchell

There was a report to the ACGC on 25 July 2019 entitled "2018/19 TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT". This referenced a change in the TMS. The note said:

"13.5 Altana Wealth Bond Fund – the TMSS was updated in the Mid-Year report to include the investment in a corporate bond instrument. Investments of £10m were held at the end of the financial year earning an interest rate of 2.18%."

Subsequently Bloomberg has highlighted the riskiness of the Altana Wealth Corporate Bond Fund when they wrote on 13 October 2023:

“Less than a fifth of the fund invests in high-grade debt, with the majority funnelled to junk bonds and other risky securities, based on the company’s own reports and Bloomberg analysis. In the 12 months to Oct. 6, the fund returned almost 5.7%, compared with the 11.2% average of gains for the general European high-yield credit market, the universe that the fund resembles the most.”

“Those faltering returns come on the back of investments in risky bonds that many asset managers shun: The fund’s holdings include Credit Suisse’s additional-tier 1 debt or notes issued by the French retailer Casino Guichard Perrachon SA and Spanish engineering firm Abengoa SA, all of which are now valued at less than 10% of their face value.”

Please can the Cabinet Member Responsible for Corporate Finance describe and explain the changes that were made to the TMS and confirm whether they changed the TMS so that subsequently WBC could invest in junk bonds?

A written response would be provided.

19. Councillor Butler to Councillor Mitchell

Please can the Cabinet Member Responsible for Corporate Finance send me the description of the Altana Wealth Corporate Bond Fund as provided to WBC before it made its £10M investment?

A written response would be provided.

20. Councillor Tynan to Councillor Mitchell

Please can the Cabinet Member Responsible for Corporate Finance confirm the total amount of all monies that were invested into units in the Altana Wealth Corporate Bond Fund as well as the total amount of monies that were returned on their sales.

A written response would be provided.

21. Councillor Allen to Councillor Henshaw

On 11 April 2023, Cabinet approved a Building Maintenance Programme / Decarbonisation Contract with a company called Equans to deliver civic building maintenance services. Equans is expected to provide feasibility studies and develop project plans to reduce carbon emissions. Following this, Equans/WBC would be able to submit sufficiently detailed bids to central government for carbon reduction funding, including the installation of heat pumps.

On 10 July 2023, Cabinet approved heat pump installation projects for the Town Hall & West Annex (project A) and Walton Hall (project B). For both programmes mobilisation to site of the main contractor was due to

commence in September 2023 and the practical completion was due in March 2024.

Please can the Cabinet Member Responsible for Climate Change provide an update on WBC's progress on the installation of heat pumps mentioned in the above projects and any other heat pump plans for Council owned buildings?

A written response would be provided.

22. Councillor Jervis to Councillor Bowden

I refer to the Leader's absurd, unreasonable, and very late response to my Q21 to Full Council on 18 September 2023.

Since May 2021, the Conservative Group has exposed many issues of concern with the ruling Labour Group's actions in relation to various Treasury Management activities, and in relation to the Council's various associated entities including LiveWire, Redwood Bank, Birchwood Park, Warrington's Own Buses, Torus, Wire Regeneration, and the abortive Doncaster Solar Farm Project.

The Leader sought to apply the spurious "need to know" principle to my legitimate information request regarding Group Entities.

This was a simple distraction, and it is simply unacceptable for the Leader to tell me, an elected Member, what is in the interests of the residents I represent, and also for the Leader to seek to challenge my interest in these organisations because it may be politically inconvenient for the Leader and for the Labour Group.

Without any further delay, please will the Leader make available the information requested in my Q21 to the 18 September 2023 Full Council. Otherwise, I will have to conclude that this Labour administration has abandoned all pretence of openness and transparency and/or has things that it wants to unreasonably hide from the residents who I represent.

A written response would be provided.

23. Councillor Jervis to Councillor Mitchell

In your response to my Q22 to Full Council on 18 September 2023 regarding the abortive Council expenditure on new proposed new loan arrangements for £145M of Council borrowings, you assured me that there was no wasted internal and external expenditure as this was "hedged to be picked up by Moulding Capital" if the flawed proposals approved by Cabinet did not get implemented.

However, in your response to my follow up Q20 to Full Council on 30 October 2023, you said that abortive internal expenditure was not recorded and therefore presumably this expenditure was not "picked up by Moulding Capital".

Your two answers are inconsistent and therefore one answer appears to be wrong. Please will you confirm which is the correct answer, and correct the record in relation to the wrong answer.

A written response would be provided.

C56 Adoption of Warrington Local Plan 2021/22 - 2038/39

Council received a report of the Cabinet.

It was proposed by Councillor H Patel and seconded Councillor J Henshaw.

A number of technical queries were raised with regards to the Local Plan.

Councillor Jervis spoke on behalf of the Conservative Group, Councillor Barr spoke on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group and Councillor Lenihan spoke on behalf of the Independent Group. The matter was then opened up for debate.

As per Council Procedure Rules 18.2 of the Constitution, a Recorded Vote was requested by Councillor Critchley and supported by Councillors: Allen, Balding, Buckley, Butler, Jervis, Maisey and Tynan.

For (32): Councillors Barr, Bowden, Carr, Cooksey, Ellis, Emery, Flaherty, Friend, Gallagher, Gillham, Gowland, Hall, Henshaw, Higgins, Hussain, Jennings, Kerr-Brown, Lenihan, Lloyd-Fitzgerald, Matthews, McLaughlin, H Mundry, K Mundry, Parish, Patel, Rydzkowski, Sudworth, Warburton, Watson, Whalen, Wright, Zaman.

Against (15): Councillors Allen, Balding, Benson, Browne, Buckley, Butler, Critchley, Heaver, Jervis, Johnson, Maisey, Marks, Speed, Tynan, Wheeler

Abstain (1): Councillor A Abbey

Decision,

That Council:

- (i) Approved the Main Modifications to the Local Plan proposed by the independent Inspectors, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, for incorporation into the final version of the Local Plan.
- (ii) Approved the amendments to the Local Plan Policies Map, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report, for incorporation into the final Local Plan Policies Map.
- (iii) Approved the Minor Modifications to the Local Plan, as set out in Appendix 3 of the report, for incorporation into the final version of the Local Plan.

- (iv) Formally adopted the Warrington Local Plan 2021/22 – 2038/39 (provided in Appendix 4) – incorporating the Main Modifications, Amendments to the Policies Map and Minor Modifications – as the new Development Plan for Warrington, in accordance with Section 23 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended).

C57 Appointment of the Leader

It was proposed by Councillor J Flaherty and seconded by Councillor M McLaughlin.

Decision,

That Councillor H Mundry be elected to the post of Leader of the Council with immediate effect.

C58 The Cabinet

Council was requested to note the appointment of the Cabinet.

C59 Committee Places – Update

Council received an update from the Leader on the current schedule of Committee Places.

Decision,

The Council approved the appointments.

Councillors Critchley and Jervis voted against the appointments within the schedule of Committee places.

C60 Community Governance Review -Poulton with Fearnhead and Winwick Parish Councils

Council received a report of the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.

Councillor S Rydzkowski proposed the report and Councillor M Hussain seconded.

Resolved,

- i. That Polling Districts NTE & NTE/1 be moved from Winwick Parish Council to Poulton-with-Fearnhead Parish Council and be merged with Polling District NTA to form Cinnamon Brow ward. NTA will therefore

be removed from Longbarn, Fearnhead & Cinnamon Brow ward, which will be renamed Longbarn & Fearnhead

- ii. That the updated breakdown of Parish wards and Councillors as set out in paragraph 5.7 be approved.
- iii. That no changes be made with regards to the number of Parish Councillors within Winwick Parish Council.

C61 Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023

Council received a report of the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.

Councillor S Rydzkowski proposed the report and Councillor M Hussain seconded.

Resolved,

That the Polling Districts and Polling Places be approved.

C62 Half Yearly Treasury Management Report

Council received a report of the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.

Councillor S Rydzkowski proposed the report and Councillor M Hussain seconded.

Councillor K Critchley proposed an amendment to the report which was seconded by Councillor M Jervis.

Council voted on the amendment to the report.

Resolved,

That the amendment was defeated.

Resolved,

That the annual treasury strategy mid-year review 2023/24 be approved.

Councillors Critchley and Jervis voted against the approval of the annual treasury strategy mid-year review 2023/24.

Motion 1 – Bin Strike

Proposed by Councillor M Jervis

Seconded by Councillor K Critchley

In Warrington, the trade union UNITE notified the Council that it would continue its rounds of Bin Strikes despite the national collective agreement reached on 1 November 2023 between National Employees and the three trade unions, GMB, UNISON and UNITE.

Given this national collective agreement, these further rounds of bin strikes by UNITE in Warrington cannot be justified.

The strikes disproportionately impact the more vulnerable in Warrington who are unable to take their overflowing waste to the three Household Waste Collection Centres in the town.

The strikes also have an environmental impact because they inevitably reduce recycling rates and they have resulted in more illegal and totally unacceptable fly tipping across the town.

This Council resolves to:

1. Condemn the continuation of strike action by Unite after the national collective agreement on pay on 1 November 2023.
2. Encourage UNITE to return to work immediately for the benefit of all our Residents, public health, and the Environment.
3. Encourage constructive joint collective local trade union discussions on any issues associated with local working arrangements.

An amendment to the original motion was proposed by Councillor J Henshaw and seconded by Councillor M McLaughlin.

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Given this national collective agreement, these further rounds of bin strikes by UNITE in Warrington cannot be justified.

The strikes disproportionately impact the more vulnerable in Warrington who are unable to take their overflowing waste to the three Household Waste Collection Centres in the town.

The strikes also have an environmental impact because they inevitably reduce recycling rates and they have resulted in more illegal and totally unacceptable fly tipping across the town.

This Council ~~resolves to:~~

1. ~~Condemn~~ Regrets the continuation of strike action by Unite after the national collective agreement on pay on 1 November 2023.
2. ~~Encourages~~ UNITE to return to work immediately for the benefit of all our Residents, public health, and the Environment.
3. ~~Encourages~~ constructive joint collective local trade union discussions on any issues associated with local working arrangements.

Members requested a named vote on the amendment.

For (19): Councillors Barr, Bowden, Browne, Carr, Cooksey, Flaherty, Gowland, Henshaw, Higgins, Johnson, Jennings, Lloyd-Fitzgerald, Marks, McLaughlin, K Mundry, Rydzkowski, Speed, Warburton, Wheeler.

Against (11): Councillors Allen, Balding, Benson, Buckley, Butler, Critchley, Heaver, Jervis, Lenihan, Maisey, Tynan.

Abstained but remained in room (3): Councillors Abbey, Hussain and Watson.

Abstained and left the room (15): Councillors Ellis, Emery, Friend, Gallagher, Gillham, Hall, Kerr-Brown, Matthews, H Mundry, Sudworth, Parish, Patel, Whalen, Wright, Zaman

Resolved,

Members approved the amendment to the motion.

Members then voted on the substantive motion. Members requested a named vote.

For (30): Councillors Allen, Balding, Barr, Benson, Bowden, Browne, Buckley, Butler, Carr, Cooksey, Critchley, Flaherty, Gowland, Heaver, Henshaw, Higgins, Jennings, Jervis, Johnson, Lenihan, Lloyd-Fitzgerald, Maisey, Marks, McLaughlin, K Mundry, Rydzkowski, Speed, Tynan, Warburton, Wheeler.

Against (0)

Abstained but remained in room (3): Councillors Abbey, Hussain and Watson.

Abstained and left the room (15): Councillors Ellis, Emery, Friend, Gallagher, Gillham, Hall, Kerr-Brown, Matthews, H Mundry, Sudworth, Parish, Patel, Whalen, Wright, Zaman.

The motion was **CARRIED**.

Motion 2 - Leaseholds

Proposed by Councillor S Carr
Seconded by Councillor S Rydzkowski

This Council notes:

- The two Council motions from March and October 2019 supporting much-needed leasehold reform.

- The Leasehold and Freehold Bill announced as part of the King's Speech on 7th November which proposes to make it "cheaper and easier" for more leaseholders to extend their lease, buy their freehold, and take over management of their building by banning the creation of new leasehold houses.
- That this proposal falls far short of the reforms needed to protect residents in Warrington from unfair and costly leasehold arrangements. In essence it is too little and too late.
- The number of houses being sold on this basis is very small.
- In the above proposals, the leasehold tenure for new build flats – which represent by far the biggest proportion of leasehold properties - will not be scrapped.
- The government has instead announced plans to consult on capping existing ground rents, once again kicking the issue into the long grass.
- This Council has attempted over time, to put pressure on the Government but is powerless to make the changes needed without ministerial intervention.

This Council resolves:

- 1) To ask the Leader to write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Housing Minister to:
 - Draw attention to our previous communications on this matter and express our concern that the current proposals do not go far enough.
 - Raise our concerns regarding the problems with leaseholders of flats.
 - Call for the consultation on capping to be scrapped and request that all ground rents on all existing leases be capped at £250 a year and all new build flats to be sold on a commonhold or share of freehold basis.
- 2) To write to both Warrington MPs to urge them to champion this matter and to support Warrington residents by raising these issues in Parliament.

The motion was CARRIED



26/02/2024