

## Minutes of the Council

### County Hall, Worcester

**Thursday, 9 September 2021, 10.00 am**

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#### **Present:**

Cllr Steve Mackay (Chairman), Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Martin Allen, Cllr Alan Amos, Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cllr Dan Boatright, Cllr Bob Brookes, Cllr David Chambers, Cllr Brandon Clayton, Cllr Kyle Daisley, Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Nathan Desmond, Cllr Allah Ditta, Cllr Matt Dormer, Cllr Aled Evans, Cllr Elizabeth Eyre, Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Karen Hanks, Cllr Ian Hardiman, Cllr Adrian Hardman, Cllr Paul Harrison, Cllr Marcus Hart, Cllr Bill Hopkins, Cllr Matt Jenkins, Cllr Adam Kent, Cllr Adrian Kriss, Cllr Aled Luckman, Cllr Luke Mallett, Cllr Emma Marshall, Cllr Karen May, Cllr Natalie McVey, Cllr Jo Monk, Cllr Dan Morehead, Cllr Richard Morris, Cllr Tony Muir, Cllr Beverley Nielsen, Cllr Tracey Onslow, Cllr Scott Richardson Brown, Cllr Andy Roberts, Cllr Josh Robinson, Cllr Linda Robinson, Cllr Chris Rogers, Cllr David Ross, Cllr Mike Rouse, Cllr Jack Satterthwaite, Cllr James Stanley, Cllr Emma Stokes, Cllr Kit Taylor, Cllr Craig Warhurst, Cllr Shirley Webb and Cllr Tom Wells

#### **Available papers**

The members had before them

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. 5 questions submitted to the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance (previously circulated); and
- C. The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2021 (previously circulated).

#### **2289 Apologies and Declaration of Interests (Agenda item 1)**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Adams, Akbar, Gretton, Miller, and Udall.

Cllr Onslow declared an interest in Agenda item 6 as the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia.

#### **2290 Public Participation (Agenda item 2)**

Lucy Harrison presented a petition for a crossing on Batchley Road, Redditch.

Simon Grimsley presented a petition against the building of a bridge over the A38 in Bromsgrove.

Mary Turner commented and asked a question about climate change.

The Chairman thanked all the public participants for their contribution and said they would receive a written response from the relevant Cabinet Member.

## **2291 Minutes (Agenda item 3)**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **2292 Chairman's Announcements (Agenda item 4)**

Noted.

## **2293 Visit of the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (Agenda item 5)**

The Chairman welcomed Mr John Campion, the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner, to the meeting. The Chairman also welcomed and introduced Mr Anthony Bangham, the Chief Constable of West Mercia Police.

Both the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable gave a brief presentation of their respective roles, their vision for the future and the current state of policing in Worcestershire. The Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable then answered a wide range of questions posed by members.

The Chairman thanked Mr Campion and Mr Bangham for their attendance. On behalf of the Council, the Chairman wished Mr Bangham a happy retirement.

## **2294 Reports of Cabinet - Summary of Decisions Taken (Agenda item 6)**

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care reported the following topics and questions were answered on them:

- A Review of Day Opportunities for Adults with Learning Disabilities; and
- A Review of Replacement Care Provision for Adults.

## **2295 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 1 - Climate Change (Agenda item 7)**

The Notice of Motion was ruled out of order as it was substantially similar to a motion considered within the last 6 months as set out in the Constitution of the Council and not considered at the meeting.

## **2296 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 2 - On-street electric charging machines (Agenda item 7)**

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion set out in the agenda papers standing in the names of Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Dan Boatright, Cllr Jack Satterthwaite, Cllr Richard Udall, Cllr Josh Robinson, Cllr Lynn Denham, and Cllr Luke Mallett.

The motion was moved by Cllr Lynn Denham and seconded by Jack Satterthwaite who both spoke in favour of it, and Council agreed to deal with it on the day.

The following amendment was moved by Cllr Alan Amos and seconded by Cllr Adam Kent:

*“Council is aware of government policy to cease the production of petrol and diesel vehicles by 2030. Furthermore, Council wishes to see the expansion of electric charging facilities to enable more people, especially those without any off-street parking, the ability to charge their vehicles. Council calls upon the Cabinet Member with Responsibility to consider how best to meet this potential demand, if there could be a revenue generating opportunity for the Council and where they could be located to maximise usage but without causing an obstruction or a hinderance to other road users.”*

In the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport commented that a Council policy had been adopted in relation to on-street electric charging machines and this policy was constantly reviewed. Government funding for EV charging installations at a number of locations had been sought. There was also a requirement in the streetscape design guide for all new developments to provide more on-site off-street EV charging points. There were issues with the installation of EV charging points where there was little provision for off-street parking. These issues included access to facilities, maintenance costs and exacerbation of congestion on the road network. The practicalities of enforcement was a further issue. In the future, the private sector would become the main supplier of charging points as the market could react quicker to meet demand and competition would drive prices down and offer improved choice. The County Council would have an enabling role and safeguard the integrity of its assets. It was likely that electricity as a fuel source would be time-limited as the use of hydrogen evolved. Eventually fuel station forecourts could be the main charging points for motorists
- There was a need for more charging points and the concept of the Council becoming more entrepreneurial as it embraced a new local carbon economy was welcomed. The priorities set out in the

Worcestershire Energy Strategy included overcoming infrastructure and development barriers, promoting low carbon transport and Active Travel. It was important to recognise that low carbon transport particularly electric vehicles represented the main opportunity to achieve rapid de-carbonisation

- It was disappointing that the reference to a member advisory group (MAG) had been removed from the original motion because it was important to understand all the needs of residents across the county. There was an in-built inequality at present for those EV users who did not have a driveway which prevented them from installing a charging point at their home
- The Council was not doing enough to instal EV charging points and thereby encourage increased use of EVs. It was a particular issue in densely populated urban areas with no off-street parking. Electrification rather than any other form of energy was the main way that climate change would be tackled
- A huge amount of investment was required to provide a network of rapid charging facilities to give motorists the confidence to switch to EVs. Once the network had been established, a motorist should experience no difference from a current visit to a fuel station and associated facilities
- A fuel station was not an attractive place to spend half an hour to an hour recharging your car. A MAG would provide an opportunity for a breadth of ideas/experience/knowledge to be shared which would also be documented
- Petrol/diesel car users did not refuel their cars at home so why should EV users be any different. EV users had the opportunity to charge their vehicles at their destination
- EVs were not the whole solution to the energy crisis, other forms of energy such as Bio CNGs were available. A recent report from the Energy Strategy for the West Midlands indicated that if every vehicle in the West Midlands became an EV, it would require double the current electricity requirement to power them. In addition, there was a huge effort ahead to ensure that energy sources were cleaner and less reliant on fossil fuels
- The best way to achieve a consistent approach to EV charging points was to allow the Cabinet Member enact Council policy and not the establishment of a MAG. Members had the opportunity to input their thoughts through the scrutiny process. In addition, the creation of a MAG would add to the Council's carbon footprint
- It was important that the Council did not dictate the energy use of the future but instead enabled market demand to determine the appropriate energy source
- Local businesses would adapt to the increased use of EVs and instal charging points in order to encourage custom
- The planning policy for the installation of EV charging points in new developments was excellent but was not clear enough in terms of the understanding by developers that these facilities were for community use.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried and put as the substantive motion which was agreed unanimously.

**RESOLVED:** “Council is aware of government policy to cease the production of petrol and diesel vehicles by 2030. Furthermore, Council wishes to see the expansion of electric charging facilities to enable more people, especially those without any off-street parking, the ability to charge their vehicles. Council calls upon the Cabinet Member with Responsibility to consider how best to meet this potential demand, if there could be a revenue generating opportunity for the Council and where they could be located to maximise usage but without causing an obstruction or a hinderance to other road users.”

## 2297 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 3 - Refugees from Afghanistan (Agenda item 7)

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion set out in the agenda papers standing in the names of Cllr Richard Udall, Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Dan Boatright, and Cllr Mel Allcott.

The motion was moved by Cllr Mel Allcott and seconded by Cllr Lynn Denham who both spoke in favour of it, and Council agreed to deal with it on the day.

The following amendment was moved by Cllr Matt Dormer and seconded by Cllr Simon Geraghty:

*“Council is concerned about the growing humanitarian and refugee crisis after the recent collapse of the government in Afghanistan.*

*Council welcomes the call to do all it can to aid the resettlement of Afghan refugees and to co-ordinate assistance, help and support for any Afghan refugees coming to Worcestershire by working with our district partners, and also voluntary community sector groups. This engagement has already started.”*

In the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities considered that the original motion did not make sufficient reference to partnership working. Under the UK Resettlement Scheme, the Council had committed to resettling a further 50 people over the next 12 months. This Scheme was a 5 year programme with a greater emphasis on language development and work training. Under the Afghan Relocation Strategy ,the Council had committed to resettling 30 families. It was important to note that under this scheme, individuals had a good understanding of the English language and were not refugees. The scheme was only expected to last a year. Under the new Afghan Resettlement scheme, the Government had committed to resettling 25k people over the next 5 years of which this Council had committed to 200 individuals over that period. Details of the scheme were awaited. Appropriate and suitable properties for long term use were being

sourced throughout the county for all these schemes. A resettlement team was in place to co-ordinate the provision of housing and other resettlement requirements. He also paid tribute to the work of the volunteers supporting the welcome groups

- The Leader of the Council paid tribute to the partnership working with district councils, housing associations and community groups under these resettlement schemes. It was intended to build on the work already undertaken to support Syrian refugees to support these initiatives. The Council had a good track record in this area working as One Worcestershire and would continue to co-operate with partner organisations
- Tribute was paid to the work of the voluntary sector in the Bromsgrove and Redditch districts. Donations were still required for a number of essential items. The main limiting factor was availability of properties because the Government did not want to draw down from social housing. It was hoped that housing would be provided from within the private sector
- Everything possible must be done to support these refugees which included unaccompanied children. Worcestershire should become a county of sanctuary for refugees
- Whilst the reference to partnership working in the amendment was welcomed, the reference in the original motion to communication had unfortunately been removed. There was a lack of information about how the voluntary sector would be supported and how the arrangements would be co-ordinated
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities indicated that he was willing to provide updates to Council on a regular basis. The key issue was that all partners worked on a collaborative basis.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried and put as the substantive motion which was agreed unanimously.

**RESOLVED: “Council is concerned about the growing humanitarian and refugee crisis after the recent collapse of the government in Afghanistan.**

**Council welcomes the call to do all it can to aid the resettlement of Afghan refugees and to co-ordinate assistance, help and support for any Afghan refugees coming to Worcestershire by working with our district partners, and also voluntary community sector groups. This engagement has already started.”**

## **2298 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/22 (Agenda item 8)**

The Council considered the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/22.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board introduced the report and congratulated the Scrutiny Panel chairs for their work to date and scrutiny members, particularly those members who were new to the scrutiny function. He also thanked the Vice-Chairman for his support. The purpose of scrutiny was to add value to the decision-making process. Scrutiny subject matter would be measured against timeliness, relevance, and the likelihood of a positive outcome
- The Vice-Chairman thanked the Chairman for his leadership. He was particularly keen for all members to be involved in scrutiny even if they were not a panel member. The work programme was interim up to May 2022 so that it could be developed over subsequent years.

**RESOLVED that the 2021/22 Scrutiny Work Programme be endorsed.**

## **2299 Question Time (Agenda item 9)**

Five questions had been received by the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance and had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The answers to all the questions are attached in the Appendix.

## **2300 Reports of Committees - Audit and Governance Committee (Agenda item 10)**

The Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee introduced the report and commented that it was anticipated that this Council would be the first County Council in the country to have its Statement of Financial Accounts signed off by the external auditor unqualified and on time at the meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee on 24 September. He thanked the Chief Financial Officer and his team for their professionalism. It was anticipated that only 35% of councils would sign off their accounts on time. The work of the Finance team had been recognised nationally, having been shortlisted by CIPFA for two national awards in relation to Financial Reporting and Investing in Apprenticeships.

In response to a query about the overall opinion of Moderate Assurance for Council's control environment, the Chairman commented that he was comfortable with an overall moderate assurance level. He emphasised that the culture and ethos of Internal Audit had been overhauled in recent months and was now heading in the right trajectory.

In relation to a query about the five debts for social care service clients/cases and the c£1m relating to social care accrued accommodation costs, the Chairman commented that level of outstanding debt in social care was one of a number of areas identified by the Committee as an issue. The Committee had focused on tackling outstanding debt with officers and a centralised team had been established. In addition, the Committee had a standing item on debt management on each agenda.

The Council received the report of the Audit and Governance Committee containing a summary of the decisions taken.

The meeting was adjourned from 11.25am to 11.35am and ended at 1.30pm.

Chairman .....



## COUNCIL 9 SEPTEMBER 2021 - AGENDA ITEM 9 – QUESTION TIME

*Questions and written responses provided below.*

**QUESTION 1** – Cllr Martin Allen asked Alan Amos:

*"The County Council is currently constructing a new roundabout on the A38/A4104 near Holly Green, I am pleased to see this infrastructure going forward, clearly it will be a great help to motorist and makes a dangerous junction much safer. I thank all those concerned in it design and construction. As Cllr Alan Amos is the nicest member of the Cabinet would he please pass on my thanks to all those concerned and also would he please agree to a speed review of the whole length of the A38 from the M50 junction to the A38 Ketch Roundabout within three months of the completion of the new roundabout? I should add that each of my Parish Councils in my division have raised this matter and are all very concerned."*

### **Answer**

I thank Cllr Allen for his maiden question and for the very perceptive comment about me. He is certainly the nicest new Member for Croome.

As someone who was involved in the genesis of this project, I will certainly be very happy to pass on his kind comments to all the team who have worked so hard to make it a reality.

On the speeding issue, Worcestershire County Council takes guidance on such matters from the Department for Transport. One of the key aims, when setting local speed limits, is to provide a consistent message between road geometry and environment, so that changes in speed limits reflect changes in the road layout and environment. This ensures that, in the absence of enforcement, speed limits are the most effective. It is not envisaged that the A38/ A4104 roundabout scheme will have an adverse effect on vehicle speeds and no changes to the current speed limit, on the A38, are proposed.

As part of the planning process, consideration is always given to changes in speed limits due to any significant, planned development. Accordingly, this situation is continually monitored. In addition to new development, speed related injury collisions are also a key factor when considering changes to speed limits.

Nonetheless, and in view of the changing nature of the A38 in terms of its strategic significance and the increasing volume of traffic using it, and without wishing to unfairly raise expectations, I will in good spirit agree to Cllr Allen's request to review the section to which he refers, but I will take advice about whether 3 months is the ideal timespan to do it.

**QUESTION 2** – Cllr Richard Udall asked Andy Roberts:

*"Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families confirm how many children from Worcestershire have been taken into care during the current financial year?"*

## **Answer**

74 children have been received into care since the start of this financial year – and gives us a total Looked After population of 876 as at 25 July.

**QUESTION 3** – Cllr Lynn Denham asked Alan Amos:

*"What is the membership of the Network Efficiency Board and how often does it meet?"*

## **Answer**

I thank Cllr Denham for her question.

The Network Efficiency Board is an officer board that exists for the overall governance and management of the County Council's programme of works to reduce congestion, as a Congestion Programme Board. The Board includes officer representation from the Economy and Infrastructure Directorate with further support as required. The membership evolves depending on the make-up of the projects within the programme. It meets monthly.

## **Supplementary Question**

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member undertook to establish the legal position with regard to the public access to information rights associated with meetings of the Network Efficiency Board.

**QUESTION 4** – Cllr Matt Jenkins asked Alan Amos:

*"Given the recent Department for Transport Announcement that funding from the Capability Fund, originally allocated to Worcestershire County Council to support infrastructure plans and behaviour change initiatives in relation to walking and cycling, has been 'halted' until the DfT can be sure of a commitment to active travel.*

*Will the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport change his current view that 'no loss of road space will be accepted', which is incompatible with Government policy, in order to receive this and future funding?"*

## **Answer**

I thank Cllr Jenkins for his question.

Unfortunately, the assumption in it is untrue and misleading. The decision on these bids to the DfT are, and always have been, expected this month. We submitted our application to the DfT Capability Fund in April 2021. The bid was for £198,722 primarily for the production of 4 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) and for the promotion of behavioural change activity in relation to walking and cycling. The proposed locations for these 4 LCWIPs are Droitwich, Malvern, Redditch and Kidderminster. These documents will enhance the aspirations for active travel as set out in the Local Transport Plan 4, LTP4, by developing the network of routes to be implemented subject to funding being available.

In July 2021 we were one of 15 authorities, including our neighbouring counties of Gloucestershire and Shropshire, who were asked to provide further clarification on their bid, absolutely nothing unusual or exceptional about that, and no conspiracy or plot involved. The information requested included further detail of the 4 towns proposed for the LCWIPs with an indicative cost breakdown for producing the documents.

This information was duly submitted to the DfT in August, and we continue to expect a decision later this month.

As for road space, politicians rarely get credit for what they do, and never get credit for what they don't do. We have not gone down the route of closing roads, taking away lanes, and removing people's parking spaces all over the place. So, unlike many other authorities throughout the country, we are not now in the unfortunate position of having to engage in costly defensive legal action, or wasting time and money undoing ill-thought out schemes that were imposed on communities. Our policy is very clear that we support all forms of travel to the detriment of none so we will not be advancing one form at the expense of another. We believe in choice, namely that people know best what form of travel to choose for their own needs and circumstances. We do not believe in the confrontation so beloved of some people pitting one form of travel against another. As I have said, I will not bring the City or any other place in the County to a standstill by implementing daft schemes designed to increase disruption and create chaos whose intention seems to be to make driving such an unpleasant experience in the absurd belief that people will then abandon their cars for cycling. Most car journeys are undertaken for essential reasons such as going to work or doing the weekly shop. Unlike others, Conservatives are not anti-car and we do not demonize drivers. Road traffic has been at pre-Covid levels for months now and, of course, there is an on-going extra demand on our roads from the enormous increase in food deliveries for elderly and other people following recent lockdowns. More than most people, however, I want to get people out of their cars and onto other forms of transport, but by encouragement and persuasion, not by diktat and draconian undemocratic measures. We have and are implementing an exciting new bus strategy, as part of the Government's recently announced National Bus Strategy, and WCC will be an Enhanced Partnership next spring building on the 13% of people who currently rely on bus travel. This County has introduced more new cycle provision in the past 4 years than ever before, with much more coming and in the pipeline, and we have done it without adding to traffic disruption and creating chaos anywhere. In other words, not either/or but both/and; complementary provision, not confrontation. And that's what the people of Worcestershire very clearly voted for overwhelmingly just a few months ago. So I challenge Cllr Jenkins to tell me now what specific roads he wants to close in the City; what roads will have to take the significant amount of displaced cars and heavy vehicles; and which quiet residential roads are now to become busy rat-runs?

### **Supplementary Question**

The Government had stated that wider funding to councils who were not doing enough to promote cycling and walking through Active Travel would be cut. In light of the change in the Government's approach, assurance was sought that the Cabinet Member's approach to Active Travel would be more positive than previously. The Cabinet Member responded that the Government had not cut funding to the Council and he emphasised that this Council had provided more cycling provision than ever before. The work undertaken had been achieved without impacting on congestion and supported all forms of transport.

### **QUESTION 5** – Cllr Richard Udall will asked Matt Dormer:

*"The University of Worcester have today taken the decision to no longer offer Archaeology as a discipline with effect from the end of the 2021/22 academic year.*

*This is despite repeated outstanding figures for student satisfaction and graduate opportunities in the National Student Survey. The University of Worcester has consistently attracted the highest number of admissions to Archaeology in the West Midlands. Over the last four years, between 50-80% of UW graduates have gone on to employment in the historic environment sector or further study, compared to the standard (2001) benchmark of 15%. Archaeology graduates from the University of Worcester are placed in a number of strategic positions within the historic environment sector, both locally and nationally. The degree at the University of Worcester is also committed to making archaeology and heritage open to all and is one of few programmes with an impressive track record of inclusion.*

*Lecturers and staff have been told that now they face redundancy and there is no option to appeal.*

*The Worcestershire County Council Archaeology Service is a successful and important part of his portfolio, we will continue to require home grown graduates and the demand for our service is likely to increase not decrease. The decision to close these courses could have an impact on our ability to recruit future staff.*

*The decision undermines our attempt to promote a World Class Worcestershire and will tarnish the academic and historical reputation of the county. Investment and growth could be at risk and new archaeological opportunities for research and development within the county could be lost or sacrificed.*

*What action will he take to persuade the Vice Chancellor and the UEB to reconsider their decision."*

## **Answer**

We are aware of the decision made by University of Worcester to no longer offer Archaeology as a discipline with effect from the end of the 2021/22 academic year. We understand that this decision is based on the impact of low course take up on its financial viability.

Worcestershire's archaeology service is a predominantly commercial, self-funded service and while it has recruited from the University of Worcester Archaeology graduate pool, it also recruits widely from a range of universities and other archaeology practices and we expect this to continue.

The archaeology service also offers NVQ based traineeships and has a successful track record of recruiting trainee archaeologists through this route.