

COUNCIL

27 FEBRUARY 2024

PRESENT:

Councillors Anketell, Ashton, Ball, Banevicius, Bennion, Booker, Bragger, Checkland, Cox, Cross, L Ennis, Evans, Galvin, Harvey-Coggins, Henshaw, Hill, Ho, Holland, Hughes, Leung, Marshall, Mears, Norman, Powell, Pullen, Ray, Robertson, Rushton, Salter, Silvester-Hall, A Smith, J Smith, Strachan, P Taylor, S Taylor, Trent, Vernon, Whitehouse, M Wilcox, S Wilcox, Woodward and B Yeates

69 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (IF ANY)

Apologies were received from Councillors Coe, D Ennis, Farrell, Hawkins and Warfield.

70 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Silvester-Hall declared an interest in item 15 as a County Councillor for Lichfield City North.

Councillor Cox declared an interest in item 15 as a County Councillor for Lichfield Rural West.

Councillor M Wilcox declared an interest in item 15 as a County Councillor for Lichfield - Burntwood South.

71 TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the last meeting were approved subject to amending the omission of a Councillors prefix.

72 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair highlighted the historical significance of the meeting occurring close to the 50th anniversary of the Council. She shared her recent activities, expressed openness to invitations for future engagements, and spoke about her commitment to supporting a district wide charity focused on dementia care - MHA Communities South Staffordshire, Lichfield & District.

73 REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL ON CABINET DECISIONS FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 6 FEBRUARY 2024 AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

The Leader of the Council submitted his report on the Cabinet Decisions from the meeting held on the 6 February 2024 and Cabinet Member Decisions. He highlighted progress on the greenway project, funding for biodiversity net gain, and efforts to convert properties into housing for those facing homelessness. He said these initiatives showcased the Council's commitment to sustainable practices and community welfare, reflecting accomplishments that all members could be proud of.

74 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Norman submitted the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 December 2023 and 30 January 2024.

Councillor Evans thanked Councillor Leung for her reports on health matters and emphasised the importance of staying informed on healthcare services for the residents. She expressed concerns about the Samuel Johnson Birth Centre's temporary closure, highlighting the need for adequate services for pregnant women in the District.

Councillor Norman highlighted the discussions at the recent Health and Care Scrutiny Committee regarding the temporary closure of the Samuel Johnson Birth Centre and mentioned future actions and reports expected by the committee.

Councillor Robertson raised the establishment the Civic Matrix Task Group and announced that the committee would be meeting soon to prepare a report.

Councillor Salter raised concerns about the exclusion of ex-Chairs and other office holders from the Civic Matrix Task Group, stating the importance of including input from experienced individuals. He commented on the need for external consultation to ensure informed decision-making.

Councillor Ball proposed a change to the task group notes, regarding the sharing of confidential information with task group members. The amendment was accepted by Councillor Norman.

Councillor Robertson highlighted the importance of addressing funding issues for GP capacity within the District. He discussed the challenges faced in securing funding for essential healthcare services and noted the need for procedural improvements to prevent composite bids from hindering individual project funding. Councillor Pullen clarified that the bid referred to was to create GP consulting rooms.

Councillor Norman acknowledged the points raised by Councillor Robertson and stated the importance of fair consideration for all funding requests. He mentioned the opportunity for board members to request additional funding and noted enhancements in the decision-making process involving parish councils.

75 MINUTES OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

Councillor Robertson inquired about any communication from Officer Ian Edwards (ICT manager) regarding suppliers using non-UK data centres. Councillor Ho confirmed he would follow up on it.

Councillor Woodward raised a concern about new members completing GDPR e-learning courses.

It was proposed by Councillor Ho that the Minutes be approved and adopted. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Whitehouse and it was

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Audit Committee held on 1 February 2024 be approved and adopted subject to the amendment of a typographical error.

76 MINUTES OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Councillor Norman raised a concern about the approach taken during the planning application on the new leisure centre at Stychbrook Park. He questioned the initial comments made by a

speaker and emphasised the need for a more balanced and thorough discussion by the Planning Committee.

Councillor Marshall responded by highlighting the significance of the application and the community's anticipation for a new leisure centre. He expressed satisfaction with the progress and defended the positive tone of the discussion.

Councillor Woodward emphasised the quasi-judicial role of the Planning Committee and expressed surprise at the lack of detailed scrutiny during the meeting. She sought clarification on the roles of the Chair of the Planning Committee and its members.

Councillor Marshall welcomed feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the appropriate length and depth of Planning Committee meetings.

Councillor Norman reiterated concerns about the level of scrutiny during the discussion of planning applications, particularly emphasising the need for in-depth questioning and examination before approval. He highlighted the importance of addressing planning issues adequately.

Councillor Checkland defended the Planning Committee members' scrutiny of papers and highlighted the rigorous conditions imposed to ensure proper scrutiny of application and the thoroughness of the planning department's work.

It was proposed by Councillor Marshall that the Minutes be approved and adopted. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Checkland and it was

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Planning Committee held on 15 January and 24 January 2024 be approved and adopted.

77 MINUTES OF THE REGULATORY & LICENSING COMMITTEE

Councillor Ray expressed support for the revised taxi licensing policy, highlighting the importance of increasing the number of electric vehicles in the District to enhance the environment. He suggested following the example set in London, where all taxis must be non-diesel and non-petrol by 2033. He also proposed extending the lifespan of taxi vehicles beyond the standard seven years to encourage investment in modern and clean vehicles. He expressed the benefits of a strong taxi service for the community and the environment. He urged the Council to consider these points seriously during the consultation process.

It was proposed by Councillor Yeates that the Minutes be approved and adopted. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Checkland and it was

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Regulatory and Licensing Committee held on 13 December 2024 be approved and adopted subject to the addition of Cllr Ashton to the list of those present.

78 AUDITORS ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22 & 2022/23

Councillor Ho moved that the auditor's annual report for 2021/2022, and 2022/2023 be received and noted. He thanked Anthony Thomas, Andrew Wood, and their teams for their work.

Councillor Norman drew attention to the improvement recommendation related to reviewing the arrangements for the appointment of directors to minimise conflicts of interest.

Councillor Woodward also referred to the improvement recommendations, especially regarding the review of the governance arrangements of the LATCo. She highlighted recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and urged revisiting those recommendations.

Councillor Pullen noted that steps were already taken to minimise the risk of conflicts and mentioned that the review of LATCo governance arrangements is included in the internal audit plan for further improvement.

79 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

It was proposed by Councillor Strachan and seconded by Councillor Pullen 'that the Medium Term Financial Strategy (Revenue and Capital) 2023-2028 and the Council Tax Resolution 2024-2025 be approved.'

In submitting his report Councillor Strachan expressed gratitude to the finance team and highlighted the challenges of uncertain local government finance settlements. Despite the lack of long-term visibility and the potential for significant changes in the sector, he commented that the Council remained resilient and committed to delivering services for the District.

Councillor Strachan highlighted key accomplishments in the past year, which included securing partnerships for new projects, improving waste management practices, and supporting community initiatives. He stated that the Medium Term Financial Strategy aimed to balance financial prudence with ambitious projects, address inflationary pressures, and ensure support for vulnerable members of society.

He concluded that by proposing a moderate increase in council tax, maintaining emergency reserves, and engaging in collaborative efforts, the Council aims to protect its residents and promote sustainable development.

Councillor Pullen supported the budget proposals, recognising the challenges faced and praised the collaborative effort on the first budget to be submitted since the Council had entered a state of no overall control.

Councillor Robertson commented that there was unity and proper scrutiny in discussing the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. He mentioned the importance of public money being spent correctly and commended the teamwork behind the detailed reports. Despite finding the MTFs imperfect, he acknowledged its strengths, particularly in funding for the regeneration of Burntwood and utilising the area's history for economic development. Councillor Robertson also highlighted the significance of supporting community groups and the need to understand and preserve the District's heritage. However, he raised concerns about the council tax increase and financial implications for the Council.

Councillor Woodward expressed concerns about the MTFs and the proposed council tax increase. She advocated for more significant investment in Burntwood's regeneration projects and heritage initiatives, emphasising the need for broader community engagement.

Councillor Ray supported economic generation project proposals but raised concerns about the Council's efforts on climate change initiatives and supporting the voluntary community sector.

Councillor Trent raised concerns about the budget reduction for climate change initiatives, stressing the necessity of funding to address the climate emergency and questioning the Council's commitment to tackling climate change.

Councillor Cox supported the recommendations, emphasising the importance of the council tax reduction scheme.

Councillor M Willcox highlighted the challenges of managing finances amid rising costs, stressing the need for detailed financial controls and prudent decision-making to ensure value for residents.

Councillor Norman expressed confidence in the budget figures but raised concerns about limited budgeting information.

Councillor Ball commended the efforts to produce a balanced budget despite challenges from central government. He highlighted the need to address the spending-income gap in future years and expressed concerns about potential cuts.

Councillor Marshall discussed climate change and the potential costs of implementing carbon Net Zero, urging caution in underestimating the costs.

Councillor Booker addressed funding issues for rural areas and projects, expressing disappointment and questioning the allocation of funds for certain projects.

Councillor Pullen acknowledged areas of difference and spoke about the rationale behind the budget decisions, particularly the council tax rise.

Councillor Strachan addressed points raised by councillors, explained budget decisions, and emphasised responsible financial management based on community needs.

Councillor Ray proposed a vote specifically on recommendations 2.14 and 2.15 set out in the Council report. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Trent.

Members voted in favour of recommendations 2.14 and 2.15.

To comply with statutory regulations a named vote was then taken on the complete recommendations set out in the Council report and on council tax resolution and recorded as follows:

FOR (20)

1. Checkland
2. Cox
3. Cross, D
4. Hill
5. Ho
6. Holland
7. Leung
8. Marshall
9. Mears
10. Powell
11. Pullen
12. Salter
13. Silvester-Hall
14. Smith, A
15. Strachan
16. Vernon
17. Whitehouse
18. Wilcox, M
19. Wilcox, S
20. Yeates, B

AGAINST (0)

ABSTAIN (22)

1. Ashton
2. Anketell
3. Ball
4. Banevicius
5. Bennion
6. Booker
7. Bragger
8. Ennis, L
9. Evans
10. Galvin
11. Harvey-Coggins
12. Henshaw
13. Hughes
14. Norman
15. Ray
16. Robertson
17. Rushton
18. Smith, J
19. Taylor, P
20. Taylor, S
21. Trent
22. Woodward

80 APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES

Councillor Pullen submitted proposed changes to Committees. Councillor Woodward proposed an amendment and also proposed an amendment to nominate Councillor Harvey-Coggins as Chair of the Employment Committee. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Bragger.

Following a vote the amendment was accepted.

It was then

Resolved: That the following changes to the appointments to committees as amended be approved:

- Councillor S Wilcox be appointed to Regulatory and Licensing Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee and be removed from Employment Committee and Planning Committee.
- Councillor Warfield be appointed to Employment Committee and removed from Regulatory and Licensing Committee.
- Councillor Hawkins be appointed to Planning Committee and removed from Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Councillor Sharon S Taylor be appointed to Planning Committee
- Councillor Harvey-Coggins be appointed Chair of the Employment Committee

81 APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor Pullen proposed Councillor Richard Cox as the representative of Lichfield District Council as a stakeholder governor for the University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Woodward and it was

Resolved: That Councillor Cox be appointed as the representative of Lichfield District as a stakeholder governor for the University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust.

82 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

Councillor Pullen submitted the Calendar of Meetings 2024-2025. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Woodward and it was

Resolved: That the Calendar of Meetings 2024-2025 be approved.

83 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

Councillor Bragger submitted the following Motion on Notice:

"This Council, recognising the severe shortage of decent homes to rent at genuinely affordable levels across our District, asks that the Cabinet, acting on behalf of the Council as shareholder in the Company, requests that the Council's Local Authority Trading Company (LWMTS) immediately draw up plans with a clear timeline for building and acquiring housing at social rents across the District and that there is liaison with a cross party working group of Councillors in doing this."

Councillor Bragger highlighted the urgent need for social housing in Lichfield District. He emphasised the shortage of affordable housing for low-income residents and suggested using available resources to build and manage social housing.

Councillor Ashton seconded the motion and expressed support for the initiative and emphasised the importance of integrating social and affordable housing in town and city centres to create vibrant communities.

Councillor Pullen voiced support for the motion, noting that progress was already underway. He highlighted the financial viability of building homes for rent and the positive impact of social housing.

Councillor Ball reflected on the challenges faced in advocating for social housing over the past five years but expressed optimism about the current progress and expressed his support for the motion.

Following a vote **the motion was approved.**

Councillor Robertson submitted the following Motion on Notice:

“That this Council:

- notes the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGCBE) revised proposals for divisions within Lichfield District
- believes the proposals as published on 30th January 2024 are, as far as possible, appropriate reflections of the communities within Lichfield District
- resolves to write to LGCBE expressing support for the revised proposals on the basis that the revised proposals:
 - better reflect the geographical communities served by this council,
 - better preserve the rural identity of many parts of Lichfield District,
 - will ensure that fewer additional polling districts need be created to accommodate changed division boundaries
 - will prevent the need for the creation of additional parish wards within Lichfield City and therefore better preserve the ratio of electors to councillors for this parish.”

Councillor Robertson outlined the need for updated boundaries to reflect population changes and discussed specific revisions to divisional boundaries to better represent rural areas.

Councillor Anketell seconded the motion, supporting the revised proposals for boundary changes.

Councillor Silvester-Hall raised some concerns about the boundary commission's proposed changes, highlighting issues with representation equality and effective local governance. She urged councillors to review the updated proposals and provide feedback during the consultation period.

Councillor Bennion acknowledged the challenges of boundary reviews and supported the revised proposals for their coherence and practicality in addressing issues like urban-rural divisions.

Following a vote **the motion was approved.**

Questions under Procedure Rule 11.2 for Council

Q1. Question from Councillor Ashton to the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Parks & Major Projects

"Beacon Park has been flooded with raw sewage far too many times in the past few months. Given that the sewage system in the region of Beacon Park is clearly unfit for purpose, and represents a public health hazard, what steps are being taken by the Council to ensure that Severn Trent Water fulfil their obligations to manage wastewater and sewage in a timely and responsible manner?"

Response from the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Parks & Major Projects

"There have been three incidents in the last year of sewage entering the Museum Gardens – all of which have been attributed to sewers underneath the Lichfield City Council-owned Garden of Remembrance.

Severn Trent have attended as an emergency call out and carried out clean up works and investigations.

In April 2023 the cause was due to tree roots in the Garden of Remembrance, owned by Lichfield City Council, damaging the pipework. This was fixed and cleared at the time.

The most likely cause of the January & February 2024 incidents have been determined to be ongoing blockages in the Garden of Remembrance. Clean up works have been completed and Severn Trent are now working directly with Lichfield City Council to further investigate the underlying cause within the Garden of Remembrance."

Supplementary Question from Councillor Ashton

"Can we please ask Severn Trent to carry out a program of Diagnostic and preventative maintenance because this is going to happen again with the sewage system and so if we can instruct Severn Trent to stop this before it happens again, please?"

Response from the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Parks & Major Projects

In terms of this particular issue I've been assured now that that Severn Trent have finally got to the bottom of the problem which is in the sewer pipe that runs beneath the Remembrance Garden, so work is now happening on that again."

Q2. Question from Councillor Evans to the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

"As a member of the Shadow Cabinet, shadowing Councillor Cox, the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, I emailed him and others on the 7th February regarding the organisation of the Community Safety Partnership and asking a number of questions. Not having received the courtesy of a reply I am asking for the following questions to be answered now. They are:-

- 1) What are the sub groups and who receives feed back from them?
- 2) What are the outcomes?
- 3) Do any of the groups overlap?
- 4) What are the overall objectives of the whole structure?"

Response from the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

“Cllr Evans received a response from James Johnson on 13th February updating on work to refresh the delivery plan and a commitment to share the updated delivery plan as soon as possible.

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Strategic Group is supported by a CSP Delivery Group, which currently has three sub-groups – a Problem Solving Group, a Vulnerability Hub and a Young People’s Services Group. In addition, task and finish groups are sometimes established to look at particular issues or topics.

CSPs were introduced by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to bring together local partners to develop and deliver strategies to tackle crime and disorder in their local communities. CSPs provide localised actions tailored to the needs of their communities. The CSP Strategic Group produces and agrees an annual delivery plan, based on evidence, which identifies outcomes we wish to see delivered locally and the actions we will take to achieve this. A refreshed delivery plan is due to be discussed at the next meeting of the CSP Strategic Group.

The CSP Delivery Group delivers and monitors the delivery plan. Sub-groups are predominately operational and cross-cutting, for example the Vulnerability Hub meets fortnightly to review and problem solve live issues effecting vulnerable residents that require a partnership approach. Sub-groups report into the Delivery Group, which in-turn reports into the Strategic Group.”

No supplementary question was raised.

Q3. Question from Councillor Henshaw to the Leader of the Council

“Is the Leader aware of Councillor dissatisfaction with the way the Digital Electoral Polling decision was announced on 6th. February. This is a £177k commitment by the council and was discussed at Cabinet on 6th. February, The Agenda item was only made available to councillors on 5th February. All the other papers for that Cabinet Meeting were published on 29th January.

That gave no time for prior consultation with ordinary councillors. Last May we were promised a more collegiate approach in council decisions. Has this policy now been abandoned?”

Response from the Leader of the Council

It is factually incorrect to suggest there was no time for consultation with ‘ordinary’ councillors on this procurement.

- The item: Modern Democracy - ‘To introduce a digital poll clerk system for elections’, was published in the Forward Plan on 27 December 2023. Once an item is on the Forward Plan, O&S can include the issue on their work programme and/or individual ‘ordinary’ councillors can engage with the Decision Maker or Lead Officer.
- On 1 February 2024, the draft report was circulated to all Group Leaders, providing a further opportunity for them to provide comments for consideration by the Decision Maker or Lead Officer.
- All the papers for the Cabinet meeting on 6 February were published on 29 January. There were no late papers - this was not a matter considered at that meeting.

- As a Cabinet Member Decision, the report on this procurement was published on the website on 6th February 2024, a minimum of five clear days before implementation – allowing an opportunity for ‘call in’.
- The Cabinet Member Decision was implemented on 14 February 2024.

I hope this helps clarify the process and provides reassurance that the usual notification procedures were adhered to.

The administration of elections has become increasingly challenging due to additional complexity following the introduction of the Elections Act 2022, and difficulty in recruiting and retaining skilled polling staff.

The Council is responding to these challenges by modernising the check-in and voter ID process at polling stations using a digital platform. This system is used by over 40 local authorities and will introduce a quicker standardised check-in and verification process, simplify the process for polling staff, provide increased oversight and improve the voter experience.

Ultimately it is the role of the Returning Officer to ensure that an election is administered effectively and that effective systems are in place.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Henshaw

“What provision is there if this electronic system breaks down on an election day?”

Response from the Leader of the Council

“I will respond in writing on that councillor. It may not surprise you that I don't have that specific detail to my fingertips this evening, but I will write to you with a full answer in terms of what backup provisions there are for it. I'm sure officers will have investigated that at length, and we'll have a ready response for you.”

Q4. Question from Councillor Whitehouse to the Chair of the Council

“Will she join me in welcoming the recent and on-going investment by this council in sports facilities across the District, which will help keep more people, more active, more often?”

Response from the Chair of the Council

“Thank you for your question. Of course I welcome public investment in sports and leisure facilities. I am also delighted by the success of the District's sports clubs and their enthusiastic contributions to the wider community. It is not my place as Chair of the Council to comment on specific proposals underway or awaiting planning permission – many of which date from before my election as a Councillor. I would hope that specific investment is based on discussion within the Council and on consultation with local residents.”

Supplementary Question from Councillor Whitehouse

“I'm very grateful that you along with Councillor Ennis and Councillor Evans attended the opening of some of the facilities and it's obviously good that you welcome this investment by the Conservative Administration. Will you therefore distance yourself from comments made by your colleagues in the Labour group last year when it was said that this investment showed that the council had in fact got the wrong priorities?”

Response from the Chair of the Council

“The answer is no. I'm not going to argue about specifics. I know that padel tennis for example is coming before the Planning Committee and I'm not able as the Chair to comment on specific proposals, but I do generally of course welcome public investment.”

Q5. Question from Councillor Powell to the Chair of the Council

"As both Chair of LDC and Mayor of LCC, when you are invited to events within the parish of Lichfield City, how do you decide which organisation you will not represent?"

Response from the Chair of the Council

"I am grateful to Councillor Powell for his interest in events in the parish of Lichfield City, but I can assure him that there is little for him to worry about. I am very conscious of the responsibilities I have as the democratically elected Chair both of a parish and of this District Council. There are 'traditional' events in Lichfield City's civic calendar which it is appropriate to attend as Mayor whereas on other occasions (such as the recent opening of the law term in Stafford) I attend as Chair of the District. As you are no doubt aware I am fortunate in having an extremely competent Vice-Chair and an equally effective Deputy Mayor to work with so that both organisations can be represented if required (Councillor Holland attended city events on Shrove Tuesday on behalf of the District, for example). I am also perfectly capable of explaining to hosts that I am privileged to have been elected as Chair of two local Councils."

Supplementary Question from Councillor Powell

"Can you confirm that for every event you've attended as Mayor instead of the Chair that you have extended the invite to Councillor Holland to attend as the vice-Chair? To ensure that the Lichfield District Council does not go understated?"

Response from the Chair of the Council

"I can certainly say that that he came to Pancake Day. The slightly bizarre thing which makes your point is that I have today as Chair been invited to the Mayor's cocktail party. Everybody else is very welcome too. The Civic officer and I are very much hoping that Councillor Holland and his wife will be able to attend"

Q6. Question from Councillor Ball to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Local Plan/Leader of the Council

"Following on from the Motion agreed at Council on 12th December, can the Leader of the Council/Cabinet Member for Housing and Local Plan, please, tell the Council when the letter to the Chancellor and our two local MPs was sent and what responses we have received from all three of them and when their letters arrived and also what progress is being made with the other two points in the Motion"

Response from the Cabinet Member for Housing and Local Plan/Leader of the Council

"The letter was emailed to the two MP's and the Chancellor on the 25th January 2024, and a copy was also sent by first class post to the Chancellor on the 26th January. A response has been received from the Office of Michael Fabricant MP, confirming that they wrote to the Department in January and their enquiry has now been followed up for response. As soon as the Minister's reply is received it will be forwarded to us. No response has yet been received from Sarah Edwards MP.

On point 2 of the motion, the adopted local plan uses a dynamic model to set the percentage of affordable homes that are required on residential developments. As part of the work on developing a new local plan we will be updating a range of technical evidence, including that relating to affordable homes. We will also need to consider and establish affordable housing requirements moving forward and this will be informed by the technical evidence to ensure the

targets we set are robust. Members will have the opportunity to comment on the revised technical evidence as work on the new local plan progresses.

On point 3, research has been carried out on the Living Rent Model and we have contacted all the approved Registered Providers in the District to ask if they have considered or would consider implementing the model to their rent setting. The Living Rent Model was also discussed in the annual review meeting held with Bromford Housing on 1st February 2024 that was attended by Cllr Ball and myself. Bromford confirmed that they are currently reviewing their rent setting policy and once work on this has progressed further we are going to meet to discuss the findings and Bromford's plans. Bromford have agreed to provide us with information on rents in advance of this meeting."

Supplementary Question from Councillor Ball

"I'd like to ask whether Councillor Pullen knows why it took until the 25th of January for that letter to go? It was only two paragraphs, and the Council meeting was on the 12th of December. I wonder whether the letter would have gone at all had I not emailed Councillor Farrell and some senior officers about it on the 12th of January to ask whether it had gone or not. It's a concern that we make decisions here at this Council and we don't follow them through. On the second point Councillor Farrell has sidestepped the question. I asked what was being done to further the motion which was looking at our current way of assessing affordable housing and seeing how it could be improved. The response talks about a future way of doing it. I think we need to look at what we can do now rather than waiting two or three years to try and sort it out."

Response from the Leader of the Council (in absence of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Local Plan)

"On the second point, Councillor Farrell will email you with a response. In terms of sending the letter, the Christmas period was in the middle but yes, we should be able to send letters more quickly. We'd quite welcome responses from our MPs more quickly as well."

Q7. Question from Councillor Robertson to the Cabinet Member for High Streets and Visitor Economy

"In January of this year you introduced significant changes to car parking charges in car parks operated by Lichfield District Council in Lichfield City Centre, without any recourse to the overview and scrutiny committee before the decision was made. The significant nature of these changes, and the very obvious potential impact of them on visitors, residents and businesses as well as the financial implications for the Council have garnered significant discourse around our District. Can you explain what effect the changes have had on the economy of Lichfield City Centre?"

Response from the Cabinet Member for High Streets and Visitor Economy

"The review of car parking fees was published on the Forward Plan on 19th June 2023. Once an item is on the Forward Plan O&S can include the issue on their work programme. On 29th August 2023 the first iteration of the draft report was sent to Shadow Cabinet representations for comment- Cllr Ennis and Cllr Smith. On 8th September an updated version of the report was also circulated to Cllrs Ennis and Cllr Smith. Following feedback from Cllr Smith on proposed evening charges, amendments were made. The Cabinet Member Decision was published on the website on 23rd October, a minimum of five clear days before implementation – allowing an opportunity for 'call in' by O&S. Formal statutory consultation was published, in notices in all car parks, the website and local publications leading up to the implementation in early January. As such there was ample time and opportunity for members to engage.

The changes to car park charges are part of the wider Car Parking Strategy to encourage an even use of all car parks and support the local economy. The charges are designed to

encourage behaviour change and better utilisation of the long-stay car parks where visitors can stay longer for less. This in turn frees up spaces in the short stay car parks to be utilised by visitors and residents who only wish to be in the City for up to 3 hours. Early indications are that the changes have boosted usage during the daytimes, however we will continue to closely monitor and review as necessary. We have also been closely engaging with Lichfield Chamber of Trade & Commerce to hear directly from businesses.”

Supplementary Question from Councillor Robertson

“I don't actually think what she's written actually answers the question which in reference was ‘can you explain what effect the changes to car parking fees have had on the economy of Lichfield city centre?’ I do know why that question hasn't been answered because in preparation for this question I did ask officers about the following pieces of information for this year and comparative years last year and in 2019. I asked about the number of short and long stay tickets sold so we can figure out the number of people visiting the city, I asked about the income raise for the council in those time periods, I asked about the number of PCNs in those periods so we can see if people are parking more often without tickets, I asked about the average length of tickets bought so we can figure out what's happening with the dwell time. However, yet again with this Cabinet member, and significant changes that she's made to the city centre and the livelihoods of people who work there, that data isn't available. My supplementary is in your answer you've committed to closely monitor and review the changes but if you're not accessing that data and if that data isn't readily available so it isn't being monitored how are you going to make sure that monitoring happens?”

Response from the Cabinet Member for High Streets and Visitor Economy

“A couple of points that I'd respond to within the initial part. The first part of your actual question gave more of a statement which was replied to with a significant amount of detail about how much communications were done between myself and the Opposition Shadows, between yourself and between the Liberal Democrat group, as well and there's a fair amount of detail that I think that is worthwhile just revisiting before you actually got to your question which was about the impact on the economy which is an absolutely valid point.

I think that everybody who wants this District to be successful and certainly as far as City Centre and the wider economy wants to make sure that information is available. Some of that is being put together into a dashboard that's being compiled at the moment and that's a work in progress and we certainly have some information on that which could be shared and at the same time details that we need to establish as to how we're actually arriving at some of that information in the first place. Specifically on the car parking, we've got a study that's going up to the 3rd of March and then when that wider information comes out, then that also can be shared.

I would also add that the amount of tickets that are being issued as far as car parking has increased substantially but we'd certainly like to be able to quantify that and certainly the element which is for the free 30-minute parking which I think has been taken up very well across residents and visitors that are coming in and also to be able to point out the fact that when it comes to the car parking side it is still the case that long stay has been reduced. Certainly, for when we start looking at where we can park for any extended period. As well as working together as members, we are also working with the local Chambers of Commerce and that's equally important. Just being able to establish how many parking tickets has been issued, as in sold, we also need to be able to have some quantifiable information as to the impact on our local community as far as the economy on that also.”

Q8. Question from Councillor Norman to the Leader of the Council

“Lichfield District Council were one of the sponsors in the “Lichfield Small Business of the Year” award at the 2024 Royal Sutton Coldfield, Lichfield & Tamworth and Cannock Chase Chamber of Commerce Awards. However, the Council seems to have a policy of not publicising the success of local businesses in these awards. Can he explain why?”

Response from the Leader of the Council

“I can confirm there is no such policy. Lichfield District Council was very proud to once again be a sponsor for the Royal Sutton Coldfield, Lichfield & Tamworth and Cannock Chase Awards this year, sponsoring the “Lichfield and Tamworth Micro Business of the Year” award. As such we supported the Chambers in their promotional activities, including supplying quotes for press releases and engaging with their social media posts.

The Council itself, ran for the first time its own business awards in October 2023 which celebrated businesses from across the District, plans are already underway for an even bigger, and better 2024 business awards ceremony. Working, and engaging with local business is an absolute priority for the administration, as such we are looking to establish a dedicated Town Centres Manager to work with businesses in Burntwood and the City to further enhance and develop our town centres.”

Supplementary Question from Councillor Norman

“Care Owl won from Lichfield won the micro business category and have already put their award on their website. Haywood Contracts from Burntwood won the small business award but haven’t put their award on their website yet. But doesn’t the Leader think, we are sponsoring it, it’s good for business, it’s good for the Council and that we’ll do some follow up publicity on this. That’s all I’m asking.”

Response from the Leader of the Council

“Absolutely. It was deemed inappropriate for a Labour councillor to approach our communications team directly for a social media post about their business winning an award. There is no policy about not doing publicity or not. We work closely with the chamber to promote all businesses across the District. We’ll do that on a frequent basis. On one occasion, because of the nature of the enquiry, and as there was no planned press about it, it was deemed inappropriate to continue.”

Councillor L Ennis spoke on a point of information and advised that the councillor who approached the communications team did not mention their company's name or seek publicity for it, and it was another company in Burntwood that won an award but was not recognised for it.

(The Meeting closed at 8.44pm)

CHAIR