

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet held at 2.00 pm on Tuesday, 6 January 2026

Present:

Members: Councillor A S Khan (Chair)
Councillor N Akhtar
Councillor L Bigham
Councillor R Brown
Councillor K Caan
Councillor P Hetherton
Councillor J O'Boyle
Councillor K Sandhu
Councillor P Seaman

Non-Voting Deputy
Cabinet Members:

Councillor S Agboola
Councillor P Akhtar
Councillor D Toulson

Non-Voting Opposition
Members:

Councillor J Gardiner
Councillor P Male
Councillor E Reeves
Councillor G Ridley

Other Non-Voting
Members:

Councillor R Lakha
Councillor G Lloyd

Employees
(by Directorate):

Children and Education
Services

S Kinsell

Finance and Resources

B Hastie (Director for Finance and Resources), T Pinks

Law and Governance
People and Facilities
Management

J Newman (Director for Law and Governance), M Salmon

S Newing (Director for People), A Yarnall

Policy and
Communications

N Hart

Regeneration and
Economy

R Palmer

Apologies:

Councillor B Christopher
Councillor G Duggins
Councillor G Hayre
Councillor L Kelly
Councillor J McNicholas

Public Business

50. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

51. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th December 2025 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

52. Outcomes of the Fair Funding Consultation 2026/27

Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Children's and Education Services that set out the results of the 2026/27 Fair Funding Consultation and sought approval for recommended changes to the Fair Funding Scheme of Delegation and recommended operation of the 2026/27 Fair Funding Formula.

The Fair Funding Consultation 2026/27: Summary of Responses; De-delegation levels approved for 2025/26; and Fair Funding Consultation 2026/27, were attached as Appendices to the report.

The report indicated that under Section 48 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Local Authorities (LAs) were required to have schemes of delegation which set out the financial controls and arrangements that would operate between maintained schools and the LA. Any proposed revisions to these schemes and/or the Fair Funding Formula (which impacts all mainstream schools) must be the subject of consultation and required approval by the Schools Forum.

The Department for Education (DfE) introduced its National Funding Formula (NFF) for LAs in 2018/19, whereby mainstream school allocations for LAs were determined under the NFF approach, but LAs retained a level of flexibility over how they chose to distribute that funding amongst their schools. In Coventry the decision since 2018/19 had been to mirror the NFF allocation for schools as far as possible (subject to overall affordability). In the future it was expected that local flexibility would be removed from LAs, and the Council's approach would minimise funding volatility when this occurred.

In a standard funding cycle indicative NFF allocations and operational guides were published in July. Final NFF allocations were issued in December. This year LAs were informed that 2026/27 indicative NFF allocations would not be published in July 2025 and instead would be delayed until November 2025. In recognition of this delay, to support schools and LAs with financial planning the DfE published a policy note in June 2025. In this they confirmed there would not be any significant changes to the operation of the mainstream school NFF in 2026/27 compared to 2025/26.

The Coventry Fair Funding Consultation document was circulated on 7th November 2025 to Head Teachers including Academy Head Teachers/Principals, Chairs of Governing Bodies, relevant Councillors, Trade Unions, Diocesan authorities, the Coventry Governors Association and members of the Schools Forum. The consultation period ended after 2 weeks on 21st November 2025.

Stakeholder groups were briefed throughout the consultation period, these included Primary Finance representative Head Teachers and the Schools Forum. The consultation document also sought to act as an information document to school stakeholders regarding anticipated cost pressures.

The National Funding Formula continued to be in a 'soft' phase. This meant that the DFE would run the NFF for each individual school and the total of Coventry schools' allocations would become the total budget available for schools in Coventry. The LA was still required to go through the usual budget setting process and run the local schools funding formula for maintained schools and academies to distribute the resource. The Council's expectation was that the DFE would eventually operate a direct NFF, through which it would allocate funding directly to mainstream schools without LA involvement. Timescales for this were unclear. In a recent letter sent to the Secretary of State for Education by the Leader, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and Chair of the Coventry Schools Forum regarding the financial challenges facing schools, it was highlighted that local decision-making flexibility added value and should be maintained.

Mainstream schools were receiving two additional or supplementary grants in 2025/26 over and above their NFF allocations: Schools Budget Support Grant (SBSG) - to support the cost of officers and teachers pay awards in 2025/26, and National Insurance Contributions (NICs) grant - to fund the increase in employer national insurance contributions from April 2025. The DfE had confirmed that from 2026/27 these would be rolled into the NFF meaning they would no longer be received as separate grants. The SBSG would be annualised to reflect the fact that there was only a part year impact of the September 2025 teachers pay award in 2025/26. The annualisation of SBSG would result in additional funding in 2026/27 compared to 2025/26, however it was important to note that schools would have to fund the full year effect of the September 2025 pay award from this. Excluding the rolling in of existing supplementary grants and the annualisation of SBSG, the indicative 2026/27 NFF factor values would increase by ca. 2.1% on average compared to 2025/26. The equivalent figure in 2025/26 was an increase of 0.5%.

The pure NFF (without any protection) delivered less resource for Coventry schools as there were still some schools in Coventry who were on the funding floor and were receiving protection funding. The DFE's policy note confirmed that for 2026/27 the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) which protected schools against significant year-on-year change in pupil led funding, must be set between -0.5% & 0%. This was the same level as was prescribed in 2025/26. Alongside the MFG, LAs must also include a Minimum per Pupil Levels (MPPLs) protection mechanism in their formula which guaranteed a minimum amount of funding for every pupil. It was not clear what protection arrangements would be in place after 2026/27 although it was not anticipated that the full protection would be immediately removed from 2027/28 as any significant reductions would be likely to have a detrimental impact on school financial sustainability. Any changes would be subject to further DFE announcements.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- 1) Approves the recommended operation of the 2026/27 Fair Funding Formula and changes to the Fair Funding Scheme of Delegation, which are summarised in section 2 of the report.**
- 2) Delegates authority to the Director of Children's and Education Services, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, to:**
 - a) make (subject to prior consultation with the Schools Forum) such minor and technical variations to the Fair Funding Scheme of Delegation as is deemed necessary; and**
 - b) make any necessary amendments to the final detail of these recommended changes, in order to comply with the School Finance (England) Regulations once full detail of the schools funding settlement has been published by the Department for Education for 2026/27. Any such changes will be made following discussion with the Schools Forum as appropriate.**

53. The 2026/27 Council Tax Base Report

Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Finance and Resources that established the 2026/27 Council Tax base for tax setting purposes. Appendices to the report provided: Tax Base Calculation for 2026/27 Tax Setting (Coventry); Tax Base Calculation for 2026/27 Tax Setting (Allesley); Tax Base Calculation for 2026/27 Tax Setting (Finham); Tax Base Calculation for 2026/27 Tax Setting (Keresley); and Grant payments to parish councils.

The Council Tax base was the measure of the taxable capacity of an area, for the purpose of calculating an authority's Council Tax. It represented the estimated number of Band D equivalent chargeable dwellings for the year. It also took into account the authority's estimated Council Tax collection rate.

The report did not set the actual level of Council Tax in Coventry; that would be set by Council on the 24 February 2026.

Further to the query relating to the zero dwellings figures under the heading relating to empty properties with a 50% discount in Appendix 1, officers confirmed that the disclosure was required by the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012 but as Coventry did not operate a 50% discount for empty properties, the applicable figure was zero. Subsequent to the meeting officers further confirmed that the figures were correct and consistent with previous years.

Members requested that information relating to Coventry's Council Tax collection performance relative to other English billing authorities, be circulated to them. The Briefing note considered at the meeting of the Finance Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) at their meeting on 5th November 2025 on this matter, would be circulated accordingly.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- 1) Approves that the Council Tax collection rate for 2026/27 be set at 97.6%
- 2) That, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the amounts calculated by the City Council for 2026/27 shall be:

a net tax base of 91,413.3 for the whole of the City Council area made up as follows:

Allesley Parish	498.7
Finham Parish	1,587.2
Keresley Parish	744.4
All Other Coventry City Council Wards	<u>88,583.0</u>
TOTAL	91,413.3

- 3) That the following grant payments should be made to parish councils to reflect the impact in 2026/27 of Council Tax reductions on their tax bases.

Allesley Parish	£2,183
Finham Parish	£2,514
Keresley Parish	<u>£1,840</u>
TOTAL	£6,537

54. **Brandon Wood Nature Reserve**

Cabinet considered a report of the Director of the Director of Regeneration and Economy, that would also be considered at the meeting of Council on 13th January 2026, which sought approval for the in-principal change of use of Brandon Wood Golf Course to a nature reserve and a registered Biodiversity Net Gain habitat bank. Appendices to the report provided: a Site Plan; a Landscape wide plan; and Proposed Interventions.

Coventry City Council had a unique opportunity to repurpose the former Brandon Wood Golf Course as a nature reserve, creating rich habitats to support wildlife and developing a new visitor destination for people to enjoy. The UK was one of the most nature depleted nations in the world, with one in six species at risk of extinction. The Council made a commitment in the Climate Change Strategy (2024-2030) to take action to support nature recovery, and this site presented a significant opportunity to do this at scale. The former golf course is 64ha, which meant it would be able to support a huge variety of habitats through the creation of wetlands, grassland and shrub. A much bigger opportunity was also unlocked as it would join up a number of parcels of land already being managed for nature covering 356ha in total (see plans in Appendix 1-3 to the report). Together this would create the biggest area of land managed for nature anywhere in the West Midlands, and at 6km from the city centre, it would be the closest nature reserve of this scale to a city centre in England.

The golf course was closed to the public in 2020, and a number of options had been assessed to identify the most appropriate future use of the site. The golf course was managed by Coventry Sports Trust, but the site was prone to regular

flooding which limited the accessibility of part of the site. It had now been deemed financially unviable to continue as a golf course. In 2024 Defra introduced a new mechanism whereby new developments were required to offset any biodiversity loss through the purchase of 'Biodiversity Net Gain' (BNG) units, which provided a significant new income stream for creating and maintaining areas for nature conservation for 30 years. The business case for the new nature reserve was based on a sustainable finance model whereby up to 304 BNG units were created that would generate income to cover costs of creating and managing the nature reserve, with no Council funding required.

The BNG units were likely to rely on offset from development taking place outside of the city, including Warwickshire, the West Midlands and potentially nationally, rather than Coventry developments. This was due to Council policy which required any Coventry developments deliver BNG within the immediate area or close by and within the city boundary as a default position, contributing to an increase in biodiversity rather than being offset elsewhere. This would help to improve the quality of the city's green spaces and waterways and help create new urban nature networks and green corridors across the city for local people to enjoy. Brandon Wood Nature Reserve would provide an experience where people could immerse themselves in nature in a wilder landscape. Any surplus income generated through the sale of BNG units at the nature reserve would be allocated to activities that supported biodiversity gain.

Biodiversity Net Gain was still a relatively new market and there was a lot of regional and national variation in unit values, demand and selling of units. Whilst the Local Authority could be confident there was a pipeline of development in the sub-region and wider region that equated to demand for units, there was less certainty in terms of timing of units being required. However, if this land was not provided by public bodies such as local authorities, it was likely private landowners would directly benefit from selling units which we were already seeing in the sub-region. To help mitigate this risk, a new Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS) had been developed by Warwickshire County Council (WCC), which created a new partnership between the County, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) and Coventry City Council to enable planning and managing the BNG and emerging nature markets more strategically through a collaborative approach. This could help unlock funding to support habitat creation and maintenance for BNG sites. Formal approval to join the NCIS partnership was therefore sought as part of this report. The Local Authority was also working with WMCA to explore similar opportunities, to ensure maximising opportunities to grow nature markets and could directly influence and benefit from where investment was delivered. Given the relatively immature state of BNG market at present, it was proposed that delegated authority was given to continue to work up the investment plan, working with NCIS, WMCA and wider markets to provide a clear pipeline of investment and phase delivery on site accordingly. Works could start as early as the second half of 2026, subject to planning and legal agreements.

The project has been developed with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, who already lease a significant area of land for nature surrounding the golf course, including their headquarters next door Brandon Marsh Nature Reserve which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is proposed that the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Group will enter into a property transaction with the Council, bringing their expertise to maintain the site as part of the wider landscape to maximise a range

of diverse habitats that support nature alongside creation of a seamless visitor experience so that people can enjoy visits to the new nature reserve and adjacent sites.

Work has been undertaken to look at how to maximise visitor experience to the site and encourage local people to connect with nature. It was proposed to undertake improvements to site infrastructure to enhance the visitor experience which would include upgraded and accessible footpaths, a new car park, benches and wayfinding. The former club house would be demolished, which would help save the Council costs related to security and business rates. There was also a further opportunity to enhance the visitor experience through creation of new outdoor education, training and wellbeing hub on the site, which could be located on the site of the former club house.

This was currently at concept stage but could be a fantastic opportunity that would complement the Council's other outdoor education facilities in the city and Plas Dol Y Moch and provide a significant natural site on the doorstep of the city for learning and skills. It was proposed that this option was developed in conjunction with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and was brought back for a decision following due governance process date once a viable business case is developed. This would reduce the extent of the site where BNG units could be delivered by around a third. However, it would provide a significant boost to visitor experience and an opportunity to share associated infrastructure costs. It was therefore recommended that this option continued to be developed and, subject to a future governance decision within the next 12 months, with a backstop position that if this didn't come forward then this part of the site would be part of the wider nature reserve. The financial modelling that supported this decision set out the potential income that related to this part of the site and demonstrated that the business case for the nature reserve still remained viable if this section wasn't included in the sale of BNG units.

It was suggested that an All Members Seminar on nature reserves would be useful.

RESOLVED that Cabinet recommends that Council:

- 1) Approves the in principal change of use of Brandon Wood Golf Course to a nature reserve and a registered Biodiversity Net Gain habitat bank, including demolition of the former golf club house subject to a formal planning process via Rugby Borough Council to deliver proposed changes to the Site (as shown in Appendix 1 and 3 to the report) and land appropriation within the Council between service areas;**
- 2) Delegates authority to the Director of Regeneration and Economic Development, following consultation with the Director of Property Services and Development, the Director of Finance and Resources (s151 Officer), the Director of Law and Governance, and the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change to:**
 - 2a) Enter into the appropriate legal agreements (including but not limited to a property transaction) and to make necessary variations from**

time to time between the Council and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Group for up to thirty years for the Site.

2b) Undertake all necessary due diligence including the investment strategy and subsequent phasing of the project and enter into necessary legal agreements (and make necessary variations from time to time) to maximise Biodiversity Net Gain Units for the whole Site up to £8m.

2c) Enter into appropriate legal agreements to enable the Council to join the Nature Capital Investment Strategy partnership with Warwickshire County Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, including acceptance of funding to support delivery of BNG on the Site if this becomes available through the partnership, subject to formal governance processes.

2d) Accept up to £2m in the sale of BNG units to deliver the initial phase of delivery of the Site.

2e) Approve the addition of up to £1.4 million for the purposes of delivering the Project (subject to the financial mitigations set out in the financial implications).

3) Approves that all Biodiversity Net Gain income from the Site is ringfenced and reinvested in biodiversity and enabling activities.

55. Gas Contract Renewal

Cabinet considered a report of the Director of People and Facilities Management on the Council's gas requirements and proposed gas contract renewal.

Coventry's Climate Change Strategy (2024-2030) set out the Council's decarbonisation ambitions, which included increasing clean energy supply and increasing the energy efficiency of the estate, alongside helping to facilitate partners to do the same. A significant amount of work had gone into decarbonising the Council's estate over the last decade. Over 40 buildings had been upgraded which included increasing renewable energy generation through installation of solar pv, decarbonisation of heat through installation of heat pumps and connecting a number of the Council's buildings to the district heat network, alongside improving insulation, glazing etc. The Council had also appointed E.ON as its Strategic Energy Partner (SEP) over the next 15 years, to help increase the scale and pace of decarbonisation across the city. One of the first activities the SEP completed was production of the Coventry Energy Plan, which looked at how the city could decarbonise energy infrastructure over the next 15 years. This included moving away from gas and creating more locally produced electricity. At present, the Council were in a transition phase and the purchase of gas was an unavoidable activity that had in recent years had increasing financial implications for the Council. Since 2021 the annual gas spend for both corporate and independent sites had varied between £1.6m and £3.3m per year due to significant global events that had impacted the gas markets. The corporate contract currently covered over 60 Council gas supplies but also supported more than 80 related 3rd party gas supplies including schools and community centres.

The Council's current gas contract was not set to expire until 31 March 2027, but by engaging early, the chosen supplier would have a longer period over which to buy gas ahead of the contract start date. This approach was widely used and was known as "flexible procurement". It involved purchasing blocks of gas over time when the cost was lower which reduced the risk of being subject to shock price increases.

The Council had been using the flexible procurement approach to gas since 2009. This approach had been successful in mitigating the impact on the Council from the unprecedented volatility in the gas market.

The report sets out the Council's gas requirements as well as the anticipated financial implications on Council budgets. It was important to note that the proposed gas contract allowed flexibility to reduce gas demand during the contract period, which was anticipated as energy efficiency improvements were made to more buildings across the city.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- 1) Approves the proposal to enter into a Gas Framework up to £6.3million for the supply of gas up to 31 March 2031.**
- 2) Delegates authority to the Director of People and Facilities Management, following consultation with the Director of Finance and Resources and the Director of Law and Governance, to finalise the legal due diligence and terms and conditions of the Gas Framework and any other legal agreements required to facilitate delivery of the gas supply and its ancillary services.**
- 3) Delegates authority to the Head of Energy Services, following consultation with the Director of People and Facilities Management, to oversee the ongoing management of the wholesale purchasing strategy during the term of the contract.**

56. Outstanding Issues

There were no outstanding issues.

57. Any other items of public business which the Chair decides to take as a matter of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 3.20 pm)