

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources
held at 10.00 am on Monday, 5 February 2024

Present:	Councillor R Brown (Cabinet Member) Councillor P Male (Shadow Cabinet Member)
Other Members:	Councillor J Blundell Councillor M Heaven Councillor Dr L Kelly Councillor AS Khan (Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities) Councillor J Lepoidevin Councillor S Nazir Councillor A Tucker
Employees (by service area):	
Education and Skills:	R Sugars
Finance:	P Helm
Law and Governance:	O Aremu, M Salmon, C Taylor
Public Health and Wellbeing:	K Larsen
Streetscene and Regulatory Services:	A Walster (Director of Streetscene and Regulatory Services)
Apologies:	Councillor G Ridley

Public Business

9. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

10. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 7th March 2023 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

11. Petitions Relating to the Budget Setting Proposals 2024/25

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources considered a report of the Chief Legal Officer relating to petitions that had been received in relation to the budget setting proposals for 2024/25 to 2026/27. In line with the Council's Petition Scheme, the petition organisers/sponsor had been invited to attend the meeting to outline their concerns to the Cabinet Member.

On 12th December 2023, Cabinet approved the Pre-Budget Report for 2024/25 which outlined, for consultation, a set of new revenue budget proposals for 2024/25 to 2026/27 which represented changes to the Council's existing Budget. The proposals were subject to an 8-week consultation period ending on 7th February 2024. The outcome of the consultation process would be included in the final Budget Setting Report for 2024/25, which would be considered by the Cabinet and Council at their meetings on 20th February 2024.

A petition had been submitted headed 'Memorial Park Free Parking', bearing 3307 signatures, relating to the proposal to remove the current 3 hours free parking at the War Memorial Park and to standardise parking charges with those at Coombe Abbey Park. The proposed parking charges were as follows:

Up to 1 hour - £1
1-2 hours - £3
2-4 hours - £3.50
Day ticket £5

The petition was sponsored by Councillor Blundell, a Wainbody Ward Councillor, who attended the meeting and spoke on behalf of the petitioners. The Petition Spokesperson was unable to attend the meeting.

Councillor Blundell spoke in support of the petition explaining that it had been raised due to concerns from park users, in particular, from parents of children at Styvechale Primary School who used the car park to park to walk their children to and from the school. He also raised concerns relating to the resulting additional parking pressures that would be created in nearby streets and the War Memorial Park café attracting less patronage if people changed their parking habits as a result of the introduction of charges.

Councillor Kelly and Councillor Tucker, Earlsdon Ward Councillors, also spoke in support of the petition outlining their concerns, in particular, that the War Memorial Park was used differently to Coombe Abbey Park and couldn't be used as a comparison and that the streets of Earlsdon would be adversely affected, especially in light of the Earlsdon Liveable Neighbourhood Scheme's implementation.

Councillor Male spoke in support of the petition, concurring with Councillors comments, and referring to the results of the impact study which was carried out when parking charges were first applied to the War Memorial Park.

The issues raised were summarised as follows:

- Parents used the War Memorial Park car park to park their cars to walk children to and from Styvechale Primary School.
- The proposed charges would result in additional parking pressures on nearby roads and the café in the park would attract less patronage if people changed their parking habits.
- It was likely that the proposed car parking charges would not achieve the income target of £150k.

- Additional monies had recently been received from Government and those, along with the surplus from the budget proposals, would allow a balanced budget without the inclusion of the proposed parking charges at the park.
- The charges could have an adverse impact on the Earlsdon Liveable Neighbourhood Scheme proposals, due to the likelihood of more cars being parked in nearby streets.
- The proposals did not fit with the promotion of healthier living as part of the One Coventry Plan, if the charges deterred people from using the park.
- The War Memorial Park should not be compared to Coombe Abbey Park as the parks were used for different purposes.

Officers responded, advising of the following:

- By increasing parking charges, officers were confident that the £150k savings would be achieved.
- The charges would bring car parking charges at the War Memorial Park in line with Coombe Abbey Park. This was based on car parking charges applied elsewhere and in line with actual car numbers using the Park.
- The impact study results when charges had first been introduced at the park had shown no detriment to parking on the surrounding streets.
- There would be a review of parking in the streets around the War Memorial Park to measure impact post implementation.

Two petitions had been submitted in relation to the proposal to remove funding that subsidised the provision of non-statutory school transport, affecting 5 dedicated school routes to Bishop Ullathorne Secondary school and an extension to a public transport route serving Blue Coat Secondary school, affecting approximately 400 pupils. The Council had provided funding to subsidise these routes following a commercial provider ceasing to operate during the pandemic in 2020. The Council would continue to provide bus passes for children entitled to statutory support for home to school transport to enable them to utilise the public transport network.

The first petition was headed 'Save Our Buses' and contained 538 signatures. The Petition Organiser attended the meeting and spoke on behalf of the petitioners.

The second petition headed 'Removal of Funding Subsidy to Faith School Bus Routes', contained 250 signatures. The Petition Organiser attended the meeting and spoke on behalf of the petitioners.

The Petition Organisers raised the following issues:

- Public transport buses were already full to capacity.
- More buses were needed to ensure all children could be accommodated.
- If the funding was removed and the school buses were stopped, children would not be able to get home safely and reliably.
- Petition organisers had contacted the Mayor for the West Midlands and Transport for West Midlands about the issue but had received little or no response.
- The need for pupils to travel to and from school safely and reliably has not gone away since the pandemic.

- Traffic volumes, due to parents using cars for school drop-offs and pick-ups, would increase and the impact on the environment and the air quality would decrease.
- It was necessary to arrange an additional bus service using the same route with an appropriate provider.
- It was suggested that the City Council, Transport for West Midlands, and the school should work together to find a solution for the future.

Councillors Blundell, Heaven, Lepoidevin, Male and Nazir spoke in support of the petition and concurred with the comments made by the Petition Organisers.

Officers responded, advising of the following:

- The City Council provided a short-term response to the situation following the commercial provider ceasing to trade.
- Concerns relating to bus capacity would be taken up with Transport for West Midlands.
- When the commercial provider ceased trading, the City Council was in receipt of a grant from the Department for Education for transport relating to social distancing. This grant was used for the 2021 and 2022 academic years after which the grant ended. Initially the grant provided additional transport for 15-16 schools in the city. Once the grant had finished all additional transport to schools stopped with only the bus to Bishop Ullathorne School remaining.
- Officers were in touch with schools and Transport for West Midlands were aware of the issue.
- The Council had not been subsidising the bus routes.
- Officers were aware that transport costs had increased and there had been difficulties in recruiting bus drivers.

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources thanked everyone for attending the meeting and for the comments made and confirmed that the issues raised would be considered as part of the consultation process for the Budget Setting proposals for 2024/25.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources:

- 1) Notes the petitions received and considers comments and issues raised at the meeting.**
- 2) Agrees that the petitions and issues raised be considered as part of the consultation process for the Budget Setting proposals for 2024/25.**

- 12. Any other items of public business which the Cabinet Member decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.**

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.00 am)