

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at The Forum, Towcester, NN12 6AF on Tuesday 20 December 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present Councillor Jonathan Nunn (Chair)
 Councillor Adam Brown (Vice-Chair)
 Councillor Fiona Baker
 Councillor Mike Hallam
 Councillor Phil Larratt
 Councillor Malcolm Longley
 Councillor David Smith

Also
Present: Councillor Sally Beardsworth
 Councillor Alison Eastwood
 Councillor Jonathan Harris
 Councillor Ian McCord
 Councillor Kevin Parker
 Councillor Ken Pritchard
 Councillor Wendy Randall
 Councillor Danielle Stone

Officers Anna Earnshaw, Chief Executive
 Rebecca Peck, Assistant Chief Executive
 Martin Henry, Executive Director - Finance (Section 151 Officer)
 Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic (Monitoring
 Officer)
 Paul Hanson
 Jane Carr, Director of Communities & Opportunities
 Sarah Reed, Executive Director - Corporate Services
 Stuart Timmiss, Executive Director - Place and Economy
 Gillian Baldock, Political Assistant to the Conservative Group

118. **Apologies**

Councillor Rebecca Breese, Councillor Matt Golby, Councillor Daniel Lister

119. **Declarations of Interest**

None

120. **Minutes**

Agreed that the minutes from the Cabinet meeting on the 6th of December 2022 were approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

121. **Chair's Announcements**

None

122. **Urgent Business**

None

123. **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee – recommendations in respect of the Children's Trust Budget**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Ian McCord, the Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the report. Members were advised that this report could have come to Cabinet earlier and had been flagged as such. It was noted that the findings should be brought to the attention of the Department of Education (DfE).

Councillor Malcolm Longley advised that the DfE would be written to.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet would write to the Department for Education regarding the Children's Trust model and state that, whilst West Northamptonshire Council will honour its contract regarding funding its agreed proportion of the Children's Trust budget, any subsequent difference should be covered by the Department for Education

124. **Revenue Monitoring - Quarter 2 - Financial Year 2022-23**

At the Chair's invitation councillors made the following comments.

- It would be useful to have more regular monthly figures.
- Overspend had been flagged but this was now expected to be zero, what roles/vacancies were being held to achieve this?
- Large amounts of reserves had been used, could there be more detail provided on how it was allocated.
- There seemed to be an underspend in education, why was this?
- There needed to be more focus on early years funding, there seemed to be no provision for EAL support.
- It was noted that although the running of Leisure services was costly it was important for the residents.

The Chair of The Corporate and Scrutiny Overview committee felt that reports needed to come to the committee faster than they presently do.

The Chief Executive advised that with regards to cost cutting, there were 150 lines of mitigation open to the Council.

Councillor Fiona Baker advised concerns would be raised at the schools forum.

Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report to Cabinet and noted that further central government input would be welcomed.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- a) **Noted the forecast outturn position for 2022-23 and associated risk**
- b) **Noted the deliverability assessment of West Northamptonshire Council savings requirement for 2022-23 summarised in section 7 and detailed in Appendix B**
- c) **Delegated authority to the Executive Director – Finance in consultation with the portfolio holder to apply any budget virements required to effectively manage the overall budget during the 2023/24 year.**
- d) **Cabinet noted and endorsed the three requests made by the Children's Trust set out in paragraphs 6.4, 6.5 and 6.7 and supported by the Strategic Commissioning Group and recommend to Council that they should be approved and for the approval of further contract sum adjustments to be delegated to the Executive Director – Finance in consultation with the Finance Portfolio holder.**
- e) **Noted the position on Capital Dispersations set out in paragraph 6.48.1**

125. Quarter 2 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Monitoring Report 2022-23

At the Chair's invitation councillors made the following comments.

- It was noted that the Children's Trust had raised an issue about their buildings, did the council have a budget set aside for this?
- It was queried whether any issues around Section 106 money been resolved.
- Flood resilience had been mentioned, the lakes in the eastern district should be added as they are important flood defences.

Councillor Malcolm Longley noted that there was about £2.5 million set aside for various purposes within the Children's Trust.

The Executive Director Place & Economy advised that the Council had been given some funding by central Government to look at flood resilience, this information could be shared after the meeting.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet

- a) **Noted the latest capital monitoring position for the General Fund and HRA.**
- b) **Noted the new capital schemes and changes to the Capital Programme since the report that was considered by Cabinet in September 2022.**
- c) **Approved the budget virement outlined in section 10.**

126. **Treasury Management Update Quarter 2, 2022-23**

At the Chair's invitation councillors made the following comments.

- How many LOBO loans the Council currently had was queried?
- Could there be clarification as to the role interest rates.
- Cabinet was urged to review policy as soon as possible.
- It was important for the Council to implement socially responsible investments. Green and clean should not just apply to residents but also to where the Council chooses to invest.
- Having the correct framework in place was important.

Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report and made the following comments.

- There were currently roughly 50 LOBO loans.
- Members would be provided with information regarding interest rates.
- The maturity table and capital expenditure would be broadly balanced over the next couple of years.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the report and treasury activity for the second quarter of the 22-23 financial year.

127. **Progress Update Transformation and Local Government Reform**

At the Chair's invitation councillors made the following comments.

- It was queried whether some of the efficiencies and figures were too ambitious, could the Council deliver what had been promised.
- There had been a reduction in senior staff costs because of the amalgamation of the four councils. It was questioned how much knowledge had been lost as part of this process.
- It was noted that a lot of outsourcing had taken place.

The Executive Director Place & Economy advised that he would be happy to discuss any transformation queries with councillors.

The Chair presented the report to Cabinet and noted that the Lodge Hall site in Daventry was a valuable asset which had had a reasonable level of interest.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- **Noted the efficiencies delivered to date and planned for 2023-24;**
- **Noted the content of the detailed reports at Appendices 1,2 and 3 which set out the details of our progress against our plans, commitments, and savings targets.**
- **Noted the key elements of our Council operating model in Appendix 1 and the design principles that would underpin our future operation and service to stakeholders.**
- **Noted the summary of the West Northants Master Property Plan for our buildings, and**

- **Noted the progress on disaggregation of services from North Northants and status of services that are still shared.**

128. 2023-24 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan

At the Chair's invitation councillors made the following comments.

- Working on the budget should be a collaborative exercise.
- There had been no alternative options put forward with regards to the bus routes that had been removed.
- Could there be some further clarity given with regards to the community grant scheme figure, as it was not clear.
- The increase in various charges was noted.
- It was queried how the budget aligned with the corporate plan.
- It was noted that equality impact statements were not being produced alongside reports although they are a legal requirement.

Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report and made the following comments.

- It was advised that there was an emissions budget, councillors would be welcome to discuss this.
- There was a working group dedicated to buses.
- Members were advised that all ideas were welcomed and to please ask for further detail should it be required.

The Executive Director of Finance noted that it would be unlikely that business rates would be reset and that the budget itself was aligned with the corporate plan.

The Chair advised that any increases in costs were only done, when necessary, with the goal of avoiding cuts to services.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet.

- a) **Approved for consultation the 2023-24 Draft Budget, including**
 - i. **an estimated net revenue budget of £798.3m (£377.1m excluding Dedicated Schools Grant) as set out in Appendix A.**
 - ii. **an average Band D Council tax of £1,693.73 for West Northamptonshire Council, which represents an average increase of 4.99%. (2.99% increase in 'core' Council Tax and 2% Adult Social Care Precept).**
 - iii. **proposed Fees and Charges as detailed in Appendix C**
 - iv. **provisional dedicated schools grant budget of £421.2m as detailed in Appendix D**
 - v. **the draft Capital Programme additions as set out in Appendix E**
- b) **Set the tax base for West Northamptonshire at 142,060.8, Band D equivalents, as set out in paragraph 6.67**
- c) **For the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG):**
 - i. **Noted the provisional allocations and planned usage of the DSG for 2023-24 pending the final DSG settlement, and**
 - ii. **Following consultation with the Schools Forum, delegated authority to the Executive Director for Children's Services to determine the DSG**

2023-24 schools funding formula, high needs funding arrangements and the Early Years Funding Formula in line with Department for Education guidance.

129. Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Plan

At the Chair's invitation councillors made the following comments.

- WNC housing stock has been minimised by the right to buy scheme, how many of these houses are now in the hands of private landlords?
- Residents have advised that they are not able to sell their accessible homes back to the council.

Councillor Adam Brown made the following comments.

- A housing fund had been set up for residents who require help with rent payments.
- It was advised that the right to buy scheme cannot be stopped and agreed it does have a decimating effect on the councils housing stock.
- With regards to adaptive homes, the housing team would be happy to hear from residents who wish to sell back their homes. There is a budget in place for this.

Councillor Malcolm Longley advised that the uptake of the hardship fund by councillors had been trivial.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet.

1. **Approved for the draft HRA budget 2023-24**
2. **Approved for consultation the 7% (£6.79) increase in average rents from £97.00 to £103.79 per week in accordance with the government's amended Rent Standard with effect from the 3rd April 2023.**
3. **Approved for consultation the draft HRA Capital Programme and financing for 2023/24, as detailed in appendix 3 and notes the forecast programme from 2024/25 to 2027/28.**
4. **Approved for consultation the 10% increase in tenants and leaseholder service charges with effect from the 3rd April 2023 as set out in Appendix 5**
5. **Approved for consultation the 10% increase in garage rents and commuter surcharges with effect from the 3rd April 2023 as set out in Appendix 5**
6. **Noted the draft 2023-24 Total Fees proposed for NPH in appendix 4 to deliver the services in scope.**
7. **Noted that the Council has made an application in partnership with NPH for Wave 2 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation fund for £1.28m and approve delegated authority to the Executive Director of Finance to enter into a funding agreement with the Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) if successful in the bid process.**

- 8. Approved for consultation the setting up of a new hardship/management contingent budget within general management to provide help for tenants facing financial difficulties.**

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____