



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at The Forum, Towcester, NN12 6AF on Monday 13 February 2023 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Jonathan Nunn (Chair)
Councillor Adam Brown (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Fiona Baker
Councillor Rebecca Breese
Councillor Matt Golby
Councillor Mike Hallam
Councillor Phil Larratt
Councillor Daniel Lister
Councillor Malcolm Longley

Also Present:

Councillor Sally Beardsworth
Councillor Jonathan Harris
Councillor James Hill
Councillor Nigel Hinch
Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere
Councillor Andrew Kilbride
Councillor Ian McCord
Councillor Kevin Parker
Councillor Suresh Patel
Councillor Ken Pritchard
Councillor Bob Purser
Councillor Wendy Randall

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor David Smith

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)
Jane Carr, Director of Communities & Opportunities
Stuart Lackenby, Executive Director - Adults Communities and Wellbeing
Sarah Reed, Executive Director - Corporate Services
Stuart Timmiss, Executive Director - Place and Economy
Gillian Baldock, Political Assistant to the Conservative Group
Becky Hutson, Head of Communications
Paul Hanson, Head of Democratic and Elections
Kathryn Holton, Committee Officer

150. **Apologies**

Councillor David Smith

151. **Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

152. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 17 January 2023 were agreed subject to the following amendment to Section 141:

Councillor Adam Brown advised that having a governance framework was *necessary to enable the Council to meet statutory requirements and other obligations*.

153. **Chair's Announcements**

None

154. **Urgent Business**

None

155. **Report from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (if any)**

The budget scrutiny report was presented under Item 10 (2023-24 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan).

156. **Revenue Monitoring, Quarter 3 - Financial Year 2022-23**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Longley presented the report and summarised the salient points.

Councillors made the following comments:

- What was being done about homelessness?
- Care workers should be paid more to avoid the issues arising from lack of staff.
- £150k was spent on legal costs at SEND tribunals - 90% of which were won by parents. Educational Psychologists were spending time in tribunals instead of assessing children.
- There had been an underspend in children's care due to family breakdown. Early preventative work was needed, such as children's hubs.
- Could street lights be dimmed at night to save energy?
- Alternative budgets had been drawn up which Cabinet should consider.
- The Housing Revenue Budget was balanced but did not recognise the pressures involved such as inflated material costs and staff leaving due to below inflation pay increases.

- Roads had taken a battering over the winter – were we keeping pace with the repair work needed?
- Was there any impact on services or funding from general reserves in respect of the £3.9m overspend?
- What measures were being taken to mitigate the forecast overspend of Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT)?

Cllr Longley made the following comments:

- There were currently sufficient contingencies to cover the forecast overspend of £3.9m.
- NCT were in charge of their own accounts so WNC would not be able to control overspending.
- HRA had a balanced budget but this had not been easy. NPH set their own pay levels.
- A temporary accommodation scheme was being planned.
- Alternative budget ideas would always be welcomed and considered.

Councillor Hallam advised that the lowest paid WNC staff had seen an 18% increase since vesting day. WNC would like to do more but it had to be affordable.

Councillor Brown stated that more temporary accommodation was being provided – and stressed that it needed to be of good quality.

Councillor Larratt pointed out that street lights were already dimmed late at night. There would also be additional savings provided by LED lighting.

Councillor Baker stated that although WNC had not been eligible for government funding for family hubs for early help, a programme was being developed to put these in place without the funding. The needs of children had to be put first and with the increase of children coming into care, NCT had to fund what was needed.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- a) Noted the forecast outturn position for 2022-23 and associated risks
- 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 for finance to apply any budget virements required to effectively manage the overall budget.

157. **Quarter 3 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Monitoring Report 2022-23**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Longley presented the report and summarised the salient points.

Councillors made the following comments:

- It was important to find ways to deliver against housing targets and to increase them in line with demand.
- Innovative ways of providing housing needed to be considered.
- No figures had been provided for the Disabled Facility Grant (DFG) for South Northants and Northampton (page 61 of report).
- The pothole fund was noted, but pavements were not being repaired quickly or well enough.

Councillor Brown advised that a governance regime with NPH had been agreed at the last cabinet meeting. NPH had been innovative in converting garage sites for housing.

Councillor Longley stated that DFG figures would be reported when received.

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 December 2022.

158. **Treasury Management Update Quarter 3, 2022-23**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Longley presented the report and summarised the salient points.

Councillors made the following comments:

- In relation to social and corporate governance some countries should be favoured more than others regardless of ratings.
- A training exercise on treasury management had been circulated to all members and was recommended. Could the link be sent again in the weekly newsletter?

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

159. **2023-24 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor McCord made the following comments on behalf of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- Thanks were expressed to all those involved in the scrutiny process and preparation of the report.
- The process of budget scrutiny needed to be started earlier in the year.
- Where figures were quoted it would be helpful if narrative could be provided around assumptions.
- A better communications plan was needed for fees and charges.
- The removal of parking charges for the Racecourse was welcomed.
- Concern was expressed about the net zero target of the Council.

- Care services were the most challenging part of the Council's budget and operation as they were demand-led services with statutory rights and needs. Central government should be asked to sort out the problem.

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Longley presented the report and summarised the salient points. The budget summary appeared on page 135 of the report.

Councillor Larratt advised that there had been changes to the proposed car parking charges as outlined in the two documents circulated at the meeting and published online. Charges had been withdrawn for the Racecourse to allow further consultation. Charges had been amended for Country Parks with free parking for blue badge holders and a Park Run season ticket had been introduced. This was valid between 08.30 am and 10.30 am (not 08.00 am and 10.00 am as in the report). An hourly charge was proposed for Country Parks with all day parking reduced to £8.00. Two hours free parking would be introduced at weekends in Northampton town centre. The financial impact of these changes would be £282k and the contingency had been reduced by this amount.

Mr Mark Mullen (Northampton Town Centre BID) was invited to address the Cabinet and made the following comments:

- Northampton Town Centre BID represented over 600 businesses and there was strong opposition to the proposals. The consultation process needed to be more transparent – the proposals were amongst 144 pages of other proposals.
- There were towns within the county with no parking charges. Given that there was an overhead charge for car parking, other towns should be making a contribution.
- Council employees were able to benefit from reduced cost parking – why could this not be provided for other businesses too?
- A graph was available on request from democraticservices@westnorthants.gov.uk showing that parking charge increases resulted in fewer people visiting Northampton town centre.

Councillors made the following comments:

- Council tax harmonisation resulted in some residents receiving a reduced service but a higher increase.
- Country Park charges increasing from a flat rate of £2.20 per day would result in parking on local roads around Daventry Country Park.
- WNC needed to look at policy and budget consultation and development. The process should start earlier and work through conflicting issues to obtain buy-in from residents and businesses.
- Parking needed to be considered holistically. It was good to have the opportunity to stay and pay for a shorter time in Country Parks. The proposed introduction of ANPR was positive. However, charges were inequitable, costing more in Country Parks than Northampton town centre. The concession for Park Run parking was welcomed. Could this be extended for open water swimming groups?
- A statement was read out from Paul Reedman (Naseby Parish Council) expressing concern at the proposal to reduce the 59/60 bus service. If implemented this would adversely affect the quality of life of those in rural

communities. A petition would be presented to Council requesting reconsideration of the proposal.

- Budget amendments had been proposed which needed to be taken seriously.
- How was the upkeep of car parks in Daventry and Towcester funded?
- Frequency of bin collections in Northampton should be reconsidered.
- The ongoing sustainability of future WNC budgets was a concern. Funding for all areas was being reduced to pay for statutory services. This was not fair or sustainable and the government needed to be lobbied for fairer funding.

Mr Mark Higgs was invited to address the Cabinet and made the following comment:

- Parking charges were too high which would drive people away from the town and parks.

Councillor Longley made the following comments:

- The proposed decision to increase parking charges had not been taken lightly. There were significant pressures in adult care and children's services which were unlikely to improve. Difficult decisions had to be taken and any good ideas would be gratefully received.
- Harmonisation was a three year plan agreed at the outset of WNC which had to be carried out.

Councillor Larratt made the following comments:

- WNC had met with Northampton Town Centre BID to discuss the issues raised. In terms of staff parking benefits, parking spaces could be bought by local businesses to sell for season ticket holders.
- In respect of the proposed three-weekly bin collection, no action would be taken until it had been decided through the waste strategy.
- The one hourly charge at Country Parks would help, for example, the lunchtime trade. The issue of parking on local roads to avoid charges needed to be monitored. Discussion regarding open swimming parking permits would be welcomed.
- A consultant was looking at how WNC could best support bus routes. A bus working group would meet once the report had been received.
- A change was proposed to the recommendations for highways, adding £1m to the highways maintenance budget to prioritise high quality repair of potholes. This was in addition to funds already included.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet;

- a) Approved the 2023-24 Budget for West Northamptonshire set out in this report, and recommended the Budget to the Full Council meeting on 22 February 2023, including:
 - i. an estimated net revenue budget of £826.069m (£382.391m 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. fees and charges schedule as detailed in Appendix D.
 - iv. dedicated schools grant budget of £443.7m as detailed in Appendix EP.

- v. the Capital Strategy as set out in section 7 and Appendix F1, and Capital Programme as set out in Appendix F2.
 - vi. the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy set out in Appendix G.
 - vii. the Treasury Management Strategy set out in Appendix J.
 - viii. setting the authorised limits for borrowing as set out in Appendix F1 section 8.13 and 8.14.
- b) Recommended the following to Full Council on 22 February 2023, to ensure that the revenue and capital budget and all associated financial policies can be delivered in a safe and legal manner from 1 April 2023 and also to ensure there is flexibility to manage the overall budget in the year:
- i. To delegate authority to the Executive Director - Finance to manage any variation in budget prior to the start of 2023-24 as a result of final confirmation of the local government finance settlement, or as a result of unforeseen commitments; in consultation with the Finance Portfolio Holder.
 - ii. To delegate authority to the Executive Director - Finance in consultation with the portfolio holder for Finance to amend the capital programme for 2023-24 going forward so that it accurately reflects issues such as slippage on current year projects that will need to be added to the programme, any amendments made to existing capital programmes, adjustments to accommodate any future use of capital receipts policy and for any other reason where the capital programme needs to be adjusted.
 - iii. To note the use of reserves as summarised in the table contained at paragraph 5.102.
 - iv. To delegate authority to the Executive Director - Finance to employ earmarked reserves for the purposes they were set up for including the release of the risk reserve if required.
 - v. To delegate authority to the Executive Director – Finance in consultation with the portfolio holder for finance to release the general contingency fund of £11.1m if required in the year.
 - vi. To note the Executive Director – Finance has delegated authority to amend fees and charges.
- c) For the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG):
- i. Noted the allocations and planned usage of the DSG for 2023-24.
 - ii. Following consultation with the Schools Forum, delegates authority to the Executive Director - People 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.
- d) Considered the Section 25 statement of the Chief Finance Officer detailed in section 8 of the report.
- e) Noted that car parking charges are still in the process of being considered following budget consultation and discussions with local business leaders and other interested parties. Final charges will be confirmed at the Cabinet meeting.
- f) Noted the consultation feedback on the budget in Appendix H.
- g) Noted the feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Appendix I.
- h) Following consideration of the budget consultation exercise and ongoing dialogue with local business leaders and other interested stakeholders Cabinet

agree to amend the final budget proposals recommended to Council so that the car parking fees and charges tabled at the meeting are adopted in place of the car parking charges contained in the previously published fees and charges schedule.

- i) Cabinet recommend as part of the final budget proposals to full council that free parking be provided for blue badge holders at the Council's Country Parks.
- j) Following consideration of the budget consultation exercise Cabinet agree to amend the final budget proposals recommended to Council to include the creation of a highways fund of £1m to be funded through re-purposing one off reserves.

160. **Housing Revenue Account Budget 2023-24 and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Longley presented the report and Councillor Brown highlighted the salient points. The rent increase of 7% had been essential to allow NPH to maintain properties and pay staff. 80% of NPH tenants have rent covered by universal credit. The other 20% would have to find an extra £30 per month. A hardship fund to mitigate the rent increase had been budgeted for.

Councillors made the following comments:

- How much would the hardship fund provide for each tenant and how would they get it? Help needed to be provided for all those in Housing Association properties, not just NPH.
- It was suggested that the hardship fund form was difficult to complete.
- Could the Council's pension fund be used to borrow money for providing new housing?
- The proposals for Ecton Brook were welcomed.

Councillor Brown advised that the tenant support details were being worked out. This would only be for NPH tenants but WNC were offering cost of living help to residents.

Councillor Longley noted that hardship funds were often not taken up. Pension fund borrowing would be looked into.

The Executive Director Finance advised that the hardship fund had been better used this year.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet recommended Council to approve: -

- a) The HRA revenue budget for 2023-24 of £61.19m.
- b) An average maximum rent increase of 7% per dwelling, in line with the legislation and the government's amended national rent standard, to take effect from 3 April 2023.
- c) An average maximum increase of 10% in garage rents and commuter surcharges to take effect from 3 April 2023.
- d) An average increase of 10% in tenants and leaseholders service charges with effect from 3 April 2023.
- e) The HRA capital programme for 2023-24, noting the future year estimated commitments, and proposed sources of finance.

- f) The total management fee of £32.8m for NPH to deliver the services in scope for 2023-24.
- g) The setting of the minimum working balance at £5m, informed by the outcome of the latest financial risk assessment.
- h) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance to transfer monies to/from earmarked reserves and the working balance, should that become necessary during the financial year.
- i) That authority be given to the Executive Director of Finance to update the prudential indicators in the Treasury Management Strategy reported to Council.
- j) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Finance in consultation with the portfolio holder for Finance to amend the capital programme for 2023-24 going forward so that it accurately reflects issues such as slippage on current year projects that will need to be added to the programme, any amendments made to existing capital programmes, adjustments to accommodate any future use of capital receipts policy, and for any other reason where the capital programme needs to be adjusted.
- k) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Finance to make any technical changes necessary to the papers for the Council meeting of 22 February 2023.

161. West Northamptonshire Council Emissions Report

The Chair presented the report and summarised the salient points.

Councillors made the following comments:

- The work undertaken was to be commended. There was much to do in changing culture and if targets were to be met budget decisions needed to be looked at and aligned with.
- Emissions needed to be reduced massively.
- There was no budget of sufficient size to deliver net zero and the case for it should be ended.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet;

- a) Noted the progress towards the commitment to publish WNC emission levels
- b) Noted the commitment to Net Zero Emission Levels

162. Rural leisure centres heat decarbonisation schemes

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Brown presented the report and summarised the salient points.

Councillors made the following points:

- The opportunity to access funding to implement heat decarbonisation schemes was welcomed.
- If cost savings were being made was there scope for providing help, such as some free swimming sessions?

Councillor Brown advised that this was a difficult time for leisure centres. They needed to save money and therefore would be unable to provide free sessions.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet;

1. Noted the inclusion of the scheme in Capital Programme contained within the final budget proposals being considered by Council on 22 February 2023.
2. Authorised the procurement of services and works and, subject to Council approval of the budget, delegate the award of contracts for the services and works to the Executive Director of Place, Economy and Environment in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and the Portfolio Holder.

163. Contract for Dry Mixed Recycling

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Larratt presented the report and summarised the salient points. At present there were several contracts for collection and sorting of mixed recycling across WNC. The Daventry contract was due to end in June 2023 and South Northamptonshire in February 2024. The prices quoted for a temporary arrangement were prohibitive so it was proposed to tender for a WNC contract in several stages.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet;

- a) Approved the recommendation to commence procurement for a new contract for mixed recycling.
- b) Agreed to delegate authority to the Executive Director for Place, Economy and Environment in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste Services, and the Executive Director for Finance to
 - i. take decisions related to the procurement process, to enable it to progress as planned; and
 - ii. award the contract, (provided the procurement reaches a satisfactory conclusion).

164. Public Health and NHSE (NHS England) Integrated Sexual Health Services

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Golby presented the report and summarised the salient points.

The Chair advised that work was being done with the Terence Higgins Trust. A pilot scheme was being undertaken and it would be good if this could be extended to WNC. The aim was to stop new HIV infections by 2030 which required undiagnosed cases to be picked up.

A Councillor stated that they would have expected to see greater improvements for the money spent.

Councillor Golby acknowledged that it was expensive but it was a mandated service. It could potentially be scrutinised.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet;
Delegated authority to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Adults, Wellbeing and Health Integration, to extend the current NISHH contract with the existing provider for 2 years (1 + 1).

165. **West Northamptonshire Council Primary and Secondary Co-ordinated Schemes for 2024 Intakes**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Baker presented the report and summarised the salient points. This was a valuable document which gave information on school admissions and was a useful reference.

RESOLVED: Cabinet approved the two co-ordinated schemes as detailed in Appendices A and B.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____