



Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at The Forum, Towcester, NN12 6AF on Tuesday 7 March 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
Councillor David Smith

Also Present:

Councillor Sally Beardsworth
Councillor Janice Duffy
Councillor Rosie Herring
Councillor Nigel Hinch
Councillor Rosie Humphreys
Councillor Bob Purser
Councillor Wendy Randall
Councillor Emma Roberts
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)
Sarah Reed, Executive Director - Corporate Services
Stuart Timmiss, Executive Director - Place, Economy and Environment
Tony Challinor, Assistant Director - Commissioning and Partnerships
Paul Hanson, Head of Democratic and Elections
Kathryn Holton, Committee Officer
Gillian Baldock, Political Assistant to the Conservative Group
Jed Scoles, Political Assistant to the Labour Group

166. **Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

167. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet on Monday 13 February 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

168. **Chair's Announcements**

There were none.

169. **People Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Child and Adolescent Mental Health and the Risk of Self-Harm Scrutiny Review**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Herring, Chair of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the report and summarised the salient points. The recommendations had come out of the work of the Task and Finish Panel and Councillor Herring thanked all those who had been involved.

Councillors made the following comments:

- The number of children self-harming in West Northants was above the national average and increasing. There was a need for youth provision.
- Urgent action needed to be taken to invest in young people and address issues such as anxiety and not feeling safe.
- The environments people inhabited needed to be safer and friendlier with appropriate spaces for young people.
- WNC no longer had the budget to provide therapeutic care for children.
- Sure Start schemes had benefited many families and the closure of centres had had a detrimental effect.
- Children and young people were being failed by having to wait so long for mental health treatment.

Councillor Baker thanked the Task and Finish Panel and declared that she was in agreement with the findings. A programme of youth support had commenced and more youth provision in local areas was being looked into. Despite the absence of grant funding, family hubs were being set up in Towcester and Northampton and many services would be included within them. WNC could not arbitrarily top-slice the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to fund mental health services in schools but could consult with schools to see if this was something they wanted to consider.

Councillor Golby expressed support for the comments and recommendations and noted the number of absences due to exclusion and the effects of this on children. There were plans to look at using school facilities for longer in the day to engage with children. The LAP structure could help in responding to needs.

Councillor Brown commended the work of the Task and Finish Panel and urged cabinet members to reflect on what could be done.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet welcomed the recommendations of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health and the Risk of Self-Harm Scrutiny Review and undertook to review the recommendations and respond with proposals at a future meeting.

170. **Corporate Plan - Quarterly Performance Report**

The Chair presented the report and summarised the salient points. At the Chair's invitation Cabinet Members made the following points:

Councillor Larratt advised that trees which had been removed from WNC land were all dead, dying or dangerous. These had mainly been on highways but some had been within parks. Money was being claimed from the Urban Tree Fund and more planting undertaken. The next quarter was likely to be positive. The Queen's Green Canopy initiative had been very successful.

Councillor Golby noted that performance in adults and public health had been positive. The measures were good but could be reviewed in order to get more value from them.

Councillor Breese referred to the 'percentage of planning applications approved by Committee as recommended' and advised that other measures such as timeframe of decisions could potentially be included. Information had been added to the Apprentices measure to indicate the numbers undertaking each qualification level.

Councillor Lister noted the approval of WNC's UKSPF Investment Plan. The Rural England Prosperity Fund was still awaited. WNC continued to proactively support businesses in West Northamptonshire. Housing Benefit had been brought back in house and since then the timescale for determining applications had been reducing.

Councillor Baker acknowledged that school results were not satisfactory, but only one secondary school was under WNC control. The rest were academies over which WNC had no direct influence. Schools were suffering from 2 years of Covid disruption.

Mr Jake Blackburn was invited to address the Cabinet and made the following comments:

- Reporting tree coverage within WNC as a percentage of land mass would be a useful measure.
- Why were measures such as Covid booster programmes being reported instead of key performance indicators such as average hospital stays?
- If targets for roads had been met, why was the £1m pothole fund needed?
- Delivery of new homes needed to be vastly increased to have any meaningful impact on the waiting list.

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

- When would the climate summit take place and what metrics would this be measured by?
- Heritage assets provided value to the town and green infrastructure was important. Ongoing pressures to deliver housing and jobs meant some could be lost.
- Who decided how valuable green space was? Despite negative feedback the Northampton relief road had still been approved.
- Would WNC back the position for Harlestone Firs to be protected?

Councillors made the following comments:

- Fly tipping was still an issue. Services needed to be joined up to provide an effective prevention and enforcement programme. Could benchmarking against other authorities be undertaken? Was there any link between rising rates of fly tipping and the increased cost of bulky waste collection?
- Comparison of like for like quarters would be helpful to understand trends in leisure sports services. Figures by leisure centre would also be helpful.
- The figures for housing were welcomed. Retrospective quarterly figures were not so useful and projection into the future would be more helpful.
- Why had the number of planning applications approved gone down?
- Academies needed to be held to account. The Regional Director had declined to meet with the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- More education was needed regarding recycling to avoid contamination.
- Why were children put on a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time? Had they previously been taken off too early, or lost support?
- A repair timescale would be helpful for potholes. How many repairs lasted more than 12 months? Dangerous central carriageway defects were taking too long to be repaired.
- Would debt that was overdue by 90+ days be collected or written off?
- Was there any cohort tracking of those aged 16-18 not in employment, education or training (NEET)? How many were not known and what were they doing?
- The targets and figures relating to homelessness and overcrowding did not reflect the urgency of need. More detail was needed – was demand for housing due to inability to afford rents or other factors such as resettlement of Ukrainian refugees?
- More comprehensive data had previously been provided in relation to schools, such as age, key stage, gender, race and area. Context was relevant when looking at attainment figures.
- Many GP surgeries no longer provided a baby weighing service and health visitor visits had been reduced.
- There had been no progress with tree planting due to budget cuts. How many of the Queen's Canopy trees were still alive?
- Do we know how many school buildings are unsafe?
- The increase in adoption of children was encouraging.
- Children were being targeted with vaping which was concerning.
- How many council houses were lost with the right to buy? Was money still paid to the government upon sale?
- 38.6 days to determine housing benefit applications was not good enough.
- What was being done about the level of referrals within 2 days for children of concern?
- The number of complaints was needed, not just those escalated. How did this compare with other authorities?

In relation to net zero, the Chair advised that a climate summit comprising a number of sessions had been held 9 months into the new council.

The Executive Director Place confirmed that trees removed at Harlestone Firs had been part of a commercial crop on the Althorp estate. Althorp's strategy was that every tree cut down would be replaced within the estate.

Councillor Golby advised that moving to the ICS framework would result in changes to some of the health measures.

Councillor Brown made the following comments:

- There would always be friction between housebuilding and green spaces.
- The vast majority of those requiring housing were waiting for internal moves and were not currently homeless.
- More social housing was needed and a meeting was being held to progress this.
- Since 2017 WNC had not paid the government more than necessary on right to buy receipts. There was a 25% treasury share due on any right to buy sale, but the council were entitled to retain the rest if it was spent on more housing within 5 years.
- The demand for housing was largely due to financial problems. The Ukrainian situation had been well managed and was not a core source of demand.

Councillor Larratt made the following comments:

- Trees were not removed in spring and summer because of wildlife, so the figures were higher during winter.
- The Tree Policy had unfortunately been delayed with costings, but had now been approved by the spending panel. A consultant was being procured to write the policy.
- The weather in December had been unusual in temperature variance which had an adverse effect on potholes. Better equipment was being investigated which would deliver more repairs.

Councillor Longley advised that most debts were collected but WNC had a write off policy. Most of the overdue debt related to adult care.

Councillor Baker made the following points:

- Those missing from NEET figures were complicated. Some had moved to other areas but still had to be reported by WNC because they were registered here.
- The Assistant Director Safeguarding and Wellbeing was investigating the number of referrals with a decision within 2 working days. All those affected had oversight by team leaders so were safe.
- The relationship with academies was based on trust. It was improving and needed to be stronger.
- There had previously been more detail provided in relation to school attainment and this would be investigated.

The Chief Executive made the following comments:

- Covid was still a live issue and accounted for 13% of staff absences; reporting was therefore still relevant.
- Hospital data was already regularly published by other organisations and was in the public domain.

Cabinet - 7 March 2023

- Detailed work was being undertaken regarding 2 day referrals – red referrals had a target of 2 days, amber 7 days and green could be for information only.
- Although the aim was to ensure those discharged from hospital were placed with access to family this had not always been possible due to the need to reduce backlogs.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet

Noted the content of the appendix covering the third quarter of 2022-23.

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____