



Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at Council Chamber, The Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester, NN12 6AD on Tuesday 12 December 2023 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Jonathan Nunn (Chair)
Councillor Adam Brown (Vice-Chair)
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 Jonathan Harris
Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere
Councillor Rosie Humphreys
Councillor Peter Matten
Councillor Ian McCord
Councillor Bob Purser
Councillor Wendy Randall

Officers:

Rebecca Purnell, Assistant Chief Executive
Martin Henry, Executive Director - Finance (Section 151 Officer)
Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer)
Paul Hanson, Head of Democratic & Elections
Sofia Neal-Gonzalez, Democratic Services Officer (minutes)
Jane Carr, Director of Communities & Opportunities
Stuart Lackenby, Executive Director - People Services & Deputy Chief Executive
Sarah Reed, Executive Director - Corporate Services
Stuart Timmiss, Executive Director - Place, Economy and Environment
Gillian Baldock, Political Assistant to the Conservative Group
Josh West, Political Assistant to the Labour Group

82. Apologies

Councillor Fiona Baker

83. **Declarations of Interest**

None

84. **Minutes**

The minutes from the Cabinet meeting of the 14th November 2023 were approved and signed as a true and accurate record

85. **Chair's Announcements**

None

86. **Urgent Business**

None

87. **Response to the Report of the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Integrated Care across Northamptonshire (iCAN) Scrutiny Review**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Matt Golby presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Financial commentary found within the report had been reviewed through scrutiny triangulation and it had been agreed that no further action was required.

Councillors made the following comments.

- Solid evidence of how the programme reflects lived experiences was requested.
- There had been no real detail provided about what the triangulation group had considered.

Councillor Matt Golby made the following comments.

- It would be difficult to give an accurate representation of how much money had been saved but the programme had improved the way people were discharged from hospital and their ability to remain at home.
- WNC had provided £350,000 to the programme. This was significantly less than the sum that had been provided by the wider system.

The Executive Director Adults, Communities and Wellbeing advised that the ICAN programme had made a significant difference in lessening the escalation to level 4 within hospital. Members were advised that the amount of support provided had been doubled.

RESOLVED:

- A. Agreed the responses to the recommendations of the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutiny review of Integrated Care across Northamptonshire as described in section 5 of this report.
- B. Thanked, the Task and Finish Group for its work on the iCAN programme
- C. Agreed that the West Northamptonshire Health and Wellbeing Board ensures the delivery of the responses provided in this report.

88. Revenue Monitoring Period 7 - Financial Year 2023-24

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report copies of which had been previously circulated. Members were advised that there had been a £2.5 million overspend in Period 7 and that Children's services had been stable for some time.

Councillors made the following comments.

- Could more in-depth breakdowns be provided.
- A question was asked about how confident the finance department were about cost pressures going forward, such as the increased demand in temporary accommodation.

Councillor Malcolm Longley made the following comments.

- The budgeting carried out in the council was robust.
- Internal auditors were in place within the Council, which helped to ensure that the processes were working correctly

RESOLVED: Cabinet;

- a) Noted the forecast outturn position for 2023-24 and associated risks.
- b) Approved the use of flexible capital receipts as detailed in section 7.
- c) Noted the deliverability assessment of West Northamptonshire Council savings requirement for 2023-24 summarised in section 8 and detailed in Appendix B
- d) 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.
- e) Noted the Treasury Management update in Appendix C

89. Period 7 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Monitoring Report 2023-24

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was noted that there had been a reduction in the disability assistance grant.
- How confident was the Council in its ability to continue to improve its position and reduce expenditure.

Councillor Malcolm Longley advised that expenditure was reported to the capital assets board, which tended to balance well.

Councillor Adam Brown advised that the cost of removing the remaining cladding on the required buildings was around £1.3 million and was due to be completed within the next few days. He then thanked those involved in the project for their hard work.

Councillor Matt Golby noted that the facilities grant was maintained by the Health and Wellbeing Board and this underwent rigorous scrutiny to make sure that money was spent as effectively as possible.

RESOLVED: Cabinet;

- a) Approved the in-year additions to the Adults Services Capital programme as outlined in Section 6
- b) Approved the proposed budget adjustments and reprofiling outlined in section 7 and detailed in Appendix B.
- c) Noted the latest capital monitoring position for the General Fund and HRA.
- d) Noted the new capital schemes and changes to the Capital Programme since the report that was considered by Cabinet in September 2023.

90. **2024-25 Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report, which had been previously circulated. It was noted that the report was a large piece of work and had been a team effort. The key points were then presented to members, this included the planned rise in council tax.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was queried whether the Council should take a more ethical view with regards to its investments in relation to current world issues.
- Could the treasury management report be presented separately and not within the main budget report.
- It was noted that there were transformation challenges and it seemed as though the risks within the budget cycle were growing.
- It was noted that the investment in Housing and Communities was less than other departments.
- The costs of school transport were queried.

Councillor Malcolm Longley advised that the report was a draft copy of the budget and that many items would be discussed in more depth before it was submitted to the final budget. Many of the risks within the report were the same year on year.

Councillor Dan Lister advised that school transport discussions were being undertaken.

Councillor Adam Brown observed that it was important to do the best for the people of West Northants and that the budget was particularly robust partially due to reserves.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet;

- a) Approved for consultation the 2024-25 Draft Budget, including:
 - i. an estimated net revenue budget of £860.2m (£409.2m excluding Dedicated Schools Grant) as set out in Appendix A
 - ii. an average Band D Council Tax of £1,778.25 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 £451m as detailed in Appendix D
 - v. the draft Capital Programme additions as set out in Appendix E.
- b) Note the estimated tax base for West Northamptonshire at 143,691.71 Band D equivalent properties, as set out in paragraph 6.56.
- c) Delegate authority to the Executive Director – Finance to agree and set the final tax base.
- d) Delegate authority to the Executive Director – Finance to take the necessary steps to introduce the new premiums on long term empty properties and second homes at the earliest opportunity as set out in paragraphs 6.59-6.61.
- e) For the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG):
 - i. Notes the provisional allocations and planned usage of the DSG for 2024-25 pending the final DSG settlement
 - ii. Following consultation with the Schools Forum, delegates authority to the Executive Director for Children's Services to determine the DSG 2024-25 schools funding formula, high needs funding arrangements and the Early Years Funding Formula in line with Department for Education guidance.

91. **2024-25 Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Members were advised that there was a plan to increase the rents, with 80% of this coming from tenants' housing benefit. The number of right to buy properties purchased had dropped compared to previous periods.

Councillors made the following comments.

- The increase in rent was a surprise and concern.
- Members were reminded of the hardship that people are facing.
- It was noted that there were a significant number of brownfield sites, it was queried whether these could be used for the delivery of homes.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn advised that the Council was continuing to maintain a hardship fund.

Councillor Adam Brown made the following comments.

- There had been a visit from the Housing minister, with brownfield being part of the discussion, members were advised that every opportunity is looked at.

- It was advised that there was a good and improving relationship with Homes England.
- Without the raise in rents the general maintenance of the buildings would be affected.
- The Council would work closely with NPH to remain aware of how tenants were coping with the increase in rent

RESOVLED: Cabinet:

1. Approved for consultation the draft HRA budget 2024-25
2. Approved for consultation the 7.7% (£8.00) increase in average rents from £103.79 to £111.79 per week, in accordance with the government's amended Rent Standard with effect from the 1 April 2024.
3. Approved the 7.7% increase in tenants and leaseholder service charges with effect from the 1 April 2024 as set out in Appendix 5
4. Approved the 7.7% increase in garage rents and commuter surcharges with effect from the 1 April 2024. This will increase the average rent per garage from £10.96 to £11.80 and the commuter surcharge from £17.41 to £18.75 per week respectively, as set out in Appendix 5
5. Approved the draft 2024-25 management fee to Northamptonshire Partnership Homes in Appendix 4 to deliver the services in scope within the management agreement.
6. Approved for consultation the draft HRA Capital Programme for 2024-25 to 2028-29.

92. **Corporate Plan Performance Report - 2023-24 Q2**

The Chair presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated, then invited Cabinet members to give an update of their portfolios as stated in the report.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was noted that there were many improved targets with fewer admissions into care homes.
- It was noted that there were still a significant number of vacancies.
- There had been a drop in housing residents prior to becoming homeless, was there a reason for this.
- It was queried whether 'green and clean' could be reviewed, specifically the green strategy.
- The length of time housing benefit claims were taking to be processed was queried, could time frames be reviewed.
- There had been 600 suspensions and 89 exclusions within schools, had there been discussions about how best to tackle this?
- The appointment of an Educational Psychologist had taken place. It was queried when this would begin to make a noticeable difference.
- Some residents had commented that the wait times when contacting the Council were too long.

Councillor Mike Hallam advised that the new telephone system is live with amendments ongoing, but that overall the statistics were good.

The Executive Director Adults, Communities and Wellbeing informed members that the Educational Psychologist would aid in the continued improvement of the service but that it was hard to give a quantitative answer.

Executive Director Place & Economy advised that the Planning team had begun to challenge developers who were deliberately slowing down constructions and not completing them in a timely manner. Issues were being resolved.

Councillor Adam Brown advised that interventions were ongoing within the housing team with regards to homelessness prevention.

Councillor Phil Larratt advised that there was still a large amount of fly tipping occurring, and that heavy fines and enforcement would be used to counteract this problem. Councillor David Smith agreed that it was important to push enforcement on this issue.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the content of the appendix covering the second quarter of 2023-24.

93. **Northamptonshire Safeguarding Adults Board (NSAB) Annual Report 2022-2023**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Matt Golby presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. The key headlines were presented to members, and it was advised that an independent scrutineer had given a candid and honest report. They had found that there was good culture and challenge on the board. Members were advised that various learning events had been put in place, and many improvements made.

Councillors made the following comments.

- Could there be clarification on the 6 key safeguarding principles.
- It was noted that there had been a high turnover of care home managers.

The Executive Director Adults, Communities and Wellbeing noted that the turnover of care home manager was being monitored.

Councillor David Smith advised that he was happy to take any questions away.

RESOLVED: Cabinet received the Annual Report of Northamptonshire Safeguarding Adults Board 2022 – 2023 (Appendix A) and noted the findings.

94. **West Northamptonshire Council (Northampton) Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) 2023**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor David Smith presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated.

Members were advised that this was a renewal that goes out for consultation every three years. There were only small changes made to the order which included, bike riding, scooters, and busking. It was advised that funding had allowed for the employment of two PSPO enforcement officers.

Councillors made the following comments.

- Education on how to behave in public spaces was important.
- Busking can add some character and entertainment to the town.
- How could smaller towns and villages be supported when enforcement is needed.

Councillor David Smith advised that buskers would only be approached should they become a nuisance or if they have been asked to leave by the police. Enforcement officers should be able to travel to any areas where they would be required

RESOLVED: Cabinet;

Approved the new Public Spaces Protection Order as set out in Appendix B for a period of three years.

The meeting closed at 7.51 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____