



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at Council Chamber, The Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester, NN12 6AD on Tuesday 16 January 2024 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 Daniel Lister
Councillor David Smith

Also Present:

Councillor Sally Beardsworth
Councillor Jane Birch (Northampton Town Council)
Councillor Maggie Clubley
Councillor Jonathan Harris
Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere
Councillor Martin Johns (Towcester Town Council)
Councillor Dennis Meredith
Councillor Ken Pritchard
Councillor Bob Purser
Councillor Emma Roberts
Councillor Lisa Samiotis
Councillor Daniel Soan (Northampton Town Council)

Officers:

Anna Earnshaw, Chief Executive
Rebecca Purnell, Assistant Chief Executive
Martin Henry, Executive Director - Finance (Section 151 Officer)
Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer)
Sofia Neal-Gonzalez
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
Rebecca Wilshire, Director of Children's Services
Gillian Baldock, Political Assistant to the Conservative Group
Simon Bowers, Assistant Director - Assets and Environment
Neil Cox, Assistant Director - Safeguarding and Wellbeing
Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager
Josh West, Political Assistant to the Labour Group

95. **Apologies**

Councillor Phil Larratt
Councillor Malcolm Longley

96. **Declarations of Interest**

Item 12 – Councillors Adam Brown and Matt Golby both have children going through the school admission process.

Item 14 – Councillor Mike Hallam as a Northampton Town Councillor. Councillor Hallam advised that he had abstained from any discussion regarding this item as a town councillor

97. **Minutes**

The minutes from the Cabinet meeting of 12th December 2023 were approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

98. **Chair's Announcements**

Members were advised that there were speakers from both Northampton and Towcester town councils.

The Chair sent best wishes and sympathy to the Leader of the Labour Group, Councillor Wendy Randall on a recent family bereavement

99. **Urgent Business**

None

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

None

101. **Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2022-23**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Fiona Baker presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Cabinet was advised that the report showed the achievements of the partnership over the last year, one of which had been strengthening the voices of children and young people.

Councillors made the following reports.

- Would like there to be a greater emphasis on the preventative measures in place.
- It was noted that many of the points had been covered in the report received from the Children's Trust.
- It was important for WNC to follow best practice.
- How does WNC plan on helping families before a crisis occurred, many brought on by the cost-of-living crisis?

- Concern was raised as to the number of children home schooled and those missing from education.

Councillor Fiona Baker advised that there were many other boards that dealt with issues such as missing in education, social issues, and other educational issues. There was a large cohort of home-schooled children that were educated successfully at home. Members were advised checks were carried out on all home-schooled children.

RESOLVED: Cabinet received the Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership's Annual Report 2022-23 (Appendix A) and noted the findings.

102. **The closure of Ridgway House, Towcester**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Matt Golby presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Members were advised that a public consultation had been carried out and that the decision had not been taken lightly. The top floor of the building was no longer in use due to health and safety issues and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) had highlighted various challenges. The home was significantly underoccupied and unable to meet most nursing care needs. Residents had advised that they were happy with the care they received from the staff. The home had a safe closure programme in place.

A Towcester town councillor made the following comments.

- It was acknowledged that there was an ever-decreasing budget provided to the council.
- Ridgway House had been neglected for many years by both NCC and WNC.
- There had been a view to build a new care home in Towcester, which has now been dropped without discussion.
- It was noted that the report did not refer to the previous plans for a new care home.
- No alternative options had been provided.

The Executive Director Adults, Communities and Wellbeing made the following comments.

- A new care home had been proposed however capital costs had increased significantly which included the cost of building materials, this would mean considerable borrowing.
- There had been a change in the type of Health and Social care required, with many more people being cared for at home.
- All councils are compelled to set rates accordingly and very few providers accept these.
- It was advised that a new build would not work financially.
- Another care home in Towcester had capacity to take residents from Ridgway.
- It was accepted that there could have been better communication with the town council.

- WNC was looking to allocate a social worker to each resident in order to liaise with family regarding needs.
- It was noted that had any of the residents developed nursing care needs they would have had to be moved from Ridgway.
- A commitment was made to discuss where residents would be moved to.

Councillors made the following comments.

- Where would the current residents be moved to?
- Public transport might be a problem for families visiting, especially those living or moved to more rural areas.
- What would happen to the site, medical facilities or social housing would be welcomed. Would it be re-invested back into the town?
- It was noted that was not enough funding and care from central government.
- The lack of funding from past authorities was echoed.
- Concern was raised that another council-owned public service was closing and that private care had to be used.
- It was noted that a managed decline of council services was occurring throughout the country.
- It was important for residents to not be displaced out of the area, as this could be detrimental to them.

The Chair advised that it was important to protect the current residents. Most of the comments made at the meeting had already been raised by members of the Cabinet.

Councillor Adam Brown noted the historic lack of investment and that there are some buildings that cannot be reconfigured.

Councillor Mike Hallam advised that should the building have been refurbished there would be a need to move residents twice.

Councillor Fiona Baker wished to make sure that every effort was made to help the families during the closure.

Councillor Matt Golby thanked colleagues for all their comments and advised that a lot of time had been spent discussing this item before bringing it to Cabinet.

RESOLVED: Cabinet;

- a) Considered the outcome of the public consultation exercise on the future options for Ridgway House.
- b) Approved the commencement of a safe closure programme with immediate effect, which will support residents to move to alternative residential care accommodation within the area.
- c) Approved the commencement of formal consultation with affected staff members on their redeployment into other council services in accordance with established HR policies and processes.

103. **Interim Bus Policy**

The Chair presented the report on behalf of Councillor Phil Larratt, copies of which had been previously circulated. He stated that public transport played a vital role in society and this new policy would guide how funding would be spent. Members were advised that there was no certainty of funding past April 2025.

A Northampton Town Councillor noted that bus services are lifelines for many residents and a great enabler of independence providing human interaction. Cabinet were urged to keep residents in mind when making decisions about public transport.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was queried whether the tender document could be made available before it goes out.
- There is a great importance of public transport in rural areas, residents could become isolated if services were diminished.
- It would be helpful to know how the fund would be used.
- It was noted that soon there would be no other bus service providers.
- The frequency of services could create a deterrent and diminish the number of people who use the service.

The Executive Director Place & Economy advised that several services would be looked at with further consultations. Various points had also been discussed in the working group.

RESOLVED: Cabinet;

- a) Agreed the adoption of the Interim Bus Policy, which will be updated alongside a wider set of transport policies as part of the Local Transport Plan process by early 2025.
- b) Noted changes in funding for the local bus network for 2023/24 and 2024/25.

104. **Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Dan Lister presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Members were advised that the various stakeholders had been involved in the strategy, with no funding from Visit England received so far.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was felt the availability of information for tourists could be made clearer.
- The incredible developments within Northampton were recognised.

Councillor Dan Lister advised that the position of Tourism Officer was out to advert and awaiting candidates.

Councillor Adam Brown discussed the potential use of digital marketing.

RESOLVED: Cabinet;

1. Approved the Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy attached at Appendix A;
2. Supported the proposal to continue to work closely with colleagues in North Northamptonshire, wider stakeholders and private sector representatives would begin to develop a LVEP. A future report would be brought to Cabinet which would set out detailed implementation plans and financial implications related to the development of the LVEP.
3. Delegated authority to the Director of Communities & Opportunities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth would undertake any activity to develop the plans for LVEP development, ahead of these being brought back to the Cabinet for approval.

105. **Commissioning a unified digital network for WNC**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Mike Hallam presented the report copies of which had been previously circulated. Members were advised that there would be separate reports on security.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was queried whether the cut in the budget would have detrimental effects going forward.
- Changes were being made incrementally which was a wise approach.

Councillor Mike Hallam advised that the restructure would be around the required service needs, the skills needed by staff have changed over time.

RESOLVED: Cabinet;

Delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Chief Information Officer and the Executive Director of Finance authority to award a contract for the provision to the Council of replacement network equipment and services, in compliance with the Council's procurement processes and procurement legislative requirements.

106. **Admissions arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled West Northamptonshire schools for 2025 intakes and co-ordinated schemes for 2025 intakes**

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

Members were advised that the report was brought to Cabinet every year to fulfil a statutory requirement.

A councillor advised that some members of the public were concerned that not all schools dealt with admissions fairly.

Councillor Fiona Baker noted that academy schools have their own admission schemes.

Councillor Adam Brown urged any concerns regarding admissions be taken to the relevant body.

RESOLVED: Cabinet:

- a) Approved the admission arrangements as detailed in Appendix A
- b) Approved the primary co-ordinated scheme as detailed in Appendix B
- c) Approved the secondary co-ordinated scheme as detailed in Appendix C

107. Disposal of former Collingtree Smallholding, Watering Lane, Collingtree

The Chair presented the report on behalf of Councillor Malcolm Longley, copies of which had been previously circulated.

Councillors made the following comments.

- This was a major development opportunity.
- Had the air quality issues around junction 15 been resolved, would these affect the site?
- What would be in place to mitigate any noise pollution?
- Could 50% social housing be viable.
- Cross-party working would be welcomed.

Councillor Adam Brown advised that there was always an ambition to deliver social housing and that it was important to look at the site in a strategic way.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet authorised the Assistant Director Assets & Environment in consultation with the Executive Director Finance and Portfolio Holder for Finance to agree terms for the disposal of the former Collingtree Smallholding, Watering Lane, Collingtree and enter any documentation required to implement or in connection with this disposal, in accordance with paragraph 6.18 with any minor variations found to be necessary or expedient.

108. Office Optimisation Phase 2 Costs

The Chair presented the report on behalf of Councillor Malcolm Longley, copies of which had been previously circulated. It was noted that the cost of maintaining multiple buildings was an unjustified cost to local residents. The Guildhall would continue to be a civic base and the Mayoral office would remain there.

A statement from the current Mayor was read by a Northampton town councillor.

A Northampton Town councillor made the following comments.

- The Guildhall was paid for by the residents of Northampton and as such belonged to them.
- The Town council is a tenant of the Guildhall and has paid its rent on time.
- The Town Council had tried to work in partnership with WNC for the last two years.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was echoed that the Guildhall belonged to the people of Northampton.
- Working together on a strategy was important.
- There were various member rooms full of storage.
- It was felt that residents viewed the Guildhall as the home of the town council.
- It was queried whether an impact assessment been carried out about moving the one stop shop from the Guildhall.
- This was a very complex situation with many variables and risks.
- Concern was raised about the Guildhall staff.

Councillor Adam Brown advised that there was complete respect for the history of the town.

The Chair noted that accessibility is a concern and that much thought and care is needed.

Councillor Mike Hallam advised that the Guildhall would still be owned by the public and that the mayor would still be based in the building.

The Assistant Director Assets & Environment advised that the County Hall is no longer suitable to house the coroner as the building is listed no big changes can be made to it.

RESOLVED: Cabinet:

1. Approved the proposals for delivering Phases 2A (Towcester) and 2B (Northampton) of the Office Optimisation programme.
2. Noted the £5 million (m) budget for the building works and £0.616m budget for IT equipment and works for Phase 2 of the Office Optimisation programme proposed in the draft budget.
3. Authorised the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children, Families & Education to consider the outcomes of consultation on relocation of Towcester Children's Centre and if justified to approve the relocation of the Children's Centre to the Forum.
4. Authorised the Assistant Director Assets & Environment in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance to:
 - a) Granted a lease of part of the Forum, Towcester to Towcester Town Council in its capacity as trustee of the Towcester Community Centre Trust (charity number 304254) as set out in 5.8. This lease would be at no rent but would be in exchange for the surrender of the lease held by the Trust over the current Towcester Community Centre.

- b) Granted a lease of the 1992 Guildhall extension (except the parts of it retained with the historic Guildhall) and allied rights and agreements to a developer or occupier following a competitive disposal process.
- c) Granted a lease of space at County Hall and an allied license to use the Council Chamber and other relevant spaces to Northampton Town Council.

109. **Procurement of bus shelter advertising franchise contract**

The Chair presented the report on behalf of Councillor Phill Larratt, copies of which had been previously circulated.

Councillors made the following comments.

- There is a need for bus shelters in rural areas.
- Some rural bus stops are currently maintained by the parish councils.
- Discussions with the local community were important as in some areas there are reasons why there is no bus shelter.

The Executive Director Place & Economy advised that he was more than happy to discuss this further with members should they wish to.

RESOLVED: Cabinet;

1. Authorised procurement of a new bus shelter advertising contract.
2. Endorsed the proposal that WNC funds the provision of new shelters, subject to the Director of Finance approving the use of capital once the actual costs are known.

110. **New Public Mortuary**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Mike Hallam presented the report copies of which had been previously circulated. Members were advised that there was a shortage of mortuary facilities in Northampton, this had meant that families were sometimes required to travel to other facilities located in other counties. The site chosen was council owned land with a good road network.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was agreed that this would make viewings easier for families.
- The project was noted as being forward thinking.

RESOLVED:

1. Noted the proposed budget of £9.4 million (m) for construction of a new public mortuary.
2. Authorised procurement of works for the new public mortuary.
3. Approved the Business Plan at Appendix A.
4. Approved a one-off revenue budget of £0.125m to cover service transition costs.
5. Authorised the Director Legal & Democratic in consultation with the Assistant Director Assets & Environment and the Executive Director Finance to enter into long-term contracts with public bodies for the Council to provide mortuary services

and to certify them under Section 2 of the Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997.

6. Authorises the Assistant Director Assets & Environment in consultation with the Director Legal & Democratic and Executive Director Finance to enter into leases or licenses to occupy property and any related agreements in connection with agreements under 5

111. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

112. **Strategic Acquisition**

The meeting closed at 9.50 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____