



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at The Forum, Towcester on Tuesday 21 December 2021 at 6.00 pm.

Present Councillor Jonathan Nunn (Chair)
 Councillor Adam Brown (Vice-Chair)
 Councillor Fiona Baker
 Councillor Lizzy Bowen
 Councillor Rebecca Breese
 Councillor Matt Golby
 Councillor Phil Larratt
 Councillor Malcolm Longley

Substitute
Members:

Also
Present: Councillor Jamal Alwahabi
 Councillor Sally Beardsworth
 Councillor Jonathan Harris
 Councillor Bob Purser
 Councillor Wendy Randall
 Councillor Emma Roberts
 Councillor Danielle Stone

Apologies
for Councillor Mike Hallam
Absence: Councillor David Smith

Officers Jane Carr, Director of Transformation
 Sarah Reed, Executive Director - Corporate Services
 Stuart Timmiss, Executive Director - Place and Economy

82. **Apologies**

Councillor David Smith and Councillor Mike Hallam

83. **Declarations of Interest**

None

84. **Minutes**

The minutes from the Cabinet meeting of the 7th December were approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

85. **Chair's Announcements**

None

86. **Urgent Business**

None

87. **Period 7 Revenue Monitoring Report for the Financial Year 2021-22**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report. The main points of the report were highlighted.

Councillors made the following comments.

- The report was very detailed, the same level of detail was requested to be included in subsequent reports and with more regularity.
- It was noted that there was still a significant deficit and it was questioned whether the actual cost of running the authority was known.
- There was a large amount of capital spent on special expenses. An explanation of this was requested.
- It was noted that there was an underspend in education, was the Council receiving statutory advice on this?
- Staffing levels were a concern with a large amount of vacancies and staff being pulled from different areas to cover others.
- It was advised that some staff were feeling overwhelmed with mental health being a concern.
- The report did show some fragility with large gaps in the budget. The Council should be making strong representation to the Government regarding these.
- The Transformation journey was queried, whether it was it working as it should, it was felt that it was a strain on services.
- It was queried whether any mitigations were already known of and if so what plans were in place to address them.
- Educational Psychology was mentioned as a particular issue which would require more focus.
- It was requested that more information be provided at the monthly briefings.

Councillor Malcolm Longley made the following comments.

- With regards to special expenses this would be looked into.
- Some items mentioned were not within the financial remit and as such could not comment on them.
- It was agreed that there was a level of fragility.
- The concerns raised over Transformation were noted and it was advised that there would be a new approach to this in the new year.
- The mitigations expected would be fairly normal ones.
- Meetings would continue to take place with Councillors Harris and Stone, extra information would be given if requested.

The Executive Director of Finance noted that there had been some pressures and issues which would be addressed going into the new year.

The Chief Executive made the following comments;

- It was noted that there were vacancies within the Educational Psychology Team. Discussions in relation to pay and terms and conditions were being undertaken with trade unions.
- There were various vacancies across the council. This was a national issue, as far as was known no services had been overly affected by this.
- Only three areas had been restructured, conversations had taken place with staff throughout.

Councillor Lizzy Bowen noted that there were regular staff surveys carried out where staff can make their thoughts known.

The Chair advised that with regards to the mental health of staff there were anonymous ways for staff to raise issues and seek help. It was agreed that the Executive Director Corporate would mention this in the next newsletter.

88. Capital Monitoring Period 7 2021-22

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Cabinet was advised that a Capital Assets board had been created which would include The Executive Director of Finance, Councillor Malcolm Longley and Councillor Lizzy Bowen. All future capital projects would come through the board. Members were informed that there were a large number of projects in the pipeline.

Councillors made the following comments.

- Did the costs mentioned in the report include the increase in the cost of materials?
- It was queried whether the school building costs would be received from central Government.
- It was noted that schools were still having to fund their own covid-prevention measures.
- The Disabled Facilities grant was mentioned. Details of where this money would be spent were requested.
- It was noted that there were many programmes from the previous authorities in progress, how many would be reliant on funding provision?
- The Active Travel scheme and its rephasing had been mentioned in the report, could what was meant by this be clarified with a full briefing?
- The EV charge points project had been agreed for specific areas, was this still going ahead?

The Executive Director of Finance advised that there was a plan to capitalise revenue and transformational costs. There were various funds available to Education schemes, this information would be provided. The re-phasing that had been mentioned was 'slippage' that would be moved forward.

Councillor Fiona Baker advised that any expenditure related to Covid within schools was dealt with by the Department of Education.

Councillor Matt Golby advised that the Health and Wellbeing Board would send any relevant information when requested.

Councillor Lizzy Bowen mentioned that contingency plans were always in place when dealing with construction costs, these were reviewed regularly at the Capital and Assets Board.

Councillor Phil Larratt advised that the active travel scheme was still being working on with various ideas coming through.

The Executive Director of Place and Economy advised that he would have to take away the question regarding EV charge points and come back with an answer.

89. Treasury Management Quarter 2 2021-22

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

Councillors made the following comments.

- It would be useful for members to know where the Council's money was invested at present.
- The report mentioned repaying Cornwall Council £5 million, had there been more borrowing from other authorities?
- It was noted that there was a good level of borrowing, was there a cap on how much could be borrowed?

Councillor Malcolm Longley advised that the council should be slowing borrowing and increasing its reserves.

The Executive Director of Finance advised that a list of investments could be provided.

90. Draft Budget 2022-23 and Medium Term Financial Plan

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Cabinet was advised that this was a draft plan and not finalised. Members were reminded that this year four authorities had come together as one with the stabilisation of the area being a main objective. The reserves were currently circa £100 million but would rise and fall as the months passed.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was queried whether the council was able to balance due only to the amount of vacancies.
- It was noted that the transformative capacity was linked to staffing levels.

- The Overview and Scrutiny committee would need to revisit various areas of this report.
- There were concerns about the rise in Council Tax and how it would affect poorer people, it was queried how this fitted into the councils anti-poverty strategy.
- Strong recommendation needed to be taken to central government with regards a 4 year budget which had been requested consistently.
- The National Insurance increase had been mentioned, how much added social care money would come to the Council through this?
- With regards to staffing, it was questioned whether the current offer given to potential staff was enough? Could this be why staffing levels are so low?
- It was suggested that the public supported keeping the Council's money local.
- It was noted that there had been an increase in the parking charges at the country parks, with some parks requesting payment for the entire day and not hourly.
- West Northamptonshire had a rapidly aging population, it was important to help keep people in their own homes for as long as possible for their own mental health.
- Daventry had increased residents parking permits but Northampton had not, harmonisation these charges would be appreciated.

Councillor Adam Brown made the following comments.

- There would be central Government funding for homelessness.
- Residents would see tangible results from the council tax rise.
- It was advised that without raising funds it would not be possible to raise wages and fund services.
- Members were informed that there was a constant dialogue with central Government about the county's needs.

Councillor Phil Larratt noted the differences in the costs of parking at country parks and that once all of the services had come together costings would be looked at.

91. **Draft Housing Revenue Account Budget 2022-23**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Adam Brown presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. It was advised that there had been a rent increase with universal credit and housing benefits increasing in tandem with this. Cabinet was reminded that there was a national shortage of housing with over 3000 families on the Northampton housing list at present. Members were advised that the Council had been active in seeking funding from various routes.

A Councillor noted that not much detail had been mentioned with regards to the housing strategy and that the Overview and Scrutiny committee had requested to see this information pre-decision.

92. **Northampton North West Relief Road - progress and funding update**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Phil Larratt presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Cabinet was reminded that this was a legacy project with planning consent given in 2020. It was advised that this item would also come back to Cabinet at a later date.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was queried whether the levelling up fund had made it past the gateway and whether there had been any feedback with regards a re-submission.
- As the bid had not been successful would the Council be reviewing its funding process.
- It was noted that the report could have been presented at the December 2021 Council meeting.
- Cabinet was reminded that the Flore bypass had been built in order to improve travel between Daventry and the M1 but was a single carriageway.
- It was felt that central Government should also fund part of this as they had requested the extra housing mentioned in the report.
- The report noted that there would be a limited effect on climate. It was felt that this could not be correct as any new road would contribute to pollution.
- It was queried whether the 10% contingency that was in place would be enough and whether this would be a fixed price contract?
- It was noted that there had been a significant increase in the overall costs as building materials had risen in price.
- What would happen should some of the houses not be built, would the Council need to request another loan?

Councillor Phil Larratt made the following comments.

- The Flore bypass would remain a single carriageway for now, but duelling in the future was an option as it had been built with that in mind.
- The concern for the environment was echoed, and work would go into looking for different construction methods to ensure the project would be as carbon efficient as possible.
- The contingency worries were understood.

The Executive Director of Place & Economy made the following comments.

- There had been no feedback at present about the levelling up fund.
- Members were advised that the strategy used to applying for funding was continuously under review.
- It was advised that the contract was a fixed price one with all risk being transferred to Balfour Beatty.
- The contract had taken inflation and the price of materials into consideration.
- It was advised that part of the road would also be built by the developers.
- The project would be continually monitored.

The meeting closed at Time Not Specified

Chair: _____

Cabinet - 21 December 2021

Date: _____