

## **West Northamptonshire Council**

### **Cabinet Minutes**

**15<sup>th</sup> February 2022**

#### **Cabinet Members Present:**

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

#### **Other West Northamptonshire Council Members Present:**

Sally Beardsworth	Jonathan Harris
Emma Roberts	Ian McCord
Dennis Meredith	Danielle Stone
Bob Purser	Jamal Alwahabi
Kevin Parker	Ken Pritchard

#### **West Northamptonshire Council Officers Present:**

Gillian Baldcock	Political Assistant - Conservative Group
Anna Earnshaw	Chief Executive
Alison Golding	Assistant Director - HR
Paul Hanson	Democratic Services Manager
Martin Henry	Executive Director of Finance
Stuart Lackenby	Executive Director Adults, Communities and Wellbeing
Sofia Neal-Gonzalez	Democracy Officer (minutes)
Sarah Reed	Executive Director of Corporate
Jed Scoles	Political Assistant - Labour Group
Mitchell Thomason	Project Manager
Catherine Whitehead	Monitoring Officer

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE:**

Councillor David Smith

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

#### **3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN PUBLIC ON 18<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2022.**

RESOLVED: That the minutes from the Cabinet meeting of the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2022 were approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

#### **4. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

None

#### **ITEM 05- URGENT BUSINESS**

None

#### **ITEM 06 - REVENUE MONITORING PERIOD 9 - FINANCIAL YEAR 2021-22**

The Chair invited member of the public, Ms Suzy McClernon to address the committee. Ms McClernon made the following comments.

- The need for careful budgeting is understood especially considering past mistakes.
- Cabinet was reminded that it was important to not be so careful that it could adversely affect the most vulnerable in society.
- It was queried why council tax had increased by 3.34% in South Northants compared to 2.29% in Northampton, this had then been averaged out, had this been done avoid a democratic referendum?
- There was a real issue with rural poverty especially the reduction of services which included the £42 green bin collection charge.
- Social care was failing in Northampton, there was currently a 14 month wait for mental health diagnosis in children's and over 2 years for adults.
- There should be a greater support for schools and children's services.

The Chair advised that WNC do what central government ask of us and that the council tax increase was an average one. There had been various financial legacy issues that WNC have had to work through from the previous authorities. It was noted that more needed to be done locally and nationally to support the care sector and its staff.

Councillor Matt Golby noted that there had been a lot of effort put into the anti-poverty strategy and will be rolled out once approved by council. The Health and Wellbeing Board will receive the strategy.

Councillor Fiona Baker advised that there had been significant work carried out and continuing to happen within SEND support. There was a complete overhaul planned with new measures to be announced soon.

Councillor Adam Brown advised that there was a bus service improvement plan, this was a government scheme to enhance public transport and its use.

Councillor Malcolm Longley noted that many reserves were ringfenced for certain projects.

Following this discussion councillor Longley presented the report copies of which had been previously circulated. It was noted that at the time of the meeting, WNC were 6 weeks away from the year end.

Councillors made the following comments in response to the report.

- It was noted that 3 of the directorates had come in over budget, with mentioned savings due to vacancies. It was queried whether these vacancies would increase staff and service pressures.
- It was queried why the pension fund and climate change had not been mentioned, could members have an update?
- It was noted that there was a delay in discharging residents from hospital. It was suggested this was down to the lack of social workers and carers.
- What precautions had been put in place regarding the National Insurance increase?
- The Covid grant was for councillors to use, it was requested if there could be an update on the spend and allocation of this money.
- The house support fund excluded people who use oil in their homes, will this be amended?

Councillor Malcolm Longley made the following comments.

- The National Insurance increase was government led.
- Each directorate would be able to give more information with regards to the vacancies in their areas.
- It was advised that the pension fund was in a robust position.
- With regards to the Covid grant, with Cabinet's approval, this would move into the next financial year, this had been a slow process.
- The requested update from the Pension Committee would come from the sub-committee, which hadn't met yet.

Councillor Adam Brown noted that many rural areas rely on oil as fuel.

**RESOLVED:** Cabinet.

- a) Noted the forecast outturn position for 2021-22 and associated risks.
- b) Noted the deliverability assessment of West Northamptonshire Council savings requirement for 2021-22 and 2022-23 in Appendix B.
- c) Approved the virements set out in section 5.81

## **ITEM 07 – P9 GENERAL FUND CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT 2021-22**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. It was advised that many inherited projects were going through, members were advised to email any questions to Councillor Longley or Executive Director of Finance.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was queried whether members would be advised of any equality impacts that might occur.
- Cabinet was questioned as to what benefit the council would receive from the Old Black Lion project which had used section 106 money.
- It was noted that two disability grants had been mentioned, were these both the same? It was concerning to see a drop in these grants.
- There had been no mention of the Heritage Park project

Councillor Lizzy Bowen made the following comments.

- The finance for the Black Lion Inn project was coming from various places.
- The Heritage Park project had not been mentioned in the report as it was not on the priority list, it will need a business case to be created and approval from Cabinet.
- There would continue to be a monthly meeting where new plans are discussed, which was a cross party meeting.
- Kevin Langley, the Economic Growth and Regeneration Manager, was happy for members to contact him with any queries.

The Executive Director of Finance advised that there were 3 different types of disability grants, these would eventually merge.

Councillor Mike Hallam noted that one of the projects included a secondary school, the committee was advised that Councillor Hallam's daughter was a pupil at that school.

RESOLVED: Cabinet.

a) Noted the latest capital monitoring position for the General Fund.

b) Noted new schemes and changes since Period 7 report that was considered by Cabinet in December 2021

## **ITEM 08 – FINAL 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. There had been no significant changes to the report since the draft version, with WNC going into next year in a good position.

Members were advised to review appendix C for any changes and asked that any in-depth questions be emailed.

The Chair invited Councillor Danielle Stone the Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to present that committees report. Councillor Stone made the following comments.

- Cabinet was informed that any decisions made had been through cross party member groups and had been a complex project.
- So far there had been 3 meetings.
- It had been felt that Carbon Neutral needed a cohesive plan, the committee recommended a delegated officer, and should be costed.
- The committee had asked for confirmation with regards the £100,000 set aside for two posts to support the council in its climate pledge.
- The committee had been please by the robust budget for Children's Services, this had been a huge improvement on previous years.
- The committee was happy with the openness and transparency of Adult Social Services.
- A unanimous recommendation had been to apply some uplift to carers in the Adult Social Services sector.

Councillor Malcolm Longley made the following comments.

- It was agreed that Carbon Neutrality should be costed.
- There would be two new dedicated members of staff to support climate work.
- Cabinet would welcome any information on committee-based investment.

Councillor Mike Hallam proposed that the living wage be increased to £10 per hour. This was agreed.

Councillor Matt Golby felt that WNC needed to value carers more within society which included rates of pay. The re-procurement of the care contract would address some of the underlying issues.

Councillors made the following comments.

- Thanks were given to Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager, and her team for the work they had done to ensure the smooth running of the Scrutiny Committee.
- The lack of services like Sure Start had created an issue.
- It had been noted that the anti-poverty strategy would be very important.
- It was acknowledged that Adult Care was one of the most difficult areas budget wise.
- The income provision and savings looked different from previous reports, could this be clarified?
- The role of the Hardship Fund was an important one.

- It was queried whether business rates were an area of risk for WNC?
- It was noted that other unitaries of a similar size normally have a budget fund of £30 million. WNC has a fund of £40 million due to the newness of the council and to mitigate for any risks.
- Cabinet was advised that residents were being double charged for the collection of green waste as it had already been paid for in tax.
- It was queried whether the council could take a less risk adverse stance.
- Could there be some confirmation as to when the increase (of £10) for carers would begin.
- Not all residents were technologically minded, it was important to ensure that they would still have access to the services they require.
- It was noted that Talavera Way had been promised extra funding, but this was not mentioned in the report. This area had high levels of poverty and homelessness.

Councillor Lizzy Bowen agreed that business rates had a huge impact on shops, MPs had been spoken to, but this was outside the remit of WNC.

Councillor Malcolm Longley advised that a set date for the increment in carer pay would be announced as soon as possible.

Councillor Fiona Baker noted that the Children's Trust seemed to be funded quite well but would like to see it funded enough to weather a crisis.

Councillor Mike Hallam advised that investing digitally was important as this would then free up time for more face-to-face communication.

The Chair advised that WNC was committed to work on Talavera Way.

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet:

a) Approved the 2022-23 Budget for West Northamptonshire set out in this report, and recommended the Budget to the Full Council meeting on 24 February 2022, including

- I. An estimated net revenue budget of £753.375m (£342.203m excluding Dedicated Schools Grant) as set out in Appendix A.
- II. An average Band D Council tax of £1,613.23 for West Northamptonshire Council, which represents an increase of 2.99%. (1.99% increase in 'core' Council Tax and 1% Adult Social Care Precept).
- III. Noted the Council Tax rebate of £150.00 for all Band A-D Council Taxpayers and a further discretionary amount of funding for properties in Bands E-H. The details of this scheme were yet to emerge, and more information would be provided once it is available.
- IV. Noted the balance of the WNC Council Tax hardship fund and encouraging residents to apply for such funding if they are facing financial hardship.

- V. Fees and Charges schedule as detailed in Appendix D
- VI. Dedicated schools grant budget of £411.2m as detailed in Appendix E
- VII. The Capital Strategy as set out at paragraphs 6.116-6.134 and Appendix F1, and Capital Programme as set out in Appendix F2.
- VIII. Adoption of the changes to the 2021-22 capital strategy and MRP policy as outlined in paragraph 6.125
- IX. The Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy set out in Appendix G
- X. The Treasury Management Strategy set out in Appendix J
- XI. Set the authorised limits for borrowing as set out in the table at paragraph 6.141

b) Would recommend the following to Full Council on 24 February 2022, 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 2022 and also to ensure there is flexibility to manage the overall budget in the year:

- I. Delegated authority to the Executive Director - Finance to manage any variation in budget prior to the start of 2022-23 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. Delegated authority to the Executive Director - Finance in consultation with the portfolio holder for Finance to amend the capital programme for 2022-23 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. Approved the review of reserves as summarised in the table contained at paragraph 6.103
- IV. Delegated 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. Delegate authority to the Executive Director – Finance in consultation with the portfolio holder for finance to release the general contingency fund of £9.7m if required in the year.
- VI. Delegated authority to the Executive Director – Finance in consultation with the portfolio holder for Finance to amend Fees and Charges if required in 2022-23
- VII. Delegated authority to the Executive Director – Finance to finalise and agreed all outstanding financial policies and strategies in order to ensure that the Council has the policies in place by 1 April 2022

c) For the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG):

- I. Noted the allocations and planned usage of the DSG for 2022-23, and



- II. Followed consultation with the Schools Forum, delegated authority to the Executive Director for Children's Services to determine the DSG 2022-23 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 at paragraphs 7.1- 7.42 of the report.

e) Noted the consultation feedback on the budget in Appendix H

f) Noted the feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Appendix I

g) Cabinet appreciated the amount of time and effort the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee put into analysing the budget proposals for 2022-23 and welcomed their report on the subject. After due consideration Cabinet recommended that full council include provision in the budget for the minimum hourly rate to be increased above the Foundation Living Wage of £9.90 to £10.00 per hour for all Council staff recognising that the final award is subject to the collective bargaining with the recognised trade union representatives. It is recommended that the additional costs are funded through the base budget contingency contained within the final budget proposals

#### **ITEM 09 - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT FINAL 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. It was advised that this was a continuing strategy that had come over from Northampton Borough Council (NBC) with a major review in the pipeline. It was noted that the green budget would need to be incorporated and that there would be some slippage.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was queried whether the housing revenue had to be factored into the budget.
- It was questioned whether there would be an impact to the Housing Strategy and how the different budgets would link in.
- It was noted that the number of Right to Buy properties had increased, this would have an adverse effect on the number of affordable houses available, which would increase the wait times for residents.

Councillor Adam Brown agreed that the lack of affordable housing was a real issue and WNC would look at every avenue to mitigate this.

Councillor Malcolm Longley made the following comments.

- The housing situation had been an inherited one.



- WNC needed to decide as a whole what can be done to mitigate and what can be achieved.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet recommended Council to approve:

a) An average maximum rent increase of 4.1% per dwelling, in line with the legislation and the government's national rent standard, to take effect from 4th April 2022.

b) The HRA budget for 2022-23 of £56m expenditure detailed in Appendix 1.

c) The HRA capital programme for 2022-23, including future year estimated commitments, and proposed sources of finance, as set out in Appendix 2.

d) The proposed service charges listed in Appendix 3.

e) The Total Fees proposed for NPH to deliver the services in scope for 2022-23 detailed in Appendix 4.

- The reserves strategy of protecting balances wherever possible to allow the option of supporting future years' budgets, aiming for a minimum level of unallocated HRA balances of at least £5m for 2022/23 having regard to the outcome of the financial risk assessment.
- That authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Finance in consultation with the portfolio holder for Finance to amend the capital programme for 2022-23 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.
- That authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Finance to make any technical changes necessary to the papers for the Council meeting of 24 February 2022.
- That authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, and where appropriate the relevant Director and Portfolio Holder to:

a. Transfer monies to/from earmarked reserves should that become necessary during the financial year.

b. Transfer monies to / from HRA working balances between the Council and NPH for cash flow purposes should that become necessary during the financial year.

c. Updated the budget tables and appendices, prior to Council should any further changes be necessary.

d. Updated prudential indicators in both the Prudential Indicators report and Treasury Strategy report, for Council for any budget changes that on these.

## **ITEM 10 - ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SCHOOLS FOR 2023 INTAKES**

## **AND THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY CO-ORDINATED SCHEMES FOR THE 2023 INTAKES**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Fiona Baker presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. This would be the first time this report has come to cabinet as WNC.

### **RESOLVED:**

- a) Approved the admission arrangements as detailed in Appendix A
- b) Agreed the two co-ordinated schemes for the 2023 intake as detailed in Appendix B and Appendix C
- c) Agreed the "Relevant Area" for all West Northamptonshire schools

## **ITEM 11 - ABINGTON STREET PUBLIC REALM WORKS**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Lizzy Bowen presented the report, copies of which had previously circulated. Cabinet was advised that the council would look favourably on contractors with green credentials. The committee was informed of the way the project plans were put into place and the impact that decreased footfall had had on the town centre. In terms of the design of the project it had been decided that a blended option based on the 4 listed designs would be used. It was advised that work was being done on a business strategy on the BHS and Marks & Spencer buildings in the town centre.

Councillors made the following comments.

- The town's cultural heritage was important and it was imperative to build on what the town has.
- It was queried whether there should be further conversations before architects are called.
- It was noted that £3 million had been spent on the de-pedestrianisation of Abington Street, as part of the green agenda should the council reverse this?
- WNC needed to understand the types of people that would be residents in the new accommodation provided.
- It was requested that there be less nightclubs on the main roads to maintain the goal of a family friendly environment.
- There were financial risks mentioned in the report, could members be made aware of what it is? This was requested for all individual projects.
- It was queried whether all the project teams had spoken to each other, would there be an opportunity to link the projects together?
- The climate impact section of the report had only been 3 lines long, it was important to understand the impact better.

Councillor Lizzy Bowen made the following comments.

- A marketing exercise was being planned. It was important to have somewhere residents could go to to see any progress on projects such as this.
- It was advised that there had been a great deal of pressure and that the council had to learn from previous mistakes and get it right this time.
- It was hoped that projects like this would be a catalyst for future work and investment.
- The flats that would be provided in Abington Street would be open to anyone.
- Climate impact had been mentioned in the report but would be more included in the next stage of the plan.
- The money would be taken away should the council decide to not proceed with the project, this was a risk.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- a) Approved the business case for the Abington Street Public Realm project to draw down on £4,610,625 of Towns Funding.
- b) Delegated authority to the Executive Director of Place, Economy and Environment in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth to appoint a principal contractor following a competitive procurement process to undertake the works

## **ITEM 12 - PEOPLE STRATEGY 2022 – 2025**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Mike Hallam presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Cabinet was advised that this was a working document and would continue to evolve.

Councillors made the following comments.

- Trade unions were only mentioned twice in the report, more work had been undertaken by them than stated.
- It noted that staff still felt disjointed, the separation of IT systems and access was a key reason why.
- The recent survey had shown that there were uneven feelings across the organisation.
- It was queried whether there could be more appreciation of the additional skills that members of staff bring to the service, such as language skills.
- Was Cabinet confident of the staff numbers that were given in the report.

Councillor Mike Hallam advised that it was not possible to devolve every IT system and that dialogue was key.



RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the People Strategy 2022-2025 and supported its implementation across the Council

There being no further business the meeting ended at 9:15pm