

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at The Forum, Towcester, NN12 6AF on Tuesday 12 April 2022 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 Mike Hallam  
Councillor Phil Larratt  
Councillor Malcolm Longley  
Councillor David Smith

Substitute  
Members:       None

Also  
Present:       Councillor William Barter  
Councillor Sally Beardsworth  
Councillor Karen Cooper  
Councillor Alison Eastwood  
Councillor Jonathan Harris  
Councillor Nigel Hinch  
Councillor Rosie Humphreys  
Councillor Dennis Meredith  
Councillor Ken Pritchard  
Councillor Bob Purser  
Councillor Wendy Randall  
Councillor Emma Roberts

Officers       Gillian Baldock, Political Assistant to the Conservative Group  
Jo Barrett, Assistant Director - Housing and Communities  
Jed Scoles, Political Assistant to the Labour Group  
James Smith - Assistant Director of Finance & Strategy (Deputy Chief Finance Officer)  
Stuart Timmiss - Executive Director Place & Economy  
Catherine Whitehead – Monitoring Officer

128.   **Apologies**

None

129.   **Declarations of Interest**

None

130. **Minutes**

The minutes from the Cabinet meetings of the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 and 15<sup>th</sup> March 2022 were approved and signed as a true and accurate record

131. **Chair's Announcements**

None

132. **Urgent Business**

None

133. **West Northamptonshire Enhanced Partnership**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Phil Larratt presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Members were advised that the report did not discuss subsidised routes, this would be looked at in more detail going forward. The improvement plan had been considered by Cabinet in October 2021 and had included information of a bid for funding. Members were informed that this bid had been unsuccessful and as such no funding would be awarded through this route. Feedback had been requested. It was advised that significant work had also taken place on the enhanced plan. The council would work with bus services to look at travel changes that had occurred since Covid.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was noted that the working group had been essential and had worked well.
- It was queried whether the council could bring the bus service back into public ownership.
- Could concessionary tickets be provided for certain groups of people, such as under 18s?
- It was noted that further conversation was needed about active travel and sustainability.
- It was noted that members had not been informed of the results of the bid before the press had.
- It was understood that the enhanced partnership arrangement needed to remain in place should other funding opportunities become available.
- Cabinet was reminded that there had been an issue within rural areas, with insufficient public transport options, a strong plan was needed for this.
- The officer who had worked on this report was acknowledged for their hard work.
- It was important to keep pushing for better buses in order to meet the council's net zero pledge.
- It was queried how much of an impact the council could have on services as the bus operators control when and where to run services.

Councillor Larratt made the following comments in response.

- It was acknowledged that much work had been done by the officer responsible who had also been working within North Northants Council.
- It was noted that the ambition was there it was the innovation that was lacking.
- It was agreed that lack of public transport within rural areas was a problem.
- It was noted that real time displays for buses in rural areas was important.
- It was advised that many of the issues presented could be addressed through the partnership scheme.
- Members were advised to forward any other queries and they would be added to the agenda to discussed.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet;

- a) Made the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Enhanced Partnership Scheme, which form Appendices A and B of this report, as proposed in accordance with Section 138G of the Transport Act 2000.
- b) Noted the requirement to develop, consult on and publish a policy for subsidising bus services.
- c) Noted the allocation of additional Government funding to support bus services and the requirement to work with bus operators to co-design a financially sustainable and passenger-focused public transport network, that works for changing travel patterns post pandemic.
- d) Agreed to reimburse bus operators for concessionary travel at 100% of pre-Covid levels until 30 September 2022 and then at 90% of pre-Covid levels until 31 March 2023.
- e) Agreed to allocate £50,000 of the resultant projected saving in the concessionary travel budget for 2022/23 to work with operators on a marketing strategy for bus services.

134. **West Northamptonshire Anti-Poverty Strategy 2022-2025**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Matt Golby presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Members were advised that it was important that the Council had a clear strategy in place in order to hold itself to account. It was noted that there was a wealth of experience within the council as well as within the voluntary sector which would help with this, the Hope Centre being an example. Members were advised that the Poverty Truth Commission would be kept open. It's main role would continue to be interacting with residents who live in poverty.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was noted that this was an excellent piece of work and the commitment made to work together needed to continue.
- Officers had been very receptive to feedback as well as voluntary sector groups.
- It was felt that a 'poverty assessment' could now be added as a recommendation on the report templates, as a variety of complex issues can add to poverty.

- It was advised that many residents had asked about how to access vouchers, as at times it had been unclear.
- It was noted that there had been a huge increase in domestic bills which included heating and fuel.
- Not many residents knew of the hardship fund, it was important that this information was made easily accessible to the public.
- The statistics available with regards to fuel prices dated back to 2019. The question of whether there were more up to date figures was raised.
- It was noted that the household support fund needed to be inclusive of all users.

Councillor Golby made the following comments in response.

- The additional recommendation was a valid point and will be looked into.
- It was important to make sure that both rural and non-rural poverty is addressed. Rural exclusion must be taken into account.

The Chief Executive advised that the original hardship fund had ended on the 31<sup>st</sup> March, with other schemes now in operation in its place.

Councillor Adam Brown noted that the terms of the household support fund had been amended and fuel oil would now be covered. Northampton Partnership Homes would continue to invest within West Northants including Talavera ward. Members were advised that stable and affordable homes go hand in hand with poverty.

The Chair reminded members it was important to work towards eliminating inequality across the whole of West Northants.

Councillor Phil Larratt noted that community facilities were an important part of a community.

Councillor Rebecca Breese agreed that all councillors should know where to point constituents to for help.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet;

1. Approved the West Northamptonshire Anti-Poverty Strategy 2022-2025 for adoption and implementation by the Health and Wellbeing Board.
2. Approved the continued engagement of our community, partners and community and voluntary sector organisations to develop a robust set of action plans, aligned to the objectives set out in the strategy and the performance framework which will underpin the strategy.
3. Approved the creation of an additional delivery fund to underpin the strategy, namely 'Community Health and Wellbeing Innovation Fund' using available Public Health Grant Reserve. That the strategy includes a commitment to produce an annual summary detailing key achievements and challenges faced in the preceding year

### 135. **Appointment of an Operator for the Vulcan Works Creative Hub**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Lizzy Bowen presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Cabinet was advised that the report sought approval

to enter into a contract. The report was then presented in detail. There would be various managed work spaces within the location. The importance of supporting businesses after lockdown was underlined. Members were advised that Oxford Innovations had been given the contract, the company had over 30 years' experience within this type of specialised business venture.

A Councillor noted that it would be important to keep aware of the performance of the company throughout.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the appointment of the preferred bidder following the procurement process for the operation of the Vulcan Works Creative Hub using Competitive Procedure with Negotiation (CPN).

136. **Homes for Ukraine Scheme**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor David Smith presented the report copies of which had been previously circulated. It was noted that the Afghan Scheme should also be remembered at this time, there were currently 2 hotels in West Northants where families were being hosted. The Homes for Ukraine family scheme would be supported when needed. Members were asked to email with any queries, these emails were asked to be as concise as possible.

Councillors made the following comments.

- The process of how councillors can draw down the required funds was queried.
- It was questioned whether resources would be pulled from other areas to help with the scheme, if so, how would this be managed?
- It was queried whether WNC had the required interpreters in place to help.
- It was noted that there were currently 200 Afghan refugees in hotels in the area, was there a plan in place for these people.
- Could a briefing be provided to WNC councillors?
- It was noted that the current visa allowance was for 3 years only.

Councillor David Smith made the following comments.

- Members were advised that WNC was a council of sanctuary.
- The query behind visas had been discussed with MP's, however, the speed at which applications were processed and granted was not under the council's control.
- Members were advised that they were welcome to join the next parish briefing for further information.
- It was noted that the situation was always evolving.

RESOLVED: Cabinet noted the content of this report and associated appendices

137. **Towns Fund: 35-45 Abington Street Project- Business Case and Delivery Strategy**

The Chair advised that the appendix to this item was confidential and that if councillors wished to discuss it then the meeting would go into private session.

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Lizzy Bowen presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Cabinet were advised that the costs would be met by the Towns Revenue Fund, and would come on to the market in a managed manner. The areas would be mixed use developments.

Councillors made the following comments.

- All regeneration of the Town Centre should be welcomed as it had seen a significant decline over the last few years.
- It was queried what WNC would get back should the venture not work.
- It was noted that affordable housing had not been discussed in the report.
- The question as to what type of sustainability would be built into this project was asked.

Councillor Lizzy Bowen made the following comments.

- To do nothing with the sites was not an option.
- Sustainability would be a key part of the project.
- Members were advised that the council would look to introduce more green space into the town centre.

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

- The grant money had been provided specifically for this project.
- The development was a joint venture as such risks and rewards would be shared.
- WNC would set the parameters in which it would be working.
- Members were advised that development appraisal had been put forward based on the current market.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet;

- a) Approved the Outline Business Case (OBC) for the 35-45 Abington Street Project, to draw down on £9.7m of Towns Fund funding.
- b) Approved the Procurement and Delivery Strategy (Appendix B) that sets out the recommended delivery route for the 35-45 Abington Street Project (which recommends using a form of Development Agreement to deliver the project).
- c) Authorised the purchase of each of 35-39 Abington Street and 20-28 Wood Street, in each case subject to a red book valuation and satisfactory due diligence on the site, a resultant acquisition being made at no more than a fair commercial price taking account of all relevant factors.
- d) Confirmed it is willing in principle to exercise its compulsory purchase powers to facilitate the development, if necessary.
- e) Noted a further Cabinet report would be brought back upon the completion of the procurement process to seek approval for the preferred bidder.

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The meeting closed at 8.32 pm

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_