

Cabinet**Thursday, 6 January 2022, County Hall,
10.00 am****Present:****Minutes**

Cllr Alan Amos, Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cllr Matt Dormer, Cllr Simon Geraghty (Chairman), Cllr Adrian Hardman (Vice Chairman), Cllr Marcus Hart, Cllr Karen May, Cllr Tony Miller and Cllr Andy Roberts

Also attended:

Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Matt Jenkins and Cllr Richard Udall

**2067 Apologies and
Declarations of
Interest**

Apologies had been received from Cllr A Kent.

**2068 Public
Participation**

There were three public participants; Susan Picton, John Duddington and Phil Swarbrick who attended as family carers with experience of three different social care settings; residential care, supported living and support from personal assistants. They detailed the difficulties in recruiting and retaining social care staff for their adult children who had learning disabilities and complex needs. Cabinet were asked to urgently address the issues of poor pay and conditions in the care sector that had led to a huge recruitment and retention crisis and to look at the inadequate funding and support for family carers.

The Chairman thanked the public participants for attending the Cabinet meeting and assured them that their message had been heard.

**2069 Confirmation of
the Minutes of
the previous
meeting**

It was agreed that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 December 2021 were an accurate reflection of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman,.

**2070 2022/23 Draft
Budget**

The Leader, also the Cabinet Member with responsibility for finance, introduced the report. He highlighted that the budget report was being launched for consultation and noted that the contributions from the Public Participants had been welcomed. The draft budget proposed record investment in adult and children's social care with the gross budget to rise by £25 million. The budget would address issues raised by the public such as roads,

pavements and congestion. Economic growth would be supported as well as the environment. A 2-year capital programme of £130 million was also proposed. The Council's income was rising by £30 million and Council Tax would rise by £1 a week on an average band D property, but the maximum increase was not being proposed as it was recognised people were already facing rising costs. The County Council continued to have one of the lowest Council tax rates in the country. The budget would return to Cabinet and then Council in February.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care felt the public participants had eloquently reflected the difficult position of Adult Social Care and outlined the position they faced. The care market was in a precarious position with a lack of pay and increased demand due to an aging demographic. He praised the unsung heroes, such as the public participants, who dedicated their lives to looking after others and thanked all the carers for their efforts during the pandemic. He gave reassurance that the Council was in a strong financial position and even after dealing with the increased costs of the pandemic a near neutral financial position would have been achieved towards the end of this financial year. The Government had not given a three-year settlement but the £6.1 million uplift in social care grant, the raising of Council Tax by 3% and the potential of receiving an increased percentage of the Better Care Fund by working more closely with Health in the Integrated Care System, were all positive.

In response to one of the queries raised by a public participant it was clarified that people would be helped to access the Council's Commissioning Unit if they wished. The Adult Care budget would be increased by £17.1 million, the majority going into the Learning Disability area and it was reiterated that the Council would listen to comments about the budget and they were keen to consult on it.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families felt credit should be given for producing a balanced budget for this year. He felt it was reasonable for the public to look at where the increased council tax money would be going, with the answer that three quarters of the increase would be going towards helping the most vulnerable in society. Tribute was paid to the Director of Children's Services who was leading the successful improvement strategy which was contributing to helping families stay together and doing the best for

the child, which had led to Worcestershire having the lowest number of children moving into care in the region for the fourth year running. He was very pleased that capital was being used for a new High School in Worcester.

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport thought it was a fantastic budget for highways. There was investment in the future to allow Worcestershire to remain in the top quartile of quality in the country for quality of roads and to give people a choice in how they travelled. There was also investment in drainage and flood mitigation work, lighting, improvements to stations, public rights of way and increased budgets to highways liaison officers, parish lengthman schemes and the continuation of the Local Members highways fund. Bus companies had been supported and further improvements in the bus network were planned. The Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel were thanked for their helpful proposals.

The Cabinet Member for Education endorsed the draft budget and felt it was good news for everyone. He felt the public participants raised some very pertinent issues which were the same around the country. Worcestershire would be spending around 70% of its budget on protecting the most vulnerable and the increased social care grant was welcomed but he was pleased that the budget was for everyone and capital was being spent on areas such as the highways and local schemes could be supported by Councillors with the divisional fund. In terms of education the dedicated schools grant was going up by around £12 million and the higher needs block was receiving around £7million more, which was not enough, but was a step in the right direction. Overall, he was very pleased with the draft budget.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills felt the Government had listened to what was needed and delivered, and significant sums had been invested in the economy to help with COVID-19 recovery. The Council had invested in gamechanger sites around the County, such as Malvern Technology Park, Worcester Shrub Hill and Redditch Rail Quarter. There was also investment in the business links careers programme, tourism and connectivity. It was an ambitious budget which he was proud to support.

Various questions from Councillors outside the Cabinet were answered:

- In response to pleas for Cabinet to co-operate

with scrutiny and the opposition parties, the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council agreed that they would both attend the next Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board. An assurance was given that any constructive alternative ideas would be listened to,

- A query about the climate emergency not being addressed urgently enough, elicited a response from the Leader that the aim in the budget was to weave all the key priorities together,
- A question regarding whether the Cabinet were following a populist strategy to keep Council tax low rather than putting sufficient money into adult social care and whether demand was being adequately addressed was answered by stating that at the Scrutiny meeting the Chief Finance Officer had deemed all the budgets to be a fair forecast and £2.1 million extra had been allocated for the domiciliary care front line. Health were still awaiting their settlement but it was hoped that a greater percentage of the Better Care Fund would be allocated to social care. At present Worcestershire did not have waiting lists for care and all the statutory duties were being fulfilled despite the pandemic.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- (a) approved for consultation the draft budget set out at Appendix 1A of £373.199 million;**
- (b) approved for consultation the new 2022-24 total capital programme of £113.8 million as noted in Appendix 1B;**
- (c) approved for consultation an earmarked reserves schedule as set out at Appendix 2; and**
- (d) agreed that it is minded to recommend to Council in February 2022 an increase in Council Tax Precept of 0.94%, plus a 1% Adult Social Care Levy and 2% Adult Social Care Levy that was carried forward from 2021/22.**

The meeting ended at 11.10am

Chairman