

Minutes of the Cabinet

County Hall

Thursday, 2 February 2023, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Simon Geraghty (Chairman), Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cllr Adrian Hardman, Cllr Marcus Hart (Vice Chairman), Cllr Karen May, Cllr Tracey Onslow, Cllr Andy Roberts and Cllr Mike Rouse

Also attended:

Cllr Matt Jenkins

2138 Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence had been received from Adam Kent and Richard Morris.

2139 Public Participation

None

2140 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 January were agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

2141 2023/24 Proposed Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2026/27

The Leader, also the Cabinet Member for Finance, explained that the draft budget had been out for consultation with Scrutiny and at other forums. The Leader thanked everyone who had engaged with the consultation process and believed that people understood the undeniable pressures of demand led services, inflation and rising costs, as well as the ambitious agenda which needed investment for Worcestershire's future. Scrutiny members were thanked for the detailed work they had done on the proposals.

The key proposals were around having the resources to meet demand led pressures to support the needs of the most vulnerable residents within the County. The pressures amounted to £67.9 million and would be funded by an

excellent settlement from Government, the efficiency reform and income programme and asking residents to pay a little more on their Council Tax.

Some minor amendments had been clarified such as £19.4 million for roads, which was within the funding envelope already set out; a one-off capital investment in Malvern Outdoor Centre; a 5% uplift for the Parish Lengthsman scheme and £50,000 for the Coronation.

The Cabinet Member for Communities explained that at the consultation with Parish and Town Councils, there had been no negativity around the overall financial strategy and they had been pleased with the uplift to the Lengthsman scheme. The investment in highways was seen as a benefit for all, whether they were motorists, bus users, cyclists or pedestrians. The increase of 4.94% in Council Tax would yield around £13.9 million in vital additional resource. It was a fair and measured budget and there was a clear plan to balance the books and deliver the services that residents expected, wanted, and deserved.

Cabinet Members thanked OSPB and Scrutiny Panel members for their time and their well made comments, and were pleased that the business community had been included in the consultation. They felt the budget did a great deal for rural people, with the increase to lengthsman scheme, extra money for drains and flooding mitigation, and subsidies for public transport.

It was pointed out that recommendation 1b mentioned Clinical Commissioning Groups but should now read the Integrated Care Board. It was also confirmed that the Public Health Ring Fenced Grant had not yet been confirmed.

A Member from outside the Cabinet understood the demand led pressures in children's and adult's social care, but felt that Council Tax was not the fairest way to raise money. He felt any details about the climate emergency and getting to net zero by 2050 was missing. He appreciated that additional money for areas such as railway stations and for buses was helping, but actions should be more front and centre. The Chairman wanted to reassure Cabinet that work on Net Zero was going on with the Member Advisory Panel and that work would be fed into the development of strategies. The Corporate Plan themes such as the environment needed to be fed into everything which was done at the Council.

RESOLVED that Cabinet Recommends to Council to approve the:

- a) The budget of £400.813 million set out in Appendix 1 of the agenda report;**
- b) The capital programme of £432.720 million set out in Appendix 2;**
- c) The Earmarked Reserves Schedule set out in Appendix 5;**
- d) The Council Tax Band D equivalent for 2023/24 be set at £1,465.78 which includes £197.40 relating to the ring-fenced Adult Social Care precept, and the Council Tax Requirement be set at £317.337 million, which will increase the Council Tax Precept by 4.94% in relation to**

two parts:

- **2.94% to provide financial support for the delivery of outcomes in line with the Corporate Plan 'Shaping Worcestershire's Future' and the priorities identified by the public and business community; and**
 - **2.00% Adult Social Care Precept ring-fenced for Adult Social Care services, in order to contribute to existing cost pressures due to Worcestershire's ageing population;**
- e) **Treasury Management Strategy set out at Appendix 6; and**
- f) **The Pay Policy set out at Appendix 7.**

Cabinet agreed to:

- (a) **give delegated authority to the Leader of the Council to recommend to Full Council, in consultation with the Chief Financial Officer, any further adjustments to the revenue cash limits as a result of Central Government confirming the final Local Government Finance Settlement, Council Tax and Business Rates Income, and associated Specific Grants and income for 2023/24; and**
- (b) **authorise the Strategic Director for People and the Director of Children's Services in consultation with relevant Cabinet Members with Responsibilities, to approve the agreement for the use of resources between the Council and the Integrated Care Board under Section 75 of the NHS Act 2006 (the Section 75 Agreement) for 2023/24.**
- (c) **approve changes in the forecast use of reserves as set out at paragraphs 3.4 to 3.7 of this report**
- (d) **note the Medium-Term Financial Plan set out in Appendix 4.**

2142 Request to Consult in Relation to Charging for Care and Support

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care introduced the report which requested that a consultation be agreed. The Cabinet Member started by thanking the Officers who had worked on the report and explained that it was being suggested that replacement care should be considered as a non-residential service so that it was not necessary for two assessments to be carried out. The consultation would also ask for views on charging for both carers when two carers were needed to carry out a visit. For those receiving care from the Council the service was free, but for self funders the council had

previously been subsidising their care, possibly at the detriment of others. It was made clear that other Councils charge for both carers.

The Chair explained that the change was about fairness in charging for the service provided. The Cabinet member for Health and Wellbeing explained that she and the Chief Executive signed the pledge earlier in the week for the Stay Connected Time to Talk day. Individuals were encouraged to take time to talk to friends and neighbours, and Companies were also to also sign the pledge. She supported the recommendations in the report.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- a) Considered the proposed amendments to the County Council's current charging policy for Adult Social Care Services in the following areas:**
 - i) Changing the financial assessment criteria for Replacement Care from a residential service to a non-residential service and making the distinction clearer for service users, and**
 - ii) Implementing charges for both carers when two carers are required to attend a home care visit (double handed care), and**
- b) Authorised the Strategic Director for People to carry out a public consultation on the proposals, to bring a further paper to Cabinet reporting on the outcome of the consultation and outline his final recommendation for Cabinet approval once the consultation is completed.**

2143 Education Sufficiency Annual Update

The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Education explained that the sufficiency report brought the forward view of what mainstream and SEND school places would be needed across Worcestershire for the next five years, to ensure that the Council met its statutory duty to provide enough good quality school places. The statutory duty applied to mainstream places up to the age of 18 and for SEND up to the age of 25. Census and NHS information was used to review the sufficiency plan each year, and was in turn used for negotiating with the DfE over school funding and with planning authorities around infrastructure such as new schools.

Worcestershire had been able to meet its statutory duties but would be facing pressures in future due to population growth, the condition of some school buildings and the increase in complex SEND placements. There was currently a bid in for a new special school in Malvern, and an alternative provision academy was being built in Kidderminster.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families explained that Worcestershire had a clear ambition to provide a good education to allow young people to fulfil their potential. He felt the report put the Council's aspirations into action.

The Chairman added how important the planning process, carried out by District Councils was. The Scrutiny Panel Chair added that it was important to have the right setting for the right child, and as the cost of home to school transport was increasing it was important to site the correct school in the correct place.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- a) **noted the updated annual sufficiency information for Mainstream school age and Specialist education provision in line with the Cabinet decision in December 2018;**
- b) **noted the pressure on Mainstream and Specialist educational provision, and Sufficiency duties highlighted in the reports;**
- c) **approved the publication of the 2022 Mainstream and Specialist Sufficiency reports as updates to the School Organisation Plan 2019 - 2024;**
- d) **noted progress on the updated Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency annual report and Post 16 education sufficiency assessment; and**
- e) **noted progress update on the delivery of the Worcester City Secondary School.**

2144 Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity, Approval for Investment

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills introduced the report. He explained that the Council played an active role in the roll out of broadband in the County and had used its own money to speed up the roll out. The County Council had benefitted from a claw back in the contracts which had in turn allowed for further investment. The report asked for permission for continued reinvestment in digital infrastructure.

With regard to mobile phone coverage there continued to be areas where reception was not good, so the Council would work with providers to inform residents of the best providers in different locations.

The pandemic had shown how important connectivity was, allowing for working remotely as well as helping to achieve climate objectives.

The Cabinet member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport highlighted the mobile improvement strategy and was impressed by the focus on collaboration and partnership. The Cabinet member for Health and Wellbeing welcomed this paper as connectivity was so important to help reduce isolation in rural areas and was a key factor in enabling people to

cope with life in the modern day. She felt MPs should work on an action plan.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- a) **noted the accomplishments of the Superfast Worcestershire Programme and associated projects to improve digital connectivity within the county, in particular the increased capability to respond to challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic and the potential of ‘improved digital connectivity’ as an enabler of new services and delivery models, as set out in paragraphs 6 and 13 of the report;**
- b) **confirmed the ongoing commitment to decisions at the June 2017 meeting of Cabinet, specifically the delegated authority to the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure in consultation with Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills for reinvestment of underspend and up to £4m of Gainshare from Superfast Worcestershire Phase 1 and Phase 2;**
- c) **approved that the scope of the digital infrastructure and connectivity agenda has expanded in order to**
 - i. **deliver the availability of gigabit capable broadband infrastructure to reach 90% of the county’s premises during 2027, and**
 - ii. **work to further improve the experience of voice and data services for mobile telephone users in Worcestershire as set out in paragraphs 22 and 23 of the report; and**
- d) **authorised the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure to take all necessary actions to progress the Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity agenda in accordance with the parameters set out in recommendations b) and c) above.**

The meeting ended at 11.00am

Chairman