

CABINET

**Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday 15 February 2024
at 10.00 am in Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One,
Telford, TF3 4JG**

PUBLISHED ON WEDNESDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2024

(DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN: MONDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2024)

Present: Councillors S Davies (Chair), R A Overton (Vice-Chair), L D Carter, C Healy, R Mehta, K Middleton, P Watling and N A M England.

Also Present: Councillors W L Tomlinson and T Nelson (as substitute for A Eade)

Apologies: Councillor E M Callear, A J Eade and S A W Reynolds.

CAB-47 Declarations of Interest

None.

CAB-48 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 January 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CAB-49 Leader's Announcements

None.

CAB-50 2023/24 Financial Monitoring Report

The Cabinet Member: Finance, Customer Services & Governance presented the report of the Interim Director: Finance & Human Resources. The report outlined the latest financial monitoring position relating to the revenue budget, capital programme and income collection. It highlighted the continued changeable economic climate with high inflation, high energy costs, increases in interest rates and the rising demand for services fuelled by the cost of living emergency facing local residents, businesses and the Council.

The latest projections for 2023/24 were set out in relation to the outturn position and how the net revenue spend compared to the budget set for the year; progress against the approved 2023/24 capital programme; the key issues to be highlighted; together with a summary of collection information in relation to Council Tax, Business Rates and Sales Ledger income.

Children's safeguarding and adult social care had continued to require further additional investment in order to meet high demand and manage market

challenges. Before application of the remaining contingencies included in the revenue budget, the projected outturn was expected to be over budget by 9.438m at year end, an increase of £1.813m since the last report. Using the remaining budget contingency and one-off reserves identified it was expected that the overall position was that an additional investment of £0.080m would be required.

The Council had an excellent track record of strong financial management and work would continue to manage budgets as effectively as possible during the remainder of 2023/24 to address in-year financial pressures. Work already identified such as accelerating savings proposals, review of reserves and balances, review of vacancies and strict control of spend would continue to be actioned.

The funding outlook for the medium term remained uncertain and would be challenging due to current inflationary pressures, the increasing costs of placements in children's safeguarding and high demand in adult social care.

Cabinet Members commented on the financial pressures that local authorities were under, particularly in relation to the increasing demands on children's and adult's services. It was possible that 20% of Councils may need to issue s114 Notices or go bankrupt.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group welcomed the report but noted that the Council would have to use £6.7m of reserves and increase Council Tax in order to meet the increased demand in children's services but that this would have an impact on other council services.

The Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group noted the report and the effort the Council was making despite the increased demand for adult social care and children's services. This was a national situation which required national government to review how local government was funded.

The Leader commented that one in four councils across the country of all political persuasions faced significant pressures due to the demand for adult social care, children's services, temporary accommodation, homelessness and housing need and stressed the importance of a stable, safe home.

RESOLVED – that:

- a) the 2023/24 revenue budget position be noted;**
- b) the position in relation to capital spend be noted; and**
- c) the collection rates for NNDR, council tax and sales ledger be noted.**

CAB-51 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 – 2027/28

The Cabinet Member: Finance, Customer Services & Governance

presented the report of the Interim Director: Finance & Human Resources.

The report sought approval of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the four years 2024/25 – 2027/28 and contained details of the Capital Strategy; Medium-Term Capital Programme; Investment Strategy; Treasury Management Strategy and the Prudential Indicators. This combined information formed the Council's overall Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the budget framework for 2024/25.

Key points from the report were the 2% adult social care precept for next year meaning a 4.99% overall increase in Council Tax would be required. This increase would support the most vulnerable members of the community and despite the increase council tax remained the lowest in the region.

A public consultation had taken place together with scrutiny by members of the Council's cross-party Business and Finance Scrutiny Committee on the MTFS. The report remained consistent with the strategy and set out a prudent financial management throughout an unprecedented and protracted period of severe financial constraint.

The report set out the proposed medium-term capital investment programme which totalled £420m and highlighted the financial benefits such as high-quality homes for rent and jobs for local people.

The Council were currently below the national average in relation to financing costs and net revenue streams and this was expected to remain the same for the remainder of the financial year. Borrowing was proportionate for the size of the authority with a 60% planned return on investment which helped to protect front line services.

Cabinet Members commented on the difficult circumstances that the Council were facing along with the long-term degradation of services. The Council would continue to invest so as to benefit the local community and work hard to find efficiencies and investment opportunities in order to provide services and for the local community to live well and be protected.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group applauded the return on the investments and the creation of jobs and partnerships which brought in additional tax. The focus had to be on the government funding local councils in order to prevent the issuing of s114 Notices.

The Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group noted the report and welcomed the opportunity for debate at Full Council.

The Leader thanked the cross-party Scrutiny Committee who had unanimously agreed a robust budget. It was regrettable that Council Tax would be increased, the first time in 2 years, but every penny of the increase would go to protecting adult social care and children's safeguarding. Careful financial management and efficiencies would be required to meet the increased cost and demand for services.

RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL that:

- a) the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2024/25 – 2027/28 and the budget framework for 2024/25 set out in this suite of reports;**
- b) council tax increase of 4.99% for 2024/25 including the Government's 2% Adult Social Care precept, which will be fully invested in the provision of social care services for the most vulnerable members of our community;**
- c) the net investments of £5.9m into Adult Social Care in 2024/25;**
- d) the net investment of £7.6m into Children's Safeguarding in 2024/25;**
- e) the budget savings listed in Appendix 10 totalling £17.567m in 2024/25;**
- f) the continuation of work with partner organisations, including Town & Parish Councils and Voluntary Sector and Community Groups to seek to identify ways to mitigate the impact of some of the cuts to services that we can no longer afford to deliver and to note the availability of the Invest to Save/Capacity Fund which is available to support partnership working;**
- g) the base budget in Appendix 8;**
- h) the policy framework for Reserves and Balances and their planned use outlined in Appendix 6;**
- i) the Risk Register at Appendix 14;**
- j) the endorsement of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme a link to which is included within Appendix 16, for adoption by Full Council on 29 February 2024, ready for implementation on 1 April 2024;**
- k) the continuation of the Council Tax Reduction Hardship Assistance Policy, also within Appendix 16;**
- l) the revenue implications of the medium-term capital programme for the period 2024/25 – 2027/28 set out in the Capital Strategy and Programme reports also on this agenda;**
- m) to grant delegated authority to the Director: Finance & Human Resources, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance and Customer Service to action any virements required following the final allocation of the Dedicated**

Schools Grant and other Grants and following completion of NNDR1 and final estimates of Business Rates Income;

- n) to grant delegated authority to the Director: Adult Social Care after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health Integration and Transformation, to enter into appropriate Section 256 and Section 75 Agreements under the NHS Act 2006 (as amended);**
- o) the authorisation of Director: Policy & Governance to execute all necessary contract documentation including affixing of the common seal of the council as appropriate to enable the council to enter into appropriate Section 256 and Section 75 Agreements under the NHS Act 2006 (as amended);**
- p) to grant delegated authority to the Director: Finance & Human Resources, in consultation with the Leader or relevant Cabinet Member to allocate funding from the £20m Capital investment fund referred to in paragraph 4.6 of the report;**
- q) this suite of MTFs reports as the Council's Efficiency Strategy for 2024/25, including the document at appendix 13, to enable new capital receipts to be used to fund the revenue costs of transformation and efficiency projects as assumed throughout these reports;**
- r) to grant delegated authority to the Director: Finance & H.R. after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance & Customer Services to amend the use of the contingency in 2024/25 and to make any other associated adjustments to accommodate any difference in funding between that currently assumed and final grant allocations when received;**
- s) delegation of authority to the Director: Finance & H.R. after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance & Customer Services to make changes to the Medium-Term Financial strategy with immediate effect to reflect all grants received from Government with authority to incur associated spend;**
- t) the Pay Policy for 2024/25 included as Appendix 17;**
- u) the application of a 100% council tax premium to second homes from 1 April 2025 provided that the necessary legislation is in place by that date and delegation of authority to the Director: Finance & H.R. to finalise the detailed policies required after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance & Customer Service, irrespective of when legislation comes into force; and**

- v) the additional recommendations contained in other reports included in this suite of Medium-Term Financial Strategy reports included on this agenda.

Members are asked to note:

- w) the unprecedented financial pressures being faced by local authorities across the country and the high level of uncertainty relating to the medium-term financial outlook for Telford & Wrekin Council due to:

- The escalating costs of, and demand for, many Council services but particularly Adult Social Care and safeguarding vulnerable children;
- National and international economic pressures resulting in an extremely challenging financial outlook for U.K. public services;
- The Government's one-year final local government finance settlement not extending beyond the end of March 2025;
- The impact of the significant potential changes to the local government finance system which have now been discussed by the Government for many years remain a major uncertainty. As does the potential impact of Adult Social Care funding reforms which have been delayed until October 2025.

- x) that this high level of uncertainty requires the Council to retain flexibility by limiting new ongoing investments to our highest priorities whilst identifying 4 significant ongoing additional budget savings to ensure a balanced budget for next year and over the medium-term.

- y) the initial projections for the potential budget gap included in this report through to 2027/28 and that these will continue to be updated as additional information becomes available and that work will commence to identify options for how the future gap can be met; and

- z) the CFO's robustness statement in Appendix 15.

CAB-52 Telford & Wrekin Council Registered Provider Housing Management Board

The Cabinet Member: Homes & Enforcement presented the report of the Director: Housing, Employment & Infrastructure.

The report sought the agreement of Cabinet for the creation of a Housing Management Board to provide oversight and compliance for properties owned by Telford and Wrekin Council under their Registered Provider (RP) status

and to have responsibility for all aspects of the Council's role as a Local Housing Authority. It set out the make up of the Board membership and its strategic oversight and governance and would ensure the Council complied fully with regulatory requirements as both a Registered Provider and Local Housing Authority.

It was intended that the Housing Management Board would operate separately but in parallel with the existing Housing Investment Programme Board which gave oversight to the investments made through the Council wholly owned Housing Company.

The Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group asked that reassurance be given that democratic oversight would not be reduced.

The Cabinet Member: Homes & Enforcement confirmed that any changes to policy would be brought back to Cabinet for scrutinisation and recommended for consideration at Full Council.

RESOLVED – that

- a) **the creation of a Housing Management Board with responsibility for all aspects of the management, operation and oversight of the Council's responsibilities as Local Housing Authority, including the approval and adoption of any and all associated policies be approved;**
- b) **delegated authority be granted to the Housing Management Board to confirm and adopt suitable Terms of Reference; Telford & Wrekin Council Registered Provider Housing Management Board;**
- c) **the work which has been undertaken so far in respect of the Council's responsibilities as a Registered Provider of housing and Local Housing Authority be noted; and**
- d) **the Housing Management Board provide an annual update of its work and decisions to Cabinet.**

CAB-53 Building Safer, Stronger & Healthier Communities through better Air Quality

The Cabinet Member: Homes & Enforcement presented the report of the Director: Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services.

The report gave an update on how the Council would continue to build safer, stronger & healthier communities through better air quality to prevent poor health through cardiovascular and respiratory disease. It asked for approval of the Air Quality Strategy and gave details of the framework for managing

and improving air quality which linked to the Council's carbon neutral action plan.

Air quality within the borough was very good with monitoring undertaken demonstrating that it was compliant with national thresholds. Unlike many other areas across the country, there was no Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) within the borough.

The Strategy set out measures and priorities that the Council would undertake to further enhance air quality within the borough to ensure that Government targets were met.

Following a successful bid to DEFRA, further Electrical Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP) would be installed on council owned car parks bringing the total of publicly available EVCPs in the borough to 150 during 2024.

In addition, investment into the Silkin Way of £800,000 would provide residents and businesses with greater sustainable travel choices while decarbonising transport and connecting communities.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report and the benefits it brought in relation to the reduction of respiratory conditions. Further benefits were the increase in EVCPs and the active travel network which reduced carbon emissions on roads. The Council were unable to make any changes to agriculture within the rural area.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group welcomed the report but asked Cabinet to consider the concentration of vehicles and pollution around schools.

The Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group welcomed the report and commented on the anti-idling measures, the management of the cycling network and what could be done to improve this. In relation to agriculture, he asked if partnership work could be undertaken with Harper Adams University.

The Cabinet Member: Homes & Enforcement confirmed that enforcement officers from the Community Action Team (CAT) worked in conjunction with the parish and town council and did speak to parents outside schools which had a positive impact.

The Leader confirmed that work had been undertaken on safer streets outside schools, however this was not something that could be imposed and that more work was required on pavement parking enforcement. Work was already undertaken with Harper Adams University as part of the Council's partnership working.

RESOLVED – that:

a) the Air Quality Strategy be approved;

- b) delegated authority to the Director Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing & Enforcement, to make ongoing changes to the strategy as required be approved;**
- c) the development of an Action Plan which will provide the framework for monitoring and managing air quality within the Borough; Building Safer, Stronger & Healthier Communities Through Better Air Quality be endorsed;**
- d) an update being provided to the Health and Wellbeing board be approved; and**
- e) the success of external funding bid and actions that have been completed in respect of air quality management and monitoring to date be noted.**

The meeting ended at 10.54 am

Signed for the purposes of the Decision Notices

Anthea Lowe
Director: Policy & Governance
Date: **Wednesday 21 FEBRUARY 2024**

Signed

Date: Thursday 11 April 2024