

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday 16 May 2024 at 10.00 am in Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG

PUBLISHED ON WEDNESDAY 22 MAY 2024

(DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN: TUESDAY 28 MAY 2024)

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

Also Present: Cllr T J Nelson (Conservative Group Leader) and Cllr W L Tomlinson (Liberal Democrats Group Leader)

Apologies: Councillor N A M England

CAB-62 Declarations of Interest

None.

CAB-63 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 April 2024 be agreed and signed by the Chair.

CAB-64 Leader's Announcements

The Leader welcomed the new Leader of the Conservative Group and looked forward to cooperating over the coming weeks and months and that he hold the administration to account constructively and with respectful dialogue.

The Leader thanked Councillor Eileen Callear for her contributions to Cabinet as she was stepping down from Cabinet to take up the role of Deputy Mayor at the forthcoming AGM.

CAB-65 Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

The Cabinet Member: Homes & Enforcement presented the Annual Governance Statement 2023/24.

Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Council was required to produce an Annual Governance Statement.

The Annual Governance Statement and the Local Code of Good Governance outlined that the Council had a robust governance framework in place which would be continually reviewed and maintained to demonstrate good corporate governance.

The 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement set out the adherence to the Council's governance arrangements during the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 and measured their effectiveness by undertaking regular internal quality monitoring across the services, peer reviews, benchmarking and external audits. Senior Management Team complete questionnaires with the Internal Audit Team collating the responses and devising an action plan. Less actions were highlighted during the reporting period than in previous years.

The Council has continued to make savings. The reduction in resources was challenging and impacted on recruitment and this had led to some single points of failure. Mitigation measures had been put in place where required. Staff were encouraged to undertake essential learning and training and where essential learning had not been completed, this was reported to the Senior Management Team.

The Leader of the Conservative Group considered that the Council had many statutory and internal tools and procedures to ensure effective governance. He suggested that the evidence should not be based on assumptions and reasonableness or left to chance. It was reassuring that External Audit looked at the governance arrangements and it was asked when it was expected that the historical audits be signed off.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group confirmed that the Auditors had given the Council a clean bill of health for 2022/23 at the recent Audit Committee, together with the 2021/22 Audit. It was expected that an unqualified opinion would be received shortly but that external audit was out of the Council's control.

The Leader expressed that there was a huge challenge around audits being signed off nationally and the government was engaging with the audit sector to ensure capacity was in place. The Secretary of State was looking to increase capacity to ensure the backlogs within Councils were cleared. The Leader confirmed that the Audit for 2021/22 and 2022/23 had now been signed off which put the Council in a small number of Councils within the UK to achieve this.

RESOLVED – that:

- a) the Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 be approved; and**
- b) the report be noted.**

CAB-66 New complaint handling code and combined complaint policy

The Cabinet Member: Homes & Enforcement presented the new complaint handling code and combined complaint policy.

The report outlined the requirements of the new complaint handling code of conduct that was being introduced by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) from the 1 April 2024. It highlighted the changes to working practices that would need to be introduced across the organisation to ensure compliance with the code, including new, shorter complaint handling timescales and the requirement to undertake annual self-assessments of the Councils compliance with the code.

It was necessary to be compliant with the HOS code by the 1 April 2024, and compliant with the LGSCO code 2026/27. As part of these changes, the Council were required to combine the existing corporate complaints policy, complaints policy for council tenants, and the policy for complaints involving Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) into a single policy by 1 April 2024. The existing statutory complaints policies for Adult Social Care and Children's Services would remain as separate policies with their own specific timescales. These timescales would be monitored monthly and published annually.

There had been an increase from 81% to 87% in the average time to respond to complaints within 10 days. If agreed, the Council would proactively adopt the policy straight away and would take part in the LGO pilot scheme before the policy became mandatory in 2026.

Members welcomed the report and the robust complaint policy which was an important part of the Council's services. The improvement to the timescales, as well as the various methods available to raise complaints, was important in order to grow and develop services. All feedback was a conversation to ensure the Council provided the best service possible and when things went wrong implement improvements to ensure things were done a different way in the future.

The Leader of the Conservative Group felt that the report did dwell on the lack of resources, but he was encouraged that the revised complaint policy was a model and coherent policy. He raised the delay in implementing the policy by 1 April and that implementation was retrospective. It was considered that complaints were taken seriously and discharged in an effective manner and but that the Council could learn from a corporate approach as an opportunity to do better.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group welcomed the report and he acknowledged the challenges residents may have with technology and, although costly, he felt the old-fashioned ways of contacting the Council were still vital for the authority. He considered that feedback and complaints were dealt with positively which enabled services to adjust and react as necessary but acknowledged the difficulties when resources scarce.

The Leader confirmed that all compliments and complaints were a contact with the Council and that these could be learned from. In relation to the retrospective introduction of the policy, this only related to the housing complaints and the Council were not a stock holding council. It was proposed that the Code be adopted well ahead of the implementation date of 2026.

The Cabinet Member: Homes & Enforcement expressed that despite the loss of jobs, the services offered by the Council were still remarkable. The details relating to the policy were not received until February 2024 and officers had been working to introduce this and this meeting was the first Cabinet that the policy could be brought to.

RESOLVED – that:

- a) **the introduction of the new complaint handling code issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman Service and the Council's plans to ensure compliance with the code, despite the additional pressure and burden this will place on Council services be noted;**
- b) **the changes to the new Complaints Policy be introduced with immediate effect and the new complaint handling code and combined complaint policy be approved;**
- c) **delegated authority be granted to the Director for Communities, Customer & Commercial Services in consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, Customer Service & Governance to make amendments to this policy going forward in line with changes to the appropriate legislation or policy.**

CAB-67 Telford and Wrekin Climate Change Adaptation Plan

The Cabinet Member: Climate Action, Green Spaces, Heritage & Leisure presented the Telford and Wrekin Climate Change Adaption Plan.

In 2019 Telford and Wrekin Council declared a Climate Emergency and set out an ambitious target to ensure its activities and operations were carbon neutral by 2030. Climate change mitigation was being undertaken by implementing actions to reduce the release of carbon emissions into the atmosphere. The Council had already delivered 60% reduction in emissions compared to a 2018/19 baseline.

However, as a local authority, Telford & Wrekin Council must ensure that its services could react to current and future predicted impacts of climate change, known as climate change adaptation.

In the UK, it was predicted that climate change would cause warmer, wetter, winters, and hotter, drier, summers. This is coupled with a predicted increase in frequency of extreme weather events, such as storms and droughts.

Flooding remained one of the biggest risks to the local area as frequent storms impacted the infrastructure, homes, and businesses. Flash flooding had been experienced across the borough with infrastructure unable to cope with the intensity of the rainfall.

Extreme weather events had a huge impact on peoples' health, staying active and food prices.

Six key risks had been identified as flooding, temperatures, water supply shortages, impact on eco systems and biodiversity, food production and pests and diseases. It was asked that a cross-party pledge be encouraged to counter misinformation.

The Plan took a risk management approach to meet the needs of services and enabled the Council to be prepared for any intense flooding events. Input had been received from the Environment Scrutiny Committee, a member workshop together with input from Members.

Risk management would be kept under continual review, which was best practice, and to ensure that it remained valid to cope with any forthcoming challenges.

Members welcomed the report and commented on the effects of climate change year on year particularly in relation to health implications, GP and medical services, the effect on roads and infrastructure and increases in maintenance and repair costs. It was important to identify hazards and risks and adapt to deal with any issues, share information and learn from experience. Cool spaces during spells of heat were welcomed together with the joint work with the ICS and their guidance on keeping residents safe.

The Leader of the Conservative Group encouraged cross-party working with the Council although he felt that he could not guarantee unconditional support. He acknowledged the contribution and commitment to climate change and that it was sensible to have a set of plans in place but that this would require continual revision. It was asked that problems that had already been highlighted be recognised and resolved and not be included within the adaption plan and that Parish and Town Councils be consulted in relation to identify and clearing of drains and mitigating against floods. Severn Trent need to look after the drinking water.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group welcomed the report and asked that officers work with Severn Trent to resolve the disputes in order to reduce the impact of flooding on residents.

The Leader expressed that there were sadly things that could not be done due to the savings require each year. The Council could only do so much, and he requested that the Environment Agency work alongside to the Council to install semi-permanent flood barriers in the Ironbridge Gorge. In relation to Severn Trent the Council had to compete with other areas for infrastructure improvements. Working with Parish and Town Councils required cooperation in order to undertake joint working. With regard to planning and working with developers, powers were required to be put into place in order to hold developers to account and to ensure this was not costly and complex in time and money.

The Cabinet Member: Climate Action, Green Spaces, Heritage & Leisure commented that the Council worked well with the Environment Agency and Severn Trent but that it could be complicated. Severn Trent had previously engaged with the Environment Scrutiny Committee; gulley cleaning was not always simple with some work needing suitable arrangements putting in place. There was presumption in favour of development and the Council had to have good grounds for refusal. She hoped that in the future home standards would include solar panels grey water recycling systems and energy efficient fabric of buildings. Further mitigation and adaption would be continued to drive down emissions by 2030.

RESOLVED – that:

- a) the importance of addressing the impacts that current and future climate change will have on the Council’s ability to deliver its services to its residents, communities, and businesses be noted;**
- b) the Corporate Climate Change Adaptation Plan be approved; and**
- c) delegated authority be granted to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change Action, Green Spaces, Heritage & Leisure and the Director for Communities, Customer and Commercial Services to ensure that the risk register is kept under regular review and updates are received by Cabinet on an annual basis.**

The meeting ended at 10.46 am

Signed for the purposes of the Decision Notices

Anthea Lowe
Director: Policy & Governance
Date: **Wednesday 22 MAY 2024**

Signed

Date: Thursday 13 June 2024