

CABINET

**Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday 5 December 2024
at 10.00 am in Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford,
TF3 4JG**

PUBLISHED ON WEDNESDAY 11 DECEMBER 2024

(DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN: MONDAY 16 DECEMBER 2024)

Present: Councillors L D Carter (Chair), R A Overton (Vice-Chair), C Healy, A D McClements, R Mehta, K Middleton, S A W Reynolds, P Watling and O Vickers.

Also Present: Councillor T J Nelson (Conservative Group Leader)

Apologies: Councillors Z Hannington and B Tomlinson.

CAB-26 Declarations of Interest

None.

CAB-27 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CAB-28 Leader's Announcements

The Leader paid tribute to former Councillor Eric Carter following his passing after a short period of illness. The Council had been deeply saddened to learn of Councillor Carter's passing and acknowledged his commitment to local government and democracy for over three decades including whilst serving as a Cabinet Member between 2007 – 2011. The Leader passed on his sincere condolences to Councillor Carter's family, friends and colleagues.

CAB-29 Pride in Our High Street

The Cabinet Member: Economy presented the report of the Director: Prosperity & Investment.

The Pride in Our High Streets programme was entering its tenth year, having launched in 2015 and formed part of a key long term funding commitment to protect, care and invest in local high streets. Since its launch, the Council had invested £7.6m to support high streets to remain resilient in the face of neglect and to support businesses to adapt following the rise in online shopping since the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme had developed into a nationally recognised model for investment in high streets and had had visible and direct impact on the Borough's high streets with 65 empty retail premises brought

back into use through start up grants, 388 new jobs created and 367 business grants awarded. Over the last five years, the programme had reduced the number of empty premises from an average of 9% to 3.8% exceeding the national average of 14%.

The report set out that the third phase of the programme commenced in 2019 and had seen a further £6.1m investment to support high street regeneration initiatives to inform 5 new 'Place Plans'. Tailoring investment through Place Plans continues to support new business start-ups and help develop business resilience, raise aspirations and encourage young entrepreneurs to become business focused. Several improvement schemes had been delivered as part of the Place Plan activity with many projects concentrated on Madeley and Dawley high streets. Some investments included:-

- Nightclub exterior refurbishment in Newport supported by match funding from owners;
- Improvements in and around the bandstand on Dawley High Street;
- War memorial improvements in Madeley & Ironbridge;
- Planting schemes in Ironbridge & Madeley to improve the look and feel of the high street;
- Creation of a catering facility in Dawley Town Park to help attract new visitors and to encourage existing visitors to stay longer;
- Car Park Improvements in Ironbridge;
- Support for the creation of a permanent Post Office in Dawley; and
- Supporting specialist housing provision across out towns.

The report also highlighted the positive impact of the Pride in Our High Streets programme during delivery of its current phase in supporting the regeneration and revitalisation of the Borough's high streets. The programme had seen investment targeted at transforming the look and feel of high streets with improved shop frontages, new signage, eco grants to enable high street businesses to be more sustainable and greener, diversification grants to support businesses to adapt business models to changing markets and new street furnishings. Investment into façade improvements had seen the transformation of 100 properties across Borough high streets, making high streets more attractive and inviting for visitors and residents, with heritage colours and period features had been reintroduced into Ironbridge and Wellington.

In the run up to the annual Small Business Saturday event in December, the Council would be announcing its latest High Street Heroes with over 100 awards presented to date. Recent award winners included the Little Christmas Shop in Ironbridge, Park Street Kitchen in Wellington and Amanda's Ow Bist'Ro in Dawley.

The report set out the future plans for the programme which included further funding of £1m to develop the ongoing package and also further expansion to cover district centres such as Hadley & Leegomery, Sutton Hill and Donnington to ensure areas continue to get the investment they need.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report and thanked the Leader and Officers for their continued commitment and dedication towards championing the Borough's high street offer. The scheme had been transformative and had continued to bring new life to market towns, helping businesses to adapt with the use of diversification grants and supporting residents' wellbeing.

The Leader of the Conservative Group noted the report and highlighted the Pride in Our High Streets programme as one intervention which should be kept under continuous review. He asked if the Cabinet could consider supporting the programme through non-cash means such as minimising road closures and licence fees and also urged the Cabinet to reconsider the risks of volunteering intervention as part of high street regeneration to enable residents to continue to be involved with keeping high streets attractive and minimise costs imposed on the Council.

The Leader of the Council provided reassurance that it was not the Council's intention to impede on volunteering opportunities and emphasised the Council's support for volunteer growth. The Leader noted the successes of the programme to date and expressed his gratitude to Town and Parish Councils for their financial contribution. The Leader addressed current frustrations with private landlords holding empty properties and advised that the recently announced new government legislation on high street auctions would give local authorities the power to influence landlords to lease out their premises. Despite public dissatisfaction with high streets, the Leader stressed the importance of continued efforts and recognised the hard work and dedication of business owners and their significant contributions to the Borough's high streets and the wider community.

RESOLVED – that:

- a) the work of the Pride in Our High Streets (PIOHS) programme in supporting resilient local high streets, local businesses and communities of the borough be noted; and**
- b) continuation of the PIOHS programme be approved.**

CAB-30 Telford Land Deal Update

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member: Highways, Housing & Enforcement presented the report of the Director: Prosperity & Investment. The report set out the continued achievements of the Telford Land Deal during the last financial year and since its commencement in 2015 which with support from the Council's Growth Fund and the Invest Telford Business Pledge which had delivered new higher skilled local jobs, created growth and security in the local supply chain and new homes across the Borough.

Since the Council entered into a unique 10-year Land Deal with Homes England, the Deal had cumulatively delivered the sale of a total of 34 commercial sites and 25 sites for residential development, achieving a gross sales income of £60.3m to date. These sites have enabled the delivery of 1,583 new homes and supported commercial premises in delivering 2,473

new jobs, with many in engineering and manufacturing adding skilled job opportunities for the Borough.

The financial successes of the Land Deal have meant that a cumulative profit of £19.1m has been achieved by the Land Deal partners up to 31 March 2024. In the last year alone, the Deal had delivered £11.7m in growth sales income, delivered 381,117sqft of commercial floor space and provided 48 new homes. The Council had in 2023/24, completed the reinvestment of £3.3m of its profit share alongside its Growth Fund to support the delivery of 24 industrial units at Hortonwood following the creation of Orchard Business Park.

The report highlighted that the Telford Land Deal Board had recently endorsed the decision of the Council to spend profit share monies to support the viability of projects being delivered through the Towns Investment Fund. This included approval to invest £3m of its profit share into projects in Oakengates and the Telford Town Centre. The funding had seen the delivery of new homes, refurbished retail units and quality public realm spaces. Investment had also supported the delivery of enhanced access routes and the new 43,055sqft Digital Skills and Enterprise Hub, located in the Quad in Station Quarter, accommodating a coordinated offer for both education and a flexible new space for businesses.

Ni Park had recently reached completion of its second phase with a further 3 units totalling 30,000sqft and is now a recognised hub for small businesses. The first phase of delivery had seen 24 small business units completed in October 2021, supported through funding from the Growth Fund and Land Deal profit share. All units proved popular with small agri-tech businesses, with further opportunities to partner with Harper Adams University. Another of the Council's prime business parks, Hortonwood West had been highly successful in providing much needed employment land delivering 339 new jobs and 375,143sqft of employment floor space.

As the Land Deal draws nearer to the end of its 10 year agreement, negotiations had taken place to secure an extension, enabling the Council to continue to bring forward the small number of sites that remain and to continue to deliver new homes, create skilled jobs and foster sustainable growth.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report and thanked Officers and Partners involved. Members noted the positive impact the Land Deal continued to have in driving investment and regeneration for the Borough and the importance of delivering new homes and jobs for its residents. Members also highlighted the significant impact of the £4m income from business rates and council tax on delivering key frontline services and securing capital investment through land sales and private sector contributions. Members welcomed plans to negotiate an extension of the current agreement.

The Leader of the Conservative Group thanked Officers for the detailed and extensive report in acknowledging the achievements of the Land Deal in land remediation and growth. He expressed a desire for jobs to remain within the

Borough to reduce the need for long commutes for residents and welcomed next steps for the extension of the current agreement.

The Leader of the Council acknowledged the success of the Land Deal to date and highlighted the importance of continuing to provide good quality jobs and homes for residents. The Leader emphasised that the Borough remained open for business and the Council continued to be committed to securing new investment opportunities.

RESOLVED – that:

- a) **the outcomes achieved during the 2023/2024 financial year and overall, since the Land Deal commenced in 2015 be noted;**
- b) **delegated authority be granted to the Director: Prosperity & Investment to negotiate the terms of any extension to the Land Deal as set out in section 4.21 in consultation with the Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member: Highways, Housing & Enforcement; and**
- c) **delegated authority be granted to the Director: Policy & Governance to take all the necessary steps to give effect to the proposals set out in this report.**

CAB-31 2024/25 Financial Monitoring Report

In the absence of the Cabinet Member: Finance, Governance and Customer Services, the Leader of the Council presented the report of the Interim Director: Finance, People and IDT.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024/25 to 2027/28 was approved at Full Council on 29 February 2024 and included the 2024/25 revenue budget and medium term capital programme. Since its approval, the economic climate had continued to be challenging with cost pressures being experienced, particularly in relation to the provision of Adult Social Care.

Nationally, Councils had continued to face extreme challenges in 2024/25 with unprecedented pressures driven by high costs and high demand for services particularly Adult Social Care, Children's Safeguarding and School Travel Assistance. The Autumn Budget presented by the Chancellor on 30 October 2024, set out a medium term plan for public finances which included a one-year Spending Review covering Departmental budgets for 2025/26 with a further Spending Review stage in late Spring 2025 which it is anticipated will cover 2026/27 and 2027/28.

The headline figures indicated a real terms increase in core local government spending power of around 3.2% in 2025/26, including at least £1.3bn of new grant funding, of which £600m will be new grant funding to support social care. However, there are many unknowns and lack of clarity about what funding streams are included and the detail and impact on individual local authorities will not be known until the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement which would be announced in early December.

The report set out the latest financial monitoring position for the year relating to the revenue budget, capital programme and income collection. It provided the latest projections in relation to the projected outturn position, progress against the approved 2024/25 capital programme and gave a summary of collection information in relation to Council Tax Business Rates and Sales Ledger income.

The funding outlook for the medium term remains very uncertain and will clearly continue to be challenging, particularly given the Council has already had to deliver £156.9m ongoing budget savings since 2009/10.

The report also highlighted that the budget was within limits after applying contingencies set aside at the start of the financial year. An additional £6.7m had been invested in Adult Social Care due to ongoing pressures. Despite these challenges, the Council had maintained a surplus, avoided drastic interventions, and kept the £21.7m budget strategy reserve intact.

Although income monitoring was slightly below target, it was anticipated that targets would be met by year-end. Projections would continue to be refined, and a further monitoring report had been scheduled for the next Cabinet meeting taking place on 6 January 2025.

The Leader highlighted that the Council had an excellent track record of strong financial management and while extremely challenging the Council would continue to deliver quality services to the residents of the borough and protect critical front-line services.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report which showed due diligence, and that the Council was in a good position to deliver a balanced budget despite the increase demand in services such as Adult Social Care and Children's Safeguarding. Members acknowledged the hard work of Officers and their role on maintaining the budget and praised the Council's robust financial management and strategic decision-making on projects such as the Growth Fund, NuPlace and Solar Farm to ensure revenue regeneration for the Council.

The Leader of the Conservative Group recognised the work of the Council's Finance Team and acknowledged the complexity of the accounts and the pressures on the Council, particularly in social care, emphasising the need to predict demand more accurately. He raised concern over the overspend from dedicated school grants due to the introduction of new rules for children and young people with special educational needs and the associated costs. He noted the anticipated 3.2% increase in spending power and asked whether it would be real terms.

RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL that:-

- a) the 2024/25 revenue budget position be noted;**

- b) the position in relation to capital spend; and recommends that Full Council approves the changes to the capital programme detailed in Appendix C and all associated changes to the Medium Term Financial Strategy, including Treasury and Prudential Indicators;**
- c) the collection rates for NNDR, council tax and sales ledger be noted; and**
- d) the current position in relation to Treasury & Prudential Indicators be noted.**

CAB-32 Thrive Telford

The Cabinet Member: Economy presented the report of the Director: Prosperity & Investment.

The report set out the work that had been undertaken as part of the Council's Thrive Telford programme which had seen £5.8m invested into skills, social activities and vital business support across the Borough. The programme had targeted support to those most in need including community groups that help reduce anti-social behaviour and crime and children and young people who were currently not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Delivery of the Thrive Telford programme began in February 2023 with implementation phases continuing into Summer 2024 and a current programme end date of 31 March 2025. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) provided £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment by March 2025 which would enable local authorities funding for communities, places, businesses, people and skills to support the delivering of the following objectives:-

- Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector;
- Increase opportunities and improve public services;
- Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging; and
- Empower local leaders and communities.

The report highlighted a number of key achievements since the programme commenced including the issuing of 174 business grants, 382 residents enrolled onto NEET programmes, 30 businesses accessing support services to improve efficiency and 170 individuals receiving start up support.

Working with the St Giles Trust, the programme had supported the roll out of the Trust's Desist and Transform programme which looks to provide education and build awareness for young people in areas such as knife crime, criminal justice and gang related crime. The programme had also supported other initiatives such as Telford Kicks, a free football programme which takes place at 8 locations across the Borough and provides young people with constructive activity to reduce engagement in anti-social behaviour. School Kabaddi workshops had taken place in partnership with Sport England and

the Telford and Wrekin Interfaith Council which had seen a total of 19 schools and 1,525 pupils participating.

The programme had been vital in launching the new Digital Skills Hub located at the Quad in Station Quarter to offer maths and digital-focused courses by Telford College to students in the Borough as well as robotics, automation and engineering-based courses.

The Government had recently announced that the programme will be extended for a further year and the Council were awaiting details of the extension including any changes to priorities.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report and highlighted the positive impact the programme had had on reducing anti-social behaviour in the Borough.

The Leader of the Conservative Group acknowledged that outward investment was beneficial and noted that the report highlighted the number of enterprises and individuals who had benefitted from the programme. He asked for detail to be provided on what proportion of capital investment had been invested into the Quad and the facilities that the Council was occupying.

The Cabinet Member: Economy confirmed that details would be provided outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED – that the progress of the Thrive Telford programme be noted.

CAB-33 Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report

The Cabinet Member for Inclusion, Engagement, Equalities & Civic Pride presented the report of the Director: Policy & Governance. The report provided an update on the work that had taken place to meet the Council's commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant and in support of the Borough's Armed Forces community during 2023/24.

As a signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant, Telford and Wrekin Council was required to uphold a commitment to support those who serve or had served in the Armed Forces. In the last year, the Council had delivered its annual Armed Forces Day event and had broadened outreach activities through partnership working to include the Armed Forces Staff Network, Veterans' Cafes in Dawley, Madeley and Donnington, the Models for Heroes Group, Bake & Banter Sessions, Veterans' & Spouses' Craft & Sewing Group, Armed Forces Community Art Lessons and a Veterans Football Club which meets weekly at AFC Telford United. The Council had also been recognised by the Ministry of Defence as a Gold Employer for veterans, an award granted for 5 years and due for renewal in 2025.

Since 2011, a total of 151 organisations across the Borough had signed up to the Armed Forces Community with 35 signatories collected in the last 12 months. A total of 26 Town & Parish Councils had also signed the Covenant

and the Council had continued to receive positive feedback about how these organisations had benefited greatly from being able to build a reputation as being 'Forces Friendly'.

The report highlighted the Council's commitment to enhancing its support offer through the development of a new Armed Forces Community Hub, creating a single point of contact for veterans and their families.

Cabinet Members recognised the importance of supporting veterans and armed forces personnel and the Council's continued commitment to supporting them. Members also highlighted the success of some of the outreach activities such as the Veteran's Café which had seen over 1,000 attendances in recent months and how these initiatives had provided a space for Veterans to seek support.

The Leader of the Conservative Group welcomed the report and commended the work of the Council in supporting the Armed Forces community and looked forward to receiving further updates in relation to the progress of the new Armed Forces Community Hub.

The Leader of the Council praised the Council's continued commitment to supporting the Borough's veterans and their families highlighting the Council's accreditation and acknowledging the work of Parish and Town Council's in making High Streets armed forces friendly. The Leader acknowledged the challenging landscape for providing veteran's support and the reliance on 1,700 charities in the UK but provided reassurance that the Council would continue to support veterans and their families through outreach activities and access to skills and employment opportunities.

RESOLVED – that:

- a) the progress made developing the Council's "offer" to the borough's Armed Forces community be noted;
- b) the proposed restructure of the Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Board be endorsed; and
- c) the £10,000 funding for the Armed Forces community cafes for the next two years be approved.

CAB-34 Councillors Pride Fund 2023-24: Helping to Protect, Care and Invest to Create a Better Borough

The Cabinet Member: Inclusion, Engagement, Equalities & Civic Pride presented the report on Councillors Pride Fund 2022-23: Helping to Protect, Care and Invest to Create a Better Borough which provided details in relation to allocation of the Councillors' Pride Fund during the financial year 2023/24.

In 2023, Members were allocated a total of £270,000 to invest in projects and activities which would seek improvement at a local level. The fund enabled Members to deliver the Council's five priorities in their ward with a small amount of money making a big difference on a local level, particularly to small

community groups that found it difficult to access alternative grant funding. The final deadline for submitting applications in the current financial year was 1 February 2025.

During the reporting period, a total of 335 proposals had been received and awarded with the largest proportion of applications supporting activities for children and young people ranging from uniformed groups, youth clubs, sporting activities, playgroups and school trips. Funding had also supported a number of community and voluntary groups for older residents, services to support residents who continue to be affected by the cost of living crisis as well as the Armed Forces community. Members had been encouraged to seek match funding for their grants which had secured an additional 60p of funding for every £1 allocated.

The report highlighted how Members had used the funding available to support the Council's priorities and provided various examples of projects and initiatives which had reaped the benefits.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report and highlighted the positive impact it had made in local communities and gave examples of some of the initiatives they had supported in their own ward areas.

The Leader of the Conservative Group advocated for the scheme which was administered efficiently by Officers. He acknowledged the growth of the ward fund over the past nine years, highlighting the flexible criteria which had allowed Members to focus on delivering priorities for their residents and make a significant impact to their communities.

RESOLVED – that:

- a) the continued impact of the Councillors' Pride Fund in supporting Councillors to deliver the Council's five priorities in their ward to protect, care and invest in order to create a better borough be noted;**
- b) the importance of this funding in offering a bespoke response to need in individual communities and in supporting community organisations to thrive and offer valued services to residents be noted;**
- c) the additional funding that applications to this scheme have secured through match funding of projects to the value of £163,064 be noted; and**
- d) the final deadline for applications in the year 2024-25 is 1 February 2025 be noted.**

The meeting ended at 11.18 am

Signed for the purposes of the Decision Notices

Anthea Lowe

Director: Policy & Governance

Date: **Wednesday 11 DECEMBER 2024**

Signed

Date: Monday 6 January 2025