

## **CABINET**

**Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday 6 January 2025 at 6.00 pm in Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG**

**PUBLISHED ON MONDAY 27 JANUARY 2025**

**(DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN: THURSDAY 30 JANUARY 2025)**

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

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

**Apologies:** Councillor R Mehta

### **CAB-35 Declarations of Interest**

None.

### **CAB-36 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.**

### **CAB-37 Leader's Announcements**

The Leader wished Members a Happy New Year and thanked officers who had worked over the Christmas period to continue to provide frontline services to residents such as clearing of fallen trees, road closures and the deployment of flood barriers as a result of bad weather.

### **CAB-38 2024/25 Financial Monitoring Report**

The Cabinet Member: Finance, Governance & Customer Services presented the report of the Interim Director: Finance, People & IDT.

Since the last update presented to Cabinet in December 2024, the national picture had remained the same with many Councils continuing 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 Transport.

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 which was expected

to be over budget by £4.832m at year end, however noted a reduction of £0.429m since the last report.

During 2023/24 Telford & Wrekin's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was overspent and a deficit of £1.82m was carried forward to 2024/25. The deficit had been a result of budget pressures relating to High Needs provision and these pressures had continued in 2024/25. The current financial monitoring position set out that the deficit was currently projected to significantly increase in 2024/25, from £1.82m at the start of the year to approximately £6m at the end of the current financial year.

In 2020, the Government introduced a statutory override that meant that all local authorities' DSG deficits were separated from a Council's wider accounts. This override is currently in place until 2025/26 and the Council were currently awaiting an announcement from government on its policy position beyond 2025/26.

The income collection rates for council tax, business rates and sales ledger had remained the same since the last report presented to Cabinet.

The Council had continued its excellent track record of strong financial management and budget holders would continue their work to manage budgets as effectively as possible to address in-year financial pressures.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group welcomed the report and was pleased to see improvements on the Council's current financial position since the last report presented to Cabinet.

The Leader of the Conservative Group recognised the work of the Council's Finance Team and expressed his thanks for the briefings that had been conducted.

**RECOMMENED TO FULL COUNCIL that:-**

- a) **the 2024/25 revenue budget position, which shows that, after applying budget contingencies, the Council is projecting to be within budget at year end, and this is without having to use the Budget Strategy or General Fund reserves be noted;**
- b) **the position in relation to capital spend; and recommends that Full Council approve 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; 2024/25 Financial Monitoring Report; and**
- c) **the collection rates for NNDR, council tax and sales ledger be noted.**

**CAB-39 Telford & Wrekin 2025/26 Schools Funding Formula**

The Cabinet Member: Children, Young People, Education, Employment & Skills presented the report of the Director: Education & Skills.

A review of the local funding formula for mainstream schools in line with revisions from the Department for Education (DfE) took place annually in consultation with schools and the Schools Forum and applied to both academies and maintained schools as set out in the report.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) were allocated to local authorities by the DfE in four blocks which included Schools, High Needs, Early Years and Central School Services. In order to help with addressing high needs pressures, local authorities could transfer up to 0.5% of the schools block budget to high needs, which equated to £0.9m in 2025/26 for Telford and Wrekin. As the DfE classifies this as a transfer between DSG blocks, rather than a funding formula issue, this is a decision for the Schools Forum, rather than the Cabinet.

Funding for the School Block was calculated by multiplying the number of pupils at the preceding October census. The allocation for the 2025/26 year was set at £178m which was approximately £5m more than 2024/25.

The High Needs Block was calculated using a combination of historic allocations and the national funding formula. The allocation for 2025/26 was set at £39.6m which saw an increase of 8% compared to the allocation set for 2024/25. The Early Years Block was calculated by taking the average number of pupils in the two relevant January censuses and multiplying by a unit of funding. The allocation for 2025/26 was estimated as £26m despite challenges due to the extension of school funding provision.

The Central School Services Block was calculated through a mixture of historic expenditure levels and the number of pupils. The grant was introduced in 2018/19 to replace the abolished Education Services Grant. The allocation for 2025/26 was set at £1.2m.

Since 2020/21 the DfE had required local authorities to apply a national minimum funding per pupil amount to all schools. For 2025/26 this was set at £4,955 for primary schools and £6,465 for secondary schools. This funding would consequently boost the funding of schools with less deprived intakes, as these schools received relatively little from funding factors linked to deprivation and low prior attainment.

A further national minimum funding guarantee was to be expected, assuring a minimum increase per pupil compared to the previous year. For 2025/26, national regulations meant this must be set between -0.5% and 0%. The Council had proposed to adopt the highest possible level of 0%.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report and noted that the way in which the funding is calculated ensures that children and young people receive the maximum funding allowed and schools receive funding in a timely manner.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group welcomed the increase in funding for children and young people in higher needs but noted the 2.23% increase in

the school block was still below national inflation rates and highlighted the pressures it could impose on schools when balancing their budgets.

The Leader of the Conservative Group highlighted the challenges schools may face if required to find financial efficiencies and expressed concerns in relation to turnover of teaching staff. He asked Cabinet to clarify if the funding guarantee would be set at 0% or 0.5% and if delegated powers could be recovered if required in the future.

The Cabinet Member: Children, Young People, Education, Employment & Skills confirmed that the Council would be setting the minimum funding guarantee at 0% in line with national regulations.

The Director: Policy & Governance confirmed that delegated powers were not permanent and Cabinet would retain the power to make the decision if circumstances changed in the absence of the Director to whom powers had been delegated to.

**RESOLVED – that:**

- a) the 2025/26 funding formula for Telford & Wrekin mainstream schools, consulted on with the Schools Forum be approved; and
- b) delegated authority be granted to the Director for Education & Skills, in consultation with the Cabinet Member: Children, Young People, Education, Employment & Skills and the Schools Forum, to approve the Telford & Wrekin funding formula for mainstream schools.

**CAB-40 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 to 2028/29**

The Cabinet Member: Finance, Governance & Customer Services presented the Medium Term Financial Strategy which gave an update on the key uncertainties, financial pressures and increase in demand for the provision of social care services.

A consultation would take place between 7 January 2025 and 5 February 2025 with key stakeholders, voluntary and community sectors, Town and Parish Councils, businesses and cross-party Business & Finance Scrutiny committee. Views would also be sought from local residents through the Council's website.

Following the consultation, a report containing the budget and finalised levels of Council Tax would be brought back to the Cabinet meeting being held on 13 February 2025 which would contain recommendations to be considered at Full Council on 27 February 2025 and would ensure that the Council's medium-term financial position remained sustainable and robust.

Since the approval of the current Medium Term Financial Strategy on 29 February 2024, which covered a four year period to 2027/28, there had been significant changes to the national economy. Locally, Councils had seen an

increase in demand for key services and higher costs, particularly in relation to adult social care.

Due to these factors, the Government published a policy statement in November 2024 which set out the proposals for the 2025/26 Local Government Finance Settlement and confirmed a real term increase of 3.2% and a new recovery grant worth £600m to be distributed to areas with greater need and demand for services. The settlement also included a £250m Children's Social Care Prevention Grant.

The report highlighted that the Council had managed to maintain financial stability and set a balanced budget for 14 consecutive years and had continued to offer the lowest level of council tax in the Midlands and of any unitary authority in the country despite the requirement for a general increase. In 2024/25, the Council achieved a net budget revenue of £157m, with £88m generated from council tax and £57m generated from business rates.

A total of £181.7m savings had been delivered by the Council since 2009 as a result of reduced government funding, despite an increase in costs and demand for services such as Adult Social Care. Due to the current high levels of financial pressure arising from increased demand in services, a general council tax increase for 2025/26 across all council tax bands of 2.99% equivalent to £0.69p per week for an average Band B property would be proposed as well as a 2% increase for the adult social care precept. All funding raised through the council tax increase would be invested in the provision of social care services.

Cabinet Members highlighted the increase in demand in both adult and children's services and asked residents to take part in the consultation. Members highlighted how the Council had continued to deliver high quality homes, create new jobs, provide transport networks, protect and enhance green spaces and invest in improving local schools, demonstrating ambition for the Borough and the local community.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group supported the report and was pleased to see a 7% increase in government grants. He expressed concerns surrounding the proposed increase to council tax and additional pressures many families would face as a result. He asked the Cabinet to confirm what contingency plans had been considered for next year's budget.

The Leader of the Conservative Group thanked officers for the detailed report however requested that information pertaining to government grants be set out more clearly. He asked that responses received as part of the consultation process be considered before the report returns to Cabinet and Full Council for debate.

The Leader of the Council confirmed that the Council's contingency plans remained the same as those set out in previous budget reports and thanked officers for their hard work and due diligence.

**RESOLVED – that:**

- a) the contents of this report be noted with the main aims being:
- For the 14th Year running, to maintain the financial stability of Telford & Wrekin Council and set a balanced budget;
  - To continue to have the lowest level of Council Tax in the Midlands for the services we provide and amongst the lowest Council Tax of any Unitary Authority in the Country, see graphs at Appendices 1 and 2;
  - That the Council continues to invest in its main priorities, a few examples being:
    - £7.7m investment into Social Care to support the most vulnerable in our community
    - £94m on high quality homes and new neighbourhoods
    - £54m for Growth Fund to bring jobs to the borough
    - £30m for highways and transport schemes
    - £26m for Towns Fund projects to revamp local centres
    - £1.7m for protecting and enhancing green spaces
    - £45.2m invested into expanding improving local schools
- b) the proposed revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) set out in this report for consultation between 7 January 2025 and 5 February 2025 be approved;
- c) a general council tax increase for 2025/26 across all council tax bands equivalent to £0.69 per week for an average Band B property, which will be fully invested in the provision of social care services for the most vulnerable members of our community be approved;
- d) a council tax increase for 2025/26 for the Adult Social Care precept across all council tax bands equivalent to £0.46 per week for an average Band B property, which will be fully invested in the provision of social care services for the most vulnerable members of our community be approved;
- e) the savings delivered of £181.7m since 2009/10 as a result of reduced government funding from 2011 whilst the cost and demand for many Council services have been increasing and in particular for Adult Social Care be noted;
- f) that 75 pence in every £1 the Council spends is now allocated to Social Services be noted;
- g) that a number of the investments made in this report also generate a financial benefit, as well as fulfilling their primary purpose, which is invested in front line services be noted; and
- h) national and international economic pressures which have resulted in an extremely challenging financial outlook for U.K public services with interest rates remaining high be noted.

## **CAB-41 Long Term Empty Property Strategy Update**

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member: Highways, Housing & Enforcement presented the report of the Director: Housing, Commercial & Customer Services.

The report provided an update on the actions that the Council had taken since Summer 2021 to bring long term empty properties back into use. Since its implementation, the Strategy had seen 312 long term and problematic empty properties brought back into occupation against its set target of 375 properties by June 2026.

Of the 312 properties brought back into use, there were 3 properties which had been empty for longer than 20 years, 12 properties which had been empty for longer than 10 years, 20 properties which had been empty for longer than 5 years and 60 properties which had been empty longer than 2 years.

Properties which had been empty for less than 6 months were typically part of a natural churn in the residential market linked with changes in ownership, tenancy, refurbishment and probate therefore the Strategy's main focus had been on properties that had been vacant for more than 6 months.

The Strategy had continued to recognise the negative environmental impacts that empty properties had brought to the Borough's streets, such as an increased risk of fly tipping and anti-social behaviour but also that every unoccupied property was a wasted housing opportunity for Telford and Wrekin residents in need of affordable accommodation.

The report set out how the Strategy had positively impacted families in need, including those in temporary accommodation. The Council had acquired a further 81 properties for refurbishment to provide an increase in accommodation for those previously homeless through the Rough Sleepers and Next Steps Accommodation programmes.

Partnership working had remained a key focus of the Strategy to ensure that not only are properties brought back into use, but also that the best outcomes are achieved for the owners of the empty properties, the neighbourhoods affected by them and to maximise opportunities for residents to access affordable homes.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report and the significant outcomes of the Strategy to date. Members highlighted the positive results the Strategy had had in providing much needed affordable housing for vulnerable residents in the Borough and the Council's approach to maximising financial benefits through the new homes bonus and council tax recovery.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group welcomed the report and commended Officers for their ongoing work to address the long-standing issue of empty properties which had been a national issue for many years.

The Leader of the Conservative Group commented on the importance of property ownership and the responsibilities that come with it and asked how the Council collates data in relation to the number of empty properties currently in the Borough and the total number of empty properties that could be brought back into use.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member: Highways, Housing & Enforcement confirmed that the Council held up to date records of the number of empty properties in the Borough as these properties would be subject to paying increased council tax rates and advised that Members were able to report empty properties to the Council for investigation.

**RESOLVED – that:**

- a) the actions undertaken in respect to the delivery of the Long-Term Empty Property Strategy be noted; and**
- b) the Strategy and the approach being taken to address long term empty properties across the Borough be re-affirmed.**

**CAB-42 Better Buses in Telford & Wrekin**

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

The report outlined the progress the Council had made to improve bus travel and connectivity across Telford and Wrekin and sought approval to procure new bus services from July 2025 to ensure the bus network remains fit for the future.

At its meeting in October 2021, the Cabinet approved the creation of an enhanced partnership and received an update on the development of a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) as required by the National Bus Strategy. The Council entered into an enhanced partnership agreement on 1 April 2022 which sought to bring together the Council, bus operators and user groups to focus on increasing patronage, improving services and delivering transformation.

Following extensive consultation with service users, the Council tendered seven new bus routes with the first launched in December 2022, commonly known to residents as the Work Express. These new routes have completed over 400,000 passenger trips with fares capped at £2 for an adult and £1 for a child. The Work Express provided connections for residential areas including Sutton Hill, Woodside and Brookside to employment sites at Hortonwood, Halesfield and Stafford Park and operated from 5am to 11pm seven days a week and with an average of 12,800 passenger trips a month. The other six services improved connectivity in rural areas linking Newport and Wellington as well as urban services linking Lawley and Lightmoor with the Town Centre and Wellington.



In November 2024, the Council received £3.5m grant funding which would be used in the 2025/26 financial year to support new tendered services and infrastructure upgrades such as new bus shelters and the expansion of real time passenger information through the Citymapper app in order to maintain connectivity while seeking opportunity to enhance the existing bus network.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report highlighting the success of the Work Express and how council-led bus services have significantly improved transportation options, especially in rural and underserved areas of the Borough by designing routes based on residents' needs. Members praised the positive impact the new services had had on communities, including better access to work, school and healthcare and commended the council's efforts to ensure public transport had been made more accessible and affordable, reducing reliance on cars and supporting climate change goals.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group was pleased to hear that funding for bus services would remain with the possibility of increase in funding in the near future and commended the Council for recognising how vital the bus network is for the Borough's residents. He asked if the bus service in Shawbirch could be considered for improvement following a recent reduction in services offered by Arriva.

The Leader of the Conservative Group welcomed the report and asked if details of the new services including costs would be reported back to Cabinet when available and if alternative provisions could be made available to residents who may be unable to access the new Citymapper app.

The Cabinet Member: The Economy confirmed that bus timetables would still be made available to residents in bus shelters and that the Citymapper app would be an additional service to enable residents to check their journeys in real-time and plan for late or cancelled buses.

The Leader of the Council advised that further updates on the continued progress of the scheme and introduction of new services would be reported back to future Cabinet meetings.

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm

### **Signed for the purposes of the Decision Notices**

Anthea Lowe  
Director: Policy & Governance  
Date: **Friday 10 JANUARY 2025**

Signed .....

Date: Thursday 13 February 2025