

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday, 10 June 2021 at 10.00 am in Telford College, Haybridge Road, Wellington, Telford, TF1 2NP

PUBLISHED ON WEDNESDAY, 16 JUNE 2021

(DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN: MONDAY, 21 JUNE 2021)

Present: Councillors R A Overton (Vice-Chair), A J Burford, R C Evans, C Healy, S A W Reynolds, P Watling, D Wright and S Davies (Chair).

Also Present: _____ Cllr W L Tomlinson (Liberal Democrats / Independent Group Leader) and Cllr N A Dugmore (Conservative Group Leader)

Apologies: Councillor E M Callear and L D Carter

CAB-78 Declarations of Interest

Councillor S Davies declared a personal and non-pecuniary interest in Item CAB-83 as the Council's representative on the Wrekin Housing Trust Board. He indicated he would not be withdrawing from the meeting during the determination of this item.

CAB-79 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 May 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CAB-80 Leader's Announcements

The Leader announced that the Council would be receiving £22.3m from the Towns Fund. He thanked officers for their hard work in submitting the bid, which was for a significant sum, and would be used to bridge the gap between the train station and the shopping centre and beyond to Southwater. This development would include a new digital and maths hub, in collaboration with Wolverhampton University and Telford College.

CAB-81 2020/21 Financial Outturn Report

Councillor R C Evans, Cabinet Member for Council Finance & Governance presented the report of the Director: Finance & Human Resources, Chief Finance Officer.

Cabinet Members noted that despite the significant financial impacts relating to the coronavirus (CV-19) pandemic, the Council had ended the year in a positive financial position. During this unprecedented time, the Council had continued to offer all usual services (Subject to national and local restrictions),

as well as providing additional support for residents and businesses, such as distributing grant support, business rates relief, supporting vaccination roll out and the track and trace provision. The Council had not needed to use any unplanned use of reserves during 2020/21.

The gross revenue budget for 2020/21 was £414m and the net budget was £129m. The revenue outturn position was within budget with a final net underspend of £0.039m (which was equivalent to only -0.03% of net budget) after the proposed transfers to reserves and balances had been made. This position had been achieved after delivering £2.9m of budget savings in 2020/21, on top of the £123.5m made since 2009/10 years giving a total of £126.4m- equivalent to around £700 for every home in the Borough.

The funding outlook for the medium term was very uncertain. The Government had confirmed that, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the planned review of local government finance system would be postponed, however, changes to the New Homes Bonus system would come into effect during 2022/23. However, there had been no confirmation of the funding levels for 2022/23, and it was anticipated that the Council would need to deliver £8.8m savings already identified for 2021/22 and 2022/23, plus an additional £10.7m of further savings over the two years 2022/23 and 2023/24.

The key areas of pressures during 2020/21 were noted. Several areas of pressure were highlighted, including children's safeguarding, adult social care and communities, customer and commercial services.

The Capital Outturn position 2020/21 was noted; capital spend ended the year at £57.71m against an approved estimate of £63.7m which was largely due to re-phasing expenditure into 2021/22.

NuPlace was a separate legal entity and as such prepared its own accounts but as NuPlace was wholly owned by the Council, consolidated group accounts were also prepared. The unaudited accounts showed that NuPlace had generated an operating profit after interest and taxation of £0.463 in 2020/21, and was expected to issue a dividend of £0.156m during the year to the council as the sole investor. The Council also received income from NuPlace totalling £1.5m during 2020/21 net of additional interest and other marginal costs.

It was reported that the draft formal statement of accounts were considered at the Audit committee at the end of May and would be audited by Grant Thornton, the Council's external auditors, during June and July, the accounts would also be available for public inspection for 30 working days.

Members welcomed the report and stated it was a tremendous achievement in the circumstances of Covid-19 and over a decade of government cuts. Members expressed their thanks to officers for their hard work in producing the budget.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to COUNCIL that –

- (a) the Revenue outturn position for 2020/21 and related virements in Appendix 3 of the report which is subject to audit by the Council's external auditors be approved;**
- (b) the transfers and changes to reserves and associated approval to the relevant members of the Senior Management Team (as determined by the Chief Executive) and after consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member to spend the reserves as detailed in section 5 of the report and Appendix 5 of the report be approved ;**
- (c) the Capital outturn position and related supplementary estimates, re-phasing and virements shown in Appendix 4 of the report and as summarised in the report be approved;**
- (d) that delegated authority be granted to the Director: Finance & HR to make any changes required as the outturn is finalised in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Council Finance and Governance;**
- (e) the performance against income targets be noted; and**
- (f) the 2021/22 Public Health Grant be approved and the 2021/22 budget strategy be updated accordingly**

CAB-82 Tree & Woodland Management Policy and Ash Dieback Management Programme

Councillor C Healy, Cabinet Member for Visitor Economy, Historic and Natural Environment and Climate Change presented the report of the Director of Neighbourhood and Enforcement Services.

The Borough had significantly more trees than many other towns and cities and it was estimated that the Council was responsible for around 15 million trees. The Council had recently launched the 'Trees4TW' scheme, where 8,600 trees were provided to local residents, schools and landowners to plant as part of the fight against climate change.

The Council would continue to support planting of trees and aimed to mitigate the loss of trees through Ash die back, other disease or storm damage. The report sought the agreement for additional resources to survey trees within the borough and to undertake safety works as required.

The Leader of The Liberal Democrat / Independent Group expressed his thanks to the Council's Tree Officers and noted the vital work the Council was undertaking with partner organisations regarding green spaces in the Borough. He raised that he would like to see the Council offer support to residents who due to means or capacity were not able to manage neighbouring trees themselves, comments which were echoed by the Leader

of the Conservative Group. The Cabinet Member for Visitor Economy, Historic and Natural Environment and Climate Change stated agreed that there needed to be a balance of where the Council was able to support residents where it was needed, however, recognising the budget pressures this would incur.

RESOLVED that –

- a) the amendments to the Tree and Woodland Management Policy as set out in Appendix 1 of the report be approved
- b) the progress to date be noted and the approach to the management of trees and woodlands within the Council's ownership be endorsed
- c) authority be delegated to the Director of Neighbourhood and Enforcement Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Green Spaces, Natural and Historic Environment and the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood, Commercial Services and Regeneration, to secure £150,000 for the financial years 2021/22 only to undertake condition surveys and priority works in the management of Ash dieback
- d) authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Green Spaces, Natural and Historic Environment to see funding opportunities for Ash dieback since withdrawal of funding by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) following in March 2020.

CAB-83 Housing Investment Programme - Telford & Wrekin Homes

Councillor D Wright, The Cabinet Member for Economy, Housing, Transport and Infrastructure presented the report of the Director for Prosperity and Investment.

The report provided an update in relation to the Housing Investment Programme. The report updated on the acquisition of around 100 existing homes for affordable and private rent, presented branding for the scheme and sets out proposals for increasing the scheme.

Telford & Wrekin Homes builds on the strengths of Nuplace. The objectives of Telford & Wrekin Homes were to protect existing housing stock, to raise standards in the private rented sector and to provide a range of housing options for priority groups in the Borough, for example care leavers and veterans.

Members welcomed the report and stated that the scheme would help to build communities. Members noted that they received complaints regarding poor landlords, although there were many excellent landlords in the Borough.

In response to a question from the Conservative Group Leader, The Cabinet Member for Economy, Housing, Transport and Infrastructure stated that the valuer appointed was to provide a starting point valuation. Telford & Wrekin

Homes, as well as Nuplace, needed to provide a balance between providing market rent and affordable properties as the schemes needed to be sustainable long term.

RESOLVED that –

- a) the progress made to date in relation to Telford & Wrekin Homes and the acquisition of the first tranche of properties be noted**
- b) the branding proposals for Telford & Wrekin Homes be approved.**

CAB-84 Telford & Wrekin Council Digital Strategy

Councillor R A Overton, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Community Safety and Customer Services presented the report of the Director of Communities, Customer and Commercial Services. The report sought approval for a new Digital Strategy.

The strategy was set into 4 themes; digital customers, digital communities, digital place and digital workforce. The strategy aimed to maximise the potential of digital technology in how the Council communicated and interacted with residents, customers and partner organisations, whilst recognising that not everyone is able to access digital methods. The Council would always be accessible to everyone.

Members welcomed the report, in particular the inclusion of those for whom digital methods were not easy, it was noted that this was not just the elderly population, but those who were on low or modest incomes could struggle to access the internet. The Council offered free wifi in community centres.

RESOLVED that –

- a) the new Digital Strategy attached at Appendix A of the report be approved**
- b) authority be delegated to the Director: Communities, Customer and Commercial Services (and any officer authorised in writing by this director) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Community Safety and Customer Services to take the necessary steps to implement these recommendations.**

The meeting ended at 11.02 am

Signed for the purposes of the Decision Notices

Anthea Lowe

Associate Director: Policy & Governance
Date: **Wednesday, 16 JUNE 2021**

Signed

Date: Thursday, 8 July 2021