

Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Thursday 26 January 2023 at 1.00 pm

Cabinet Members Physically Present and voting: Councillor David Hitchiner, Leader of the Council (Chairperson)
Councillor Liz Harvey, Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairperson)

Councillors Ellie Chowns, Pauline Crockett, John Harrington, Diana Toynbee and Ange Tyler

Cabinet Members in remote attendance Councillors Gemma Davies

Cabinet members attending the meeting remotely, e.g. through video conferencing facilities, may not vote on any decisions taken.

Cabinet support members in attendance Councillors John Hardwick and Kath Hey

Group leaders / representatives in attendance Councillors Terry James, Jonathan Lester, Bob Matthews and William Wilding

Scrutiny chairpersons in attendance Councillors Elissa Swinglehurst, Jonathan Lester and Louis Stark

Officers in attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Assurance, Corporate Director - Children & Young People, Corporate Director - Economy and Environment, Corporate Director Community Wellbeing and Head of Legal Services

192. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies from members of the cabinet.

193. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

194. MINUTES (To Follow)

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

195. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 7 - 8)

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 1 to the minutes.

196. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

There were no questions from councillors.

197. REPORTS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (To Follow)

Cabinet received two reports from the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee. The first on The Local Plan and the second on The Herefordshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. The chairperson of the committee presented the

recommendations and thanked all who had attended the meetings and contributed to the debate.

Cabinet noted the reports and confirmed that a response would be provided within two months.

198. 2023/24 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

Cabinet considered a report on the proposed council tax reduction scheme for 2023/24. The cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning introduced the report and explained that the proposed scheme maintained the 100% discount from the 2022/23 scheme and that a recommendation was required from Cabinet to put to the forthcoming meeting of the Council.

Cabinet members discussed the report and noted that:

- The scheme provides important support for households in need;
- The scheme is a complex document designed to meet the requirements of legislation but residents applying for support are guided through the criteria and there are a number of third party organisations that also help claimants to navigate the scheme;
- There is no hard and fast way to calculate the exact levels of need but information is gathered on numbers of existing claimants and from the Department of Work and Pensions on potential eligible households;
- There are a number of other support mechanisms in place for residents who do not meet the criteria of the council tax reduction scheme and residents who are struggling are always encouraged to contact the council for help.

Group leaders expressed support for the principle of the scheme which is vital for those households struggling.

It was resolved that:

- a) The Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24, with the same parameters as the existing scheme, be recommended to Council for approval.**

199. CONSULTATION OUTCOMES AND DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS

Cabinet considered a report on the proposed budget for 2023/24 and associated Medium Term Financial Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy for recommendation to Council at its meeting in February 2023. The cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning introduced the report and explained that the council is moving on from the worst of the pandemic but is now impacted by the cost of living crisis and high food and energy prices. The settlement from central government means that councils have to raise council tax by the maximum allowed.

The cabinet member summarised the key points of the budget proposal and it was noted that:

- Some councils across the country are struggling to set a balance budget, this is not the case in Herefordshire;
- The proposal is for an increase of 2.99% in general council tax and 2% increase for social care, the cabinet is very aware of the additional burden this places on residents;
- Financial support will be available for the worst off, in addition to the council tax reduction scheme, the budget proposes £1.7m of discretionary funding for other support;
- The budget seeks to continue to invest while providing statutory services and many discretionary services valued by residents;
- The cabinet have reflected on the results of consultation when putting the budget proposal together;

- The council's reserves meet the minimum required and earmarked reserves are set aside for a range of targeted activities.

The cabinet member thanked officers for their work in putting the budget proposals together, and scrutiny committee members for their consideration and recommendations.

Cabinet members discussed the report and highlighted key developments in each portfolio area.

Group leaders gave the comments and views of their groups. The level of settlement from central government was discussed and the delivery of savings challenged. Continued pressure on the childrens' services budget was noted and the importance of investment in infrastructure, the economy and the environment was highlighted.

The chairperson of the scrutiny management board was unable to attend the meeting but though the leader of the council expressed her thanks for the work undertaken in supporting scrutiny of the budget proposals and to the Cabinet for their prompt and positive response to the recommendations made.

It was resolved that:

Cabinet recommend to Council for approval:

- a) the council tax base of 71,073.11 Band D equivalents in 2023/24;
 - b) an increase in core council tax in 2023/24 of 2.99%;
 - c) an additional precept in respect of adult social care costs of 2% applied to council tax in 2023/24 resulting in a total council tax increase of 4.99%, increasing the band D charge from £1,701.70 to £1,786.61 for Herefordshire Council in 2023/24;
 - d) the balanced 2023/24 revenue budget proposal totalling £193.3m, subject to any amendments approved at the meeting, specifically the net spending limits for each directorate as at appendix C;
 - e) the revenue budget includes £4.0m for All Ages Social Care to fund edge of care and prevention services for all ages and the continuation of support for low income households;
 - f) delegating to the section 151 officer the power to make necessary changes to the budget arising from any variations in central government funding allocations via general reserves;
 - g) the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023/24 to 2026/27 at appendix A;
 - h) the Treasury Management Strategy at appendix D;
- and
- i) the responses to the scrutiny committee recommendations in the supplementary paper be approved.

200. 2023/24 CAPITAL INVESTMENT BUDGET AND CAPITAL STRATEGY UPDATE

Cabinet considered a report on the proposed capital investment budget for 2023/24 and capital strategy. The cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning introduced the report and explained that a recommendation was required from Cabinet

to put to the forthcoming meeting of the Council. New items for the capital investment budget have been selected on business need and ability to deliver.

Cabinet members discussed the report and it was noted that:

- There are strict rules for councils about the use of revenue funding and capital spend;
- External funding will be sought where available and appropriate.

Group leaders gave the views and comments of their groups, with the planned investment generally welcomed. It was noted that contingency funding has been allowed in each business case to cover a range of uncertainties, including inflation, but it is still challenging to mitigate the economic situation.

It was resolved that:

the following be recommended to Council

- a) To approve the proposed capital programme from 2023/24 attached at appendix C; and**
- b) Approve the capital strategy at appendix D.**

Cllr Gemma Davies left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.

201. BIG ECONOMIC PLAN

Cabinet considered the draft Herefordshire Big Economic Plan and accompanying initial five year delivery plan 2023 to 2028. The cabinet member environment and economy introduced the report and highlighted the range of projects the council has recently delivered to support businesses in the local economy. The economic plan sets out the ambition for where the county wants to get to by 2050, with a 5 year deliver plan which sets out the concrete steps towards delivery on those ambitions. The document is a collective strategy with engagement from a wide range of stakeholders and local businesses.

Cabinet members discussed the report and it was noted that:

- There has been good engagement and positive feedback from partnerships;
- The plan seeks to balance investment with planning for future growth;
- The plan will complement other documents such as the market town investment plans and work across the county to bring forward opportunities for rural areas.

Group leaders gave the views and comments of their groups. The document was broadly welcomed and it was noted that:

- The approach would have to be flexible to adapt to changes in central government policy and take advantage of opportunities as they arise;
- Investment in infrastructure is a key priority and while there are differences of opinion as to the best solutions, the council will continue to work with businesses.

It was resolved that:

- a) To approve the Herefordshire Big Economic Plan, and initial five year delivery plan 2023 to 2028;**
- b) To agree to the principle of creating a place-focused partnership board, with proposals to be developed for cabinet's consideration; and**
- c) To delegate to the Corporate Director Economy and Environment authority to agree minor typographical and presentational amendments prior to**

formal publication of the plan, subject to consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Economy.

202. APPOINTMENT OF CABINET MEMBERS TO THE SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE

Cabinet considered a report seeking nomination of four members of the cabinet to sit on the Shareholder Committee. The cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning introduced the report and recommended that the nominated cabinet members should reflect the relevant portfolio areas covering services currently delivered by Hoople. She explained that substitution arrangements are set out in the agreed terms of reference of the committee so that other cabinet members can substitute in the absence of one of the nominated committee members.

It was resolved that:

The following members of cabinet are nominated to be members of the Shareholder Committee:

- a) Leader of the council;**
- b) Cabinet member, finance, corporate services and planning;**
- c) Cabinet member, health and adult wellbeing; and**
- d) Cabinet member, commissioning, procurement and assets**

The meeting ended at 3.26 pm

Chairperson

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 26 JANUARY 2023

Question 1

From: Mr P McKay, Leominster
To: Cabinet Member, Infrastructure & Transport

May I please have an update on progress re an integrated highways, public rights of way and open spaces map viewable online, reference reply to question of 26 May?

Response

Unfortunately the work to produce the map as described has hit an issue in relation to the work required to pull the information into one map. As a consequence we will need to look at a bespoke map for which a significant amount of work to develop and implement is required. As an interim measure the Council will be adding links to the Open Space and Property maps on the map page. This will be implemented within the next couple of weeks.

Question 2

From: Ms Reid, Hereford
To: Cabinet Member, Children and Families

Please state the amount budgeted for the legal costs of the [Children and Young People] directorate (eg care proceedings).

Response

The costs budgeted for legal within the Children and Young People directorate budget is £125,000 for 2022/23; this is due to increase to £232,000 for the next financial year 2023/24.

For completeness, it should be noted that a significant proportion of the legal costs in respect of Children and Young People sit outside of the directorate. The budgeted costs, including staffing, for legal costs in respect of the Children and Young People directorate are £1,168,000 for 2022/23 and £1,340,000 for 2023/24.

Supplementary question

£1,572,000 (£232,000 + £1,340,000) is budgeted for the legal costs of the Children and Young People Directorate in 2023-24. The base budget for Early Help and Early Years combined is £1,437,000. Early Help is support to prevent children going into care. The base budget for Looked-After Children (LAC) in 2023-24 is £28,724,000. Herefordshire has a high rate of LAC. Placement Sufficiency is on the Corporate Risk Register. The rate of care proceedings in Herefordshire is about double England's and Statistical Neighbours' rates. Ofsted: "Some children are in pre-proceedings who do not need to be ..." Investing in supporting families and implementing statutorily recommended Family Group Conferences would reduce the high cost of LAC and care proceedings.

Please itemise the budget of £1,572,000. For example, the amount related to Children's Services and the amounts for care proceedings and litigation within Children's Services.

Response:

The response to your initial question noted the budgeted costs for 2023/24 for legal costs in respect of children and young people was £1,340,000; this figure was for the total budget

(included the budget which sits within the directorate – which is the £232,000) rather than an amount in addition to the budget held within the directorate. With apologies if this was not clear.

An itemisation of the 2023/24 budget is as follows:

Staffing	£807,997
External Fees	£300,000
Fees	£177,000
Translation & Interpretation	£40,000
Transport & Subsistence	£15,000
Total	£1,339,997

In respect of litigation, any claim for compensation is reviewed on its own merit and reparatory action is taken as appropriate. We currently do not have monies specifically budgeted for any potential future compensation claims.