

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 13 November 2014

Present

Cabinet Members:

Councillors	Izzi Seccombe	Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet
	Peter Butlin	Transport & Planning
	Les Caborn	Community Safety
	Jeff Clarke	Environment
	Alan Cockburn	Deputy Leader
	Jose Compton	Adult Social Care
	Colin Hayfield	Education & Learning
	Kam Kaur	Customers
	Bob Stevens	Health

Other Councillors:

Councillors Boad, Chattaway, N.Davies, Gifford, Hicks, Kondakor, Morson, Rickhards, Western, Whitehouse, Williams

1. General

(1) Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor June Tandy (Leader of the Labour Group) and Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group).

The Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet Councillor Izzi Seccombe informed the meeting that Councillor June Tandy had recently undergone an operation and was in hospital. Members expressed their best wishes for a speedy recovery.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2014 and Matters Arising

The minutes for the meeting held on 9 October 2014 were agreed as an accurate record for signing by the Chair. Under matters arising Councillor John Whitehouse informed Cabinet that the pilot 20mph scheme at Burton Green referenced in the final paragraph of item 2 in the minutes was now in operation. He expressed his satisfaction with the scheme and the way in which he was being kept informed of its effectiveness.

(4) Public Speaking

No requests had been made to speak.

2. One Organisational Plan Quarterly Progress Report April – September 2014

Councillor Alan Cockburn (Deputy Leader of the Council) informed Cabinet that the County Council was on course to deliver the One Organisational Plan. Work was being undertaken to reduce the age profile of the workforce and an underspend of almost £7 million was forecast for the year end.

Members welcomed the report commending the efforts being made particularly through the young apprentices scheme to attract younger people into the authority. Concern was raised over the reported revenue (variance) performance which was below target.

The relationship between forecast underspends, overspends and reserves was explored. It was noted that it was proposed to place £9.796 million into reserves for service delivery in future years. Members noted that significant overspending was currently being forecast in certain service areas and it was suggested that further consideration be given to whether some of the underspend would be required to cover this in the current year.

It was noted that 48% of key business outcomes are on target to be met for delivery of the One Organisational Plan. However members stated that they will seek assurance that additional efforts will be made to meet the outstanding 52%.

Concerning the Care Act 2014 the meeting was informed that it is essential that resources are protected to meet the cost of its implementation. It is expected that the Chancellor's Autumn Statement will provide more information regarding funding although the Local Government Association has expressed the view that it is unlikely that sufficient additional funding will be provided to cover the entire cost of implementation. Officers and members are working in partnership with other organisations to agree how to deliver on the Care Act and how best to use such funds that will be available.

The range of underspends and overspends was highlighted. It was suggested that whilst these reflect the current position they leave the authority in a vulnerable position and that what is needed is a degree of financial stability.

Major capital schemes such as those concerning transport infrastructure were cited as examples where it is important to robustly manage budgets. It is important that the Council avoids unnecessary borrowing when it has reserves it can call on. Contracts for major schemes are now agreed on a fixed price basis reducing the risk of schemes being delivered over budget.

Focusing on the forecast underspend in Early Help and Targeted Support (Page 4 of 9 of the report) Cabinet was asked what alternative sources of funding might be available to address it. In response the meeting was informed that the priority is to seek alternative means of service delivery. For example the proposed new AEN facility in Nuneaton will reduce the need to access out of county services.

In response to a question concerning the movement to reserves of £1.530m to cover interest rate rises Cabinet was informed that this assumption was based not on recent announcements from the Bank of England concerning short term interest rate stability but on the longer term when interest rates may rise.

The meeting was reminded that the conclusions of the recently completed peer review were that the County Council was performing well.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

- 1) Notes the detailed progress on the delivery of the One Organisational Plan as at the end of September 2014 as set out in Appendix A of the report;
- 2) Notes the overall progress on the delivery of the One Organisational Plan as summarised in section 1 – 3 of the report;
- 3) Approves the transfer of £9.796 million from 2014/15 budgets to Business Unit reserves to support the delivery of services in future years, as outlined in paragraph 3.2.1 of the report;
- 4) Approves the use of £1.785 million of reserves to support plans for the delivery of services in 2014/15, as outlined in paragraph 3.2.2 of the report;
- 5) Approves the revised capital payments totals and the revised financing of the 2014/15 capital programme as detailed in the table in paragraph 3.3.4 of the report; and
- 6) Requests that Corporate Board report back on proposals for how the position for those Business Units in deficit can be resolved both in the current and future years as part of the Quarter 3 One Organisational Plan Progress Report.

3. Adult Social Care Charging Review – Feedback and Recommendations

Councillor Jose Compton (Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care) commended the report and summarised its key elements.

In response to questions regarding opportunities for the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to engage in the review process Cabinet was informed that at several stages members were given the opportunity to comment either individually or on a committee basis.

Concerns were expressed that there appeared to be a period in the future between the introduction of the changes proposed and the implementation of the Care Act. During this period users would be significantly disadvantaged. Cabinet was assured that this would not be the case. Means testing was discussed with the meeting being informed that the financial position of service users is constantly reviewed to ensure fairness.

The differential between savings targets and their delivery by 2017/18 was explored (Para 10.2 – Page 67 of the report). The meeting was informed that as with any budget the situation will be reviewed if it does not appear the savings plan target will be met.

Resolved

- 1) That the consultation proposals are implemented in line with the proposed timetable, as detailed in Table 1 in Section 2 of the report, but that specific conditions are adhered to in how the changes are implemented in order to minimise the impact of the changes;
- 2) For customers who already have a financial assessment, and who would not see any changes in their payments, that they are informed that this does not change their payments now and explaining any circumstances in which it might change their payments in the future so that those customers understand the change in policy and that it does not affect them at this time;
- 3) For customers who already have a financial assessment and who would see increases in their payments, that they are informed, giving them at least 4 weeks' notice of the changes;
- 4) That customers who have not had a financial assessment have one arranged, and that the implementation of any charges for those customers do not begin until 4 weeks after they have been notified of the charge (which may be a later date than the 1st January 2015, depending upon when assessments can be done); and
- 5) That charging rates are updated annually to reflect full costs, including price inflation and other changes in costs, and that the actual rates for April 2015 would be adjusted for these factors.

4. Schools Sufficiency Strategy

Councillor Colin Hayfield (Portfolio Holder – Education and Learning) explained the process that had been followed in the preparation of the strategy highlighting the input of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee into it.

The assumptions made in the strategy concerning housing development particularly in Nuneaton and Bedworth were questioned. It was suggested that the number of houses forecast will not be built in the timeframe set out. This will impact on the demand for school places. This point was noted with Cabinet being reminded of the role of the Warwickshire Observatory in monitoring the rate of housing development.

Councillor Clive Rickhards declared an interest as a Governor at Mappleborough Green Primary School. He noted that the strategy focuses on schools and demand for places in Warwickshire observing that major development is proposed for Redditch and that it is likely that children from those new houses will wish to travel across border into Warwickshire for education. In response Cabinet was informed that the responsibility of the Council is to ensure that it is providing adequate school places in its area.

It was suggested that there is a disconnect between the rate of development of new housing and the planning of new school provision. Piece-meal planning should be avoided wherever possible.

Having agreed the Strategy the next stage will involve meetings schools and local members to discuss options.

Resolved

That Cabinet approves the amended Schools Sufficiency Strategy, set out in Appendix A of the report, as Council policy.

5. School Improvement Strategy

Councillor Colin Hayfield highlighted the three elements of the vision for education as set out in paragraph 1.3 of the report. Cabinet's attention was drawn to the gap between educational performance in the north and south of Warwickshire. In order to address concerns over school performance it will become increasingly important for the County Council to intervene with those concerns being referred to the Secretary of State as necessary. The meeting was reminded that gaps in attainment are not unique to Warwickshire. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee had previously considered the draft strategy challenging officers on issues such as resources and staffing.

The need for a balance between challenge and support was noted with the importance of involvement by local authorities in the running of schools being emphasised.

It was noted that schools (especially those at secondary level) face the challenge of needing to collaborate with each other whilst competing to attract pupils and their attendant funding.

Looking to the future Cabinet was informed that the next stage will be the implementation of the strategy with a review of schools where concerns exist. Where necessary, additional support will be provided to schools by the council.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

- 1) Adopt the vision for education in Warwickshire to deliver the priorities of the One Organisational Plan (as set out in paragraph 1.3 of the report) and
- 2) Approve the School Improvement Strategy subject to final changes being made by the Strategic Director for Communities in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder.

6. Bus Fares – Report of the Chair of Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Following introductory comments from Councillor Richard Chattaway (Chair of Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee) the meeting was informed of major disparities in bus fares across the county. Members were informed of those areas where bus operators hold a monopoly and they were reminded that whilst some train fares are lower than bus fares, train travel is heavily subsidised by government. It was agreed that any letter being sent to the Secretary of State should be from the County Council.

Resolved

That Cabinet approves the recommendation of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to make representations to the Secretary of State for Transport to express growing concern about the unaffordability of bus travel in Warwickshire

7. Findings of Project Arrow and the Evaluation of Collaborative Opportunities between Warwickshire and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

Councillor Les Caborn (Portfolio Holder – Community Safety) explained that the report before members marked the end of a stage in the process toward collaboration between the two fire services. Councillor Caborn explained progress to date regarding shared services and informed the meeting that there had already been secondments between the two services to share experience.

The meeting agreed that with the impending election in 2015 and the uncertainties surrounding that the project was at a good stage to pause before moving on.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

Notes the progress made to date and the recommendations which represent the detailed findings of the Project Team that are supported by the Joint Project Board and the Member Reference Group:

- 1) Supports the progression of an operational collaboration between the two Fire & Rescue Services under the direction of the two Chief Fire Officers and the Warwickshire Strategic Director for Resources;
- 2) Supports the continued exploration of greater collaboration between the two Fire & Rescue Services, working towards a strategic alliance light by late 2015 under the direction of the Joint Project Board;
- 3) Agrees to a report being submitted to the Joint Project Board in the summer of 2015 detailing the progress made;
- 4) Agrees that the Joint Project Board continue to meet biannually;
- 5) Agrees that work to date is shared with other key partners, notably Northamptonshire FRS, Shropshire FRS, West Mercia Police and Warwickshire Police with the aim of stimulating interest in wider collaboration; and
- 6) Confirms that no further work on Options 4 and 5 be progressed until the report submitted in the summer of 2015 has been considered.

8. Any Other Urgent Items

There were no items of urgent business.

9. Reports Containing Confidential or Exempt Information

Resolved

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items mentioned below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972.

EXEMPT ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION IN PRIVATE (PURPLE PAPERS)

10. Consideration of the Exempt Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet on 9 October 2014 and Matters Arising

The exempt minutes of the 9 October 2014 meeting were agreed as an accurate record. There were no matters arising from them.

11. Declare Surplus and Dispose of Mabels Farm Cottage, Ilmington, Shipston on Stour

Councillor Alan Cockburn explained the background to this proposal. Cabinet agreed to the disposal of Mabels Farm Cottage as set out in the exempt minutes.

The meeting rose at 3.23pm

..... Chair