

THE CABINET

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Library Meeting Room,
Taunton Library, on Wednesday 23 January 2019 at 10.00am.

PRESENT

Cllr D Fothergill (in the Chair)

Cllr M Chilcott
Cllr D Hall
Cllr D Huxtable
Cllr F Nicholson
Cllr F Purbrick
Cllr J Woodman

Junior Cabinet members:
Cllr G Fraschini

Other Members present: Cllr S Coles, Cllr H Davies, Cllr J Lock, Cllr T Lock, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr L Redman, Cllr B Revans, Cllr A Wedderkopp

Apologies for absence: Cllr C Lawrence, Cllr M Pullin

162 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – agenda item 2

Members of the Cabinet declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Member of a District, City/Town or Parish Council:

Cllr M Chilcott – West Somerset District Council
Cllr F Purbrick – Yeovil Town Council
Cllr John Woodman – Sedgemoor District Council

163 **Minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 19th December 2019** - agenda item 3

The Cabinet agreed the minutes and the Chair signed these as a correct record of the proceedings.

164 **Public Question Time (PQT)** – agenda item 4

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill noted that public questions would be considered as a part of the relevant agenda item.

165 **Proposed Capital Investment Programme 2019/20** - agenda item 5

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Mandy Chilcott introduced the report and made a number of points including: the Council is continuing to invest in schools, transport infrastructure, and supporting economic growth; the 2019/20 Capital Investment Programme included nearly £90m of investment; work to maximise external funding; and the potential for up to £52m of borrowing over the next 4 years.

The Cabinet proceeded to debate the report, points raised included: consideration of all available revenue streams for the schools building programme; external funding and the associated reduced reliance on

borrowing; and working with District Council's to maximise revenue from new housing developments.

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Mandy Chilcott responded to the points raised in debate, highlighting: the flexibility in the new schools building programme.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill opened the debate to other members present, points raised included: alternative funding sources; development in the Wilstock area of North Petherton and the associated availability of school places' the 'pot hole fund' and plans for utilising this funding; and new school developments in the east of the County.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill, the Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Mandy Chilcott the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Cllr John Woodman responded to the points raised, noting: the £84m Housing Infrastructure Fund bid; the Councils proposed Investment Strategy; proposed works on the A358, A367, A361 and A358; and details of the school developments in the east of the County.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill noted the importance of working with both District Councils and central government.

Following consideration of the officer report and appendices the Cabinet agreed and recommends to County Council:

- 1. Approval of the proposed capital programme for the period 2019/20 to 2022/23 of £224.121m, shown in Appendix A. Full details of individual schemes are available online as background papers. It is to be noted there is an existing programme approved in 2018/19 that overlaps with this one;**
- 2. That the Chief Executive and the Senior Leadership Team Officer, following appropriate consultation and after giving due regard to the information contained within any associated impact assessments, are given delegated authority to decide on the individual projects to be delivered within block allocations;**
- 3. That the Section 151 Officer is given delegated authority to accept any additional grants or funding that is made available to the County Council together with authority to consequently expand the approved capital programme, providing there are no negative revenue budget implications as a result of that action.**

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Mandy Chilcott introduced the report noting: the report details actual spend until the end of November 2018; the projected underspend; the contribution to the general fund reserve; the continued tight grip on the revenue budget; the 95% delivery of savings proposals; work to improve the Building Schools for the Future funding arrangements; and the robust action taken to address the Council's serious financial challenges.

The Cabinet heard from Nigel Behan who raised three questions regarding: the revenue budget and the associated equalisation reserve and reduction in assumed transformational costs; and the increases on the Children and Families operations and commissioning budgets.

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Mandy Chilcott responded to the questions, noting: details of the equalisation reserve; that staff exit support costs had been less than anticipated; and that increases in Children's Services budgets have largely been as a result of the increasing number of external placements for Children Looked After and the increasing cost of placements.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill opened the debate to other members present, points raised included: details of how the Building Schools for the Future funding agreement may be improved; and possible changes to the budget risk score (00043).

The Interim Director of Finance, Peter Lewis, responded to the points raised in debate, noting: PFI funding agreements amendments were common practice; and potential improvements to risk score 00043.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill noted: the difficult decisions which have been taken; the projected underspend; the use of one-off monies; and the need for fairer funding for Somerset.

Following consideration of the officer report and appendices the Cabinet:

- 1. Commented on the contents of this report and particularly notes the progress being made with controlling the budget for 2018/19, including the intention to partially replenish earmarked and General Fund reserves to improve the resilience of the Council for future years;**
- 2. Supported the use for urgency and agreed the expansion of the Capital Investment Programme to incorporate the recently announced additional funds from the Department for Transport for Local Highways Maintenance.**
- 3. Delegated to the Council's Chief Finance (S151) Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources, the authority to sign a new Building Schools for the Future Public Finance Initiative (PFI) contract on behalf of the Council if the evidence shows that it will be a long-term benefit to the Council. See paragraph 2.9**

Note – the Chair of Scrutiny Committee for Policies and Place has agreed the case for urgency for the decision relating to recommendation 2 to enable that decision to be taken by Cabinet and reported to the next meeting of Full Council.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

167 **National Funding Formula for Schools and High Needs 2019/20 – agenda item 7**

The Cabinet Member for Education and Transformation, Cllr Faye Purbrick introduced the report, noting: her thanks to officers and the Schools Forum; the complex process and formula; and that if Somerset were funded at the national average level this would result in a 4.5% increase.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Cllr Frances Nicholson added to the points raised by Cllr Purbrick highlighting the potential £8m increase in funding if Somerset were funded at the national average level.

The Strategic Finance Manager – Adults, Health and Children's, Elizabeth Watkin added to the points raised by the Cabinet Members, noting that the Department for Education was moving to a hard National Funding Formula.

The Cabinet proceeded to debate the report, points raised included: the importance of continuing to lobby government regarding fairer funding; the historic layering of previous funding systems; the Comprehensive Spending Review; the F40 group of lowest funded authorities; and deprivation and rural poverty.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Cllr Frances Nicholson noted changed to High Needs Funding and the child's legal right to support.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill noted the importance of working with the F40 group regarding fairer funding and requested the Director of Children's Services and Director of Corporate Affairs prepare a presentation to given to local MP's.

Following consideration of the officer report the Cabinet resolved to:

- 1. Approve the allocation of Dedicated Schools Grant for delegation to Somerset Schools and High Needs provision, including Academies and Free Schools.**
- 2. Devolve approval of the final formula allocations at individual school level for 2019/20 (total allocation received 17 December 2018) to the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, the Cabinet Member for Education and Transformation and the Cabinet Member for Resources.**

3. **Request the Cabinet Member for Education and Transformation and the Cabinet Member for Children and Families write to the relevant Secretary(s) of State to set out a request for additional DSG funding to be allocated to Somerset Schools and taken into account as part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review in 2019/20**

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

168 Admission Arrangements for Voluntary Controlled and Community School 2020/21 – agenda item 8

The Cabinet Member for Education and Transformation, Cllr Faye Purbrick introduced the report, noting: there was no change to the previous admissions policy; and the Council was good at ensuring children were offered their first choice of school place.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill raised questions about the potential for delayed school entry and how it impacted on parents and children. He asked that information regarding this and where parents could find out more be included within the admission arrangements and the council's website.

The Service Manager – Access Admissions and Entitlements, Jane Seaman responded, noting that: some schools continue to offer staggered entry, but the Council inform parents that they can request a full-time school place; and that if parents are unhappy with their child's proposed entry arrangements they should raise directly with the relevant school.

Following consideration of the officer report the Cabinet agreed the determination of the Admission Arrangements for all Voluntary Controlled and Community Schools for 2020/21 as set out in this report, noting that there are no proposed amendments as the current arrangements are fit for purpose.

169 Any other urgent items of business – agenda item 9

There was no other business.

(The meeting ended at 11.10pm)

CHAIR