

## THE CABINET

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the JMR, The Deane House, Taunton at 10.00am on Wednesday 18th December 2019

### PRESENT

Cllr D Fothergill (in the Chair)

Cllr M Chilcott

Cllr D Hall

Cllr D Huxtable

Cllr C Lawrence

Cllr F Nicholson

Cllr F Purbrick

Cllr J Woodman

Junior Cabinet members:

Cllr G Fraschini

**Other Members present:** Cllr A Groskop, Cllr M Keating, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr T Munt, Cllr A Wedderkopp

**Apologies for absence:** Cllr M Pullin

#### 234 **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 J Woodman – Sedgemoor District Council

#### 235 **Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2019** - agenda item 3

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

#### 236 **Public Question Time (PQT)** – agenda item 4

The Committee heard from Mr John Hassell speaking on behalf of Mr David Redgewell who raised a number of points regarding the Climate Change Emergency and the connection with public transport.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill, requested that the Council's best wishes are passed to Mr Redgewell.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Community

Infrastructure responded to the points raised, noting: the evidence-based approach being adopted by the Council; and reviewing the role public transport can make to reducing carbon emissions.

The Committee heard from Mr Nigel Behan who raised a number of questions regarding: the Climate Change Emergency Framework and the Medium Term Financial Plan Strategy.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure, Cllr David Hall and the Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Mandy Chilcott responded to the points raised, noting: the social value procurement framework which is currently being drafted; and levels of earmarked reserves.

## 237 **Climate Emergency Framework** – agenda item 5

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure, Cllr David Hall, introduced the report, noting: the importance of fully considering the Council's role; that Somerset County Council cannot solve the emergency alone; the importance of consultation; and the importance of ensuring resources are utilised to the maximum effect.

The Economic and Community Infrastructure Commissioning Director, Michele Cusack added to the points raised by Cllr Hall, highlighting: the importance of the consultation process; the importance of consultation including businesses and young people; the proposed timescales for the completion of the strategy; and the role of the County and District Councils.

The Cabinet proceeded to debate the report and invited comments from other members present. Points raised included: the Council's roadshow bus; the role of the Youth Parliament; links to the Improving Lives Strategy; and engagement with Parish Councils.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill, highlighted the recommendations as detailed in the report

**Following consideration of the officer report and discussion the Cabinet approved:**

- 1. Endorsed the draft Climate Emergency Framework document for consultation and the approach to its delivery through the workstreams**
- 2. Endorsed the timeline for development of the full Climate Emergency Strategy**
- 3. Endorsed the proposed consultation activities**
- 4. Notes the risks in**

**item 7 below and the challenges to delivery in section 6 of the Framework document.**

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

238 **Review of the Councils Scrutiny Function** - agenda item 6

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill introduced the report and highlighted: the importance of effective scrutiny; joint scrutiny including the Police and Crime Panel, Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel, and the Somerset Rivers Authority Scrutiny Panel; the Centre for Public Scrutiny report; and that the Council's three Scrutiny Committees had been consulted and supported the recommendations.

The Council's Monitoring Officer, Scott Wooldridge, added to the points raised by Cllr Fothergill, highlighting: the cultural programme of change required; the additional support requirements; looking for best practice elsewhere; training requirements; and officer support.

The Cabinet proceeded to debate the report and invited comments from other members present. Points raised included: the availability of bespoke training; the importance of ensuring training is undertaken by all members; the importance of Scrutiny; pre-scrutiny work; officer support requirements; mandatory training; and the cultural transformation required.

The Monitoring Officer, Scott Wooldridge, responded to the points raised, noting: the Centre for Public Scrutiny offer training; and recognition of the importance of appropriate levels of officer support.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill noted the importance transforming Scrutiny within the Council and highlighted the recommendations as detailed in the officer report.

**Following consideration of the officer report and discussion the Cabinet recommended to Full Council:**

- 1. that the Council agrees to implement a transformation and improvements to its scrutiny arrangements by March 2021, including the provision of additional resources in the Democratic Services Team and members training budgets to deliver the**

- enhanced scrutiny arrangements;**
- 2. the approval of 10 of the 11 recommendations within the Centre for Public Scrutiny's 'Supporting governance, scrutiny and member support in Somerset County Council' report as detailed on pages 9 and 10 of Appendix A and for these to be implemented by March 2021. In line with Scrutiny recommendations, the Cabinet is asked to endorse an alteration to Recommendation 6 within the CfPS report and recommend that the number of agenda items is limited to an absolute maximum of 4, rather than the 2 as currently recommended;**
  - 3. approval to the 11 recommendations within the Centre for Public Scrutiny's 'Supporting governance, scrutiny and member support in Somerset County Council' report as detailed on pages 9 and 10 of Appendix A and for these to be implemented by March 2021;**
  - 4. that it receives a progress report on the improvements and review of scrutiny arrangements by November 2020.**

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

239 **Medium Term Financial Plan (2020 – 2023) Strategy** – agenda item 7

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Mandy Chilcott introduced the report, noting: the long-term approach being adopted; a focus on forward planning; the journey of financial recovery; the sustained effort required; the heightened level of transparency; increased engagement including all member briefings; the fair funding review; the business rate review; Governments consideration of Council Tax precept changes; that budget details would be brought to the January Scrutiny Committees; the increased levels of reserves; the modest shortfall in future budget projections; and that there were no new savings proposals were being brought forward.

The Interim Finance Director, Sheila Collins added to the points raised by Cllr Chilcott, noting: the publication of CIPFA financial resilience guidance; the increase in the levels of reserves held by the Council; and that growth in the Council tax base remained unknown.

The Cabinet proceeded to debate the report and invited comments from other members present. Points raised included: the general election; the importance talking to central government; the importance of guaranteed funding; the importance of maintaining the focus on the South West; ensuring the South Wests' voice is strong enough to challenge the north of England; ensuring the region speaks with a single voice; and the difficult financial decisions which the Council took in September 2018.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill, noted the small budget gaps for years 2 and 3, and proceeded to highlight the recommendations as detailed in the officer report.

**Following consideration of the officer report and discussion the Cabinet:**

- 1. Recognised the strengths of this financial strategy for Improving the Lives of Residents in Somerset.**
- 2. Approved the Medium-Term Financial Strategy as a basis for developing the revenue and capital budgets for the next three years (2020-23) for consultation with businesses and Scrutiny Committees in January / February 2020 ahead of consideration by Cabinet and Full Council in February 2020.**
- 3. Endorsed the proposed improvement to long term financial resilience and sustainability achieved through this strategy.**
- 4. Recognised that more could be done if Government allocated more funding on a fairer basis according to rising needs, and therefore endorse further lobbying of Government for:**
  - a. the new Social Care Grant funding (£1bn nationally) to become permanent;**
  - b. delivering a multi-year Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) that recognises rising service needs and removes the currently uncertainty for Government funding beyond 2020/21, and;**
  - c. the necessary additional resources and flexibilities that are likely to be required to support the delivery of Somerset's Climate Emergency Strategy priorities in due course.**

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report.

240 **Investment Strategy** – agenda item 8

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Mandy Chilcott introduced the report, noting: the report outlines options for investments and potential additional income; building long term cash investments; strategic investments; a diversified portfolio; and ensuring the maximum value from assets including potential sale values and income streams.

The Interim Finance Manager, Sheila Collins added to the points raised by Cllr Chilcott noting: £6m of strategic investments; making decisions over a period of time to mitigate market volatility; and changes in PWLB loan rate changes resulting in more marginal financial gains.

The Cabinet proceeded to debate the report and invited comments from other members present. Points raised included: the importance of updating or disposing of property assets.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill noted: the importance of not exposing the Council to the commercial market and the importance of considering the Council's current property assets including County Hall C Block. Cllr Fothergill proceed to highlight the recommendations as detailed in the officer report.

**Following consideration of the officer report and discussion the Cabined endorsed and recommended that Full Council agrees to:**

- 1. Build on its current Treasury Management investment activities to generate higher returns, protect against inflationary risks, sustaining a prudent balance of risk and reward.**
- 2. Pro-actively consider options for further investing in existing Council owned property to optimise the value from these assets.**
- 3. Consider other investment opportunities that may arise from time to time subject to appropriate due diligence and governance arrangements being in place.**

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

241 **Management of Risk Pathway documents: Strategy, Policy and Process**  
– agenda item 9

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Mandy Chilcott introduced the report, noting: the suite of documents are used to systematically manage risk; only minor changes have been made to the documents; and the importance of good governance.

The Cabinet proceeded to debate the report and invited comments from other members present. Points raised included: the role of the Audit Committee; and ensuring appropriate resources are available.

In response to one of the points raised, the Chief Executive, Patrick Flaherty noted: the role of mitigatory work; and that sufficient resources were available.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill requested a further update be brought to the committee in a years' time and noted the recommendations as detailed in the report.

**Following consideration of the officer report and discussion the Cabinet endorsed the Management of Risk Pathway documents and recommend approval and adoption as part of the Council's Governance arrangements.**

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

## 242 **Revenue Budget Monitoring – Month 7** – agenda item 10

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Mandy Chilcott introduced the report, noting: seasonal risks including Adult Social Services and highways; the variances detailed in Appendix A; £6.4m of contingency remained unallocated; 98.9% of MTFP savings were on track to be delivered; and that feedback on the report format would be welcomed.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill noted the Children's Services overspend. In response the Director of Children's Services, Julian Wooster, highlighted that there were insufficient foster care placements in Somerset.

The Cabinet proceeded to debate the report and invited comments from other members present. Points raised included: the Dillington House budget position.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr David Fothergill noted that the Council was managing well within its overall budget. Cllr Fothergill further thanked staff

for their work.

**Following consideration of the officer report and discussion the Cabinet:**

- 1. Noted the forecast balanced position for the Council for the end of 2019/20.**
- 2. Noted that £6.399m of the corporate contingency remains unallocated.**
- 3. Noted the forecast favourable position of -£0.792m for Accountable Bodies (LEP/SRA) for the end of 2019/20.**
- 4. Noted the delivery of £18.093m savings by Month 7 and the forecast delivery of £21.314m by the year end of the total target of £21.547m.**

243 **Any other business** – agenda item 11

There was no other business.

(The meeting ended at 11.22am)

**CHAIR**