

Cabinet

25 July 2023 – At a meeting of the Cabinet held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Present: Cllr Marshall (Chairman)

Cllr Crow, Cllr J Dennis, Cllr Hunt, Cllr A Jupp, Cllr Russell, Cllr Urquhart and Cllr Waight

Apologies were received from Cllr Lanzer

Also in attendance: Cllr Burrett (virtually), Cllr Baldwin (virtually), Cllr Wall (virtually) and Cllr Boram (virtually)

Part I

8. Declarations of Interest

8.1 No declarations of interest were made.

9. Minutes

9.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2023 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

10. Update on Council Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy

10.1 Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Finance and Support Services and Director of Law and Assurance. The report was introduced by Cllr Jeremy Hunt, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property, who outlined the high-level medium-term look at the Council's financial position, an early indication of the challenges faced and a refresh of the Council Plan. Work is underway to identify how the budget gap can be closed. The Director of Finance and Support Services added the assumptions in the report will be kept under review as the year progresses and outlined key risk areas such as changes to government funding and various government reforms. The Medium Term Financial Strategy looks over five years with an increased focus on 2024/25 and 2025/26.

10.2 Cllr Kevin Boram, Chairman of the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee welcomed the approach in developing the budget and the longer-term planning. He explained the critical role of the Fire and Rescue Service and the broad issues contained within the Community Risk Management Plan and the need to ensure its effective and efficient delivery.

10.3 Cllr Andrew Baldwin, Vice-Chairman of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee recognised the challenges faced by the service, particularly in demand and complexity of placements for children looked after and the increased demand for

Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP). The committee welcomed the introduction of funding for schools at 20 weeks for those awaiting an EHCP. Cllr Baldwin noted the recovery plan for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), the increase in SEND places and Special Support Centres in mainstream schools and improved performance for those not in education, employment or training.

- 10.4 Cllr Garry Wall, Chairman of the Health and Adult Social Care Committee said the report recognises excellent work and identifies challenges in responding to demand, such as an increased population of older residents. Cllr Wall outlined funding as a core issue and that clarity on this is needed to support the workforce challenges and the expected social care reform.
- 10.5 Cllr Richard Burrett, Vice-Chairman of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee supported sight of the Council Plan refresh and MTFs at an early stage. He noted that major corporate projects will be considered by the Committee going forward and outlined key risks for the Council such as climate change plans, recruitment and the delivery of savings. Cllr Burrett discussed the reserves and asked how these will be replenished.
- 10.6 The following points were made by Cabinet Members in discussion:
- Cllr Paul Marshall, Leader of the Council outlined three key challenges over and above business as usual; the lasting consequences of Covid-19, the cost of living situation and the conflict in Europe and discussed the associated impacts of these on residents and businesses. Cllr Marshall highlighted the 9.4% population increase compared to neighbouring authorities and the significant impact on demand for services as a result. The Leader set out the role of the budget to deliver the Council Plan and its priorities, underpinned with protecting the environment and that forward planning begins to address the budget gap and helps to focus resources for those who need the most support.
 - Cllr Joy Dennis, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport explained the significant pressures the service has to manage alongside resourcing issues. There remains a significant backlog of maintenance works and future capital funding discussions will be important.
 - Cllr Jacquie Russell, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Learning and Skills set out the importance of partnership working in order to support care leavers and explained the volatility of the external residential market. The service continues to face recruitment challenges however the project to recruit social workers internationally has gone well with 32 new starters. In education the pressure on the high needs block remains but the Cabinet Member hoped to report an improved picture in coming months on the recovery plan. A bid for funds to improve SEND services is being submitted to government.
 - Cllr Duncan Crow, Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue welcomed proposals for making future savings including maximising digital technology. He also welcomed exploring options

to maximise and find new income streams. The Fire Service is achieving well through its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

- Cllr Amanda Jupp, Cabinet Member for Adults Services welcomed the report and outlined the number of uncertainties in the portfolio which will impact planning. She highlighted the pressure on the social care market, on the workforce and short-term funding. The care system remains under pressure but close collaboration with partners is helping to mitigate the challenge. Work is underway to deliver the Adults Services Improvement Plan.
- Cllr Steve Waight, Cabinet Member for Support Services and Economic Development noted the need for all portfolios to consider efficiencies and highlighted the good track record in the delivery of savings. He updated on the progress of change programmes which were substantial and complex. The Cabinet Member advised of the work to recruit and support staff and he stressed the importance of a professional workforce.
- Cllr Deborah Urquhart, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change explained the challenge of future funding and the risks of inflation and delivery of savings. Plans are awaited from government for separate food waste collections and the Council continues to seek funding for its decarbonisation work.

10.7 Cllr Hunt summarised that lobbying of Government for funding will continue but, in view of the varied and increasing pressures, additional resources may be unlikely. Cllr Hunt thanked Cabinet Members and teams for operating within budgets but emphasised the need to continue to drive out savings in order to balance the budget. A further update on the MTFs will come to Cabinet in the Autumn.

10.8 Resolved – that Cabinet note the report.

11. West Sussex Digital Infrastructure Strategy 2023-2030 (CAB04_23/24)

11.1 Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Place Services. The report was introduced by Cllr Steve Waight, Cabinet Member for Support Services and Economic Development who outlined the purpose and audience for the report, including those businesses who use digital technology, District and Borough Councils, universities and central government. The report set out the work and ambitions for the Digital Infrastructure Strategy and the many opportunities greater connectivity for residents and businesses can bring. The Director of Place Services added the document contributed to the Council's wider Economic Strategy and the importance of a digital infrastructure.

11.2 Cllr Richard Burrett, Vice-Chairman of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee welcomed the report as an innovative way forward with many potential opportunities. Cllr Burrett questioned how performance and progress will be measured and when and how those in rural communities could expect to receive the same level of digital service as those in more urban areas. He questioned whether

greater funding is required to lay fibre in hard to reach rural areas and whether there is reluctance from investors for such projects.

11.3 The following points were made by Cabinet Members in discussion:

- Cllr Paul Marshall, Leader of the Council welcomed the strategy and the need to ensure that connectivity is future ready. He highlighted the challenges for rural communities, businesses and residents and how important the strategy is to these areas. He discussed the need for an excellent digital infrastructure to underpin and deliver ambitions and the Council's role in removing barriers for commercial investment. He added the social, environmental and cultural benefits of technology to support communities and unlock opportunities.
- Cllr Amanda Jupp, Cabinet Member for Adults Services commended the team on the Strategy and emphasised the importance for the economy's growth for residents. Cllr Jupp said that improved mobile connectivity will be important and useful in agricultural and horticultural sectors which occupy rural areas.
- Cllr Duncan Crow, Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue welcomed the strategy and explained the importance for the Council to be with or ahead of the curve in digital advancements. He felt the strategy linked well with the Council Plan priorities particularly in helping people and communities to fulfil their potential.
- Cllr Joy Dennis, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport commended the Strategy and gave an example of the success it has achieved already with a better connected broadband scheme for a local business.

11.4 Cllr Waight summarised that targets and KPIs are available and progress will be monitored. He said the Strategy will develop as things move forward and agreed with the need for the Council to keep up to date and to continue to be innovative in the digital space as Artificial Intelligence and the Internet of Things (IoT) develops rapidly.

11.5 Resolved – that Cabinet endorses the West Sussex County Council Digital Infrastructure Strategy 2023-2030.

12. Date of Next Meeting

12.1 The next meeting of Cabinet will be held on 12 September 2023.

The meeting ended at 11.53 am

Chairman