

Cabinet

30 January 2024 – 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 Lanzer, Cllr Russell, Cllr Urquhart and Cllr Waight

Also in attendance: Cllr Britton, Cllr Montyn, Cllr Boram (virtual), Cllr Oxlade (virtual) and Cllr Wall (virtual)

Part I

30. Declarations of Interest

30.1 No declarations of interest were made.

31. Minutes

31.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2023 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

32. Council Plan and Draft Budget 2024/25

32.1 The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Finance and Support Services and Director of Law and Assurance (copy appended to the signed minutes).

32.2 The Leader introduced the report and highlighted that the budget delivered the Council Plan which contained the key priorities for the council. There had been significant growth in demand for services, particularly social care. There had also been a rise in inflation, and challenges with recruitment. Public consultation showed a majority of support for the priorities. Despite the financial pressures, key work was continuing such as keeping children safe and with their families wherever possible, school improvement journeys, library literacy activities and preventative works from the Fire & Rescue Service to keep people safe. Economic planning was also key, with the Council adopting the Local Enterprise Partnership work from April. This would include working with District and Borough councils on growth deals. The proposed budget makes good use of reserves and assets and delivers the best outcomes for residents. Despite the challenging environment, the County Council continues to invest in the economy and capital projects.

32.3 Cllr Hunt, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property, introduced the budget and confirmed that it had be prepared to support key priorities and front line services. It was confirmed that the gross spend for 2024/25 was calculated to be over £2bn. There were key government announcements to highlight. The first is the November statement and the increase in national living wage. The improvement this gave to workers was welcomed, but it added a financial impact to the budget that was an

estimated extra £6m. The second is the increase in funding of £14.5, which was welcomed to help soften the increase of front line services costs which had increased by £82m. The Government had also recently announced further funding of £500m for councils. It was anticipated that this would mean approximately £6m for West Sussex. An addendum would be made to the final County Council budget papers to consider this allocation. The conclusion by the Director of Finance and Support Services, reported satisfaction with the accounts and that the County Council was able to deliver its statutory duties without relying on reserves for revenue commitments.

32.4 Taryn Eves, Director of Finance and Support Services, confirmed that the budget had been prepared to reflect the challenging financial environment. Risks would need to be monitored, as well as all assumptions and forecasts concerning service pressures. It was confirmed that the recently announced additional funding from government would be carefully considered and proposals would be prepared in time for the County Council meeting. There was an expected impact on treasury management income due to the impact of the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) deficit as well as other factors. This impact would lead to external borrowing for the capital programme in 2025/26, rather than 2026/27 as originally planned. Reserves remained at a prudent level.

32.5 The Leader clarified the position on the DSG deficit, in that education provision should be covered by the Government. The demand exceeded the allocation which was causing an issue for all councils. Lobbying was being undertaken to address the impact of the deficit. West Sussex MPs were thanked for their support in this matter.

32.6 The following points were made by Scrutiny Committee Chairmen.

- a. Cllr Montyn, Chairman of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee, summarised the comments made by the committee which had been circulated as annex 4. A request was made that future budget reports outline the difference between statutory and discretionary services. Cabinet and officers were thanked for their attendance at the scrutiny meeting.
- b. Cllr Britton, Chairman of the Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee (CHESC), welcomed the transparency of the budget to reflect the challenges of adapting to the autumn statement. The increased spend on highways expenditure was welcomed. The proposed budget ensured that the three portfolios under CHESC's supervision would continue to deliver corporate priorities for West Sussex.
- c. Cllr Wall, Chairman of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee, noted the challenges for the savings targets. The extensive lobbying works had been welcomed. The report clearly showed how priorities were being delivered despite the financial challenges.
- d. Cllr Boram, Chairman of the Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee, noted that required key performance indicators had been met. The committee had recognised the preventative works to keep communities safe. The opening of Platinum House was welcomed.

32.7 The following points were made by Minority Group Leaders.

- a. Cllr Marshall noted Cllr Lord, Leader of the Liberal Democrat group, had sent apologies for the meeting but had passed on her thanks to Cllr Hunt and the finance team for their work on the budget.
- b. Cllr Oxlade, Leader of the Labour group, passed on thanks to the finance officers for their work on the budget.

32.8 The following points were made by Cabinet Members in discussion.

- a. Cllr Urquhart, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, noted that environmental commitments had been supported to combat the increasing impact of climate change. Previous work had reduced emissions by 10% over the last two years.
- b. Cllr Russell, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Learning and Skills, explained that there was continued commitment to meet the needs of vulnerable children. Plans were in place to address the high volume of health and care needs assessments. The outlined savings could be made through service efficiencies.
- c. Cllr Crow, Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue said that Platinum House would bring training opportunities to West Sussex firefighters, and income by offering training opportunities. Safe and well visits had achieved their target, and preventative works had led to reduced deaths and injuries. There would be a change in Record Office opening hours, but an increase in the offer of online services.
- d. Cllr Lanzer, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing, explained that the public health grant helped other portfolio activities such as safe and well visits, cycle safety schemes and healthy child programmes.
- e. Cllr A Jupp, Cabinet Member for Adults Services, noted that the growing population and Covid-19 had led to increased demand on the adults portfolio. Plans for social care improvements and Care Quality Commission assessment preparation had been outlined.
- f. Cllr Waight, Cabinet Member for Support Services and Economic Development, reported that service pressure increases were at risk of becoming unsustainable. He felt the proposed portfolio savings were deliverable with the move to efficient working practices. Capital programme successes included digital connectivity which had helped rural businesses.
- g. Cllr J Dennis, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, outlined the various activities covered within the portfolio. Investments were being made to highway improvements, and maintenance of carriageways, footways, signals and drainage. Works to improve bus usage were identified, such as the rural book a bus service. Portfolio promises were being delivered despite the tight budget.

32.9 Councillors in the meeting thanked Taryn Eves and the finance team for their hard work in preparing the budget and thanked all officers for their hard work in delivering services in ever demanding circumstances.

32.10 The Leader thanked everyone for their contributions and noted the significant demand for all services. The budget represented no service cuts, and savings via identified efficiencies. Investments were being made

in areas such as the environment, schools, and highways. The corporate priorities were being met, particularly to those identified as vulnerable.

32.11 Cllr Hunt gave reassurances that despite the identified challenges, the County Council was in a sound financial position. The Cabinet were recommended to endorse the report to County Council.

32.12 Resolved that the Cabinet endorse the Council Plan and the County Council Budget for 2024/25, as set out in Appendix A, including the recommendations listed on page 5 and Annex 1, the updated Council Plan as set out in Annex 1 (Appendix 8), the Capital Strategy set out in Annex 2(a) and the Treasury Management Statement set out in Annex 2(b), for approval by County Council on 16 February 2024.

33. Emerging Issues

33.1 The Leader confirmed there were no portfolio updates required.

34. Date of Next Meeting

34.1 The Cabinet noted that its next scheduled meeting will be held on 12 March 2024.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm

Chairman