

## **Cabinet**

18 October 2022 – 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 N Jupp, Cllr Lanzer, Cllr Urquhart and Cllr Waight

Apologies were received from Cllr Russell

Also in attendance: Cllr Montyn, Cllr Lord (virtual), Cllr Baxter (virtual), Cllr Johnson (virtual)

### **Part I**

#### **13. Declarations of Interest**

13.1 No declarations of interest were made.

#### **14. Minutes**

14.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2022 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

#### **15. Council Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy**

15.1 Cabinet considered a report by the Interim Director of Finance and Support Services. The report was introduced by Cllr Jeremy Hunt, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property who outlined the Council Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as the council's framework for business and financial planning and decision making. The Cabinet Member highlighted the progress made in the Children's Services and Fire and Rescue improvement programmes, the challenges faced by Adults Services and national pressures including the cost of living, inflation and recruitment challenges which are likely to impact on the budget and the delivery of services. The Cabinet Member thanked staff for their hard work in these challenging circumstances.

15.2 The report outlines key assumptions but uncertainty in future government funding makes budgeting difficult. The current gap is expected to be £5.6m after savings. It assumes the statutory licence which enables Local Authorities to keep the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit off balance sheets will be maintained for the next financial year. The Interim Director of Finance and Support Services further explained the assumptions and projections in the report and added that pressures may increase but will be kept under constant review as part of the budget process.

15.3 Cllr Pieter Montyn, Chairman of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee outlined the comments included those relevant

to the Quarter 1 Performance and Resources Report (PRR) and from the Committee's Business Planning Group. The Committee noted the council plan progress and reported the committee's desire to scrutinise any savings proposals in light of the national economic challenges. Points of concern included rising energy costs, the DSG deficit, Adult Social Care reform and recruitment and retention challenges. The Committee will want to be kept up to date in these areas. The Chairman reported the budget gap as commendably narrow but questioned whether it would remain this way. The Committee is interested to see how growth and risk are managed in the budget and the role of members within this.

15.4 Cllr Kirsty Lord, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group outlined the challenging national situation and the great level of uncertainty ahead. Cllr Lord hoped the statutory instrument for managing the DSG deficit would be extended and advised of the potential need to account for a higher level of inflation. Cllr Lord agreed with the need to continue to lobby for additional support, however felt that council funding is not a priority for Government. She raised the possibility of a higher level of Council Tax and the difficulties this may pose for households in the County with the backdrop of other economic challenges.

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

- Cllr Paul Marshall, Leader of the council highlighted the notable increase in the West Sussex population and the effects this has on future planning. The national context brings a higher risk to local finances and so prudence in how budgets are managed will be vital, as will ensuring a continued level of resilience.
- Cllr Nigel Jupp, Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills advised that West Sussex would not be alone in lobbying for an extension of the statutory instrument for the DSG deficit and additional support for pupils with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is planned, along with bids submitted to government for special free schools in the county.
- Cllr Steve Waight, Cabinet Member for Support Services and Economic Development highlighted the extensive work underway to transfer a number of IT functions to new systems and commended council staff involved. He also outlined the Smarter Working Programme developments. The council will continue to support local businesses where possible and develop new working arrangements with partners. The Capital Programme will focus on key areas including schools, highways and climate change.
- Cllr Bob Lanzer, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing noted the council's uninterrupted position of financial stability. Cllr Lanzer mentioned the review to the energy support scheme recently announced by government and suggested the review in April was sensible in view of seasonality and changes in energy consumption. He said the risk of COVID-19 remained, however this was significantly less severe with a substantially

vaccinated population. Cllr Lanzer encouraged engagement with vaccination programmes to protect residents and services.

- Cllr Amanda Jupp, Cabinet Member for Adults Services outlined that Adult Social Care reform posed additional costs in the region of £30-35m, and if this is not met by government it would have a significant impact on the budget. Demand in the service continued to be high, however robust triage systems were in place and resources would continue to be used to best effect. She advised the council was writing to the Minister for Care to seek confirmation on funding arrangements and whether reforms will go ahead as planned.

15.6 The Leader summarised that the Council Plan sets the context for the journey of council business and the review of its priority outcomes. The council's recently launched [cost of living website](#) offers information for those requiring help and support and he urged residents to connect with this. Cllr Hunt thanked Cabinet colleagues, the Finance team and all council staff. He outlined the ongoing commitment to deliver successful services whilst providing value for money for residents.

15.7 Resolved – that Cabinet:

1. Agree the existing priority outcomes and underpinning theme of the Council Plan remain unchanged as the basis for planning 2023/24 and beyond
2. Note the national context and level of uncertainty
3. Note the latest Medium-Term Financial Strategy and current financial projections.

## **16. Date of Next Meeting**

16.1 The next meeting of the Cabinet will be held on 29 November 2022.

The meeting ended at 11.27 am

Chairman