

Cabinet

Thursday, 14 November 2019

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Chair)
Councillor Peter Butlin
Councillor Les Caborn
Councillor Colin Hayfield
Councillor Jeff Morgan
Councillor Jeff Clarke
Councillor Andy Crump
Councillor Heather Timms

Officers

Others Present

1. General

(1) Apologies

(2) Members' disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

With reference to agenda item 6 – Education (Schools) Capital Programme 2019/20 Councillor Judy Falp declared a non-pecuniary interest as two of the schools in the report (Whitnash Primary and Champion) fall within her division. In addition, she is a Governor of Champion School.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2019 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

(4) Public Speaking

None.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet) welcomed Richard Ennis, the new Interim Head of Finance, to the meeting.

2. One Organisational Plan Quarterly Performance Progress Report - Period under review: April to September 2019

Councillor Peter Butlin (Deputy Leader – Finance and Property) introduced the published report and summarised key elements of it. He informed Cabinet that in the future the report will be presented in a different format. Councillor Butlin singled out good performance around delayed transfer of care, bed occupancy and the incidence of crime. The number of children looked after was noted to be higher than the target figure although the overall number had decreased slightly since quarter 1.

Members' attention was drawn to the table on page 13 of 19. Concerning fatalities on Warwickshire's maintained roads it was noted that the figures presented month on month are cumulative and not each month's figure. Concerning road safety Councillor Butlin stated that additional funds have been provided to support this and that the Warwickshire Road Safety Partnership has been reconvened.

Staff sickness levels continue to be a cause of concern. Councillor Butlin acknowledged that the current period of transformation has increased levels of stress amongst staff and recognised that this may have resulted in an increase in sickness levels. Turning to call abandonment rate it was explained that this has increased as a result of additional services (non-safeguarding calls to the MASH and Fitter Futures calls for Public Health) being taken on.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) echoed concerns over staff sickness levels. Improvements are required and it is to be hoped that a focus on healthy workplaces as acknowledged by the Director of Public Health will assist in this. Regarding the diagram on page 3 of the report Councillor Roodhouse observed that 77% of performance is static. With the transformation programme he hoped to see a shift to improvement in performance. In response Councillor Peter Butlin suggested that static performance indicates that targets are being met.

Resolved

That Cabinet notes the progress of the delivery of the One Organisational Plan 2020 for the period as contained in the report.

3. 2019/20 Financial Monitoring as at the end of September 2019 – Capital and Revenue

Councillor Peter Butlin introduced the report. Members' attention was drawn to the forecast overspend by the Communities Directorate with much of this falling under Education Services. It was however, noted that additional funding has been pledged by central government in recognition that shortfalls in education budgets are a national issue. The underspend in the People Directorate (para 3.2.5) serves to hide a trend of increasing demand for services. The figures presented reflect the timing of the provision of funding rather than offering a true reflection of demand and resource commitment.

Within Corporate Services and Resources (para 3.4.10) the two underspends resulting from additional business rate income and lower capital financing costs were highlighted. It was

particularly noted that the lower capital financing costs were the result of slippage in the capital programme and the level of unallocated Capital Investment Fund.

Reserves are forecast to increase to £164.495m. Councillor Butlin emphasised that a third of these are held for specific purposes and cannot be used to support the budget more generally.

Concerning slippage with capital projects Councillor Butlin noted that this is frequently due to factors beyond the control of the County Council.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse observed that some might regard the County Council's reserves as excessive at a time when more resources are being sought from central government. Councillor Roodhouse asked if there are any proposals to produce a strategic paper that could be sent back to central government explaining how reserves will be used and offering assurances that there is a plan for them. Regarding slippage with capital projects Councillor Roodhouse noted that investment by the council in securing the services of the right people could result in more rapid progress being made and corresponding savings being realised. He asked that a briefing paper be produced setting out the benefits or otherwise of such investment in additional staff or skills. In response to Councillor Roodhouse, Councillor Jeff Clarke (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) stated that additional resources have been made available to provide the correct levels of staffing. However, some key officers have left the organisation. Councillor Izzi Seccombe noted that there is a national shortage of town planners with many being drawn into the private sector working for developers.

Councillor Helen Adkins (Deputy leader of the Labour Group) reminded Cabinet that Council in May 2019 had agreed a motion concerning school deficits and a request that the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny consider a report on these. Councillor Adkins asked for that to be actioned. Regarding messages around increasing demand for adult social care and the reported underspend in the area Councillor Adkins requested more information on how these two (underspends and increased demand) are reconciled.

In response to Councillor Adkins' latter point Councillor Les Caborn (Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health) observed that demand for adult social care services is being met. However, there is a growing demand for mental health services. The net result is that there are underspends in some areas and overspends in others.

In conclusion, Councillor Butlin reminded members that a significant proportion of reserves is already allocated. The County Council is reviewing the risks that form the basis of the assignment of reserves to ensure that it is not double-counting them. In addition, a new strategy is being developed to govern how reserves are managed. Regarding the ability of the council to increase its staffing capacity, Councillor Butlin observed that it is restricted on what it can pay people.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the forecast underspend of £1.829m for the 2019-20 financial year on the Council's revenue budget;
2. Notes the forecast underspend on the capital programme of £12.113m; and

3. Approves the carry forward of the underspend on the capital programme of (£14.302m) in 2020-21 and future years and the changes totalling £2.189m to the cost and funding of schemes detailed in the report and Annexes A to M.

4. Treasury Management Monitoring Report

Councillor Peter Butlin explained the purpose of the report before members explaining that decisions on investments and returns are based on risk. In response to a question from Councillor Helen Adkins concerning “green” investments Cabinet was informed that these are considered but are high risk. The Council tends to invest cautiously but will invest ethically wherever it can.

Resolved

That Cabinet notes the report on Treasury Management activity and performance in respect of the first six months of 2019-20.

5. Capital Investment Fund 2019/20 Quarter 3

Councillor Peter Butlin introduced the report highlighting the significance of the projects proposed.

Members expressed their support for the proposed funding of the cycleways referenced in the report adding that enhanced cycling links with Coventry would fit well with the City of Culture initiative and Commonwealth Games. The merits of a county-wide cycle forum were acknowledged.

Councillor Andy Crump (Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety) welcomed proposals to support ICT investment in the Fire and Rescue Service and the installation of average speed cameras.

Concerning the Kenilworth to Leamington cycleway Councillor Clarke agreed to produce a briefing note for members explaining the engineering challenges to be met in its construction providing an idea of timescales involved.

Cabinet was reminded that the capital Investment Fund was the result of growth in the County. It is therefore important that the county’s economy continues to grow.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

1. Approve the allocation of £0.438 million from the CIF to construct a cycle route between Hinckley and Nuneaton and add to the Capital Programme;
2. Approve the allocation of £1.012 million from the CIF to construct a cycle route between Nuneaton and Coventry and add to the Capital Programme;

3. Approve the allocation of £4.749 million from the Capital Investment Fund and recommend to Council to approve £4.749 million for the Kenilworth to Leamington Cycle Route scheme and its addition to the Capital Programme;
4. Approve the allocation of £0.500 million from the CIF to fund a casualty reduction road improvement project at the junction of the A439 and Hatton Bank Lane and add to the Capital Programme;
5. Approve the allocation of £0.500 million from the CIF to fund a signalised junction casualty reduction scheme at the Green Man Crossroads, Coleshill and add to the Capital Programme;
6. Approve the allocation of £0.648 million from the CIF to fund additional costs not covered by the existing project budget for the Portabello Crossroads Signalisation casualty reduction scheme;
7. Approve the allocation of £1.322 million from the CIF to fund a three year programme of Historic Bridge Maintenance conditional upon additional funding being secured from the Department for Transport;
8. Approve the allocation of £0.821 million from the CIF to fund ICT investment to prepare the Fire Service for changes to the Emergency Services Network and add to the Capital Programme;
9. Approve the allocation of £1.764 million from the CIF to fund the installation of Average Speed Cameras on four identified routes in Warwickshire and add to the Capital Programme; and
10. Authorise the Strategic Director for Communities to procure and enter any agreements to give effect to the proposals in 1 to 9 on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources subject to Council agreement in relation to proposal 3.

6. Education (Schools) Capital Programme 2019/20

Councillor Colin Hayfield (Portfolio Holder for Education and Learning) introduced the report adding that future reports will be expected to include an environmental implications section.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

1. Recommends that Council approves the addition of £15,694,411 to the capital programme to deliver the schemes outlined in Section 3; and
2. Authorises, subject to the approval of recommendation 1 and Council agreeing to add the schemes to the capital programme, the Strategic Director Communities to invite tenders and enter into the appropriate contracts on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director Resources, or (where the scheme is school-led) to make the necessary funding arrangements for these schemes.

7. New Highways Management Information System

In introducing this report Councillor Jeff Clarke explained the imperative to replace the current system that has been in use for 20 years. The new system will bring benefits to officers as it will provide better information. In addition, it will assist with information to support bids for funding and it will provide better outcomes in terms of customer service.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the use of G-Cloud to procure a new Highways Management Information System, with a view to replacing the existing system by April 2020; and
2. Authorises the Strategic Director for Communities the authority to award and enter the final contract on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources.

8. Capital Investment in Nuneaton Town Centre

Councillor Izzi Seccombe explained that the project before members had been underway for around four years. It had been promoted at a number of events over that time and provided a clear statement of local authority intent to invest public money in projects that serve public need and promote inward investment. Cabinet was informed that the new public building in Nuneaton would provide a library, a business start-up centre and community hub. As well as being an asset for the town the building will provide a source of revenue for the Council.

Members expressed their support for the scheme. Councillor Jeff Morgan (Portfolio Holder for Children's Services thanked officers and members for their hard work in getting the project to this stage. Other comments made concerned the potential for the new building to attract inward investment whilst Councillor Clare Golby particularly welcomed that the building will include adult changing facilities.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse drew members' attention to paragraph 5.7 and the references to VAT. The challenges that this may present were noted as was the assurance in the report that officers will work to mitigate any risks arising from the tax situation.

Resolved

That Cabinet:

1. recommends Council approves the investment of £19,423,000 into the creation of a new public sector building in Nuneaton town centre using WCC Capital Investment Fund resources.
2. recommends Council approves the addition of the £19,423,000 scheme to the capital programme in financial years 2019/2020, 2020/21 and 2021/22 as per the profile shown in section 6.

3. authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to enter into any such contracts as may be necessary to deliver the new building on terms and conditions acceptable to Strategic Director for Resources.
4. authorises the first call on the revenue income generated (described in section 7.4) is used to re-pay reserves that may be needed to temporarily meet upfront project costs as detailed in the report.
5. notes and endorse the renewed Collaboration Agreement with Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council for the Vicarage Street Development Site.

9. Early Intervention, Prevention and Community Capacity Fund 2019/20 - Tranche 3 Allocations

Councillor Peter Butlin commended the two projects that were the subject of the report to Cabinet.

Resolved

That Cabinet approve two projects to be funded from the Early Intervention, Prevention and Community Capacity Fund at a cost of £144,000 as follows:

- Engaging Communities in wellbeing interventions – Grapevine (£46,000); and
- Bedworth Sports Club Multi-use facility development (£98,000)

10. Warwickshire's Heritage and Culture Strategy 2020 - 2025

Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Heritage & Culture) explained that the strategy before Cabinet was the result of extensive engagement and that it was particularly timely given the forthcoming Coventry City of Culture and the Commonwealth Games.

Councillor Colin Hayfield welcomed the strategy for helping to bring heritage into the mainstream.

Resolved

That Cabinet approves Warwickshire's Heritage and Culture Strategy for 2020-25.

11. Reduction of Single Use Plastic by Warwickshire County Council

Councillor Heather Timms reminded the meeting that Council had previously committed to explore ways to reduce its use of plastic. Members combined to express their support for the proposals set out in the report.

Resolved

That Cabinet approves the plans for reducing single use plastic as set out in section 3 of the report.

12. Use of Councillor Grant Fund 2018/19

Following introductory remarks by Councillor Heather Timms, Councillor Judy Falp expressed some concern at the alignment of the grants to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). Councillor Falp observed that the division she represents is diverse and that basing decisions primarily on the JSNA can cause difficulties in such areas.

Resolved

That Cabinet notes the use of the Councillor Grant Fund for 2018-19.

13. Rural Services Network's Campaign for a Rural Strategy

In introducing this report Councillor Peter Butlin emphasised the need to address rural isolation and to ensure that adequate services are provided to people living away from urban centres. Councillor Butlin emphasised the need to provide services that support people's mental health.

Councillor Colin Hayfield observed that the strategy could provide a vehicle for the development of the council's own rural community engagement programme.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe noted that the Fair Funding Review should take account of the additional cost of providing services in rural areas.

Resolved

That Cabinet approves Warwickshire County Council support for the Rural Services Network campaign to ask government to produce a national Rural Strategy.

14. Any Urgent Items

None.

15. Reports Containing Confidential or Exempt Information

Resolved

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items mentioned below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

EXEMPT ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION IN PRIVATE (PURPLE PAPERS)

16. Consideration of the Exempt Minutes for the 17 October 2019 Meeting of Cabinet

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2019 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

The meeting rose at 15.06

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Chair