

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

8TH FEBRUARY 2022 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: H E Dyke (Chairman), G W Ballinger (Vice-Chairman), N Martin, M Rayner and J W R Thomas.

Observers:

Councillors: M J Hart, I Hardiman and F M Oborski MBE.

Observed remotely: J F Byng and C Edginton-White.

CAB.59 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

CAB.60 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

CAB.61 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 9 November 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CAB.62 Call Ins

The Leader gave a verbal update on a decision that had been “called in” since the last meeting of the Cabinet.

The Leader advised that over the Christmas and new year period a call in had been submitted relating to the strong leader decision published on 22 December regarding car parking charges 2022-23.

She advised that the call in had been discussed and debated by members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 3 February. The call in did not receive the support required to implement the suggested items.

The Leader invited the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor M Hart to address the Cabinet. He said that a very interesting debate on the issue had taken place. He thanked the Chief Executive, Head of Resources and Head of Community and Environment Services for their written report and for answering questions at the meeting. He said that the Committee had agreed by a majority of 6 votes to 5 to support the Cabinet decision that already been taken.

On behalf of the Cabinet, the Leader thanked the members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for looking into the detail of the call in and welcomed their decision. She confirmed that the Cabinet would continue with their original decision.

CAB.63 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There were no items requiring urgent attention.

CAB.64 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

CAB.65 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022-2025 and Capital Strategy 2022-2032

A report was considered from the Head of Resources which updated Cabinet on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2022-2025 and made recommendations to Council on the proposed budget decision. The report also sought approval of the Capital Strategy for 2022-2032 including prudential indicators which set limits for non-financial investments and to fulfil the key requirements of the DLUHC Investment Guidance.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. She said that the report presented the Cabinet budget proposals to balance the books and included recommendations for both the Revenue budget and the Capital Strategy.

She added that achieving financial sustainability continued to be the Council's most significant challenge. She said this was being exacerbated by the sharp rise in inflation, currently running at 5.4%, and the pressure that it puts on pay and energy budgets.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio explained that the final settlement funding had been issued on 7 February and would be debated in parliament tomorrow. She said there was no significant changes from the provisional settlement which provided additional one-off funding for 2022-23 of £685,000 and disappointingly, no additional flexibility to allow the discretion for districts to approve slightly higher council tax increases without a referendum. She added that the new funding was however very welcome, but it would not fundamentally change the Council's funding position as the new funding was for one-year only. It does, however, provide a little more time to implement savings plans.

The Cabinet Member outlined the key points from the report. She said that the proposals set out how the budget can be balanced in light of the additional strains on council finances and have been shaped by public opinion. She added that the views of 789 residents who completed the council's annual budget consultation have been taken into account. She said rather than focussing on cutting services, the report continued with the significant

programme of work to consider options for how the council might deliver services differently in future to save costs and protect front line services. This could include joining forces to deliver services in partnership with other local authorities and organisations or reshaping how the authority delivered its services itself.

The Cabinet Member outlined the two proposals for reductions in discretionary services. She added that the Cabinet had carefully considered the alternative budget proposals and were sympathetic to providing funding for community groups to mark the unique Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen. She said that the Cabinet also concurred with the proposal to progress the development of the solar farm business case and advised that this would be funded from the existing Evergreen fund.

She said that the MTFS was set against ongoing uncertainty and resultant risk as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the delayed funding reform. She added that the ongoing service transformation to make the Council a smaller organisation whilst protecting front-line services, together with the two modest Cabinet Proposals would ensure the Council can go further, faster, to ensure financial sustainability. She said that this would not be easy and not all risk could be mitigated, however the authority would continue to work hard to build on the impressive track record of this Council to achieve the savings required whilst also protecting services as far as possible.

In conclusion, she said that the proposals represented a realistic way forward that will allow the authority to continue to balance the books in these challenging times.

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety seconded the proposals.

Decision: The CABINET having re-considered the Financial Strategy 2022-2025, the results of the Budget consultation exercise, alternative budget proposal and recommendations of the Strategic Review Panel RECOMMENDS TO COUNCIL that it:

- 1.1 THREE YEAR BUDGET, CAPITAL STRATEGY AND POLICY FRAMEWORK 2022-2025**
- 1.1.1 APPROVES the updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2022-2025.**
- 1.1.2 APPROVES the Cabinet Proposals – taking into account the impact on the Council’s Capital and Revenue Budgets for 2022-2025 as shown in the tables in paragraphs 6.1 and 6.3 and as set out below:**
 - a) Approval to close the small business grants scheme currently administered by North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration after March 2022. This would save £35k each year from 2022-23 onwards which will be utilised to fund additional resource in the NWEDR team**

to assist with delivery of the externally funded projects for the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) and the Levelling up Fund (LUF).

- b) Approval to end discretionary support of sport and leisure facilities from April 2023 namely, phasing out involvement in Bewdley Leisure Centre and Stourport Sports Club. This would save £38k each year from 2023-24 onwards.

1.1.3 APPROVES the fees and charges in line with this Strategy and in line with the recommendations of the Licensing and Environmental Committee of 6th December 2021, and the impact on the Council's Revenue Budget for 2022-2025, as shown in Appendix 3.

1.1.4 APPROVES the Council's updated Capital Strategy:

- a) Approval of the Capital Strategy 2022-2032 set out in Appendix 2 of the report including the associated Quantitative Indicators in Appendix 2 of the December Cabinet report.
- b) Approval of the Capital Programme and Vehicle, Equipment and Systems Renewals Schedule as set out in Appendices 1A and 1B, of the Capital Strategy report to December 2021 Cabinet.
- c) Approval of the limits for gross debt for non-treasury investments compared to net service expenditure and for commercial income as a percentage of net service expenditure as set out in Appendix 2 of the December report.

1.1.5 APPROVES that any Final Accounts savings arising from 2021-2022, together with surplus Earmarked Reserves, be allocated by the Head of Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio.

1.1.6 The General Fund Revenue Budget be APPROVED including all updates from the position in December 2021 as set out in the report.

1.2 COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES

- 1.2.1 a. SETS the Council Tax for Wyre Forest District Council on a Band D Property at £229.34 for 2022-2023 (£224.34 2021-2022) which represents an increase of 2.23% on Council Tax from 2021-2022.
- b. ENDORSES the provisional Council Tax on a Band D Property in 2023-2024 of £234.34 and £239.34 in 2024-2025, being increases of 2.18% and 2.13% respectively.

- 1.2.2 NOTES the Head of Resources (as Chief Financial Officer) opinion on the budget proposals, recommended by the Cabinet in the report, as detailed in Appendix 4 of the report.**
- 1.3 The Cabinet APPROVED that:**

 - 1.3.1 Delegated authority is given to the Head of Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital portfolio, to make any appropriate adjustments to the General Fund Revenue Budget recommended under paragraph 1.1.6 above, as a result of any further notifications from Central Government.**
- 1.4 The Cabinet NOTED in line with the recommendations of the Strategic Review Panel:**

 - 1.4.1 The Alternative budget proposals as detailed within Appendix 5 of the report, further noting that updated versions as appropriate will be provided for Full Council on the 23rd February 2022.**
- 1.5 The Cabinet NOTED that £5,000 has been allocated from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) for Jubilee events organised by community groups for activities that meet the purposes of the COMF grant.**

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 6.21pm.