

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

20 DECEMBER 2022 (6PM)

Present:

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

Observers:

Councillors: A Coleman, R H Coleman, N J Desmond, M J Hart, F M Oborski MBE and D Ross.

Observed remotely: Councillors: J F Byng, C Edginton-White and P W M Young.

CAB.33 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

CAB.34 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

CAB.35 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 7 November 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CAB.36 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 a call in had been received relating to the strong leader decision published on 14 November regarding the provision of electric charging infrastructure. She advised that the call in had been discussed and debated by members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 1 December. The Committee resolved to endorse the Cabinet decision to proceed with procurement of electric vehicle charging points.

CAB.37 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There were no items requiring urgent attention.

CAB.38 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

CAB.39 Cost of Living Action Plan

A report was considered from the Head of Strategic Growth which sought approval to the cost of living action plan 2022-23.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. She explained that the Council had worked to support households in economic distress for a number of years including through the use of the welfare assistance budget, Covid funding and more recently the Household Support Fund.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services further explained that at full Council on 21 September, Council decided an Emergency Summit should be held to explore how more local help could be provided for those struggling. She added that the summit was held on 13 October and was well attended by partners from across the district. The Action Plan had been developed following this meeting.

She added that the cost of delivering the plan mostly related to staff time and grant funding that was available to the council through the Household Support Fund which was approximately £207k. She said it was important for officers to target information at those who might not come forward for help.

The Cabinet Member thanked the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor M Hart, and the committee members for unanimously supporting the recommendation at their meeting on 1 December.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio seconded the proposal.

Decision: In line with the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from its meeting on 1 December 2022, Cabinet AGREED the Cost of Living Action Plan.

CAB.40 Car parking charges, 2023-2024

A report was considered from the Head of Community & Environment Services and the Chief Executive to decide car parking charges for 2023-24 having given consideration to the report and recommendations of the Car Parking Advisory Panel.

The Cabinet Member for Operational Services presented the report. He reminded members that Cabinet established the Advisory Panel in August, which had met three times during the autumn. He thanked the Chairman of the Panel, Councillor C Barnett and the Panel members for their work and detailed consideration of all the options relating to car parking.

The Cabinet Member explained that car parks were not free to run; costs included business rates, lighting, maintenance and marketing. He added that some car parks had a higher turnover than others, and as set out in paragraph 3.4 of the report, the accounts for the year 2021-2022 showed that after running and enforcement costs were deducted there was a net income of

almost £600,000. He further explained that the income was used in accordance with section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 which allowed the Council to improve and maintain the facilities that the general public had access to.

The Cabinet Member said it was very difficult to accurately estimate the impact of changes; the Council did not have any entry / exit barriers or any other means which would provide information on how long each user stayed in its car parks. He added that if changes were made to the charging structure, such as the time period for tickets, it would be impossible to know what proportion of users would buy tickets for shorter or longer periods than the authority had now. He said it was hoped that the recommendations from the Advisory Panel would be consistent with the income that was assumed in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). However as set out in the report, the overall effect produced a reduction in the Council's net income.

The Cabinet Member addressed each of the Panel's recommendation in turn:

Recommendation 1 – As a trial of cashless payments was forthcoming, it would be premature to accept this recommendation.

Recommendation 2 – Cabinet were invited to accept this proposal. The cost would be 70p which represented just over 60% of the one-hour charge.

Recommendation 3 – To demonstrate a willingness to help the evening economy, Cabinet were invited to accept this proposal. The cost of the ticket would be £2.

Recommendation 4 – This recommendation would be addressed in the acceptance of a £2 evening tariff.

Recommendation 5 – As set out in paragraph 4.10 of the report, there were a number of reasons why this proposal would be unsuitable, and Cabinet were asked to reject this recommendation.

Recommendation 6 – Acknowledging the fact that at peak times car parks in Bewdley ran at full capacity, Cabinet were asked to explore partnership working with other landowners in Bewdley.

In addition to the Panel's recommendations, the Cabinet Member proposed the scale of charges to be implemented on the 1 April 2023. The proposals included; a freeze on the season ticket prices that were made following significant changes made in April 2022, this would allow usage levels to continue to be monitored and for prices to be reviewed in due course for 2024; and a freeze on the car parking charges at the current price for a further 12 months. He said this was a modest but practical step that would ease the impact of inflation for local residents and support businesses in the towns which were feeling the impact of the increase in inflation and the subsequent less foot fall across the district. He said that freezing prices at current level would see the Council's income reduced by £50,000.

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

Decision: Cabinet AGREED:

a) the car parking charges for 2023-24 as set out in Appendix 2 of

the report, including freezing of existing charges and season ticket prices, and the introduction of a 30 minute ticket priced at 70p and a ticket for 6pm to 8am priced at £2.

- b) that officers should explore partnership options with other landowners in Bewdley town centre with a view to expanding public car parking provision.

CAB.41 ICT Strategy 2023-28

A report was considered from the Head of Resources / s151 Officer that provided information on the development of a new ICT Strategy to meet the future needs of the Council.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. She said that it was essential that the authority had an ICT Strategy that was fit for purpose to deliver an efficient and effective service to support, through technology, the aims and objectives of the Council.

The Leader of the Council seconded the proposals.

Decision: The Cabinet RECOMMEND to Council that:

- 1.1 **The sum of £1.60m is added to the Council's approved Capital Programme for the delivery of the ICT Strategy over the period 2023/24 – 2027/28.**
- 1.2 **The Head of Resources / S151 Officer in consultation with the ICT Strategy Board and Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio approves and implements the new ICT Strategy to meet the future needs of the Council as set out in 12.1 and 12.2 of the report.**
- 1.3 **Major expenditure will be subject to specific approval by the ICT Strategy Board and due diligence of business cases for each proposal.**
- 1.4 **That the financing of such loans be delegated to the Head of Resources / S151 Officer and that requisite amendments are made to the revenue budget to reflect potential financing costs and income streams to support the initial capital allocation in 1.1 above.**

CAB.42 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-26

A report was considered from the Head of Resources / s151 Officer that in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules and in line with the Wyre Forest Forward programme, provided the Cabinet with financial information in order to make proposals for the Budget Strategy for the period 2023-26.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. She said that the Council had done an excellent job at transforming over the past few years; services had been remodelled, savings made, and more income generated. She said that this work was continuing and had helped to balance the books. She added that, by the end of the strategy, the Council would have reduced its net spend on services by more than 50%. However, in real terms the reduction in Government funding and sums that can be raised through Council Tax meant that there was still more to do.

The Cabinet Member explained that the funding gap at the end of the previous MTFS was forecast to be £1.7m. This was predicted to increase to £2.4m by the end of the proposed MTFS. She added that the historically high rate of inflation and supply chain issues affecting construction and energy prices had added to the strain of the Council's finances. She added that the two-year provisional settlement provided one-off funding for 2023-24 of approximately £270k. She said the funding was very welcome. However, it did not meet the increase in costs the authority was facing as a result of rising prices.

The Cabinet Member gave a summary of the key issues detailed in the report and presented the Cabinet proposals.

In conclusion, she said the MTFS was set against a continuing backdrop of uncertainty and risk as a result of the troubled global and national political and economic conditions, the cost of living increase and the delayed funding reform. She added that the ongoing service transformation to make the Council a smaller organisation was helping to secure financial sustainability. However, the task was not easy and not all risk could be mitigated. She assured members that everybody would continue to work hard and build on the impressive track record of the Council to achieve the savings required.

The Leader seconded the proposals.

Decision: Cabinet NOTED:

- 1.1 The fees and charges as set out in Appendix 3 – Part 1.**
- 1.2 The comments from the Strategic Review Panel at its meeting on the 2nd November 2022;**
- 1.3 The results of the Budget Consultation survey included in Appendix 5 and summarised in paragraph 9 of the report;**
- 1.4 The recommendations in the separate Capital Strategy 2023-2033 report that are intrinsically linked to the MTFS report.**

The Cabinet ENDORSE and RECOMMEND to the Strategic Review Panel for scrutiny:

- 1.5 The Council's updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy taking into account the results of the Budget Consultation;**

- 1.5.1 **There are three Cabinet Proposals – taking into account the impact on the Council’s Capital and Revenue Budgets for 2023-26 (paragraph 10.2) as follows;**
- a) **provision of community leadership funding of £1,000 for each councillor in 2023-24;**
 - b) **additional staffing resources to address capacity issues;**
 - c) **ICT Strategy 2023-2028.**
- 1.5.2 **The level of net expenditure and resultant Council Tax for 2023-26 as per paragraphs 10.1 and 10.4 including the revenue implications of the Capital Strategy report also on the agenda;**
- 1.5.3 **The fees and charges in line with this strategy and the impact on the Council’s Revenue Budget for 2023-26, as shown in Part 3 of Appendix 3 (paragraph 10.1 also refers) which incorporate decisions taken by Council on 7th December 2022 in respect of licensing fees and charges;**
- 1.6 **The Cabinet APPROVED the fees and charges as set out in Appendix 3 – Part 2.**

CAB.43 Capital Strategy 2023-33 and Capital Programme Update

A report was considered from the Head of Resources / s151 Officer that sought Council approval of a Capital Strategy for 2023-33.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval.

The Cabinet Member gave a summary of the key issues detailed in the report. She explained that the Capital Strategy set out the Council’s capital plans for 2023-33 which included the Capital Portfolio Fund. She added that the Strategy linked to the MTFs and the Treasury Management Strategy and was an important policy report.

The Leader seconded the proposals.

Decision: The CABINET ENDORSED and RECOMMEND to the Strategic Review Panel for scrutiny:

- 1.1 **The Council’s updated Capital Strategy:**
- a) **Approve the Capital Strategy 2023-33 including the associated Quantitative Indicators in Appendix 2;**
 - b) **Approve variations to the Capital Programme and Vehicle, Equipment and Systems Renewals Schedule as set out in Appendix 1, Appendices A and B;**

- c) **Approve the limits for gross debt of non-treasury investments compared to net service expenditure and for Capital Portfolio Fund as a percentage of net service expenditure as set out in Appendix 2.**

1.2 The Cabinet APPROVED:

That delegation is given to the Head of North Worcestershire Economic Development & Regeneration in consultation with the Head of Resources and Solicitor to the Council and the Cabinet Member for Resources and Capital Portfolio Fund, to update the Capital Portfolio Strategy Policies in year if required.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.33pm.