

Decision Schedule



Cabinet

TO ALL MEMBERS OF NEWPORT CITY COUNCIL

Decision Schedule published on 16/11/2017

The following decisions were taken on 15/11/2017. They will become effective at Noon on 24/11/2017 with the exception of any particular decision(s), which is (are) the subject of a valid "call-in".

The deadline for submission of a 'Call-in' request form (available from Democratic Services) is 4.00 pm on 23/11/2017. Reports relating to staffing issues/confidential reports are not circulated to all Members of the Council as part of the consultation/call-in processes.

CAB 59/17

Wales Audit Office Certificate of Compliance 1

Options Considered/Reasons for Decision

The Leader presented the Certificate of Compliance, which was issued by the Wales Audit Office (WAO) following an audit of the council's Improvement Plan 2016-18:

- As part of the programme of regulatory activity the Auditor General had issued the council with a Certificate of Compliance following an audit of the Improvement Plan 2016-18.
- This was the first of two certificates that the authority will aim to achieve in each financial year.
- The second certificate would be as part of the Assessment of Performance Audit and the council's arrangements to secure continuous improvement.

The certificate related to the WAO's 'Improvement assessment audit' and confirmed that the council had acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance and discharged its duties in accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

The Leader concluded that the certificate gave assurance that in spite of the challenges faced by the council we not only complied with the Improvement Plan but was also able to show improvement.

Decision:

To note the positive outcome of the Certificate of Compliance in relation to the council's Improvement Plan 2016-18.

Consultation

Chief Executive, Strategic Directors, Heads of Service

Implemented By: Chief Executive, Strategic Directors and Heads of Service
Implementation Timetable: Immediate

CAB 60/17

Wales Audit Office Action Plan

Options Considered/Reasons for Decision

The Leader presented the Wales Audit Office (WAO) Action Plan, highlighting the progress made in addressing the recommendations and proposals for improvement made by the WAO in the Corporate Assessment and Corporate Assessment Follow-up:.

- This update provided Cabinet Members with oversight of the council's progress against Recommendations and Proposals for improvement made by the Wales Audit Office during the Corporate Assessment review cycle which began in 2014/15.
- In their latest corporate assessment review, the WAO reduced the number of recommendations from 7 to 4, this showed that the council had improved despite continuing financial and legislative pressures.
- The council compiled an action plan to address the WAO recommendations and proposals for improvement which was also presented to Cabinet in October 2016.
- This report was a quarterly update of progress made against the actions outlined in the council's action plan and actions planned for the next quarter. This enabled Cabinet Members to consider whether actions remained appropriate to meet the recommendations and proposals for improvement, and to evaluate whether actions had been completed in a timely manner.
- New scrutiny arrangements were now in place and a number of the actions against the recommendations were completed.
- The council made great progress in completing the planned actions reducing the number of outstanding actions from 17 to 5 in this quarter this was a result of new processes being developed and embedded.

The Leader recognized that from the update shown and through the continued efforts of council employees and with new scrutiny arrangements in place, the council was able to make excellent progress and reduce the number of outstanding actions from 17 to five. This was testament to the exceptional work of the staff. The Leader congratulated everyone involved.

Cabinet echoed the Leader's comments in thanking staff for their hard work.

Decision:

To note the progress made towards meeting the recommendations and proposals for improvement and query any areas where progress had been delayed.

To receive further quarterly monitoring reports on the progress towards meeting recommendations and proposals for improvement.

Consultation

Chief Executive, Strategic Directors, Heads of Service

Implemented By: Strategic Directors, Heads of Service
Implementation Timetable: Immediate

CAB 61/17

Corporate Plan

Options Considered/Reasons for Decision

The Leader presented the new Corporate Plan, setting out the what was intended to be done over the next five years to Build on Success and Build a Better Newport, focusing on jobs and the economy, education and skills, fairness and equality, community safety and cohesion, the environment, transport, culture and social well-being.

The Corporate Plan would meet the statutory responsibilities as set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. The draft plan was appended to the report and would provide the strategic context for the work of the organisation in the coming years.

The plan included the Council's Well-being objectives which were previously agreed by Cabinet and published in March 2017.

The Corporate Plan formed part of the Council's Policy Framework. As such, the appropriate Scrutiny Committee was consulted and their comments included below along with management responses for consideration by Cabinet.

The Corporate Plan set out the vision and direction for the council over the coming years and would need to be formally approved and adopted by full Council. It would be underpinned by the development and delivery of a comprehensive change programme which would align with the time frame of the corporate plan.

The following points were highlighted:

- This Corporate Plan to be the most comprehensive and transparent document put forward and was conclusive in the degree in which persons were consulted.
- It was encouraging to see the Children's Charter and the Council's Apprenticeship Scheme in the Plan.
- The achievements set out within the Plan showed a high standard of performance.

Decision:

To agree the Corporate Plan and recommend it to Council.

Consultation

Chief Officers; Head of Law and Regulation; Head of Finance; Head of People and Business Change.

Implemented By: Head of Democratic Services

Implementation Timetable: Immediate

CAB 62/17

September Revenue Budget Monitor

Options Considered/Reasons for Decision

The Leader presented the September Revenue Budget Monitor, which detailed the current forecast position on the Council's revenue budget and the risks and opportunities that presented themselves at the September position.

As at September 2017, the Council's revenue budget was forecasting an overspend of £1,098k, excluding the impact of the revenue contingency budget. Applying the unused revenue budget contingency (£1,373k) to offset the general overspend achieved an underspend of £275k.

The overspend of £1,098k was explained primarily by a small number of key budget areas:

- (1) There were significant overspends within three service areas of c£3.5m, excluding schools, (i) Children's social care – 'out of area placements' (ii) Adults social care – 'community care' and (iii) Education – 'special education placements', all areas linked to increasing need. These overspent in the previous year but had worsened significantly in the current year.
- (2) There was c£0.47m of undelivered / delayed savings, mainly within 'Place' services.
- (3) These overspends above had been partially offset by:
 - (a) c£1.1m of staffing underspends across services and
 - (b) non-service area savings of c£2m in respect of council tax rebates and council tax surplus.

It was noted that implementing longer term plans to stabilise and control the three major over-spending areas, whilst managing the budget risks in the shorter term was the Council's priority. Continued funding reductions and delivery of new savings added to this challenge.

Use of almost the entire Council's contingency budget to balance the budget was a significant concern, as it gave no room for manoeuvre and limited additional contingency for further unforeseen issues.

In addition to the above, school forecasts for 2017/18 currently predicted an overspend of c£3m which would reduce the vast majority of school's individual reserves to zero as they would be used to 'fund' this overspend. Currently, 46 out of 55 schools were reporting 'in-year' deficits. The Chief Education Officer agreed licensed deficits for seven schools and officers continued to work with these schools to develop deficit recovery plans, where appropriate.

The position was very finely balanced, very challenging and required on-going diligent management.

Following the same pattern as 2016/17, the service area overspending was significant and if not controlled, could have a financial resilience impact on the Council's overall finances in the future.

The following observations were made:

- Whilst there were three areas that faced challenges, the majority of areas by comparison had done extremely well to show a projected underspend.
- Social Services were looking into ways on how to maintain a quality service and reduce costs.
- It was important to emphasise that the Council was projecting an underspend, however it was during these times of financial hardship that reserves were used to ease the pressure.

Decision:

To note the overall budget forecast position and key budget challenges.

To note the use of the Council's contingency budget to balance the current level of overspending, previously approved by Cabinet, which would be assessed each month on an on-going basis.

To note that a targeted non-essential spending restriction was already in place as reported previously and re-affirm the need for robust financial management and maximise savings on the non-essential spend restriction, wherever possible.

To note the level of undelivered savings within each directorate and the risks associated with this.

To note the forecast movements in reserves (appendix 3) and approve the additional Invest to Save reserve bids summarised in appendix 4.

To note the balance in respect of the investment reserve (use of 16/17 underspend on a series of one-off projects / priorities) which was assumed within current forecast.

Consultation

Chief Officers; Head of Finance, Head of Law and Regulation; Head of People and Business Change.

Implemented By: Head of Democratic Services
Implementation Timetable: Immediate

CAB 63/17

Capital Budget Monitor

Options Considered/Reasons for Decision

The Leader presented the Capital Budget Monitor for approval.

The Leader gave an update on the current spending against the Capital Programme schemes highlighting the forecast outturn position for the programme as at September 2017. The report requested that new schemes be added to the programme.

The report also showed the current capital expenditure position as at the end of September 2017, along with the forecasted outturn for 2017/18. The net effect of the forecasts provided showed an overall Authority-wide underspend variance of £4,083k against the budget of £46,792k. This included forecasted slippage of budget into 2018/19 to the value of £1,717k, giving a true forecasted underspend of £2,366k.

The report also showed the current position regarding capital receipts. To date £770k had been received in-year (excluding JV receipts), which was a significant step towards the total £1,000k estimated to be achieved by the end of this financial year.

The Leader was pleased to include in the programme some key schemes which would have a significant boost to the on-going regeneration and developments within the city and city centre, namely the National Software Academy, which it was hoped would lead to significant benefits in the city and the redevelopment of 123-129 Commercial Street.

The following comments were made:

- It was felt overall that the Council were in a fortunate position to have external partners and stakeholders involved in the programme who were making positive comments and commitment to the City. This enabled the Council to invest wisely to schemes, including Pobl.
- The Software Academy would attract high tech businesses and entrepreneurial enterprises to the city on this basis Newport would also bring high value employment which would create wider network, which was a step in the right direction.

Decision:

To approve the additions to the Capital Programme requested in the report.

To note the capital expenditure forecast position as at September 2017.

To note the balance of and approve the allocation of in-year capital receipts

Consultation

Chief Officers; Head of Finance, Head of Law and Regulation; Head of People and Business Change.

Implemented By: Head of Democratic Services

Implementation Timetable: Immediate

CAB 64/17

Transport Bridge: Heritage Lottery Fund

Options Considered/Reasons for Decision

The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture presented the report, setting out the scope of the project that was developed as a potential Heritage Lottery Bid. The key developments for which funding was sought included repairs to a number of structural elements of the Bridge, such as the restoration of the gondola, repainting, improvements to the site and interpretation and a new visitor centre. The project also provided a programme of activities and events following the completion of the main phase of capital works.

The report concluded that further investment in repairs and maintenance was necessary to maintain the Bridge as a safe structure, and Heritage Lottery funding offered the Council the opportunity of maximising the value of its investment. The grant applied for was in the region of 10 million pounds. A sum of approximately £1.25 million was to be identified in the capital programme if the application was successful. Heritage Lottery Funding was oversubscribed and there was no guarantee that a bid would be successful; never-the-less the potential benefits made the application worthwhile. The success rate for applications was around 30%. The proposed improvements to the visitor experience and the increased profile a successful bid would bring, would improve the trading position for the future.

The application process was in two stages, but success at stage 1 meant that the final stage 2 application was likely to be successful. There was a review process and HLF would advise regarding revisions that needed to be made between stages 1 and 2. HLF funded the development work between stage 1 and 2, and so proceeding to stage 2 required a binding commitment. The funding package sought was substantial and a project of this nature needed commitment and support. The bridge would make a compelling case for funding and was very likely to be successful. When taking this decision, the Council needed to be mindful of the full implications of moving to stage 2.

The Leader thanked the Cabinet Member for the report and added that seeking heritage lottery funding was an important undertaking with a corporate commitment, that would be rewarded by the substantial capital resources a successful bid could bring. The bid would be unlike the majority of bids considered by HLF. It was being driven by a local authority, the heritage was sited in a Communities First area and Newport had not won its fair share of lottery funding to date, with this in mind the HLF have made very positive 'noises' to date.

The Leader also mentioned that there would be a visit by a trustee in March 2018 and it would be important for the trustee to meet senior politicians and managers together with representatives of the community, such as Mr Hando, Friends of Newport Transport Bridge (FNTB) to make the case for funding.

The Cabinet were pleased with the report and the prospect of an iconic symbol being preserved for future generations.

Decision:

To approve the submission of a Stage 1 lottery application to the Heritage Lottery Fund and to identify a potential £1.25 million in the Council's capital programme for the matched funding requirement at stage 2.

Consultation

Chief Officers; Head of Law and Regulation; Head of Finance; Head of People and Business Change.

Implemented By: Head of Democratic Services

Implementation Timetable: Immediate

CAB 65/17

Education and Pupil Performance Data

Options Considered/Reasons for Decision

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills presented a report on pupil performance at the end of the academic year 2016/17 for schools in Newport.

The report provided combined pupil performance data for Newport schools at Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 and 3.

The report also highlighted the expected levels of achievement at the end of the Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 and 3. The data also provided comparisons between gender achievement levels and compared performance with the national average for Wales.

During the academic year 2016-17 the performance at Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 improved compared to the previous academic year. At Foundation Phase and at Key Stage 2 performance was better than expected based on the Free School Meal population. Using this measure Newport would expect to be in a 15/22 position with local authorities in Wales.

In addition, the National Tests for English and Welsh reading and numeracy reasoning reported a decline in pupils gaining a standardised score (SS) of more than SS85+ and of SS116+. There was an increase in the percentage of pupils performing SS85+ and SS116+ in the numeracy procedural test.

It was observed that Newport should see in an improvement a wider context in GCSE results this summer and secondary schools would have achieved their highest ever position. The percentage figures on improvement might seem minor but were representing the margins of what was likely to be achieved. To be sixth out of 22 Councils was a very good sign and KS2 was also similar. The main challenges had been addressed and improvement was significant as Newport was closing the gap, although there was room for further improvement. .

Overall however, this was a very positive outcome, showing constant improvement over time and a full package of improving performance across the board.

Decision:

To acknowledge the position regarding pupil performance and progress made.

To consider any issues arising that the Cabinet may wish to draw to the attention of the Chief Education Officer.

Consultation

Chief Officers, Chief Education Officer; Head of Law and Regulation; Head of Finance; Head of People and Business Change.

Implemented By: Head of Democratic Services

Implementation Timetable: Immediate

CAB 66/17

Cabinet Work Programme

Options Considered/Reasons for Decision

The Leader presented the Cabinet Work Programme.

Decision:

To agree the updated work programme.

Consultation

Chief Officers; Head of Law and Regulation; Head of Finance; Head of People and Business Change.

Implemented By: Head of Democratic Services

Implementation Timetable: Immediate

Signed:

Councillor Debbie Wilcox, Chair of the Cabinet

Date:

