

Minutes



Cabinet

Date: 20 March 2017

Time: 11.00 am

Present: Councillors D Wilcox (Chair), P Cockeram, G Giles, D Harvey, R Jeavons, R Poole, J Richards, R Truman and M Whitcutt

In Attendance: Mr W Godfrey, Chief Executive; Mr M Nicholson and Ms B Owen, Strategic Directors; Mr G Price, Monitoring Officer, Mr M Rushworth, Head of Finance and Mr R Cornwall, Head of People and Business Change

1 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Jeavons declared a non-prejudicial interest in item 9- The EAS Business Plan

2 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 February were confirmed as a true record by the Cabinet and signed by the Chair of the Cabinet

3 **Response to White Paper**

The Leader of the Council introduced a report which presented a series of proposed responses to the questions posed in the White Paper. The Leader considered that the White Paper was an opportunity to suggest ground-breaking ways of providing public services and was somewhat disappointed that this was a missed opportunity.

The Chief Executive explained that the key themes covered in the document were: Regional Working; Voluntary Mergers; Local Leadership; Community Councils and Elections & Voting

The report presented to Cabinet expressed the view that the white paper presented a traditional approach to reform as it focuses on structures with little attention to the needs of the communities local government serves. It makes the assumption that the way to tackle future challenges lies in greater levels of collaboration between local authorities and across the public sector. However, collaboration between authorities is already extensive and significant savings have already been achieved.

The report informed Cabinet that whilst the creation of larger authorities now seems off the agenda, the thinking behind the white paper seems stuck in the thinking of structures. Local Government is now being urged and instructed to create regional, sub-regional and local structures with little thought given to how we can create local systems serving local communities using the social capital within places. Savings can be achieved through the sharing of senior staff but in overall terms, these will be marginal and reduce the capacity and capability to deal with possibly the most challenging environment local government has

ever faced. Creating new structures also takes times and in some cases will be dependent upon the introduction of legislation.

The danger is that time and energy appears to be focused in the wrong place and ultimately new structures are just new ways of doing things in the same way. What is needed is a fundamentally different approach to engaging with communities and a new approach to service design.

The report pointed out that more innovative models are now being created which focus much more on developing local systems using the collective capacity within a place to help meet the challenge of creating sustainable service delivery to help people live well. The report considered that the White Paper was an opportunity for Wales to set itself apart as a country determined to create a new model for the delivery of public services. Unfortunately it was considered that the white paper will not achieve this.

The Chief Executive welcomed the shift by the new Cabinet Secretary from reorganisation proposals to a focus on putting in place collaborative arrangements to ensure councils work more effectively together.

The white paper describes further work towards regional working, collaboration and shared services. The proposed response suggests the need for local negotiation informed for service delivery. The principle of local government is the need to make decisions locally. Local Authorities need to have the flexibility to decide locally how they consider services may best be provided

Cabinet Members agreed the proposed report set out in the report and noted there would be a further consultation on electoral arrangements in the summer and the Cabinet would respond at that time.

Decisions:

To agree the response to the Welsh Government white paper on reform of local government.

4 Use of Underspend

The Leader of the Council informed the Cabinet that at the last Council meeting, she had announced that details were being finalised on some one-off investments in key areas. At the time the Leader stated that much investment would be in infrastructure. The Leader had mentioned that the projects would be funded mainly from the current years forecasted underspend, and the review of reserves.

The Leader stated that the report set out details of spending that will further add to other investments in the revenue and capital budgets which the Cabinet have already agreed for 2017/18 and shows commitment to our key priorities.

The Leader pointed out the funds were available owing to sound financial management by the administration

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources stated that there were three elements to the available funding, they being: a review of reserves – release of (i) council tax reduction scheme reserve at £500,000, (ii) general legal claims reserve at £100,000; Savings from the new MRP method; and 2016/17 revenue budget forecasted underspend, over and above the £1.1m already allocated – based on January 2017 budget monitor.

The Cabinet Member stated that he, along with the Leader and the Head of Finance had reviewed the Council reserves and had identified 2 reserves which could be released and

also used to fund the key priorities – these being the (i) council tax reduction scheme reserve and the general legal claims reserve, as described above

The Cabinet Member stated that that the Council Tax reduction scheme revenue budget had underspent in recent years as claimant numbers have reduced and whilst savings have been taken from this budget for 2017/18, it is still at a level which is over the current costs and therefore the base budget itself allows for future increase in claimant numbers and the risk of overspending here, at least in any single year is therefore low. The Council's general contingency budget also provides for another layer of protection to the overall budget.

The general legal claims reserve is very small and does not provide a significant amount of risk mitigation in itself. Therefore the Council's general contingency budget can provide protection to the overall budget against legal costs.

The Cabinet Member had also considered the change of MRP methodology approved by Council as part of the 2017/18 Treasury Management policies. This will lower the cost of MRP from 2017/18 and so could also be included to bring forward a package of one-off funds to fund key priority projects.

The Cabinet Member described the proposed key features of the spending plans as:

• Investment in infrastructure -school renovation fund to be spent over a two year period	£1,100k
• Council central library & museum services	£400k
• Streetscene infrastructure / maintenance	£300k
• Investment in infrastructure - water feature at Tredegar Park	£100k
• Disabled Facilities Grants	£133k
• A package of investments and initiatives to improve facilities in; and viability of traders within; the Council's indoor market	£70k
• One-off revenue investment to maintain current grants to 'Citizen Advice centres' and 'Llamau' as Council considers future funding to all charitable organisations	£67k
• Revenue investment in a community delivered skills based project – which will also attract match funding and be spent over a three – year period	300k
• Revenue funding for initiatives stemming from an 'antisocial behaviour' group, as a sub group of the Public Services Board	£30k
TOTAL	£2,500K

All Cabinet Members welcomed the investment proposed in the report and described the impact within individual portfolio and service areas

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Young People offered thanks to the many head teachers who had thanked the Cabinet for the further investment in schools, announced since the consultation budget

The Cabinet Member thanked the Head of Finance and his team for their support and assistance in putting together these proposals

Decision:

To approve officers to utilise the resources in line with Cabinet's priority spending areas shown in the report

5 **Pay and Reward Policy**

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources informed Cabinet that it was a statutory requirement to publish a Pay and Reward Statement on an annual basis. In December 2016 the Public Services Staff Commission published guidance to local authorities on their Pay and Reward Statements to complement the 2015 Welsh Government guidance.

The Cabinet Member stated that some minor changes had to be made in order to bring the document up to date. He set out in detail the changes that had been made

Decisions:

To recommend the updated Pay and Reward Policy to the Council for adoption

6 **Improvement Plan - Quarter 3**

The Leader of the Council stated that the report set out the quarter 3 update on the Plan for the current year. The Leader informed Cabinet that there were essentially no significant changes.

Cabinet was pleased to note that see that generally the position is assessed as good and showing "green". The Leader mentioned one 'amber' element. This related to the work we do with landlords to get properties up to habitable standards

The Leader stated that it was good to see in particular that Newport was showing green on our recycling performance. The Leader expressed the view that Newport's recycling process was probably the most cost-effective in Wales and was commended by the Cabinet Secretary at a recent meeting at Welsh Government

Decisions:

To note the progress made during the third quarter of 16/17 regarding key actions and measures and to agree that corrective action be taken to address areas of underperformance

7 **Well-being of Future Generations - Well-being Objectives**

The Deputy Leader informed the Cabinet that the Well-being of Future Generations Act requires local authorities to publish Well-being Objectives and a supporting statement by 31 March 2017.

The Deputy Leader explained that the proposed objectives had been developed in accordance with statutory guidance and take into account the Council's existing Improvement Plan Objectives and feedback from the public engagement. He mentioned that, whilst there was a need to publish Well-being Objectives by 31st March, they can be amended at any time, including after the May elections when the new administration develops its Corporate Plan.

The proposed objectives were: To improve skills, educational outcomes and employment opportunities; to promote economic growth and regeneration whilst protecting the environment; to enable people to be healthy, independent and resilient; and to build cohesive and sustainable communities.

The Well-being Statement was presented to Cabinet. The Statement set out the steps to take to achieve the Well-being Objectives plus information on governance, resource allocation, timescales and how to involve people with an interest.

Decisions:

To agree the Council's Well-being Objectives and the Well-being Statement for publication by 31 March 2017.

8 Welsh Language Strategy

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources informed Members that the Council is required to publish a 5 Year Welsh Language Strategy. The aim of the strategy is to 'promote the Welsh language and facilitate the use of the Welsh language.'

The Cabinet Member stated that the target is to increase the number of Newport pupils in Welsh medium education from 892 in 2016/17, to 1,250 or more in 2022/23. The aim was to achieve this by filling the reception classes of Newport's three Welsh medium Primary schools for the next 5 years.

From consultation the Council had learnt that people have very different experiences of the Welsh language. In order to give people the opportunity to learn and speak Welsh, there was a need to engage all the people of Newport. There was also a need also to engage all partner organisations to support us in this work

The Cabinet Member stated that the consultation responses informed the Council of the need to do more to support children and young people in both Welsh and English medium schools to practice the language.

It was explained that the Council would work in partnership with local organisations, to provide more opportunities to use the language, in education and through play and social activities.

All of this was in line with the council's commitments under the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Welsh Government's own language Welsh language strategy- 'A Million Welsh Speakers.'

The final Strategy will be taken to full Council for approval and Cabinet would monitor progress through the annual reports, with full review at the end of the strategy term.

Decisions:

To recommend the Strategy for adoption by the Council

9 EAS Business Plan 2017-18.

Councillor Jeavons declared a non-prejudicial interest in this item

The Cabinet Member for Education and Young People introduced a report setting out the three year business plan for the South East Wales Consortium.

The Cabinet was informed that, although the report included a regional plan the EAS has continued to strengthen systems and processes to continue to improve pupil outcomes as a result of on-going evaluation and the slow progress noted particularly in 2016.

Debbie Hartevelde, Managing Director and Kirsty Bevan Assistant Director of the EAS informed Cabinet that the Business Plan sets out the overall targets to be achieved by the

EAS working in partnership with the five local authorities. These outcomes were based on an analysis of pupil level data and a sound judgement of what should be achieved over the lifetime of the plan. The programmes of work to achieve these outcomes were set out in detail for 2017-18 and will be reviewed for future years. The targets for schools in Newport were set out in the report

The Business Plan set out the overall priorities for the South East region and in addition provided an Annex that focused in particular on the priorities and programmes for Newport. All Amber and Red schools were noted in the Annex and would be subject to regular scrutiny of progress at Intervention and Education Improvement Board (EIB) meetings.

In addition, all schools in Newport are in receipt of bespoke support packages based on school needs. These have been discussed with senior Officers and the Cabinet Member for Education and Young People prior to submission. A half yearly review of progress towards the Newport Annex will be provided in November 2017.

The Leader referred to the importance of providing support and guidance to young people as they faced many pressures at this time. She said that educational opportunities are one of the most important things we do in order to raise young people out of poverty and to give them a better start in life.

The Cabinet Member praised the work that was being done by the education team that was helping to improve attendance

Decisions:

To note the priorities contained within the Business Plan and the Annex; and consider the impact of the plan for communities within its local authority area;

10 Purple Flag Accreditation- City Centre Night Time Economy

The Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services informed the Cabinet that the Purple Flag is a national accreditation scheme run by the Association of Town and City Management to establish national standards and raise the image of Britain's town centres at night.

He stated that by meeting these standards, a good night-time offer can be promoted and recognised. By working towards and achieving the Purple Flag, there would be an improvement to the quality of the city between the hours of 6pm and 6am by incorporating all aspects of evening and night-time economy management into a comprehensive framework for the Council and local partners to aspire to and meet.

Getting the Purple Flag shows that a town's night-time economy offers a clean and safe environment, good bars and clubs, a variety of arts and cultural attractions and excellent transport links. Swansea is the only other Welsh Purple Flag status – holder.

It was proposed the purple flag area covers the City Centre and extends across the River Usk so as to include the sports and entertainment venues in Rodney Parade and Clarence Place. As part of the submission, we have to produce a map detailing the attractions, facilities, transport links etc.

Decisions:

To agree to and supports the work towards Purple Flag Status for Newport City Centre's evening and night time economy, with a view to obtaining the Flag as early as possible, ideally in 2017.

11 Interim Executive Powers

The Leader of the Council informed the Cabinet that arrangements need to be put into place to ensure that any urgent Executive decisions may be taken if necessary following the City Council elections on 4 May 2017 and before the appointment of Executive Members. The Leader of the Council is to be appointed by the Council at the AGM. All other executive appointments are in the power of the Leader once appointed.

It was suggested that all Executive powers should be vested in the Chief Executive during that period. Decisions are to be taken by the Chief Executive only if a decision is required which cannot wait until the appointment of the Leader of the Council or Cabinet Members.

The Chief Executive will only take decisions following consultation with the individual Member of the Council who has been nominated by the Majority Group for recommendation to the Council to be appointed as Leader or in the absence of a political group with an overall majority, in consultation with Group Leaders.

A list of any urgent decisions taken in the interim period, and the reasons for the urgency, will subsequently be reported to Overview and Scrutiny/ Audit Committee in accordance with the current urgent matters procedures

It was explained that no interim scheme of delegation is needed in relation to non-executive decisions because these matters will already be delegated to officers or, in the case of decisions taken by Regulatory Committees; officers are able to take urgent decisions under Standing Orders.

The arrangements will come into force at midnight on 3 May 2017.

Decisions:

- i. To delegate powers to the Chief Executive to allow any urgent decisions to be taken following the City Council elections and before the appointment of Executive Members
- ii. To confirm that decisions are to be taken by the Chief Executive only if a decision is required which cannot wait until the appointment of the Leader of the Council or Cabinet Members and will only be taken following consultation with the individual Member of the Council who has been nominated for recommendation to the Council to be appointed as Leader or in the absence of a political group with an overall majority, in consultation with Group Leaders.
- iii. To confirm that a list of any urgent decisions taken in the interim period, and the reasons for the urgency, should subsequently be reported to Overview and Scrutiny/ Audit Committee in accordance with the current urgent matters procedures

12 Work Programme

The Corporate Assessment suggested to the Council that it should consider strengthening committee work programming arrangements to ensure they are timely, meaningful, informative, and transparent, balanced, monitored, and joined up. In response to that suggestion, Cabinet had previously agreed that the Head of Democratic Services will

regularly ask Chief Officers to update the Cabinet work programme and an update will be reported to Cabinet each month.

An updated work programme for the coming municipal year suggested by Chief Officers was discussed. This was, of course, a working document and will be subject to change.

Decision:

To adopt the suggested programme and provide an update at the next meeting

The meeting terminated at 13:15