

Cabinet

MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 6 FEBRUARY 2024 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Richard Clewer (Chairman), Cllr Laura Mayes (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Phil Alford, Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cllr Nick Botterill, Cllr Jane Davies and Cllr Nick Holder

Also Present:

Cllr Richard Budden, Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Gordon King, Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Cllr Dr Brian Mathew, Cllr Tamara Reay, Cllr Pip Ridout, Cllr Martin Smith and Cllr Graham Wright

9 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Ashley O'Neill and Caroline Thomas.

Cllr Thomas joined the meeting virtually.

10 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2024 were presented for consideration, and it was,

Resolved:

To approve and sign the minutes as a true and correct record.

11 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

12 Leader's Announcements

The Leader noted announcement by government on 5 February 2024 of details of revisions to the Local Government Financial Settlement. This would be explained further during consideration of the budget proposals.

13 Public Participation and Questions from Councillors

Questions were received from Members of the Public and Members of the Council as detailed in Agenda Supplement 2.

Lucie Castlemain was in attendance on behalf of Hilperton Area Action Group regarding Question 24-12 which the group had submitted regarding recent changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and on Housing Land Supply in Wiltshire.

A supplementary question was asked seeking more detail on the setting of the housing figures for the Local Plan process.

It was explained that the recent changes to the NPPF reduced the housing land supply that the council was required to demonstrate from 5 years to 4 years, as a result of being sufficiently advanced in its Local Plan review process. In the absence of that progress on the review the council would still be required to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, and the tilted balance in favour of development beyond allocated housing sites would still apply. However, although the council had progressed its Local Plan the calculation of projected housing need for Wiltshire across the Local Plan period which was required to be delivered remained the same irrespective of changes to the NPPF on demonstrating housing land supply.

14 **Financial Year 2023/24 - Q3 Revenue Budget Monitoring**

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning, presented a report which provided details of the revenue budget monitoring forecast for the third quarter of the financial year 2023/24, based on the position at the end of December 2023.

It was explained that the forecast revenue underspend for at the end of the third quarter had risen to £0.634m as a result of setting realistic income targets and control of expenditure. Overspend in People services had increased, mostly due to the continuing rise in the cost of care packages and SEND transport.

Cllr Botterill drew attention to the significant pressure on council finances arising from the dedicated schools grant (DSG) and increases in activity across high needs block budgets, driven by demand for statutory support for vulnerable children. Through work in the High Needs Sustainability Programme through aligned with the requirements of the Safety Valve programme, the council was further developing its DSG Management Plan in order to reach a sustainable position, but this would require major work to cover forecast expenditure of over £97m.

The Leader stated that the Cabinet would continue to lobby government regarding the pressures arising from the high needs block.

Cllr Pip Ridout, Chairman of the Financial Planning Task Group, stated the report showed a good financial position, and that the Task Group continued to examine proposed savings and risks including staff pay, inflation and cost of living.

Cllr Gordon King welcomed the report making the council's financial position and potential risks clear.

Cllr Martin Smith sought additional details relating to reported underspend in highways and transport. It was stated there was seasonal work, and others had invoices which would come in later, which would see the spending position regularise by the end of the financial year.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet approves:

- a) **The transfer of £0.068m from the Feasibility earmarked reserve to fund a feasibility study for the Super Bus Network;**
- b) **The transfer of £0.250m budget from the overachievement of income in Leisure operations to Libraries to address the £0.182m staffing overspend and increase the book fund by £0.068m;**
- c) **The transfer of £0.130m in 2023/24 from the Libraries and Leisure Programmes reserve to contribute to the Holiday Activity Food Programme;**
- d) **The gain in income Business Rates in 2023/24 of £8.666m be transferred into a new High Needs reserve;**
- e) **The transfer from the Collection Fund Volatility reserve, as follows:**
 - i. **£6m to the General Fund reserve;**
 - ii. **£6m to the Insurance reserve;**
 - iii. **£2.572m to the High Needs Reserves.**
- f) **The transfer of £2.007m balance of the Latent Demand reserve to the Transformation reserve;**
- g) **The movement in DSG reserve as tabled in table 12 bringing the total DSG reserve to a £56.247m deficit position.**

That Cabinet Notes:

- h) **The current revenue budget is forecast to underspend by £0.634m by the end of the financial year;**
- i) **The current forecast savings delivery performance for the year.**

Reason

To inform effective decision making and ensure sound financial management as part of the Councils overall control environment.

To inform Cabinet on the forecast revenue financial position of the Council as at quarter three (31 December 2023), including delivery of approved savings for the year.

15 **Financial Year 2023/24 - Q3 Capital Budget Monitoring**

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning, presented a report which provided details of the revenue budget monitoring forecast for the third quarter of the financial year 2023/24, based on the position at the end of December 2023.

The capital programme forecast had been recalculated to around £169m. This was expected to reduce further by the end of the financial year, although the actual spend remained above the level from the previous year.

The Leader stated capital forecasting was improving, but some movement in forecasting would still occur.

Cllr Pip Ridout, Chairman of the Financial Planning Task Group, added that she agreed forecasting had improved in recent years, though with some projects brought forward and others pushed back.

Cllr Gordon King welcomed the improvement in forecasting from the reports.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet approves:

- a) The removal of the £0.198m Corporate Capital scheme balance and its associated funding;**
- b) The removal of the £0.322m Dunns Lane Car Park, Castle Combe extension scheme and its associated funding;**
- c) The removal of £0.038 of the Council House Build Programme Phase 1 and its associated funding;**
- d) The use of £0.068m of earmarked reserves to enable Passenger Transport to undertake a feasibility study for the Super Bus Network;**
- e) The grant income applied for and/or received as set out in Appendix C and Appendix D.**

That Cabinet Notes:

- f) The additional budgets added to the programme of £0.458m under Chief Finance Officer delegated powers;**
- g) The movement of £37.475m of budgets into future years under Chief Finance Officer delegated powers;**

- h) The budgets brought forward from future years into the 2023/24 programme totalling £11.556m under Chief Finance Officer delegated powers;
- i) Budget movements between schemes;
- j) The revised 2023/24 Capital Programme forecast as at quarter three of £168.943m; and,
- k) The capital spend as at 31 December of £92.778m

Reason

To inform effective decision making and ensure sound financial management as part of the Councils overall control environment.

To inform Cabinet on the financial position of the Council on the 2023/24 capital programme as at quarter three (31 December 2023).

16 **Corporate Performance and Risk Report 2023/24 Q3**

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council, introduced a report on measures of performance using data available at the end of the second quarter of the year up through December 2023, in order to assess progress against the goals of the council's Business Plan.

Metrics relating to children and schools which were not moving in the right direction were highlighted, though it was noted the council had limited direct control to influence the metrics in some areas.

Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Skills, provided details of programmes in place to address some of the metrics, but that these would take time before they had an impact and could be assessed.

Cllr Nick Holder, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, drew attention to metrics relating to the council's carbon emissions. He confirmed the latest position of 3568 tonnes per year, which had been listed incorrectly in the first two quarter reports, but correctly reported to Full Council in October 2023.

Cllr Jane Davies, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, SEND, and Inclusion, provided additional details on the recording of adults in care, including if returning to care following a hospital visit being counted separately to their initially being taken into care.

Cllr Phil Alford, Cabinet Member for Housing, Strategic Assets, and Asset Transfer, added further information regarding affordable housing, decreases in demand for temporary accommodation, and the importance of data cleansing on the housing register to remain up to date and accurate.

Cllr Graham Wright, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, confirmed the Committee would review the report in detail at its next meeting, and noted details relating to staff vacancies, and sought information on the impact on any performance as a result.

Cllr Gordon King stated he shared concerns regarding educational attainment and performance, and looked forward to further scrutiny of the information.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet note and agree:

- a) Performance against the selected measures mapped to the Council's strategic priorities;**
- b) The Strategic Risk Summary**

Reason

To provide Cabinet with a quarterly update on measures used to monitor progress against the 10 missions laid out in Wiltshire Council's Business Plan 2022-32.

The Strategic Risk Summary captures and monitors significant risks facing the Council, in relation to in-service risks facing individual areas and in managing its business across the authority.

This is supported by, and in compliance with, the Council's Corporate Performance and Risk Policy.

17 Wiltshire Council Budget 2024/2025 and MTFS Update 2024/25-2026/27

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning, presented a report which provided details of the proposed 2024/25 budget and the medium-term financial strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27.

Details were provided around the impact of continued high inflation, the addition of £36m to service budgets with a net rise of £17m to the budget. Cllr Botterill noted the difficult financial situation of many councils, and that the proposed budget was balanced without seeking closure of household recycling centres, libraries or leisure centres, and did not rely on major new identified or unspecified savings or use of reserves. However, the ongoing pressure of increases in demand and cost pressures did require the council tax rise proposed, with over 80% of the council's net expenditure funded from sources the council controlled.

On 5 February 2024 the government had provided details of an updated local government financial settlement. The council would receive an additional £4.526m, of which £3.798 was part of a social care grant and would be utilised

on furthering the council's preventative approach to improve services and reduce costs. It was emphasised the additional funding could not be guaranteed for future years.

The remaining additional funding it was proposed to allocate to rural air quality monitoring projects, on refurbishment of rural play areas, and on a project to secure additional volunteers.

The Leader welcomed the additional funding announced by government, following an effective campaign from the County Council's Network. He explained the limitations on the allocation, in particular on the one-off nature, and the need to focus it in areas which did not have ongoing revenue costs. He explained many play areas were not fit for purpose, and the council would work with parish councils to discuss taking on maintenance where new equipment was able to be provided.

Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure, Libraries, FM, and Operational Assets, noted the continued investment in services planned within the budget despite the difficult financial, supporting communities and the economy.

Cllr Jane Davies, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, SEND, and Inclusion, provided details of the varied support and signposting work undertaken through council libraries.

Cllr Nick Holder, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change drew attention to investment in a programme for provision of new real time monitoring equipment to improve data collection regarding emissions in Westbury. He stated with the newly announced funding the council intended to work with universities to develop understanding of particulate emissions across the county, and provide a meaningful baseline of data.

Cllr Graham Wright, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, explained that the Committee had held a lengthy meeting on 25 January 2024 to review the proposed budget. A report of that meeting and topics raised or discussed was included at Appendix 2.

Cllr Gordon King welcomed details of emissions monitoring for Westbury, and would save further comments for debate on 20 February 2024.

Two questions from Cllr Richard Budden as detailed in Agenda Supplement 2 were received. Cllr Budden asked a supplementary question, detailing his concerns regarding maintenance of non-principal roads, requesting area by area spending within the last 4-5 years, and that benchmarking exercises comparing the council's maintenance spending with other authorities be considered by the Environment Select Committee.

Cllr Caroline Thomas, Cabinet Member for Transport, Street Scene, and Flooding, responded that much of the requested data was in the public domain or already reported to the Environment Select Committee annually, where

further questions could be raised on specific details. She stated a larger proportion of expenditure for surfacing works was on non-principle roads, and provided details of information from the Department for Transport. Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, said he would engage further over what information would be provided for the next report to the Committee.

The Leader added that the council's approach to road surfacing was not about balancing the books as it was capital spend not revenue, and that decisions on which areas received works were based on evidence and reporting, encouraging everyone to use the available reporting systems to raise concerns. He felt the question which had been submitted underplayed the severe consequences of poor financial management and not controlling costs appropriately.

Cllr Budden stated that rural communities felt neglected and that few things affected people more than road maintenance.

The Leader stated that the council would continue to maintain and fix roads, but that this could not take away focus from the many critical services the council undertook for vulnerable adults and children, where serious harm to lives could arise.

Cllr Dr Brian Matthew welcomed the proposals regarding air quality monitoring and asked about monitoring some areas as control areas to provide comparisons.

Cllr Martin Smith noted comments in the report on difficulty recruiting and retaining planning staff and sought details of the referenced planning transformation project. Cllr Botterill stated that performance metrics had improved in planning though there was a national issue for recruiting planning officers. The transformation programme might include restructuring the planning committee set up, as well as increasing enforcement, and developing specialist teams.

Cllr Smith also sought information on a capital bid to increase the grant from the Department for Education for school maintenance. Details were provided on challenges to find contractors and arrange works.

At the conclusion of discussion, and subject to an addendum report which would be prepared relating to the additional funding announced on 5 February 2024, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet recommends to Council:

- a) That a net general fund budget of 2024/25 of £485.772m is approved;**

- b) That the Council Tax requirement for the council be set at £351.077m for 2024/25 with a Band D charge of £1,805.73, an increase of £1.65 per week;
- c) That the Wiltshire Council element of the Council Tax be increased in 2024/25 by the following:
 - i. A 2.99% general increase;
 - ii. Plus a levy of 2% to be spent solely on Adult Social Care;
- d) That the Extended Leadership Team be required to meet the revenue budget targets for each service area as set out in Appendix 1 to this report, for the delivery of council services in 2024/25;
- e) That the Extended Leadership Team be required to deliver the revenue savings plans for each service area as set out in Appendix 1 to this report, over the MTFS period 2024/25 to 2026/27;
- f) That the changes in the fees and charges as set out in Appendix 4 are approved;
- g) That the Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2030/31 is approved;
- h) That the Capital Strategy set out in Appendix 2 is approved;
- i) That the DSG budget as approved by Schools Forum is ratified;
- j) That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, the forecast balanced budget over the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years and the MTFS 2024/25 to 2026/27 is endorsed.

Reason

To enable the Cabinet to recommend to Council a balanced revenue budget for the financial year 2024/25 and to set the level of Council Tax.

To enable effective, transparent decision making and ensure sound financial management as part of the council's overall control environment.

The Cabinet also sets out the final assumptions being used in the budget for growth, inflation, demand for services, the estimated level of income from sales, fees and charges and the level of income estimated from core funding e.g. Council Tax, Business Rates and government grants as well as the level of reserves held and assessed by the council's Section 151 Officer, as required, to provide future financial resilience.

This provides the council with a MTFS to deliver on the Business Plan priorities and drives long term financial sustainability.

18 **Housing Revenue Account Budget Setting including Dwelling Rent Setting 2024/25**

Cllr Phil Alford, Cabinet Member for Housing, Strategic Assets, and Asset Transfer, presented a report on the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) annual revenue budget, including rent setting, and the capital programme for 2024/25. It was stated in previous years the proposals had been included within the main budget report, but as a ringfenced account it had been agreed to consider the HRA proposals separately.

Details were provided of ongoing council house building and retrofitting programmes, and the consideration of the Housing Board of factors such as cost of living, rents being below those of other housing providers, and other cost factors.

Cllr Pip Ridout, Chairman of the Financial Planning Task Group, stated that additional training would be requested to improve ongoing understanding of the risks and monitoring of the HRA, with an approach to be agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Environment Select Committee.

Cllr Gordon King thanked the Cabinet Member for the briefing provided, noting the importance of the report.

In response to queries Cllr Alford provided details of the proposed increase in rent, and the number of tenants it would impact being those who were not in receipt of universal credit, as well as rises in minimum wage being of a greater extent.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet recommends Council:

- a) To note the draft budget estimates and proposals;**
- b) To approve the HRA Annual Revenue Budget for 2024/25 as described in the report and Appendix 1;**
- c) To approve the increase of 7.7% (CPI+1%) to Dwelling Rents and Garage Rents for 2024/25;**
- d) To approve the HRA Capital Programme for 2024/25 as described in the report and Appendix 2;**
- e) To note the reviewed and updated assumptions in the HRA 30-Year Business Plan as detailed in the report.**

Reason

To enable the Cabinet to recommend to Council a balanced budget (capital and revenue) for the HRA for 2024/25, and in so doing continue to provide services to tenants and investment in their homes.

To enable effective, transparent decision making and ensure sound financial management of the HRA as part of the council's overall control environment.

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- b) To approve the HRA Annual Revenue Budget for 2024/25 as described in the report and Appendix 1;**
- c) To approve the increase of 7.7% (CPI+1%) to Dwelling Rents and Garage Rents for 2024/25;**

- d) **To approve the HRA Capital Programme for 2024/25 as described in the report and Appendix 2;**
- e) **To note the reviewed and updated assumptions in the HRA 30-Year Business Plan as detailed in the report.**

Reason

To enable the Cabinet to recommend to Council a balanced budget (capital and revenue) for the HRA for 2024/25, and in so doing continue to provide services to tenants and investment in their homes.

To enable effective, transparent decision making and ensure sound financial management of the HRA as part of the council's overall control environment.

19 **Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024/25**

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning, presented a report recommending the Council approve the Prudential and Treasury Indicators, together with the Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25.

It was explained there were limited changes from the strategy statement for the previous year, and attention was drawn to the capital finance requirements, along with details of proposed borrowing need.

The Leader added that the report was a critical part of controlling and managing the cost of borrowing, which many councils had failed to understand.

Cllr Pip Ridout, Chairman of the Financial Planning Task Group, confirmed the group was supportive of the report and its recommendations.

Cllr Gordon King welcomed the report in setting out the roadmap for the council's treasury management.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet recommends that Council:

- a) **Adopt the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy (paragraph 26 – 28);**
- b) **Adopt the Prudential and Treasury Indicators (paragraphs 17 – 25, 41 – 47 and Appendix A);**
- c) **Adopt the Annual Investment Strategy (paragraph 65 onwards);**
- d) **Delegate to the Director of Finance and Procurement (S151 Officer) the authority to vary the amount of borrowing and other long-term**

liabilities within the Treasury Indicators for the Authorised Limit and the Operational Boundary;

- e) Authorise the Director of Finance and Procurement (S151 Officer) to agree the restructuring of existing long-term loans where savings are achievable or to enhance the long-term portfolio;**
- f) Agree that short term cash surpluses and deficits continue to be managed through temporary loans, deposits and money market funds;**
- g) Agree that any surplus cash balances not required to cover borrowing are placed in the most appropriate specified or non-specified investments, particularly where this is more cost effective than short term deposits; and delegate to the Director of Finance and Procurement (S151 Officer) the authority to select such funds;**
- h) Agree the Investment Policy (paragraph 69);**
- i) Agree the Creditworthiness Policy (paragraph 73).**

Reason

To enable the Council to agree a Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25 and set Prudential Indicators that comply with statutory guidance and reflect best practice.

20 **Public Transport Strategy**

Cllr Caroline Thomas, Cabinet Member for Transport, Street Scene, and Flooding, presented a report providing details of the results of the public consultation on a revised Public Transport Strategy, and seeking authorisation to adopt the Strategy as part of the existing Local Transport Plan.

Details were provided on the outcomes of the consultation, as well as background on challenges in the service area including shortages of bus drivers and increased costs. The high level of responses to the consultation was also noted. The strategy document would aid the council in meeting its statutory duties in line with its Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Cllr Nick Holder, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, noted comments in the report on new strategies aligning to the council's climate strategy, and work to undertake a joined-up approach to achieve this.

Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, confirmed the Committee had reviewed the report at its meeting on 11 January 2024 and provided comment.

Cllr Gordon King asked when the Local Transport Plan 4 would be completed, with it stated it was intended to be by the end of 2024.

A question from Colin Gale, Pewsey Community Area Partnership, was received as detailed in Agenda Supplement 2. He asked a supplementary question on how the council could improve public and elected Member understanding of the positive rollout of demand responsive transport (DRT) schemes, noting some of the comments from the consultation. He complimented the operation of DRT in the Pewsey area. Cllr Thomas stated there would be discussions with bus operators and the council's communications team to improve this.

Cllr Dr Brian Mathew commented on Link and community minibuses and what could be done to boost these services further. Cllr Thomas stated they provided an essential service, and the council did engage with them and provided some funding but would consider what more could be achieved through the wider public transport strategy.

Cllr Tamara Reay praised the operating zones for demand responsive transport and looked forward to being extended to other rural areas where possible.

Cllr Tony Jackson asked about extending DRT provision to include taxi operators. Cllr Thomas stated there were some schemes looking at the use of taxis instead of buses for DRT and the council was happy to consider this, but this was subject to potential restrictions on government funding.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet approve the revised Public Transport Strategy at Appendix 1.

Reason

To ensure that Wiltshire Council's supported public transport continues to deliver appropriately for Wiltshire residents and its visitors, considering changing travel habits and a challenging operational and financial market.

21 **Wiltshire Design Guide - Adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)**

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning, presented a report recommending Cabinet endorse the amended Wiltshire Design Guide as set out in Agenda Supplement 2, and recommend Council adopt it as a supplementary planning document.

Details were provided on the extent of consultation on the design guide, to expand upon Core Policy 57 to ensure high quality design and place shaping and provide a framework for this for developers to utilise.

The Leader stated it was unfortunately not practical to develop a compulsory design code, and the proposed design guidance would be a positive and impactful addition to the planning documents.

Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Skills, drew attention to the guide's support for attached housing informed by the character of the location.

Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, stated the design guide had been reviewed by the Committee in 2023 prior to consultation. He had been further briefed on 8 January 2024 on amendments to the guide and was supportive of the proposals.

Cllr Gordon King agreed development of a design guide was a positive step and was hopeful it would encourage developers to choose more appropriate designs for local settings.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

- a) **Notes the response to the consultation on the draft Wiltshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (the WDG) set out in the Consultation Statement at Appendix 1.**
- b) **Endorses the amended WDG as set out in Appendix 2.**
- c) **Approve the referral of the final version of the WDG (Appendix 2) to Council on 20 February 2024 for adoption as a supplementary planning document.**
- d) **Subject to approval of Council, delegate to the Corporate Director, Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Development and Strategic Planning, the power to undertake the final stages associated with the formal adoption and publication of the WDG, including any minor textual changes in the interests of clarity and accuracy.**

Reason

To ensure that the Wiltshire Design Guide is formally adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that provides guidance to developers that supports Core Policy 57: Ensuring high quality design and place shaping.

In a change to the agenda order the Revised Nutrient Neutrality Strategy was taken after consideration of the Proposed Closure of Shalbourne Church of England Primary School and the School Admissions Policy 2025/26.

22 **Proposed Closure of Shalbourne Church of England Primary School**

Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Skills, presented a report on the proposal to close Shalbourne Church of England Primary School.

It was explained that pupil numbers had dropped to such a degree that retaining the school at Shalbourne was not viable. All necessary consultation had been undertaken and it was confirmed all remaining children had been found alternative schooling.

Cllr Gordon King noted the impact that closing a local school could have on a community, but accepted the numbers in this case left no alternative.

The Leader commented on trying to work through the Local Plan to develop more housing in appropriate fashion in villages to ensure longer term viability for communities.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet approve the proposal to close (without modification) Shalbourne Church of England Primary School with effect from 30 April 2024.

Reason

With pupil numbers now so low, with slim prospects of recovery, Shalbourne Church of England Primary School is both financially and academically vulnerable, therefore closure is considered the only viable option.

23 **School Admissions Policies 2025/26**

Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Skills, presented a report on the elements of the Admissions Policy required to be determined by Cabinet. She noted the complexity of the schemes but reflected that it was a very open and transparent system which had generated very few queries or complaints from parents over many years.

The Leader stated the policy worked well each year.

Cllr Gordon King stated the admissions process was well administered, and the council could reassure people that sufficient places existed to meet demand.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet approve the appended schemes which will become the determined Admissions Policy for Wiltshire for 2025/26.

Reason

It is a legal requirement to have these policies in place.

The schemes and arrangements as presented have been sent out to all schools for consultation and no alternative suggestions have been received to date.

24 **Revised Nutrient Neutrality Strategy**

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning, presented a report providing details on government announcements and changes to legislation in relation to nutrient neutrality, and proposals to update the council's strategic approach to securing phosphorus neutral development in the catchment area of the River Avon (Hampshire) Special Area of Conservation.

It was explained that the special area of conservation encompassed nearly a third of Wiltshire. Government announcements in December 2023 required an update to the council's approach. Funding would be provided for the council to commit to interventions that mitigate phosphorus impact from new development. The grant fund must be recharged and developer contributions via planning obligations are sought to do so.

Cllr Botterill stated in some cases developers would undertake their own mitigation, or there would be mitigation through a wider council scheme.

The Leader noted that agriculture and sewage treatment were much more significant in their impact on nutrient issues.

Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, stated he had received a briefing from officers on 7 December 2023, and endorsed the strategic approach set out in the report.

Cllr Gordon King accepted the need for the proposals, and that it would be a lengthy and complex process.

Cllr Richard Budden commented on grant schemes for septic tank upgrades, farmers monitoring river pollution across the Wylde Valley, and whether the funding provided could be used to support farmers outside the area of outstanding natural beauty. Cllr Botterill stated the funding provided could only be utilised specifically in relation to development mitigation.

Cllr Martin Smith made a comment on water quality monitoring in other areas such as in the catchment for the Bristol Avon.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

- a) **Confirms that the Council will, until such time as the responsibility falls to others, continue to deliver a Council-led strategic approach (as set out in (ii and iii)) to secure in perpetuity measures to ensure**

qualifying development is phosphorus neutral in the catchment for the River Avon (Hampshire) Special Area of Conservation;

- b) Agrees that developer contributions via planning obligations will be sought from developers wishing to use the Council-led scheme where mitigation is available;
- c) Agrees that in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Regulations and case law the revised strategic approach applies to all housing and overnight accommodation (and other qualifying development) in the River Avon SAC catchment seeking outline, full, reserved matters and discharge of condition approval;
- d) Delegates authority for the Corporate Director of Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning approval to:
 - i. Oversee delivery of this strategic approach including approving any policy/process documents needed to support implementation of the revised strategy;
 - ii. Accept the Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund grant as lead authority for the Hampshire Avon catchment;
 - iii. Spend of the Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund and delivery of nutrient interventions in line with grant conditions;
 - iv. Oversee and approve the preparation and public consultation of a Local Development Order (LDO) to replace septic tanks with package treatment plants.

Reason

To demonstrate the council's commitment to the delivery of a revised strategic solution to secure phosphorus neutral development.

25 **Wiltshire Council's Housing Board - Annual Report**

Cllr Phil Alford, Cabinet Member for Housing, Strategic Assets, and Asset Transfer, presented a report on the annual activities of the Wiltshire Council Housing Board and performance across the Housing Revenue Account service.

Details were provided of progress with retrofit programmes, scrutinising work of the Housing service, re-procurement of maintenance contracts and the work of tenancy sustainment officers securing over £800k in additional income for tenants.

The Leader praised the work of the Board in the last year.

Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, stated the Committee received regular updates from the Housing Board, most recently at its meeting on 11 January 2024, where they had sought information on the council house building programme, developing an improvement plan, and details on heat pumps.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet note the annual report.

Reason

Wiltshire Council Housing Board (WCHB) Terms of Reference require an Annual Report to be presented to WCHB AGM and Cabinet.

26 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 1.25 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Kieran Elliott of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718504, e-mail committee@wiltshire.gov.uk

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These decisions were published on 8 February 2024 and will come into effect on 15 February 2024.