

Cabinet

MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 19 MARCH 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, Cllr Nick Holder, Cllr Dominic Muns, Cllr Ashley O'Neill and Cllr Tamara Reay

Also Present:

Cllr Sven Hocking, Cllr Gordon King, Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Dr Brian Mathew, Cllr Suzanne Wickham and Cllr Graham Wright

35 **Apologies**

There were no apologies.

36 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024 were presented.

Resolved:

To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024.

37 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

38 **Leader's Announcements**

The Leader made the following announcements:

Cabinet Changes

The Leader provided details of [changes to the Cabinet membership](#). He confirmed that Cllr Caroline Thomas had stepped down from her Cabinet role as Cabinet Member for Transport, Street Scene and Flooding due to family illness. He thanked Cllr Thomas for her service and great commitment to her role and wished her well for the future.

The Leader welcomed Cllr Dominic Muns – Cabinet Member for Waste and Environment and Cllr Tamara Reay – Cabinet Member for Transport and Assets. Cllr Nick Holder would be the Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene and Flooding.

Future of Community Services across BSW

The Leader referred to the document attached to the agenda pack which provided an update to key stakeholders of the Integrated Community Based Care Programme.

39 **Public Participation and Questions from Councillors**

[Agenda Supplement 1](#) included details of questions submitted for the meeting, together with responses.

Colin Gale asked a supplementary question in relation to question 24-16(c), about the current status of the proposals, details of consultation, and support for attractions such as Crofton Beam Engine and Winton Windmill. The Leader explained that the number of trails is expanding, the number of downloads is exceeding 4,000, the 'What's on in Wiltshire' website, which links into the same software used by VisitWiltshire, is currently being tested with an expected launch date of May 2024, and consultation with towns has been taking place for a couple of years with good engagement.

40 **Arts Council Music Hub Investment Programme**

Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, presented the report seeking delegated authority for officers to agree contract terms, final operational matters, procurement to tie in with the Arts Council and Department for Education timelines.

The Deputy Leader explained how music education currently functions in Wiltshire, and the role of Wiltshire Council in receiving and accounting for a grant from the Department for Education (DfE) via the Arts Council for England (ACE). The grant contributes towards a wider music education economy of over 130 freelance businesses and in the region of 24 music/cultural organisations in the county.

The Cabinet noted that a revised National Plan for Music Education was published in the summer of 2022, with the DfE and ACE setting out plans for a Music (Education) Hub Investment Programme. This will lead to a significant reduction in hub lead organisations from September 2024, down from 120 to about 40. The DfE and ACE have grouped Wiltshire with Swindon and Gloucestershire to work together towards a proposal for a partnership bid, and discussions between the authorities would be taking place to agree a lead authority to host the Hub Lead Organisation function and receive the grant.

Cllr Gordon King, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, noted the bidding arrangements between Wiltshire Swindon and Gloucestershire and indicated his support for the proposals.

Resolved:

Cabinet approves:

To delegate authority to the Director of Education and Skills, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Skills, to agree contract terms, approve any final operational matters and facilitate timely procurement to tie in with the Arts Council and Department for Education timelines, in the event the council is successful in being offered the music education Hub Lead Organisation ‘contract’ by the Arts Council.

Reason for Decision:

This will give Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire Music Connect the opportunity to enter into funding agreements with The Arts Council in a timely manner.

It will also enable a swift transition to become the Hub Lead Organisation should Wiltshire be selected as the lead for Wiltshire, Swindon, and Gloucestershire from 1 September 2024.

This will facilitate timely procurement to tie in with the Arts Council timetable.

41 **Air Quality Action Plan**

Cllr Nick Holder, Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene and Flooding presented the report seeking approval of the Air Quality Action Plan.

[Agenda Supplement 1](#) included details of questions submitted for this item, together with responses. There were no supplementary questions.

Cllr Holder, as former Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change explained that the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) has been produced as part of the Council’s statutory duties under the Local Air Quality Management framework. It outlined the actions to improve air quality in Wiltshire from 2024 to 2029.

Cabinet were reminded that where the Council finds areas that do not comply with the Plan, it must declare an Air Quality Management Area and put an Action Plan in place to reduce pollution to compliant levels. Wiltshire Council has eight Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs).

It was noted that the existing Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) is out of date and not in a format that meets the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs’ (DEFRA) current model. The Environment Act 1995 (as amended in 2021) requires that Action Plans be periodically reviewed. The draft Action Plan complies with the requirements now enshrined in the Act.

Cllr Graham Wright, Chair of the Climate Emergency Task Group, reported that the Task Group received a briefing on 15 March 2024. He welcomed the new Cabinet Member for Waste & Environment and thanked him for attending the Task Group meeting at short notice. He also thanked both the previous Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holder for their support and wished them all the best in their new roles. The Task Group considered the Action Plan in great depth and

received very full responses to questions asked. He further reported the following:

- The Plan is a good news story in that harmful nitrogen dioxide emissions are coming down and hopefully several of the Air Quality Management Areas will be compliant in the coming years. However, much of that fall is due to improvements in vehicle and engine technology rather than more localised actions. The Task Group trusts that even with compliance efforts are re-double to deliver countywide programmes that will improve air quality i.e., an EV charging infrastructure, active travel, and investment in sustainable public transport. A joined-up approach is emerging but improving air quality will mean that planning, transport, and public protection must work closely together.
- The Task Group raised two of further points:
 - Firstly, that air quality across the board is improved and other pollutants like particulates are considered; and
 - that consultation processes are reviewed as responses from the public were low for a plan that many people would have been interested in understanding.

The Task Group would continue to monitor the plan and ask for an update in 12 months' time.

Cllr Gordon King, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, thanked the previous Cabinet Member and wished her well for the future and welcomed the new Cabinet Member for Waste & Environment and Cabinet member for Transport and Assets and wished them well in their new roles. Cllr King noted that the subject matter was a large and complicated one with many outside influences. He commented on Table 3.1 of the Plan and asked about the differences between modelled and required road NO_x, how nitric dioxide evaporates. Officers explained that for modelling road NO_x figures related to the original model figures and the required NO_x figures were those expected for compliance. A technical response was provided in relation to the nitric dioxide question indicating that it was another form of Nitrogen which was omitted through car exhausts. Cllr King supported the Action Plan requirements and indicated that a whole Council response was required making better use of community networks.

Cllr Brian Mathew welcomed the report and Action Plan and asked about the collaborative work with a university, as this wasn't specifically identified in the report. He also asked about the timelines for reopening the High Street in Calne. Cllr Holder reported that Birmingham University was the lead university with 12 other universities involved. The Leader explained that he was not aware of the deadlines for reopening the High Street in Calne and referred Cllr Mathew to the Traffic Regulation Order for this information.

Resolved:
To adopt the Air Quality Action Plan.

Reason for decision:

To meet the legal requirements of the Environment Act 1995 (as amended in 2012).

42 **Update on Community Conversations**

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for MCI, Economic Development, Heritage, Arts, Tourism and Health and Wellbeing presented the report which provided an update on the activity arising from the ongoing pilots of community conversations.

The Leader asked officers to comment on the work being undertaken by the Council to create stronger communities. The Director of Public Health and the Director of Business Transformation commented in detail about the Council's commitment to empowering the people of Wiltshire to live full, healthy and enriched lives. The intention of the Community Conversations Programme is to recognise the inequalities effecting the residents of Wiltshire and provides a bold, holistic and innovative approach to understanding the experience of residents across the county. They gave examples of the development of new sustainable methods of support based in the communities of Bemerton Heath and Studley Green, which were also detailed in the report. The Leader reported that officers were being asked to work outside the norms of council work. The programme is in the process of expanding to five communities and expected to expand further in the future. It was noted that there were some issues about how the programmed is rolled out to small rural communities.

Cabinet members welcomed the update and recognised the incredible work being undertaken by the communities. They noted the challenges being faced by communities and the importance of the approached adopted.

Cllr Graham Wright, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, on behalf of Cllr Johnny Kidney, Chair of the Health Select Committee, reported that this item would be considered by the Select Committee at a future meeting. Cllr Wright welcomed the Programme and felt that the title of the Programme could be changed to include the 'engagement' rather than 'conversations'.

Cllr Gordon King, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, expressed his support for the programme approach and highlighted those communities that felt they didn't always receive an equal share.

The Leader emphasised the need for an understanding of the broader context. He reminded Cabinet that the two areas identified in the report and initially through national Indices of Multiple Deprivation as the most deprived areas of Wiltshire resulted in community visits to hear directly from residents and other community representatives about the lived experience. The outcome of the initial meetings being the Community Conversations Programme. Officers explained the importance of gaining an understanding of the initial two communities would help inform work with other communities in the future.

Resolved:

To note the range of activity underway to support these communities and the ongoing opportunities for community activism and tailored support.

Reason for Decision:

To inform Cabinet of the ongoing activity in relation to community conversations.

43 **The renewal of mail printing and production contract for Revenues and Benefits 2024**

Cllr Nick Botterill Cabinet member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning presented a report setting out the reasons and requirements for securing a reputable company capable of providing a printing and mailing service to deliver the requirements of the Revenues and Benefits Service.

Cllr Botterill explained that the Revenues and Benefits Service is nearing the end of the current contract with their printing provider and need to retender for this service. The cost of production and postage has risen significantly since the original arrangements were put in place and expenditure over the next 5-year period is anticipated to be in the region of £1.75m requiring approval from Cabinet.

Cabinet were informed that since 2012 the Revenues and Benefits Service has used external contractors for the production of council tax bills, business rate bills and notification letters regarding welfare benefits. Whilst significant effort has been made to provide electronic communication, the number of documents produced each year has increased in line with the growth in news, homes and businesses. The service is reliant on external providers who offer the agility, precision, economies of scale and postage discounts that cannot be achieved in-house.

Cllr Graham Wright, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, reported that the last Select Committee meeting was cancelled so a briefing was arranged at short notice for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Management Committee on 13 March 2024. The proposal were supported.

Resolved:

To approve to delegate authority to enter into the contract with the winning provider and any other relevant documentation and decisions required to the Director of Finance and Procurement.

Reasons for decision:

The report explains the reasons for the council to conduct a tender process for the provision of a printing and mailing contract for the Revenues and Benefits Service and to delegate the final decision at the end of the tender process to enter into the contract to the Director of Finance and Procurement.

The Revenues and Benefits Service in Wiltshire manages the administration of council tax for 230,000 households across Wiltshire and is one of the biggest billing authorities in the UK in terms of the number of households who are sent a bill. The service also manages the collection of business rates, income from Business Improvement Districts, the administration of Housing Benefit and assessment of Council Tax Reduction. Each of these services requires the sending of information to the liable household or business or to the individual who qualifies for a welfare benefit.

The quantity of information documents produced at annual billing is in excess of 250,000 items which require printing and dispatch within a three-week window. Each month the service issues bills and adjustment notices, reminders, and summonses in pursuit of payment and the maintenance of records and accounts, equating to a further 200,000 items per annum. The service relies on being able to produce print files and send these securely to an offsite print and mailing company to produce these documents and ensure that they are packaged and dispatched precisely, promptly and in an order (walk-sort) that achieves the greatest discount on postage costs. That the council tax bill has been used to convey information about government schemes, energy rebates for example has meant the inclusion of additional information on or together with council tax bills at short notice, which demonstrates the responsive and supportive relationship that the service is seeking along with the efficient, effective and reliable systems and processes of a specialist provider.

44 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

45 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Resolved:

To agree in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the public from the meeting for the business specified in Minute Numbers 46 and 47 because it is likely that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act and the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

46 **Update on Safety Valve Agreement with the Department for Education**

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for MCI, Economic Development, Heritage, Arts, Tourism and Health and Wellbeing reported that this item was being withdrawn as there was no update available at this time.

47 **Transfer of Local Enterprise Partnership Functions**

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for MCI, Economic Development, Heritage, Arts, Tourism and Health and Wellbeing presented a report that provided an update on the return of economic functions to local authorities and the implications for Wiltshire Council.

Comments were received from Cabinet members, Cllr Graham Wright, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Cllr Gordon King, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group.

Resolved:

That the proposals detailed in the report be noted and approved.

Reason for Decision:

That the reason for the decision be noted as detailed in the Part II report.

(Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 12.00 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Stuart Figini of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718221, e-mail committee@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line 01225 713114 or email communications@wiltshire.gov.uk

The decisions were published on 21 March 2024 and came into effect on 2 April 2024.