

Cabinet

MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2023 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 Caroline Thomas

Also Present:

Cllr Allison Bucknell, Cllr Richard Budden, Cllr Clare Cape, Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Gordon King, Cllr Dr Brian Mathew, Cllr Tamara Reay, Cllr Pip Ridout, Cllr Rich Rogers and Cllr Graham Wright

64 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Nick Holder and Ashley O'Neill.

65 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2023 were presented for consideration, and it was,

Resolved:

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

66 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

67 **Leader's Announcements**

The Leader made an announcement on council work relating to the cost of living, which would be provided on the council's website.

68 **Public Participation and Questions from Councillors**

Six questions had been received for meeting, which were provided in the agenda supplement together with written responses.

Cllr Richard Budden asked a supplementary question welcoming that no RAAC (Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete) had been identified through reviews undertaken of the council's estate, and of any updates to the council's risk register.

It was advised that four maintained schools were being surveyed in the coming week for additional checks, and further desktop reviews of the wider asset base to identify any potential areas for assessment. Inclusion within the risk register

would depend on whether there was in fact any identified risk to monitor and mitigate arising from those assessments.

69 **Financial Year 2023/24 - Quarter One 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 first quarter of the financial year 2023/24. This was based on the position at the end of June 2023, and also provided an update on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and budget gap for the financial year 2024-24 and beyond.

It was stated that Wiltshire's revenue budget position compared favourably with neighbouring and comparator authorities, with a current net overspend of only £0.311m, a variance which could be managed within the financial year. In respect of savings targets only 8% were not currently forecast to be achieved by the end of the year.

Cabinet noted the update and the proposals contained within the report, including several recommendations for budget changes requiring Full Council approval. The pressures on all councils due to cost escalations particularly in Adult and Children's social care, and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Transport, were noted, with thanks expressed to officers for their prudent management of the financial position.

Cllr Pip Ridout, Chairman of the Financial Planning Task Group, endorsed the comments of the Cabinet Member, and expressed no significant concerns with the quarter one update, with the Task Group to focus on the savings position further in quarter two. Cllr Graham Wright, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, welcomed the report and update and sought reassurance the council was not overconfident in its position. It was stated that the Cabinet and officers ensured all assessments were realistic and appropriate, and residents could be assured that Wiltshire Council was not in a severe position financially.

Cllr Gordon King, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, congratulated the Cabinet and management team for a good start financially with the quarter one update. He drew attention to ongoing risks such as prevalence of high inflation, vacancy rates among key workers, and undeliverable savings and how these could be managed.

Cllr Botterill drew attention to the report details including £2m having been set aside from earmarked reserves to mitigate inflationary increases, and if this continued further mitigation would be considered. He emphasised the unlikely savings were included within departmental budgets, and so fully accounted for if they were not achieved.

The Leader noted some savings had not been able to be delivered due to legislative changes. He also noted a risk regarding the high needs block override, for provision of children with Special Educational Needs, which was a

national issue. The spending was through the Department for Education not the council, and formed the majority of the overspend for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), and as an accounting issue that deficit if counted as part of the council's debt would be more significant, but that the council was taking preventative measures where it could.

Cllr Jon Hubbard offered congratulations on the council's financial position as compared to many other authorities. In relation to Children's Services, he highlighted the early help on issues which was the council's focus in recent years, and the importance of continuing that and taking it forward both to improve outcomes and reduce cost pressures by tackling matters in a preventative manner.

Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Skills, stated that the evidence from council projects showed early intervention worked to reduce pressures on the services and delivered better outcomes, and the Cabinet would continue that focus.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

Cabinet recommended to Full Council:

- a) **To move the £0.382m income budget associated with saving from increased retained share of funding from Business Rates for Council Assets from Assets to the Business Rates Retention Scheme in the Funding section; and**
- b) **To increase the Government Grants budget in Funding to recognise the additional Market Sustainability Improvement Fund of £2.773m and increase the net budget in Adults by the same amount.**

These 2 proposals would increase the Council's Net Budget to £469.029m.

Cabinet Approved:

- c) **The transfer of £0.772m of Ukrainian funding from the Home Office to be used to support pupils in Wiltshire schools until 31 March 2024;**
- d) **the transfer of Education and Skills reserves totalling £0.656m to reflect the estimated usage in year especially where schemes are based on the academic year including joint commissioning with the ICB; and**
- e) **the transfer of Families and Children's reserves totalling £0.328m to reflect the estimated usage in year, these all relate to grant funded schemes which straddle more than one financial year.**

Cabinet Noted:

- f) **The current revenue budget is forecast to overspend by £0.311m by the end of the financial year;**

- g) **The current forecast savings delivery performance for the year; and,**
- h) **The updated MTF5 position and revised gap of £7.344m by 2025/26.**

Reasons for Decision

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 for the financial year 2023/24 as at quarter one (30 June 2023), including delivery of approved savings for the year.

To inform Cabinet on the current position for the setting of the 2024/25 budget, it begins the process and focus for setting plans and resources for providing the services and support that will be essential for the continued delivery of a financially sustainable council and effective, quality public services for the residents of Wiltshire.

Following the vote Cllr King sought additional clarification that the transfer of £0.772m of Ukrainian funding from the Home Office to be used to support pupils in Wiltshire schools until 31 March 2024 was to be used specifically to support Ukrainian children as required by the Home Office grant. The Leader confirmed that was the case.

70 **Financial Year 2023/24 - Quarter One Capital Budget Monitoring**

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning, presented a report which set out the Capital Programme for 2023/24 as at 30 June 2023 for the first quarterly budget monitoring period of the financial year. It included budget movements, revisions to the programme, and forecasts for how the programme would be financed.

It was stated that the current annual Capital Programme forecast as a result of adjustments and reprogramming stood at £189.376m, with total capital expenditure for the first quarter being approximately 14% at £26.047m. There was some impact from delays to implementation of the Evolve programme providing a new Enterprise Resource Planning system for the council, which was due to go live in November 2023. It was anticipated expenditure would increase in future quarters.

Cllr Botterill also drew attention to proposals to invest an additional £10m investment for Highways and Transport, as a result of using Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding as part of the Trowbridge Leisure Centre project.

Cabinet noted the update and the proposals contained within the report. The Leader and Cllr Caroline Thomas, Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding, provided additional details on the additional funding for Highways in preventative and repair works, as well as Area Boards being able to comment on areas for improvement works once a planned timetable was prepared. Cllr Pip Ridout, Chairman of the Financial Planning Task Group, stated that the spending profile for the Capital Programme had improved in recent years but

could be improved further, and welcomed the use of CIL funding and associated increased investment in Highways.

Cllr Graham Wright, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, encouraged any information circulated to Area Boards to be at early stage to enable meaningful feedback. Cllr Thomas stated that Area Boards would be presented a planned schedule as soon as was practicable, noting it would not be a consultation, but the intent was to ensure local priorities received appropriate consideration.

Cllr Gordon King, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, welcomed improvements to the realistic estimates of capital expenditure, but raised concerns that only 14% had been expended in the first quarter. He supported the proposal for increased Highways investment and noted the scheduling of Area Board meetings across several months, for when it was time to circulate the proposed schedule of operations.

Cllr Jon Hubbard sought details of the forecast in relation to Education and Skills which was shown as £26.978m, and if this included money which was reprofiled or if such funds were deducted from the forecast. The Cabinet Member confirmed reprofiled funds were deducted, and referenced a full breakdown for the service area in Appendix B.

Cllr Hubbard asked about the proposed expansion to Abbeyfield School, which proposed to be delayed, and if it was currently at overcapacity. It was stated that in terms of trajectory it was anticipated it would still require expansion in future years, but not as soon, with reference to the School Places Strategy later on the agenda.

Cllr Hubbard also sought details on new education provision in the north of the county, for children unable to attend mainstream or specialist schools, listed as Alternative Provision, and if this would be an addition to the programme. It was confirmed this would be a separate project line in the quarter two report.

Cllr Clare Cape asked if the investment in Highways included maintenance of pavements. Cllr Thomas stated there was some funding through the Department for Transport to assist with that work, and she would seek further information. Together with the Leader she noted the reduced effectiveness of weedkillers, as well the environmental impact if spraying was done routinely.

Cllr Botterill also clarified an addition to the proposals as set out in the report, to approve the application for or receipt of grant income as set out in the appendices.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

Cabinet recommended to Full Council:

- a) **The allocation of a £4.4m budget for Education provision in the North of the County to be funded by a mix of capital receipts, earmarked reserves and £1.7m of new borrowing.**

Cabinet Approved:

- b) The allocation of £0.500m budget to be funded by CIL funding for the River Park programme;**
- c) The allocation of £10m CIL funding for Trowbridge Leisure Centre to replace borrowing, with no change in total budget allocation;**
- d) The allocation of £10m budget to Highways and Transport for increased investment to be funded from borrowing released from Trowbridge Leisure Centre; and**
- e) The virement of budget on the Salisbury Central Car Park & Maltings of £0.250m from Millstream Approach Bridge to Coach Park Redevelopment Riverside;**
- f) The grant income applied for and/or received as set out in Appendix C and Appendix D.**

Cabinet Noted:

- g) The additional budgets added to the programme of £17.639m under Chief Finance Officer delegated powers;**
- h) The removals of £0.396m budget in line with 2023/24 Grant award under Chief Finance Officer delegated powers;**
- i) The budgets brought forward from future years into the 2023/24 programme totalling £13.876m under Chief Finance Officer delegated powers;**
- j) The budgets reprogrammed from 2023/24 into future years totalling £69.998m under Chief Finance Officer delegated powers;**
- k) Budget Movements between Schemes;**
- l) The revised 2023/24 Capital Programme forecast as at quarter one of £189.376m;**
- m) The capital spend as of 30 June 2023 of £26.047m; and**
- n) The change in approach for Stone Circle Housing Company to set MRP aside from 2023/24 for the capital loan.**

Reasons for Decision

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 one (30 June 2023).

71 **Performance and Risk Report 2023-24 Q1**

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council, presented a report updating on the progress against the stated missions in the Council's Business Plan using measures of performance available at the end of the first quarter of the financial year, and risks as available at the time of the report's production.

Cllr Clewer highlighted some areas of concern such as the length of time to undertake Education, Health, & Care Plans, due to the increase in numbers required. He also noted issues with pothole repairs, but had been assured the latest data showed the council was on track, and he would raise through the Integrated Care System concerns relating to NHS Health checks. Other issues raised including addressing demands for temporary accommodation, and in relation to the risk register the high cost of social care.

Cabinet noted the update and the details contained within the report, including an increase in the percentage of children fostered, a reduction in the percentage of 16-17 year-olds not in employment, education, or training, data on affordable housing, and educational outcomes for those with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) being above the national average.

Cllr Graham Wright, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, stated the report would be examined in detail at the next meeting of his committee.

Cllr Gordon King, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, stated that the measures and presentation of the report had improved from the first iterations, but it was still sometimes difficult to highlight which parts were significant. In his role as Vice-Chairman of Health Select Committee he shared concerns about delivery of NHS health checks, and the committee was seeking more data from the NHS.

Cllr Richard Budden welcomed the report and urged the use of external benchmarking wherever possible.

Cllr Jon Hubbard sought detail on what pressure or influence could be applied to infrastructure organisations regarding upgrade of electric charging points. The Leader noted references within the Local Plan to charging points, but the accepted the difficulty of providing on street parking charging infrastructure was an issue.

Cllr Clare Cape sought details on data relating to bus journeys, and if there was any impact relating to reduced ticket prices. Cllr Caroline Thomas, Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding, stated it was something the council discussed with partner bus companies, and she would inquire further.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

Cabinet agreed and noted:

- 1) **The updates and outturns against the measures and activities mapped against the Council's priorities;**
- 2) **The Strategic Risk Summary**

Reason

To provide Cabinet with a quarterly update on the current corporate performance framework, which is compiled of the 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.

Note: A break was then taken from 1145-1150

72 **Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Charges for Long Term Empty Properties**

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning, presented a report detailing proposals to consult on a number of options for a local, means tested Council Tax Reduction scheme to those of working age on a low or fixed income.

It was explained that following a consultation a report would be considered at the December 2023 meeting of Cabinet.

Cllr Pip Ridout, Chairman of the Financial Planning Task Group, commented on the proposals, noting the potential cost or increases in recoverable debts.

Cllr Gordon King, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, supported consulting on the options within the report.

It was then,

Resolved:

It was agreed:

- 1) **To delegate to the Director Finance, to go out to consultation on the proposals included in the report;**
- 2) **To approve an increase in the Council Tax premium charge levied on long term empty properties with effect from 1 April 2024.**

Reason

Since 2013 the council has operated two schemes to determine entitlement to Council Tax Reduction (CTR). The scheme for those of pensionable age is a

national scheme and mandated and applies 100% relief to those households. The scheme for those of working age is referred to as the local scheme as a scheme set by the council. Both the administration and the rules of the working age scheme have been heavily impacted by the roll out of Universal Credit which is managed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The local scheme was successfully launched in 2013 and at the time efforts were made to keep the scheme cost neutral. The result was that many working age households were expected to contribute toward their council tax for the first time. Whilst this approach was widely adopted by many local authorities, the impact of changes to the calculation of council tax to allow the inclusion of the Adult Care levy, the impact of Covid-19 and the current cost of living crisis was not anticipated and has resulted in more customers being unable to meet their council tax liability especially low-income households in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.

As a local scheme the council should review the scheme regularly to ensure it meets the priorities of the council and delivers an appropriate level of support for low-income households. Due to the impacts detailed above it is right that the council review the scheme and are required to consult on any changes recommended to the scheme. It is also proposed that changes are made to increase the premiums charged on long term empty properties and adopt the same approach as our neighbouring authorities.

73 **Planning Peer Review Report**

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning, presented a report updating on the findings of the Local Government Association (LGA) Planning Service Peer Review, and setting out the initial response of officers to the recommendations.

It was stated the Peer Review had identified many positive aspects of the council's planning service, but had also identified a number of weaknesses and inefficiencies, including relating to administrative and committee arrangements which were still aligned to or relating to the pre 2009 district council arrangements. He stated some changes recommended would be taking place in the coming months, with others requiring further thought and preparation on the best response to those recommendations, but that change was needed.

The Leader commented that independent experts had provided evidence and reasoning that the set up and way of working within planning needed addressing, and that Members might find some changes challenging. He noted that only a very small proportion of planning decisions were determined by committee.

Cllr Graham Wright, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, on behalf of the Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, noted past scrutiny work involving planning committees in particular, and that the Environment Select Committee would be considering the Peer Review report at its next meeting.

Cllr Gordon King, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, highlighted the high technical knowledge within the planning service teams, but also agreed changes to administration and organisation were appropriate and necessary, fulfilling business plan and corporate objectives, and that five planning committees was not necessarily the most effective arrangement. He suggested improved training offers for town and parish councillors to provide guidance to them could be a useful objective.

Cllr Dr Brian Mathew agreed that the structures could be reformed to deliver greater efficiencies, though also stated some existing structures had strengths.

Cllr Pip Ridout stated she served on two planning committees and spoke to the Peer Review team, and supported many of their recommendations, as well as greater training for parishes.

Cllr Clare Cape highlighted comments in the Peer Review report on involving Members in the Local Plan process.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

It was agreed to note:

- 1) The findings of the Peer Review, recognising the challenges that the service faces in order to create one of the best performing planning services in the country; and**
- 2) The initial officer response to the recommendations.**

Reason

While it would not normally be necessary to report the findings of a peer review to Cabinet, as no formal decision needs to be made, given the nature of the issues raised, it is appropriate that Cabinet be given the opportunity to consider the Planning service peer review report's recommendations and the intended officer response.

74 Procurement of Housing Related Support Contract

Cllr Phil Alford, Cabinet Member for Housing, Strategic Assets, and Asset Transfer presented a report seeking delegated approval to proceed with a procurement exercise to re-commission housing related support services to meet the identified needs of single homeless young people and young parents.

It was explained support services reduced the need for temporary accommodation placements, noting Wiltshire currently had no one placed with Bed & Breakfasts, and that the recommissioned service would seek to better distribute the support provision across the county where it was most needed.

There were no other comments, and it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet approved:

- 1) The commencement of re-commissioning of housing related support services ensuring that there is a balance of housing related support services provided across all customer groups which will reflect the up-to-date needs; and**
- 2) To delegate authority to the Director of Adult Social Care in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Strategic Assets and Asset Transfer and the Cabinet Member for Finance to the award of contracts within the approved budget.**

Reason

Housing related support services provide valuable support to a range of customers who are in vulnerable situations and in need of support to enable them to live independently and maintain a tenancy. The existing contracts expire on 31 March 2024. In order to secure new contracts from 1 April 2024 it is necessary to commence a procurement exercise immediately.

75 Recommissioning of Public Health Services in Primary Care

Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure, Libraries, FM, and Operational Assets, presented a report seeking approval of expenditure of Public Health grant monies over £1m over the five year duration of the Public Health Services in Primary Care contract.

It was explained the contract covered sexual health contraception services and NHS Health Checks, which were statutory requirements, and smoking cessation services. Payment under the contract would be on delivery, meaning if the service did not delivery there would be a financial saving, and a greater cost if over delivering. However, these were considered to be low risk looking at past data and performance.

Cllr Gordon King, as Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, welcomed the focus on preventative services. As Vice-Chairman of the Health Select Committee, he stated he had received a briefing from officers and the Cabinet Member, and had indicated further information should be sought for their November meeting regarding NHS Health Checks and safe accommodation funding.

Cllr Clare Cape supported the proposals in the report, and noted there are many other screening programmes to catch diseases at an early stage, and if promoting Health Checks they may be an opportunity to encourage people to undertake other checks.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet approved:

- 1) **The commencement of a procurement process to commission these Public Health Services in Primary Care;**
- 2) **Budget spend of up to £4,645,000 over the 5-year duration of the contract;**
- 3) **To delegate authority to the Director of Public Health in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure, Libraries, Facilities Management, and Operational Assets to take all necessary steps to commission Public Health Services in Primary Care.**

Reason

The current contract of these Public Health Services is due to expire 31 March 2024, therefore there is the need to recommission these services from 1 April 2024 to avoid any gap in service provision. This is of particular importance as these services have been paused at times during the Covid-19 pandemic.

There is a statutory responsibility for Public Health to provide NHS Health Checks and Sexual health contraception services through the Public Health Grant.

Approval of the spend of Public Health grant monies allows for these statutory Public Health services, as well as additional Public Health recommended services to be commissioned and delivered for Wiltshire residents.

76 **Fleet Vehicle Replacement 2023/24 to 2025/26**

Cllr Caroline Thomas, Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding, presented a report which recommended use of The Procurement Partnership Limited framework to procure light goods vehicles and specialist vehicles for the period 2023/24 to 2025/26, and to delegate authority to approve the award of contracts to the Director of Highways and Transport.

It was stated that the capital budget of £6.463m had been approved by Council , and the preferred engine type would be electric, unless there are feasibility or other appropriate reasons. Cllr Thomas explained the reasoning behind using the framework as set out in the report, to ensure the capital spend was maximised to support service needs.

Cllr Graham Wright, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, on behalf of the Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, noted the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Environment Select Committee had received a briefing on the proposals and were satisfied risks had been appropriately identified and mitigated.

Cllr Dr Brian Mathew raised whether in some instances methane powered vehicles could be an option. The Cabinet Member noted the report was about the procurement route, and future papers would come to Cabinet regarding Fleet Strategy and the staggering of the replacement programme.

Cllr Thomas also noted that due to delivery timescales for some vehicle types orders would need to be placed quite soon.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet approved:

- 1) The use of The Procurement Partnership Limited (TPPL) framework to procure light goods vehicles and specialist vehicles for the period 2023/24 to 2025/26 up to a total value of £6.463m.**
- 2) That the award of contracts for the vehicles to be delegated to the Director of Highways and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, Street scene and Flooding.**

Reason

To award a vehicle purchasing contract to The Procurement Partnership Limited (TPPL) for the replacement of 118 vehicles for the period 2023/24 to 2025/26.

77 School Places Strategy 2023-2027

Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Skills, presented a report seeking approval the School Places Strategy.

It was explained that the fundamental aim was to provide places near to where children live, to meet parental preferences as far as possible, to locate schools at the heart of their communities, and to minimize travel to school distances. Details were provided on the number of schools in Wiltshire, the importance of rural school designation, declining birth rates and the associated impact, engagement with schools, and other matters.

Cllr Jon Hubbard, Chairman of the Children's Select Committee, stated his committee was content with the report. He also noted a comment received in feedback from a parish council raising a concern about secondary schools being asked to host satellite provision on behalf of Special Schools, and sought assurance the Cabinet agreed that such provision was a positive thing and encouraging attendance at mainstream schools was still the aim. Cllr Mayes confirmed it was.

Cllr Gordon King, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, sought details on replacement of school structures, and if this was done with future growth in mind. It was explained sometimes maintenance was required which necessitated replacement, but if expansion was needed the team looked at the data to identify and plan for this.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet approved the School Places Strategy 2023–2027.

Reason

To enable the Council to fulfil its statutory duties to ensure sufficient school places and increase opportunities for parental choice.

78

Domestic Abuse External Grant Allocation 2023-2025

Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure, Libraries, FM, and Operational Assets, presented a report seeking authority to endorse proposals for use against the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) funding, to fulfil the functions of the statutory duty on Tier 1 local authorities relating to the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children residing in safe accommodation.

It was stated that at present the grant funding was only provided for two years up to 2025, which restricted long term planning. Cllr Blair-Pilling noted support for those suffering domestic abuse and dependents was not as straightforward as providing refuges and provided details of visits to support organisations and partners, including housing associations such as Greensquare, and additional planning relating to the military community. He stated the goal was to help people early on, and to prepare them to be able to move on independently and safely.

Cllr Gordon King, as Vice-Chairman of Health Select Committee, noted the difficulties with longer term planning as a result of the short-term nature of the grant funding, but expressed confidence in the officer team to manage issues.

Cllr Jon Hubbard sought details on the breakdown of costs for the grant proposals, asking whether any allowance had been made for inflation or salary rises. In response it was stated teams were working with providers on costs, and the funding was not in year and would be rolled over, however Cllr Hubbard raised concerns whether the planning was based on first year costs only.

Cllr Hubbard, noting his own work providing counselling for young people and mental health support, and the large impact on young people where there was domestic abuse, encouraged the council to invest or work with local specialist organisations as much as possible, integrating the support that is available, or workers liaising with organisations that offer mental health support.

Cllr Blair-Pilling and officers noted the funding could not address the totality of effects arising from domestic abuse and not all organisations could be involved as a result, however the roles and delivery options would be looked at.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

That Cabinet approved and agreed:

- 1) **The £848,998 allocated from the DLUHC fund for 2023-24 (yr 3), and £865,016 for 2024-25 (yr 4) and endorsed the proposals for allocating the grant.**
- 2) **To roll any surplus funding to an earmarked reserve.**
- 3) **That any further decisions relating to the distribution of this grant are delegated to the Corporate Director of Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Director of Public Health.**

Reason

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 details the statutory responsibilities of the Local Authority functions relating to the 'provision of support for all victims of domestic abuse and their children, regardless of their relevant protected characteristics, within relevant accommodation' (as defined by the Regulations).

To support the implementation of new duties in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Wiltshire distributed its allocated year 1 funding (£830,051) and year 2 funding (£832,348) to further strengthen the local support offer to victims and their families fleeing domestic abuse and living in safe accommodation. The decision making was underpinned from evidence from the local health needs assessment, an independent review of services including a map and gap, as well as service-user engagement and multi-agency learning.

In December 2022 the government committed a further £127 million to be allocated to local authorities for year three, and £129 million for year four of its continued commitment to invest in domestic abuse services. Wiltshire have been allocated £848,998 for 2023-24 (year 3 funding), and £865,016 for 2024-25 (year 4 funding).

To maximise the opportunities of this additional funding, enhancing the local support offer available to victims and their families in Wiltshire experiencing domestic abuse, Wiltshire requires Cabinet approval to endorse the proposals for the allocation of this funding across the local system.

The proposals seek to build on the learning from projects invested as a result of the funding received in year's one and two and allows for continuation where results have been indicative of positive engagement and improved outcomes for those using the interventions and in receipt of support. Using the funding on the proposals included in the paper will enable valuable work to continue and ensure there are no gaps in service delivery, which could place vulnerable service users at risk.

79 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 1.10 pm)

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

These minutes were published on 15 September 2023 and came into effect on 23 September 2023.

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

Leader's Announcement Cost of Living Update Cabinet – 12 September 2023

Introduction

Cost of Living issues remain a concern for the Council, our partners and the communities we serve. I am proud of the way we have worked, flexibly, bringing together different services and schemes to provide support. We don't know yet the exact nature of the ongoing challenges, nor the support that central government will provide, but I am confident that we will be able to respond quickly, as we have done before, to this changing environment.

Following on from the [update](#) I gave Cabinet before the summer, and before talking about the future, I wanted to highlight some of the work that has been undertaken over the last year, and crucially the impact that this has had on individuals:

- Warm & Safe Wiltshire

The Boiler fund project supported a family to replace an oil fuelled heating system that had broken where the family was in receipt of Universal Credit and Disability benefits. The replacement was crucial as the child was homeschooled, and the cold was impacting on the families mental and physical health. After the work was completed, the parent told officers:

“You have given us the best quality of life – I cannot thank you enough. The whole house is lovely and warm, we can completely relax and enjoy it. I didn't realise the impact it was having on my mental health, worry about my son”.

- Libraries

Colleagues in the Data & Insight team analysed feedback collected by Libraries staff to identify the key themes, including that:

Libraries has created a Warm and inviting atmosphere creating a positive customer experience, which could make it easier to access to information.

Gratitude for warm spaces and warm packs provision for the public.

- Boater and Traveller Winter Support Project

Public Health secured funding from the UK Shared prosperity fund and in partnership with Julian House identified boaters and travellers who needed urgent winter support at a time when there was no government funding to support this group. The fund allowed people to receive a mixture of fuel and food vouchers. The following testimony, given to officers, shows the impact it had on one family:

A single parent with a 17-month-old baby girl, they previously worked as a carer and were determined to return to work. They were able to find employment, however after paying for childcare and travel cost, they were only earning the equivalent of £3 per hour. The winter allowance helped them maintain this work over winter whilst providing a warm environment for them and their baby and enabled her to gain promotion.

Household Support Fund 2023-24

As reported previously to [Cabinet in March](#), the Council has been allocated £5,457,313 from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This next tranche of the Fund has been provided to support households, who would otherwise struggle to buy food, pay essential

utility bills or meet other essential living costs to help them with significantly rising living costs for the financial year 2023-24.

The Council has learnt a significant amount about how to best utilise this funding, and services across the council will be delivering those most in need to combat food and energy poverty. I am very pleased to say, the charities and the voluntary sector in the county have been successful in bidding for funds from the scheme, to enable them to deliver support to the homeless, older people and those facing domestic violence amongst others. This is a real example of partnership working at its best, and you can read more about [what schemes the HSF supports](#) on our webs.

Libraries and Warm Spaces

I am pleased to confirm that all of our libraries will continue to provide a warm welcome over the Autumn and Winter and will be places where Warm Packs will be distributed from October onwards.

FUEL

You will no doubt have heard of the challenges are established FUEL programme faced when a provider pulled out shortly before the summer holidays. I commend the hard work of the officers involved to find alternative providers to ensure that children received healthy food and activities across the summer holidays.

EBSS Scheme

Officers have made the final payments under this government scheme. Stand ready to support the government should another scheme be available, and we hope to make this clear to our local MPs should the opportunity arise.

Gypsy, Roma, Traveller & Boater Communities

Many in this community are not eligible for government schemes, with a most not meeting residency requirements event with recent expansions. I am, then, pleased to see that Public Health, working with outreach charity partners, will be providing fuel/food vouchers and energy saving advice from November.

For the future

I am pleased that officers who have been coordinating work, will continue to meet regularly to horizon scan and respond to future issues.

As well as the plans highlighted already, officers will be updating the community directory to ensure that local people can find warm spaces and food providers in their community. This should be updated in the next few weeks.

As part of the 1st tranche of the HSF programme, just over £100,000 has been invested in 19 different food settings with the 2nd tranche opening around Christmas time with, approximately, another £100,000 remaining.

I was pleased to report to Cabinet previously that Area Boards had chosen to support schemes in their areas that addressed the Cost of Living issues in their area, and I hope that they will continue to do so.

I will, of course, keep the Cabinet updated.