

Cabinet

MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 12 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 and Cllr Caroline Thomas

Also Present:

Cllr Helen Belcher OBE, Cllr Richard Budden, Cllr Gordon King, Cllr Dominic Muns, Cllr Tamara Reay, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Suzanne Wickham, Cllr Graham Wright and Cllr Jon Hubbard

27 **Apologies**

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

28 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

29 **Leader's Announcements**

There were no Leader announcements.

30 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

31 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

32 **Update on Safety Valve Deal with the Department for Education**

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Military-Civilian Integration, Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Health and Wellbeing, introduced the report which provided an update on progress to reach a Safety Valve Deal between Wiltshire Council and the Department for Education (DfE), and setting out the implications of the Deal on the financial position of the council.

The Leader explained that discussions were taking place with the DfE to arrive at a negotiated position to be presented to Ministers for their approval. The outcome of the conversations and status of all Safety Valve deals were currently embargoed until published by the DfE, and therefore discussed under Part II of the agenda. He confirmed that the Council was committed to transparency around this work and the detail of the deal would be made public

as soon as possible and further information would be available at the Cabinet's next ordinary meeting on 19 March 2024.

The Leader reminded Cabinet that the Safety Valve Plan offered councils additional funds from the DfE to help with their historic deficits, so long as the Department is satisfied that the council can return their Dedicated Schools Grant to a balanced position over the period of the deal. In addition, there is the opportunity to bring additional capital investment into the county to address some of the capacity issues that have historically been present. He highlighted that the scale of the challenge should not be understated and required a concerted effort from everyone in the Council's SEND system.

The Leader explained his original views about the proposals and how these had changed over time and in listening to other Cabinet members and officers. He noted that all Councils were facing the same types of challenges to some degree and the issues had been caused by national policy. This created a set of challenges for the Council and delivery would be extremely challenging.

Resolved:

That the public update be noted.

Reasons for Decision:

The High Needs Block deficit remains the largest financial risk to the council and the Safety Valve programme forms a key part of the financial context for the council. Cabinet will continue to be kept apprised of progress and public approach to it.

33 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

It was,

Resolved:

To agree that in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the public from the meeting for the business specified in Item Number 8 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.

Paragraph 3 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

34 **Update on Safety Valve Deal with the Department for Education**

Cllr Layra Mayes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, introduced the Part II report which

provided further in-depth detail about progress to reach a Safety Valve Deal between Wiltshire Council and the Department for Education (DfE), setting out the implications of the Deal on the financial position of the council.

Cabinet Members commented on the report and proposals along with additional comments from Cllr Jon Hubbard, as Chair of the Children's Select Committee, and in a personal capacity, Cllr Gordon King as Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, and Cllr Suzanne Wickham.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

- 1) Endorse the steps being taken to address the financial deficit in the High Needs Block as set out in the High Needs Block Sustainability Plan and the Safety Valve Deal.**
- 2) Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, the Corporate Director for People (DCS) and the Director of Finance & Procurement (S151 Officer) in consultation with:**
 - the Leader of the Council,**
 - the Cabinet Member for Children's Services Education and Skills,**
 - the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, SEND and Inclusion,**
 - the Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and strategic Planning**

to sign the deal on behalf of Wiltshire Council.

Reason for Decision:

If Wiltshire Council and the Department for Education are to enter into a deal, then it must be signed and returned to the DfE by 12 March in order to comply with their requirements.

The High Needs Block deficit remains the largest financial risk to the council and the Safety Valve deal forms a key part of the financial context for the council. Cabinet will continue to be kept apprised of progress and public reporting is critical to ensure transparency of the programme and the council's approach to it.

This decision was published on 12 March 2024, and in accordance with Part 8 of the Constitution the Chairman of the Council agreed that it was reasonable in the circumstances for the decision to be treated as a matter of urgency, and therefore not subject to the call-in procedure.

(Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 10.55 am)

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