

## Cabinet

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### **MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 10 DECEMBER 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 Dominic Muns, Cllr Ashley O'Neill and Cllr Tamara Reay

#### **Also Present:**

Cllr Richard Budden, Cllr Clare Cape, Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Cllr Robert MacNaughton, Cllr Stewart Palmen and Cllr Ian Thorn

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#### 135 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Nick Holder.

#### 136 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2024 were presented, and it was,

#### **Resolved:**

**To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2024.**

#### 137 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 138 **Leader's Announcements**

1. The Leader reminded members that the public participation and questions from members section of the meeting is for statements to be heard and the submitted questions and responses to be received. He explained that one supplementary question could be asked and this may be responded to verbally by the Cabinet member at the meeting or a written response would be provided after the meeting, it was not an opportunity to engage in long debates about general issues.
2. The Leader was pleased to report that the Council had received the highest ranking possible for its recent SEND inspection. He went on to announce that the inspectors from the Quality Care Commission and Ofsted stated that people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in Wiltshire are Valued and prioritised. It was noted that

Wiltshire Council is now one of only five local authorities to have received the top grade inspection for SEND and also an 'Outstanding' Ofsted result for work with Families and Children, in the last four years. [A full report is available to read on the Council's website.](#)

Cllr Ian Thorn, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group congratulated everyone involved in the process in achieving the fantastic results for SEND and the outcome from Ofsted.

## 139 **Public Participation and Questions from Members**

Thirty-six general questions had been received for the meeting, which were provided in the published agenda supplement together with written responses.

Supplementary questions were received from:

- Cllr Ian Thorn thanked officers and the Leader for the response to his question about the Council's appetite for auctioning off leases for commercial properties that have been empty for long periods. He again asked about the Council's appetite for taking this process forward. The Leader explained that the process appeared to be very complex, and the impact on officer time needed to be assessed. Wiltshire Council is engaging in the process to learn from the early adopter authorities to understand how the process could work in Wiltshire.
- Andrew Nicolson read a statement about the Local Transport Plan 4 and the accompanying implementation plan and business risks. He asked a supplementary question about the public consultation period and why it appeared to not have been included on the Council's main consultation webpage. Cllr Tamara Reay, Cabinet member for Transport and Assets repeated that the statutory requirement for public consultation is 6 weeks, the Council would be extending the consultation period to 8 weeks to cover the Christmas period. Details about the consultation can be found on the Council's website here - [Help shape the Local Transport Plan for Wiltshire as consultation begins - Wiltshire Council](#). A written response would be provided in relation to regional strategies and the LTP4. The Leader explained that the proposed combined authorities and Mayoral model may be a route for future funding of regional transport strategies. He noted that large urban areas would implement different transport policies to combat climate change compared to rural authorities such as Wiltshire.

In addition, Mr Nicolson asked about a comment from Cabinet about the Council being too ambitious in meeting the net zero targets. Cllr Dominic Muns, Cabinet Member for Waste and Environment confirmed that the comment had been taken out of context and he was referring to other Councils and companies being too ambitious in meeting their own targets. He further explained that the Council only had control over a small proportion of transport in Wiltshire and it continued to work towards achieving its net zero commitments.

## 140 **Devolution Update**

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council, presented a report providing an update on Wiltshire Council's expression of interest in devolution submitted to government by Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire councils.

The Leader reported that since the last update to Cabinet in October 2024 further discussions have taken place with Dorset and Somerset councils and the Expression of Interest (EoI) has been amended for the proposed 'Heart of Wessex' devolution deal for a directly elected mayor for the Combined Authority.

Cabinet noted that a letter has been sent to the Deputy Prime Minister requesting that the Heart of Wessex be considered in the first tranche of devolution deals. The revised submission reflects the shared vision for securing better funding deals through local empowerment and collaboration. It was expected that an English Devolution White Paper would be published on 16 December, which should provide further clarity, ahead of further legislation being laid before parliament. The offer to Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council and Swindon Borough Council remained open.

Cabinet, although accepting of the proposals expressed concerns about additional tiers of bureaucracy being imposed, recognised the many challenges ahead and raised queries about the Combined Authorities ability to raise finances through precepts.

Three public and member questions were received for the meeting, and these were included in the published agenda supplement together with written responses prior to this meeting.

Supplementary questions were received from:

- Cllr Ian Thorn, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, recognised that the devolution process was being forced on Local Authorities by the Government and noted that one of the economic drivers for the Heart of Wessex should be the inclusion of Swindon Borough Council in the Combined Authority. He stressed the importance of backbench members and residents being involved in discussions about the future structure of any combined authority in the area and asked about the funding requirements for this additional layer of bureaucracy. The Leader confirmed that he had provided updates to members, and this would continue throughout the process with debates at Full Council meetings and highlighted the importance of seeking the views of the public. He accepted that information was limited at this stage until the White Paper was published on 16 December 2024.
- Chris Caswill asked further about the benefits of a regional mayor, issues relating to planning and public involvement. The Leader explained that the Government had decided that combined authorities are the best way

forward and there would be a risk to rural England if they were not involved in the process at an early stage. It is recognised that there would be a tension with regard to cross border planning and this required further clarity to define its impact within a combined authority.

Cllr Clare Cape asked about the funding streams for the Combined Authority and whether these would come from existing local authority funding or new forms of funding. The Leader reported that further clarity is needed on the funding of combined authorities. He reminded members that the council currently bid for a number of funding streams and it was possible that these funding streams would be diverted to the combined authority to manage.

**Resolved:**

**That Cabinet note:**

- 1. The revised expression of interest submitted to government as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.**
- 2. The intention to continue discussions with neighbouring councils and government as appropriate, particularly following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper.**

*Reason for Decision:*

*Devolution should provide greater freedoms and flexibilities allowing councils to work more effectively to improve services for local residents.*

141 **Recommissioning of Speech and Language Therapy Service**

Cllr Jane Davies, Cabinet member for Adult Social Care, SEND and Inclusion presented a report seeking approval to commission Speech and Language Therapy services for schools and early years settings, via a procurement process.

Cabinet noted that the Service provides education settings with support in meeting the needs of children and young people with communication needs and works directly with children in school and early years settings to provide therapy. The current contract ended on 31 March 2025, and Wiltshire Council proposes to commission a service directly to support children and young people in education.

Cllr Ian Thorn, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, welcomed the proposals and expressed support for the direction of travel. He asked about the level of oversight and clarity in delivering the current arrangements with the Independent Care Board (ICB) and procuring additional services with the Board. Cllr Davies reported that the Council is constantly ambitious for the early years setting and continue to make ongoing improvements. The Leader highlighted the pressures in commissioning and the many different processes followed by the members of the ICB including different commissioning cycles.

**Resolved:**

**That Cabinet:**

- 1. Agrees to commission Speech and Language Therapy services for schools and early years settings with a clear co-produced specification that meets the needs of families and children and education settings.**
- 2. Agrees to increased investment in speech and language services from the SEND Transformation Programme budget, to provide a total of £2,280,000 over the lifetime of the contract period of two years, plus one.**
- 3. Delegates authority to approve and award a new contract and future extensions and all associated documents to the Director of Commissioning and Director of Education and Skills in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, SEND and Inclusion.**

*Reason for Decision:*

*The purpose of this paper is to provide an update to Cabinet on the status of the Council's contracted Speech and Language Service which is delivered by an external service supplier and expires on 31 March 2025.*

*Following the end of the current service Wiltshire Council intend to commission a service separately from the BSW ICB to ensure a greater level of oversight and clarity in delivering a service that meets the needs of education settings, parents and children. However, the service specification will be designed to ensure full alignment with the health delivered speech and language service to provide a service that reduces duplication and allows for a holistic approach.*

*A recommissioned service following a procurement process and award of contract will be in place for 1 April 2025*

#### **142 Wiltshire Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) Adoption**

Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cabinet member for Public Health, Leisure, Libraries and Communities presented a report seeking approval to adopt the Wiltshire Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) renewal.

Cllr Blair-Pilling reported that the Strategy supplied up-to-date information to provide a robust, strategic evidence base in the Council's negotiation, secure S106 developer contributions and influence a variety of local authority functions. The Strategy was conducted over a 14 month period in accordance with Sport England's PPS Five Step Guidance covering the four main sports of football, cricket, rugby and hockey.

Cabinet noted that the PPS is not a financial package or commitment from the Council to deliver the action plan but sets out an approach to deliver within

available resources. It is a tool to assist in the planning process, informs decision making and policy development, the leveraging in of S106 developer contributions and is needed to underpin the Wiltshire Local Plan as an evidence base to conform with the National Planning Policy Framework.

Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Chairman of the Environment Select Committee reported that he and the Vice-Chairman of the Committee received a briefing on the proposals on 5 December 2024. Cllr Kunkler noted that it is a very comprehensive strategy. The Cabinet Member and officers explained the reasoning behind the strategy and the core principles which underpin it. They discussed how the success of the previous strategy could be measured and heard how the evidence used would be regularly updated. They questioned whether associated facilities such as changing rooms, toilets and lighting were covered and were reassured that they were. They were also interested in how less formal spaces would be identified and mapped. They welcomed the Strategy as it would help increase sports, physical activity and play opportunities in Wiltshire.

Cllr Ian Thorn, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, welcomed the proposals and commented on the disparity between male and female sport, budgets to implement the Strategy. Cllr Blair-Pilling confirmed that the Strategy is not a financial package or a commitment to deliver the action plan, it details the current and future infrastructure required and an enabler for others to manage the funding of schemes and projects.

Cllr Budden welcome the proposals and thanked officers for their work on the Strategy. He commented on the necessary funding to deliver the Strategy and any funding shortfalls. Cllr Blair-Pilling explained that the Strategy is a statement of where we are with the current Playing Pitch infrastructure. The future plans were very dependant on S106 developer contributions and the enthusiasm of every school, club and individual. Officers confirmed that the Strategy was an enabling document and there were no funding predictions.

**Resolved:**

**That Cabinet approve and adopt the Wiltshire Playing Pitch Strategy.**

*Reason for Decision:*

*An up-to-date Wiltshire PPS is a tool to assist in the planning process, it informs decision making, policy development, the leveraging in of s106 developer contributions and is needed to underpin the Wiltshire Local Plan as an evidence base to conform with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).*

143 **Library Strategy 2025 - 2030**

Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cabinet member for Public Health, Leisure, Libraries and Communities presented a report seeking approval to adopt the Wiltshire Library Strategy 2025-2030.

Cllr Blair-Pilling reported that the Library Service has experienced significant change over the last 5 years and the report detailed the reasons for the changes. The strategy would help to maintain the momentum already developed and provide a clear direction to sustain and improve on this performance, particularly in the areas of health and wellbeing, economic regeneration, cultural activity and digital support. He congratulated officers for their engagement with users in the preparation of the Strategy. He commented on the Peer Challenge by the Local Government Association and Arts Council England, undertaken in July 2023, with the key recommendations detailed in the report and the Executive Summary available at Appendix 2 of the report.

Cllr Reay provided an example of how she recently provided assistance to a member of the community in relation to the provision of a thermal imaging device that was available from the local library for community use. The Leader thanked officers for producing a very good Strategy and Cllr Davies thanked officers for delivering on the one council approach, and maximising the outcomes for all assets.

Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Chairman of the Environment Select Committee reported that he and the Vice-Chairman of the Committee received a briefing on the proposals on 5 December 2024. Cllr Kunkler reported on the discussions about improving the marketing of the service and the 'Think Libraries First' approach, finances, digital inclusion, and the role of libraries in supporting health and well-being. He explained that the Environment Select Committee has taken a keen interest in the development of the Library Services recognising its key role in our communities. He welcomed the new Strategy. The select committee will also want to be updated on progress over the coming years.

Cllr Ian Thorn, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, congratulated the Cabinet member and officers for their work on the Strategy. He commented on the role of Libraries in the local community and made reference to the recent storms and potential for reporting issues to the Council via the local Library. Officers confirmed that reporting issues at a local library is acceptable.

Cllr Budden welcomed the proposals and commented on the budget underpinning the Strategy.

The Leader welcomed Colin Gale to the meeting and agreed that he could ask a question on the Library Service. Colin commented on the importance of the Mobile Library Service to rural areas and the use of redundant telephone boxes for community book schemes. Officers confirmed that the Mobile Library Service is an important element of the Library Service and reported that the Service would be taking delivery of two new Mobile Libraries in 2025. The book scheme using telephone boxes is community led and not something that the library service had capacity to be involved with.

**Resolved:**

**That Cabinet approve the Library Strategy 2025-30.**

*Reason for Decision:*

*The results of a Local Government Association Peer Challenge in July 2023 recommended a strategy be developed so the library service could continue to innovate and adapt to meet the future needs of people living, working and studying in Wiltshire.*

*The potential impact of demographic, budgetary and environmental changes in the future means a clear framework is required to focus delivery and ensure the statutory requirements of the library service are maintained and delivered in a cost-effective way.*

*By articulating the vision, purpose and priorities of the library service over the next five years the strategy will ensure the service remains relevant and able to deliver on the national and local priorities a public library is there to support.*

144 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 12.00 pm)

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