

Cabinet

MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2025 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 Nick Holder, Cllr Dominic Muns and Cllr Ashley O'Neill

Also Present:

Cllr Clare Cape, Cllr Gavin Grant, Cllr Sven Hocking, Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Cllr Robert MacNaughton, Cllr Nic Puntis, Cllr Martin Smith and Cllr Ian Thorn

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Tamara Reay and Cllr Jane Davies.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2024 were presented, and it was,

Resolved:

To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2024.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Leader's Announcements

There were no Leader's announcements.

5 Public Participation and Questions from Members

Thirty-five 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 Richard Budden asked further about the development of a site in Tisbury and the need for an update so that questions from residents and

the Parish Council can be responded to. The Leader noted that the delays at the site were regrettable, and he referred to the response in the supplementary agenda pack and indicated that the Shareholder group meeting on 27 January 2025 would receive an update on the development of the site.

- Andrew Nicolson asked further questions about the LTP4 which included measures for co-operation at regional and national level following the consultation, public issues with the questionnaire and future engagement in relation to the LTP4. The Leader explained that all consultation responses would be considered in line with the agreed timetable and there is no pre-judgment at this stage about the role of proposed combined authorities and Mayoral model and LTP4. The Leader noted that it was unfortunate that the public were experiencing issues with certain aspects of the consultation questionnaire, especially as with all large consultations the process had been simplified to encourage public participation. In relation to the form of future engagement, the Leader indicated that Cllr Reay would provide a written response.
- Tom McInerney asked if the Council was abandoning the 5-year land supply. Cllr Botterill explained that this was not the case and commented on the large number of existing planning applications that had not been implemented.
- Colin Gale asked how long the Council think that they can maintain the submitted Local Plan level of housing when they do not have a 5 Year Housing Land Supply and what are the Council doing to increase the housing land supply and what strategy do Wiltshire Council have to fight of the speculative developers. Cllr Botterill explained that the Local Plan provided an allocation of 6 years.

6 Safety Valve plan update & School's Block Transfer

Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Service, Education and Skills presented a report which provided an update on the Safety Valve Agreement between Wiltshire Council and the Department for Education (DfE).

The Deputy Leader reminded members that the Council signed a Safety Valve agreement with the Department for Education (DfE) on 12 March 2024. She explained that whilst the activity to support the plan is broadly on track, the financial limits are not being met and consequently the agreement has been marked as off track. Appendix 1 of the report reflects the Q2 budget monitoring position that went to Cabinet on 19 November, forecasting an overspend of £17.49m on top of the £28.25m overspend included in the original plan. The increase in spend is primarily due to the number of EHCP's in the system, 660 ahead of the figure suggested by the original Safety Valve Plan. This now requires significant changes to the Plan as set out in Appendix 2 so that an in-year balanced position can be achieved, and the overall balanced position is

now suggested as 2031, therefore a two-year extension is requested of the Department for Education (DfE). The report detailed the changes to the Plan and revisions to be submitted to the DfE following consultation with the Schools Forum in December 2024.

The Leader noted his previous concerns about the Safety Valve agreement and acknowledged the challenges nationally and associated difficulty in dealing with the process.

Cllr Ian Thorn, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, in noting the changes to the Plan, asked that services remained at a level to meet demand. He also raised questions about the reasons for the increase in EHCP's and the necessity for a holistic approach to achieve early outcomes and therefore reducing the need for EHCP's. The Deputy Leader explained that current systems are being recreated to avoid issues of the past and the work to clear the EHCPNA backlog, ensuring where there is a level of need to warrant an EHCP it is available. It was noted that schools are fundamental partners in the process and support offered.

Cllr Martin Smith commented on the impact of the request for 0.24% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. The Deputy Leader confirmed that this transfer did not impact the national funding formula for school budgets.

Cllr Gavin Grant commented on the Council's ability to work with small rural schools and, the impact of the introduction of additional free care for 3-year-olds and capacity to engage with the number of 3-year-olds entering into childcare. The Deputy Leader explained that the Council worked with all small schools and tailored the support for each child as necessary. She indicated that there were many resource bases in primary schools successfully providing additional help and support to children and these were also being employed in the secondary school environment. Officers explained that the Council has well developed system in place to provide holistic support for 3-year-olds with educational needs along with wider family support.

Resolved:

- 1. That Cabinet endorse the draft revised plan submitted to the DfE in December, including the new timeline and the interventions set out within it.**

That Cabinet approve:

- 2. The Corporate Director for Children and Education, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Members, to seek agreement for the revised plan from the Department for Education.**
- 3. An adjustment to the Plan which was submitted to the DfE in January 2024, and revised in December 2024, to request a block transfer of the maximum amount that can be transferred without impacting school budgets (estimated at 0.24%)**

Reason for Decision:

Delivery of the SEND Sustainability Plan is vital to removing the DSG deficit, and related financial risk, from the council and bringing DSG into an in year balance position. Having a realistic plan, over seven years, enables the authority to do this in a structured way that does not compromise on the quality of support given to children and young people with SEND.

Delivery of the plan relies on schools and headteachers working effectively with the local authority and continuing to build a more sustainable system. Given the strength of feeling over the School's Block transfer, and the uncertainty about whether a request for a 1% transfer would be granted by the Secretary of State without Schools Forum approval, it is felt that maintaining the relationships with schools is paramount and a change required to that assumed and included previously.

7 Climate Delivery Plans 2025 - 2027

Cllr Dominic Muns, Cabinet member for Waste and Environment presented a report which introduced the proposed new Climate Delivery Plan for 2025.

Cllr Muns reported that the existing plans - 'Wiltshire Climate Strategy Climate Delivery Plan 2022-2024' and the 'Carbon Neutral Council Plan 2022-24' were approved in September 2022. The proposed Plan identifies the action the council is taking to tackle the climate emergency, and prioritises actions based on the impact it can have, and the role and influence the council has. Action will be focused towards the most meaningful activities to reduce carbon emissions and increase resilience to the impacts of climate change. The Plan has reviewed the areas of focus of the Climate Strategy, in order to simplify and clarify action and governance and builds on the progress to date, and the foundation laid in key areas such as county-wide retrofit, and decarbonisation of the council's buildings and fleet.

Cllr Muns thanked all officers involved in the Plan's preparation and the contributions from Councillors and the Climate Emergency Task group

The Leader commented on UK scorecards, areas of focus and their delivery, the need for national Key Performance Indicators, the Council's approach being evidence based and financially sensible, savings to be achieved year on year and the reduction on emissions.

Cllr Nick Holder, Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene and Flooding thanked Cllr Muns for referencing the decarbonisation of the Council's fleet, which will have a significant impact on the reduction in emissions.

Andrew Nicolson paid tribute to the Climate Team for their dedication and hard work. He welcomed the consultation with stakeholders in the preparation of the Plan and called for the introduction of Key Performance Indicators for the

schemes built. He further spoke on commitment to reach net zero by 2030 and the importance of engaging all Councillors.

Cllr Muns commented on the importance of being agile in relation to the delivery of schemes and referenced the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans as an example – where the Council provides the detailed document or creates the framework and then works with the local community to deliver the scheme either through the Area Board or the Parish Council. He noted that of the 200 schemes, 150 have been progressed, 10 were repurposed and 15 to be started. He welcomed the comment from Andrew Nicolson about the importance of all Councillors engaging in the process, expected that all Councillors would ‘carry the baton’ for residents.

Cllr Graham Wright, Chairman of the Climate Emergency Task Group reported that he was concerned the Task Group meeting planned for 8 January 2025 was cancelled as the draft report was not available for the Task Group to consider, and the Task Group lost the opportunity to contribute to the Plan. He asked Cabinet to consider how Scrutiny could be involved at an earlier stage, although he was aware that scrutiny can be retrospective. Cllr Muns and the Leader assured Cllr Wright that Scrutiny played an important role in the development of Plans and Strategies in addition to the review of existing Plans and Strategies. It is essential that Scrutiny had an opportunity to comment on Cabinet reports prior to the Cabinet meeting.

Cllr Ian Thorn, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, thanked Cllr Muns for the report and the achievements to date. He also thanked Andrew Nicolson for his commitment in attending Cabinet meetings and asking the hard questions. Cllr Thorn asked about how the Council can engage further with partners and encourage them to consider net zero policies, how we reach the wider public, the availability of training for members on Carbon Literacy. Cllr Muns referred to X4 and X5 areas of focus about engagement with stakeholder and community action as examples of working with communities, G1 and G3 areas of focus about upskilling and green skills the Council is actively participating in, training on Carbon Literacy is available for members and a number of members had started the training.

Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling noted that Area Boards were a vital place for communities to engage and contribute to climate issues, as the Area Boards continue to align objectives with Council priorities.

Cllr Richard Budden thanked everyone involved in contributing to the report and Plan. He thanked Cllr Holder in relation to the Decarbonisation of the Council’s Fleet and the comments on Scope 1 and 2 emissions of vehicles owned by the Council. He also mentioned his disappointment that the reduction of Scope 3 emissions – household waste management was not included in the Council’s plans, although he was aware of the financial challenges for Scope 3 emissions.

Resolved:

Cabinet is asked:

- 1. To note the conclusions of the review of the Climate Strategy Delivery Plan 2022/24 and the Carbon Neutral Council Plan 2022-24**
- 2. To note and endorse the draft Climate Delivery Plan 2025, to be approved by the Corporate Director, Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Waste and Environment.**

Reason for Decision:

To provide Cabinet with a concluding review report in relation to the Climate Delivery Plans, for the period 2022-24.

To introduce the draft Climate Delivery Plan for 2025, and to provide an opportunity for Cabinet to comment on the draft, with any necessary adjustments made before final approval.

8 Swindon and Wiltshire Economic Strategy

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council presented the Swindon and Wiltshire Economic Strategy 2025-2036 for approval.

The Leader explained that the Strategy would also be considered for approval by Swindon Borough Council on 4 February 2025. He reported that the government required the production of an economic strategy for Swindon and Wiltshire as part of its policy to transfer the functions of local enterprise partnerships (LEP) to upper tier local authorities, The completion of the strategy was also a core funding condition for 2024/25.

Cabinet noted that the purpose of the strategy is to present the strategic priorities required to deliver economic growth for the next ten years. It also sets the wider context for any future requirement to produce a 'local growth plan' that is, capital investment priorities requiring government funding for delivery or enabling works.

Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Chair of the Environment Select Committee reported that he and the Vice-Chair of the Select Committee received a briefing on 16 January 2025 and indicated that during the discussion they considered the impact of devolution on the Strategy and how a lack of detail is affecting planning. They also looked at possible content and timescales for the government's industrial strategy and devolution bill. They welcomed the Strategy and asked that the Environment Select Committee will be kept up to date on developments.

Cllr Ian Thorn, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, felt that the Strategy lacked evidence about resources., both people and finance, a lack of milestones, what the Strategy will do and how, and would it help to increase the number of start-ups and provide advice and support. The Leader referred to the monitoring section of the Strategy which set out how the Strategy would provide the detail suggested by Cllr Thorn. It was noted that responsibility for the LEP would be transitioning to the new Combined Mayoral Authorities, and that

further clarity was needed from the Government on the devolution landscape. The Leader supported the comment about advice and support for start-ups where it was required.

Resolved:

That Cabinet approve and agree:

- 1. The Swindon and Wiltshire Economic Strategy 2025-2036; and**
- 2. To delegate to the Corporate Director, Place, in consultation with the Leader of the Council to sign off the designed copy of the strategy for publication.**

Reason for Decision:

The production of an economic strategy for Swindon and Wiltshire is a government requirement.

9 Wiltshire Council's Housing Board Annual Report to Cabinet

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 an overview of the activities and performance across the Housing Revenue Account service.

Cllr Alford reported on the impact of inflation on construction costs, the roles of the Housing Ombudsman and the social housing regulator key achievements over the past 12 months, community support, planned investment in homes and the positive impact of the Housing Board on the quality of service provision to residents and their families, creating additional opportunity for residents to engage with the service and shaped further engagement opportunities.

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 14 January 2025, The Committee discussed energy performance certifications and EPC targets, the types of housing being acquired by the Housing Board and the challenges of using contractors to deliver some of the improvements in the housing stock. The Committee also considered the customer satisfaction survey and how action was being taken to improve that scoring, particularly around tenant complaints. The select committee will receive the next annual report in January 2026. Cllr Alford thanked Cllr Kunkler for his comments and for identifying the challenges with improvements to properties that are 60-070 years old. It was noted that some older stock required improvements, and funding to bring them up to the current standards.

Cllr Ian Thorn, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group commented on the opportunities to expand and develop the housing stock across the county, the challenge to provide maintenance where damp and mould issues are present in the housing stock, and the Council's ability to provide larger homes for families

requiring 4-5 bedrooms. Cllr Alford along with officers explained that the current build programme incorporates all areas of the county and are managed by the Housing Revenue Account, stock condition surveys are undertaken and improvements to homes are made as appropriate, and it was noted that the availability or acquisition of larger homes is a challenge. Purchases of new properties is generally funded from the Capital Programme, general fund or Public Loans Board and needed to be managed within the constraints of the Business Plan, although the Council is significantly under borrowed at the current time.

Resolved:

That Cabinet note the annual report.

Reason for Decision:

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

10 **Insurance Services Tender**

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning presented the report setting out the process to obtain tenders for the council's insurance cover.

Cllr Botterill explained that the current 5-year contracts for insurance services end on 31 March 2025 and they cover the Council's potential financial liabilities for a variety of insurance claims such a public and employers' liability, motor vehicles and buildings. The procurement process started in December 2024 to secure insurance cover from 1 April 2025, to ensure that the council has the right cover in place, including those covers that are required by law.

Resolved:

That Cabinet notes:

- 1. The insurance lot structure and intended insurance arrangements.**

That Cabinet agrees:

- 1. To delegate the award of the relevant contracts to the winning bidders to the Corporate Director, Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning.**

Reason for Decision:

Not having insurance cover in place would expose the Council to significant financial risk.

11 **City Hall - Salisbury**

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council presented the report which provided a recommendation to agree a lease with the preferred tenant to remobilise Salisbury City Hall as an arts, entertainment, and cultural venue.

The Leader explained that a public consultation took place in 2019 and 2020, which highlighted that one of the top reasons people go to Salisbury is for entertainment and the public 'strongly agree/agreed' for the development of 'space for culture, leisure and entertainment'. He highlighted the importance of City Hall being operated as a live entertainment venue and noted that an external report was commissioned to calculate the cost of bringing the external fabric of the building to a suitable standard, estimated to be £300,000, with the final cost being subject to formal procurement. He also referred to comments on social media from a Salisbury councillor taking credit for City Hall reopening, even though there had not been any input into the process from that councillor.

Cllr Sven Hocking, portfolio holder for Arts, Heritage and Tourism, and Officers commented on the procurement process and noted that the offer from the preferred tenant provided the best financial return to the Council, enabled the building to reopen in a reasonable timescale and secured the site for a long period of time. Cllr Hocking recommended to proceed with the preferred tenant subject to financial due diligence and agreement of the Heads of Terms.

Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Chair of the Environment Select Committee reported that he and the Vice-Chair of the Select Committee received a briefing on 10 January 2025 and indicated that they were briefed on the background to this decision starting with the closure of the City Hall in 2020. They were reassured about the robust nature of the process of identifying a new tenant and the reasoning behind the preferred option. They also discussed the due diligence process and happy to support the proposals.

Cllr Ian Thorn, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group welcomed the proposals to bring City Hall back into use as a live entertainment facility.

Cllr Tony Jackson in noting the Council's determination to remobilise Salisbury City Hall as an arts, entertainment, and cultural venue, commented on the lack of support to undertake similar action for a facility in Warminster.

Resolved:

That Cabinet approves:

- 1. The preferred tenant as the third-party organisation to operate City Hall as an entertainment venue on behalf of Wiltshire Council subject to financial due diligence and agreement of the Heads of Terms**
- 2. That the allocated Capital Receipt Enhancement (CRE), budget for Melksham Blue Pool is repurposed to complete the necessary external works to City Hall prior to lease commencement, and that a**

virement of £0.045m of the 2024/25 budget and £0.255m of the 2025/26 budget from the CRE capital scheme line is made to the Facilities Management Investment Estate capital scheme line.

3. That future decisions relating to the Heads of Terms and lease for City Hall are delegated to the Corporate Director - Place, in consultation with the Director - Assets, and the Leader of the Council.

Reason for Decision:

To bring City Hall back into use as an arts and entertainment venue.

12 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

13 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

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 14 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).

14 **City Hall, Salisbury**

The Cabinet noted the exempt information contained in the Appendix of the City Hall – Salisbury report which detailed the assessment of offers and financial implications.

Resolved:

That the exempt information detailed in the Appendix be noted.

Reason for Decision:

To aid Cabinet in making an informed decision.

(Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 1.25 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