

DORSET COUNCIL - CABINET

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 30 JULY 2019

Present: Cllrs Spencer Flower (Chairman), Peter Wharf (Vice-Chairman), Tony Alford, Ray Bryan, Graham Carr-Jones, Laura Miller, Andrew Parry and David Walsh

Apologies: Cllrs Tony Ferrari and Gary Suttle

Also present: Cllrs J Andrews, S Bartlett, D Bolwell, C Brooks, T Coombs, M Dyer, L Fry, B Goringe, D Gray, M Hall, B Heatley, R Hughes, N Ireland, P Kimber, S Jones, V Potheary, M Roe, D Shortell, J Somper, D Tooke and D Turner

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting): Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director – Corporate Development (S151)), Mathew Kendall (Executive Director of People – Adults), Jonathan Mair (Corporate Director – Legal and Democratic), Sarah Parker (Executive Director of People – Children), John Sellgren (Executive Director – Place) and Kirsty Riglar (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager).

In accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules of the Shadow Dorset Council, the decisions set out in these minutes will come into force and may then be implemented on the expiry of five working days after the publication date.

25. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2019 were confirmed and signed.

26. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made at the meeting.

27. Public Participation

A question was received from Mr Tunbridge in relation to the Climate Emergency and renewable energy. The question and answer provided are attached to these minutes as an annexure.

28. Questions from Members

No questions from members were received in accordance with procedure rule 13. However, the Leader of the Council reminded Councillors in attendance that if they wanted to speak on an item on the agenda in accordance with the Cabinet's Terms of Reference to indicate so that he could invite them to participate.

29. **Forward Plan**

The Cabinet received the latest Forward Plan, which included all scheduled decisions for the coming months.

Noted

30. **Quarter 1 Budget Report 2019/20**

The Cabinet considered a report by the Cabinet Member for Finance, Commercial and Assets providing an update on Dorset Council's financial performance, position and forecasts at the end of the first quarter of the 2019/20 financial year. Initial analysis of the first three months of the year forecast a year end overspend of £7.1M on its directly controlled budgets and up to £5.5M on funding for schools and education. The general reserves had increased following the closure of the accounts from the predecessor authorities and were now higher than when the budget was agreed in February 2019.

Introducing the report, the Deputy Leader reminded Members that the budget for 2019/20 had been produced and the accounts of the predecessor authorities closed by staff who were uncertain of their futures, demonstrating the professionalism of the Council's workforce. Whilst he acknowledged that the forecasted overspend was concerning, there was a need to understand the causes of the increases, the work currently underway to address this and the direction of travel. Particular attention was drawn to the increases in the cost of providing services relating to Looked After Children, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), in addition to the Dedicated Schools Grant funding. However, he expressed his confidence that planned in year savings of £5.5M from the convergence of six councils into one would be achieved in the current year but considered that the Council should use its reserves to help to fill the gap until it was possible to resolve some of the systemic issues which had caused the first quarter overspend.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Early Help explained that the cost pressure lay within the Higher Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). He drew attention to the increase in demand for EHCPs since 2013 when there were 1,237 to an expected 2,515 in the current year. It was anticipated that this trend would continue and there could be a rise to 2,752 EHCPs by 2021. This was due to an increase in the number of children with increasingly complex needs which the Council were obliged to meet. This was a national issue and an indication had been received that the Secretary of State would meet with local authorities to discuss this matter.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health confirmed that the pressures on the budget similarly reflected the national position in relation to the complexity of needs and the rise in the cost of care and the Council was actively working with partners in the NHS and voluntary sector and private providers to address this.

The Member for the South East Purbeck Ward, Cllr Brooks, asked whether the Council had considered evidence that the reduction in funding for school support

staff had resulted in an increase in demand for EHCPs. She also asked if there was evidence that the number of young people with EHCPs would have an impact on the future workforce and aspirations. The Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Early Help explained that there was a need to gain a clearer understanding of the responsibility of Dorset Council and its health partners in relation to EHCPs as every child had the right to be educated in a mainstream school. The Executive Director for People – Children recognised that this was a complex landscape; EHCPs were a contentious issue with schools and the assessment process was expensive. She explained that there was a need for the Council to support children and young people prior to assessment for an EHCP.

In response to a question from the Cllr Ireland, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group about the reference in the report to the financial impact of the increase in academy conversions, it was explained that there was a cost to the local authority if the school was in deficit.

In relation to the forecast overspend on the DSG, it was explained that historically the deficit had reserve funding behind it. However, it was preferable to find long-term solutions which would negate the need to draw down reserve funds.

The Leader welcomed the report and considered that the Council should take a measured approach to addressing the forecast overspend. He reiterated that a lot of work was underway to bring together an understanding of the risks and rewards going forward in a positive way.

Decisions

1. That the Senior Leadership Team's forecast for Dorset Council's position at the end of quarter 1 be noted.
2. That the context around the budget that was set for the year be noted.
3. That the impact that any overspend would have on reserves and the general fund be noted.
4. That the work going into reviewing Dorset Council's reserves and balances be noted.
5. That the approach to work to develop sustainability of the base budget position for 2020/21 and beyond be noted.
6. That the work going on around capital strategy and the capital programme and financing be noted.

Reason for Decisions

To ensure support and/or challenge for actions being taken in 2019/20 to balance the budget and consider the adequacy and use of reserves and to support transition and convergence. 2019/20 is a critical year for establishing the base budget for Dorset Council to enable an accurate, medium-term financial plan to be delivered alongside a longer-term, sustainable financial strategy.

31. **Looked After Children Reduction Case for Change**

The Cabinet considered a report by the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Early Help regarding current research on the rise in numbers of looked after children in England and Wales. This noted differential rates of increase between local authorities within the two countries and considered the possible reasons for this. It also reviewed emerging evidence about strategies to reduce the number of looked after children and indicated some potential components of such a strategy in Dorset. It was noted that there were currently 445 looked after children in Dorset and it was proposed that a strategy be developed to not only reduce the number of children entering care but also reduce high cost placements. The Cabinet Member set out his expectations that this would be bold and place the child at the centre.

Cllr Coombs, the Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Board, welcomed the report. She emphasised the importance of breaking the cycle of need through early intervention, the need for every child to have an up to date care plan and reduction of the number of unregulated placements. She pointed out that 42 of Dorset's looked after children were placed out of county and referred to the need for investment in The Cherries, the residential home for children in Weymouth.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Early Help welcomed the comments made by the Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Board. He agreed that there was a need for investment in The Cherries and for greater in-county provision which was fit for purpose.

One of the Members for the Portland Ward, Cllr Kimber, echoed the comments made in relation to the need for refurbishment of The Cherries.

Decisions

1. That the Executive Director of People – Children develop a strategy and detailed roadmap to reduce the number of children in care, taking a rights-based approach, to develop services which support children to be able to grow up in a family setting.
2. That this be presented to Cabinet in September 2019.

Reasons for Decisions

The reduction of the number of children in care in Dorset would:

1. Promote the rights of children;
2. Improve the outcomes for children; and
3. Enable services to be sustainable.

32. **Homes England Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) Grant Determination Agreement for submission - Gillingham Principal Street**

The Cabinet considered a report by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Travel and Environment proposing that, following the success of an application made by North Dorset District Council, Dorset Council enter into a Funding Agreement with

Homes England to secure Housing Infrastructure Funding (HIF) to enable the design and construction of a principal street within the proposed urban extension upon land to the south of Gillingham and help serve the wider development. This grant was conditional upon the Council ultimately recovering the HIF in full from the benefitting developers but with the agreement that any sums recovered may be reinvested in housing projects throughout Dorset.

The Cabinet Member for Planning, who was one of the Members for the Gillingham Ward, explained that he had been involved in the bid for the HIF and very much welcomed the report. He explained that the construction of the proposed principal street would ensure that construction vehicles could access the development site with ease and would accelerate the construction programme. He reminded the Cabinet that the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government had held Gillingham up as an exemplar of community-led planning.

The Leader reported comments from one of the Members for the Gillingham Ward, Cllr Ridout, supporting the recommendation as set out in the report.

One of the Members for the Rodwell and Wyke Ward, Cllr Heatley, drew attention to the omission of any commentary on the implications of Climate Change in the report and requested that this should be included in all reports. Officers acknowledged the omission from this report but confirmed that this was now included in the report template.

Decision

3. That entry into a Funding Agreement with Homes England be authorised to secure up to £6,310,000 of Housing Infrastructure Funding on terms and conditions to be agreed by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Travel and Environment, in consultation with the Executive Director for Place.

Reason for Decision

To promote and assist in the delivery of the proposed Gillingham Strategic Site Allocation by the former North Dorset District Council under the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 2011-2031.

33. Capital funding option for the West Bay Coastal Improvements Project

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Travel and Environment proposed that a decision on the report to secure a capital funding contribution towards works forming part of the current West Bay Coastal Improvements Project from the tenant of the Council's Campfield Site in exchange for granting a lease extension be deferred to enable further exploration of alternative options.

Decision

1. That a decision be deferred to enable further exploration of alternative options.

Reasons for Decision

A deferral will provide the Council with the opportunity to explore alternative options for the funding of the improvements project.

34. **Assistive Technology**

The Cabinet considered a report by the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health regarding an options appraisal for Assistive Technology developed to drive the uptake within the Dorset Council area. She explained that Assistive Technology, supported by a therapy-led social care approach, was considered to be an essential component of the Council's commitment to develop an Independent Living Pathway for the people of Dorset and provided an exciting opportunity for the transformation of services to achieve this.

Decisions

1. That option 3, as set out in the report, proceed for the development of care technology in Dorset.
2. That the procurement be approved of:
 - a. Assistive Technology service – assessment, installation and monitoring of equipment;
 - b. Careline provider and responder service; and
 - c. Development partner.
3. That the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health and Executive Director for People – Adults be delegated authority to award the contract to the successful bidder once the tender evaluation has been concluded.
4. That authority also be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health and Executive Director for People – Adults, in consultation with the Executive Director for Corporate Development (S151), to increase the available budget, subject to the compliance with procurement regulations, where clear evidence of savings and/or cost avoidance is provided.

Reason for Decisions

Commissioning services that increase wellbeing will enable the reduction and delay of more costly health and care interventions and maintain people's independence for longer. The procurement of a standalone Assistive Technology service will support the delivery of cost savings and avoidance and support the overall financial position of the Council.

35. **Recommendations from Committees**

The Cabinet considered the following recommendations from committees:

a) Somerley Household Recycling Centre - Hampshire County Council charges for Dorset residents

(The Deputy Leader took the Chair for this item.)

The Deputy Leader proposed that consideration of a recommendation from the Place Scrutiny Committee meeting on 10 July 2019 relating to

the future use of Somerley Household Recycling Centre by Dorset residents be deferred pending further discussion with Hampshire County Council. A meeting with the Leader of Hampshire County Council was being arranged to discuss this and other cross-border issues.

Decision

1. That a decision be deferred pending further discussion with Hampshire County Council, with all options on the table.

Reason for Decision

A meeting is being arranged with Hampshire County Council to discuss options for the use of Somerley Household Recycling Centre by Dorset residents.

36. Panels and Groups

The Cabinet received the following minutes and recommendations from panels, groups and boards:

a) Health and Wellbeing Board - 26 June 2019

Decision

1. That the minutes be received and recommendation be approved:

Minute 4 – Terms of Reference and Membership

That the Board's terms of reference be amended to reflect its statutory role in promoting integration and prevention.

b) Climate Change Executive Advisory Panel Update

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Travel and Environment provided a verbal update. He explained that he had engaged with a lot Dorset Councillors and town and parish councils since the last meeting. The Panel was currently exploring where Dorset Council was as a council in relation to climate change; whilst the predecessor councils had sought to address this, there was a lot more to do.

He explained that Friends of the Earth had presented the Panel with a list of 33 items to consider, which was underway and the evidence would be considered at the next meeting. He acknowledged the need for central government to be more involved in addressing climate change and for the Council to work with the private sector on such initiatives as the availability of electric vehicle charging stations. He also reported that discussions had begun with local bus companies to identify how services across the rural areas could be improved. He also added that he would be meeting with representatives of Extinction Rebellion on 5 August. He

reiterated that the Council was taking this issue very seriously and a great deal of work was ongoing.

One of the Members for the Wimborne Minster Ward, Cllr Bartlett, expressed his concern that local town councils were being pressured to commit to becoming carbon neutral by 2030 with little idea of the cost of doing this. He requested that the Executive Advisory Panel also consider the procurement of means of energy efficient power generation in partnership with parish and town councils. The Cabinet Member for Highways, Travel and Environment welcomed these comments and agreed that there was a need for local councils to use every opportunity to generate heat and power in ways that addressed climate change.

The Member for the Sherborne East Ward, Cllr Andrews, informed the Cabinet that on the previous day Sherborne Town Council had declared a climate emergency with a view to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. He expressed his concern that there was little enforcement through the planning system for the installation of renewable energy in new developments. The Cabinet Member for Planning explained that current developments were considered in relation to the extant Local Plans of the predecessor councils. However, there was an opportunity to include policies relating to energy efficiency through the development of the Dorset Council Local Plan. He added that it was important to continue to lobby central government to increase demand for this through the National Planning Policy Framework.

Decision

1. That the update be noted.

37. Urgent items

There were no urgent items considered at the meeting.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 11.10 am

Chairman

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