

CABINET

MONDAY 15TH JANUARY 2024

PRESENT: Councillor D. Price (Chair) (In Person)

Councillors (In Person):

C.A. Davies	G. Davies	H.A.L. Evans	L.D. Evans
P.M. Hughes	A. Lenny	E.G. Thomas	J. Tremlett
A. Vaughan Owen			

Also in attendance for item 4.1 on the agenda and as an observer (Remotely):
Councillor R. James

Also Present (In Person):

W. Walters - Chief Executive
C. Moore - Director of Corporate Services
A. Williams - Director of Place & Infrastructure
G. Morgans - Director of Education & Children's Services
P. Thomas - Assistant Chief Executive
L.R. Jones - Head of Administration and Law
J. Morgan - Head of Housing
C. Higginson - Media Manager
L. Jenkins - Cabinet Support Officer
J. Owen - Democratic Services Officer
D. Hall-Jones - Member Support Officer
S. Rees - Simultaneous Translator

Also Present (Remotely):

M. Evans Thomas - Principal Democratic Services Officer [Note Taker]
M. Runeckles - Member Support Officer

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen and remotely : 10:00 am - 11:35 am

[NOTE:

- (1) The order of business on the agenda was varied at the meeting and these minutes reflect the order of business itemised on the published agenda for the meeting which differs from that on the webcast recording;
- (2) In view of the fact that the Chair and Vice-Chair had to leave the meeting, having declared interests, Councillor E.G. Thomas chaired the meeting for items 8, 9 and 12.]

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence. The Chair welcomed Councillor Philip Hughes to his first Cabinet meeting following a period of ill health.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor / Officer	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
Councillor H.A.L. Evans	8 – HRA Business Plan 2024-27 - Carmarthenshire's Housing Investment Programme	Her sister is the Chief Executive of a Housing Association
Councillor H.A.L. Evans	9 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	Her sister is the Chief Executive of a Housing Association
Councillor L.D. Evans	12 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme	In relation to her father.
Councillor L.D. Evans	14 - Model Teachers' Pay Policy 2023/24	Her daughter teaches.
Councillor P.M. Hughes	9 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	He rents a property.
Councillor D. Price	9 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	His grandmother is a Council tenant.
Councillor D. Price	12 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme	His grandmother receives some form of benefit from the scheme.
Councillor A. Vaughan-Owen	14 - Model Teachers' Pay Policy 2023/24	His wife is a teacher.
J. Morgan, Head of Housing	14 - Model Teachers' Pay Policy 2023/24	His wife works as a teacher.
W. Walters, Chief Executive	12 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme	In relation to her mother-in-law.

3. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON THE 11TH DECEMBER, 2023.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on the 11th December, 2023 be signed as a correct record.

4. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE BY MEMBERS

The Chair advised that one question on notice had been submitted.

4.1. QUESTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR ROB JAMES TO COUNCILLOR ALUN LENNY, CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

“Could the Cabinet Member state how much this authority paid in consultancy fees during the last financial year, including towards joint or regional projects?”

Response by Councillor Alun Lenny, Cabinet Member for Resources:

“You will appreciate of course that this is the most busy possible period for our officers as we try to draw together the most difficult budget in this Council’s history. As you will see from the following reports in this meeting and as will be discussed at the seminars this week in Llanelli. Despite this, officers are pulling together the data that you asked for but we will need to ensure consistency and clarity regarding the definition of Consultants as defined by other Authorities in Wales. As soon as we have a definitive figure, I will of course provide you with an answer. However, I think that it is worth saying at this point that Consultants may have negative overtones so it is worth explaining that consultancy fees are paid to companies who are specialists in their field and are commissioned by this Authority to do a specific job for a specific period of time because we do not have the staff or capacity to do so. I can assure you that every commission is rigorously scrutinised by the relevant Head of Service in order to give our Council Tax payers the best possible deal. This demand will obviously vary from year to year depending on what projects we are doing that require specialist support. Otherwise projects would not be able to be delivered and that includes town centre redevelopment, zero carbon affordable housing estates, new schools and a state of the art leisure centre for Llanelli. The level of consultancy fees is directly related to the activity which is improving the quality of life and employment opportunities for the people of Carmarthenshire. As you know, this Council has a very ambitious regeneration programme. The flagship development is the £200m Pentre Awel project which will be an incredible boost to Llanelli and the region as a whole and create almost 2000 jobs in due course. It would be impossible to deliver that project without employing a whole range of external specialists i.e. design, engineering, ecology and so on. Some of the Consultants are very specialised indeed in their field i.e. thinking of Burry Port Harbour, only a handful in South Wales are specialists in harbour dredging and again Pentre Awel, where ground conditions required driving piles some 25m into the ground. Employing such specialists as full time staff, even if we could attract them which I doubt, would be hideously expensive and we might have them sitting around doing nothing for much of the year, as would other specialists if we got them in house. As I said earlier, as soon as a definitive figure is available, I will of course provide you with it but I am afraid that is where we stand this morning.”

Supplementary Question by Councillor Rob James:-

“Thank you for that response Councillor Lenny. I appreciate that there may be need for research into the true figure. Is it the intention of this administration to reduce the amount that they spend on Consultants generally?”

Response by Councillor Alun Lenny, Cabinet Member for Resources:-

“Yes, obviously we are very prudent in what we spend on anything including outside experts like this. As I said earlier, Heads of Service scrutinise very

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thoroughly the need for employing external consultants or specialists. So, I can assure you that that will continue and where we can make employ people or make use of the skills of people inhouse then certainly we will do so.”

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

6. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY 2024/25 TO 2026/27

The Cabinet considered a report providing an overview of the revenue budget for 2024/25 and the following two financial years. It detailed the budget process, the current Welsh Government provisional settlement, the final settlement timetable and identified the validation and budget pressures that need to be considered by members in setting next year’s revenue budget. The report will form the basis of the budget consultation process that will be undertaken during January.

Concern was expressed regarding the unprecedented pressures facing all Local Authorities.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 6.1 that the three year Budget Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27 be approved and the strategy be used to support the budget consultation and form the basis of the final budget proposals;**
- 6.2 that the budget reductions/savings proposals in Appendix A, which will be considered as part of the consultation, be noted;**
- 6.3 to note the 2024/25 shortfall of £801k in the current strategy, for which increased funding or cost reductions will need to be identified at the completion of the consultation as noted in paragraph 4.3 of the report;**
- 6.4 to note that the MTFP included a proposal to use reserve funding to support one off costs for Childrens’ Services.**

7. FIVE YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME (COUNCIL FUND) 2024/25 TO 2028/29

Cabinet considered a report detailing the latest proposals for the five-year capital programme 2024/25 to 2028/29 which formed the basis of the budget consultation process with members and other relevant parties. Feedback from this consultation process, along with any updates, would inform the final Capital Programme budget report to be presented to Cabinet and County Council in February 2024.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be noted and endorsed as the provisional capital programme for consultation purposes.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

**8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2024-27 -
CARMARTHENSHIRE'S HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME**

[NOTE: Councillor H.A.L. Evans, having earlier declared an interest in this item, left the meeting prior to the consideration and determination thereof.]

Cabinet considered a report detailing the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan for 2024-27 and Carmarthenshire's Housing Investment Programme. At the start of each year, a business plan is developed which explains the Authority's vision and the three year housing investment programmes to maintain our stock and deliver more affordable homes.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL

- 8.1 to confirm the vision for the housing investment programmes over the next three years;**
- 8.2 to agree that the 2024/25 Business Plan be submitted to Welsh Government;**
- 8.3 to note the new estate and tenancy management offer that will ensure our housing officers are more visible and accessible, balancing the support required by tenants and the need to take enforcement action when required;**
- 8.4 to agree the implementation of a new pilot "handyperson" scheme on priority estates;**
- 8.5 to note the Authority's commitment to keeping the number of void properties as low as possible;**
- 8.6 to confirm the Authority's commitment to reduce the number of back-logged day to day repairs by rebalancing the split between internal and external contractors, and developing a new small works framework;**
- 8.7 to confirm the Authority's priority to purchase additional land and develop large sites exclusively for Council housing and to note the contribution this plan makes to increasing the supply of affordable homes;**
- 8.8 to note the Authority's commitment to make all our homes more energy efficient for tenants, achieving a minimum Band C energy performance rating (EPC C), installing rooftop solar panels as part of our re-roofing programme and developing a business case for the wider installation of solar panels to tenants' homes and supporting the Council's net zero carbon principles;**
- 8.9 to confirm the Authority's commitment to continue to increase the supply of specialist housing in the county;**
- 8.10 to note the importance of the investment included in this plan and its role in stimulating the local economy and creating local jobs and training opportunities.**

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

9. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND HOUSING RENT SETTING 2024/25

[NOTE: Councillors H.A.L. Evans, P.M. Hughes and D. Price, having earlier declared an interest in this item, left the meeting prior to the consideration and determination thereof.]

Cabinet considered a report detailing the latest proposals for the revenue and capital budgets for the Housing Revenue Account 2024/2027. The report also detailed how housing rents will increase for 2024/25.

Cabinet's attention was drawn to the fact that the first recommendation contained in the English summary did not clarify the increases in the same way as in the Welsh summary where the recommendation provided further definition of the categories of increases. The Cabinet Member for Resources therefore requested that these additional points be added after the first sentence of the first recommendation. He also drew Cabinet's attention to a slight amendment to the third recommendation and clarified that the rent for garage bases will increase from £2.08 to £2.22 not £2.25 to £2.40 as stated in the report.

Subject to the inclusion of the above-mentioned amendments, it was

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL

- 9.1 to increase the average housing rent by 6.5% (£6.47) per dwelling per week within the parameters of the WG Social Housing Rents Policy (inclusive of progression for tenants below target rents)
 - properties at target rents will increase by 6.39% and
 - properties where rent is below target rent will increase by 6.39% plus a maximum progression of £1.00
 - those rents above target are frozen until such time that they meet the targetwhich will produce a sustainable Business Plan, maintain the CHS+ and deliver the Authority's Housing Regeneration and Development Delivery Plan;
- 9.2 to continue with a maximum progression of £1 for rents below the proposed rent for each stock type;
- 9.3 to increase garage rents by 6.5% from £9.00 to £9.60 and garage bases from £2.08 to £2.22;
- 9.4 to apply the amended Service Charge Policy to ensure tenants who receive the benefit from specific services pay for those services (Appendix C of the report);
- 9.5 to increase charges for using our sewerage treatment works in line with the rent increase;
- 9.6 to approve the Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2024/27 (2025/26 & 2026/27 being soft budgets) as set out in Appendix A the report;
- 9.7 to approve the proposed Capital Programme and applicable funding for 2024/25 and the indicative spends for 2025/26 to 2026/27, as set out in Appendix B of the report.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

10. COUNCIL'S REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Cabinet considered the revenue budget monitoring report which provided the latest budgetary position as at 31st October, 2023 in respect of 2023/24.

Overall, the monitoring report forecast an overspend for the year at departmental level of £10,900k, with a forecast overspend on the Authority's net revenue budget of £5,312k.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

10.1 that the budget monitoring report be received and the budgetary position and appropriate corrective action taken be noted;

10.2 that, in respect of significant overspends on specific budget areas, Chief Officers and Heads of Service critically review options available to them to address the ongoing impact.

11. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24 UPDATE

Cabinet received a report providing an update on the latest budgetary position for the 2023/24 capital programme, as at the 31st October, 2023 and detailed new

projects and virements for noting and Cabinet approval. Appendix A to the report indicated a forecast net spend of £89,434k compared with a working net budget of £142,641k, giving a -£53,207k variance.

The net budget included the original H.R.A. and General Fund capital programmes approved by Council on 1st March and slippage from 2022/23. Some of the budgets have also been amended to account for differences in actual grant allocations compared with the anticipated allocations at the time the programme was approved, and new grant awards received during the year to date. It should be noted that following a department reorganisation, the property services projects which had previously been reported as part of the Department of Place and Infrastructure are now reported as part of the Chief Executive's Department portfolio.

Appendix B to the report detailed the main variances within each department.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

11.1 that the capital programme update report 2023/24 be received;

11.2 that the new projects, as detailed within the report, be noted and agreed, to be funded from current year capital charges underspends.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

12. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

[NOTE: Councillors L.D. Evans and D. Price and W. Walters, Chief Executive, having earlier declared an interest in this item, left the meeting prior to the consideration and determination thereof.]

Cabinet considered a report detailing the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25.

The standard scheme introduced by Welsh Government for 2013/14 and (with minor amendments) subsequent years, is a uniform all-Wales scheme, albeit with limited areas of local discretion available to Local Authorities. Despite being an all Wales scheme, individual Councils are required by the Prescribed Requirements Regulations to formally adopt a Council Tax Reduction Scheme by 31st January each year. The limited areas of local discretion and the policy adopted by Council in respect of those discretions were detailed in the report.

Subject to the regulations being approved and coming into force on 19th January, 2024 it was

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL

- 12.1 that the standard all-Wales Council Tax Reduction scheme provided for in the Council Tax Reduction Schemes and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations 2013 be formally adopted;**
- 12.2 to implement the annual up-rating figures (used in entitlement calculations) and other technical amendments, included in the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements and Default Scheme) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2024 due to come into effect 19th January 2024 and these Regulations be applied in relation to a council tax reduction scheme made for the financial year beginning on 1st April 2024;**
- 12.3 to continue to exercise its discretion with regard to the limited discretionary elements of the prescribed scheme as outlined in the Executive Summary to the report.**

13. LICENSING ACT 2003 REVIEW OF LICENSING POLICY AND CUMULATIVE IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Cabinet considered a report detailing the review of the Authority's Licensing Policy and Cumulative Impact Assessments (CIA). Legislation requires the licensing policy to be reviewed every five years and the CIAs every three years, to ensure that they are still appropriate.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL

- 13.1 that option three, as detailed in the Executive Summary, be selected as the most appropriate policy option for the Cumulative Impact Assessments to best promote the licensing objectives within Carmarthenshire;**

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

13.2 to approve the Statement of Licensing Policy that reflects the chosen option.

14. MODEL TEACHERS' PAY POLICY 2023/24

[NOTE: Councillors L.D. Evans and A. Vaughan-Owen and J. Morgan, Head of Housing, having earlier declared an interest in this item, left the meeting prior to the consideration and determination thereof.]

The Cabinet considered a report detailing the Model Teachers' Pay Policy 2023/24 which had been updated to reflect the September 2023 pay award, as detailed in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions (Wales) Document 2023.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to endorse the Model Teachers' Pay Policy 2023/24, prior to circulation to schools for formal adoption by their Governing Bodies.

15. MODEL UNATTACHED TEACHERS' PAY POLICY 2023/24

Cabinet considered a report detailing the Model Unattached Teachers' Pay Policy 2023/24 which had been updated to reflect the September 2023 pay award, as detailed in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions (Wales) Document 2023. For the purpose of this policy, unattached teachers refers to teachers who do not fall under the control of School's Governing Bodies e.g. Peripatetic Teachers, Athrawon Bro, Centrally Employed Teachers etc.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Model Unattached Teachers' Pay Policy 2023/24 be endorsed.

16. ANY OTHER ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT BY REASONS OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THE CHAIR DECIDES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY PURSUANT TO SECTION 100B(4)(B) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972.

The Chair advised that there were no items of urgent business.

CHAIR

DATE

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.