

CABINET

MONDAY 18TH MARCH 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

Councillors (Remotely):

A. Vaughan-Owen

Also in attendance as an observer (Remotely):

Councillor D.M. Cundy

Also Present (In Person):

W. Walters - Chief Executive
J. Morgan - Director of Community Services
C. Moore - Director of Corporate Services
G. Morgans - Director of Education & Children's Services
J. Jones - Head of Regeneration, Policy & Digital
L. Rees-Jones - Head of Administration & Law
L. Evans - Policy & Involvement Manager
C. Higginson - Media Manager
L. Jenkins - Cabinet Support Officer
R. Morris - Member Support Officer
K. Thomas - Democratic Services 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 - 10:43 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor / Officer	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
Councillor C.A. Davies	7 - Business Rates - Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief Scheme 2024/25	Her family runs a business

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

Councillor G. Davies	13 - Sustainable Communities Fund - Round 4 Applications	He is a Trustee of one of the organisations
Councillor H.A.L. Evans	7 - Business Rates - Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief Scheme 2024/25	Close relative runs a business
Councillor L.D. Evans	7 - Business Rates - Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief Scheme 2024/25	Close relative runs a business
Councillor L.D. Evans	13 - Sustainable Communities Fund - Round 4 Applications	Someone she knows has applied for a grant
Councillor P.M. Hughes	7 - Business Rates - Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief Scheme 2024/25	He runs a business in the county
Councillor A. Lenny	13 - Sustainable Communities Fund - Round 4 Applications	He is a member of Carmarthen Town Council who have applied for a grant
Councillor D. Price	13 - Sustainable Communities Fund - Round 4 Applications	He has links with an organisation in Drefach which has applied for grant funding
Councillor A. Vaughan-Owen	13 - Sustainable Communities Fund - Round 4 Applications	He is a member of one of the groups who have applied for a grant

3. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON THE 4TH MARCH, 2024

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on the 4th March, 2024 be signed as a correct record.

4. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE BY MEMBERS

The Chair advised that no questions on notice had been submitted by members.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

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

6. (DRAFT) STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN 2024-2028

Cabinet considered the (draft) Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28 which had been prepared to outline how the Council will meet its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Specific Duties for Wales and builds on the Council's previous plans. The Authority is required to publish the new plan in April 2024.

The Equality Act 2010 brings together and replaces previous legislation and simplifies/strengthens the law, making it easier for people to understand and comply with. Most of the Act came into force on 1st October 2010. Specific Duties have been introduced for Public Bodies in Wales and the development of a Strategic Equality Plan is one of those duties.

Reference was made to the importance of this agenda item which was a major part of the Cabinet's vision.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL

6.1 that the (Draft) Strategic Equality Plan be approved;

6.2 that the (Draft) Strategic Equality Objectives be agreed.

7. BUSINESS RATES – RETAIL, LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY RATES RELIEF SCHEME 2024/25

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

Cabinet considered a report providing details of a rate relief scheme being made available to billing authorities by Welsh Government for 2024/25.

In 2017/18 Welsh Government introduced a "High Street Rate Relief Scheme" for eligible businesses and the scheme continued for 2018/19, and every year since then. However, unlike previous years, the 2019-20 scheme was not limited to high street premises but included all properties within Wales meeting the wider retail criteria.

In response to the Coronavirus emergency in 2020/21 Welsh Government announced that it would introduce the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief scheme to increase the discount to 100%. This scheme also applied in 2021/22 and in addition to retail sector, it was extended to include leisure and hospitality sectors e.g. shops, pubs and restaurants, gyms, performance venues and hotels across Wales.

The scheme for 2022/23, unlike the previous 2 years, provided support for eligible occupied properties by offering a discount of 50% on non-domestic rates bills for 2022/23, and the scheme for 2023/24 offered a discount of 75% for eligible occupied properties.

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

Welsh Government has recently confirmed that it will provide grant funding to all 22 Local Authorities in Wales to provide the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief scheme to eligible businesses for 2024-25. However, for 2024/25 the scheme will provide a discount of 40% for eligible occupied properties. The scheme will apply to all eligible businesses, however, the relief will be subject to a cap on the amount each business can claim across Wales.

Welsh Government has indicated the types of business that they consider appropriate for this relief and those which are not. The non-exhaustive list of business types was appended to the report at Appendix A.

As this relief is a temporary measure Welsh Government is not making any legislative changes but instead will allow billing authorities to grant relief under the general discretionary relief powers available under section 47 of the Local Government (Finance) Act 1988. However, being a discretionary power, it is necessary for the Local Authority to formally adopt the scheme. The scheme is fully funded and therefore at no cost to the authority provided relief is granted in accordance with the Welsh Government guidelines.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 7.1 that the Retail Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief Scheme 2024/25, be adopted for 2024/25;**
- 7.2 that relief be granted in accordance with the Welsh Government guidelines;**
- 7.3 that applications not specifically covered by the guidelines or otherwise require specific consideration, be determined by the Cabinet Member for Resources.**

8. COUNCIL'S REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

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

Overall, the monitoring report forecast an overspend for the year at departmental level of £10,183k, with a forecast overspend on the Authority's net revenue budget of £4,782k.

The Cabinet Member for Resources made particular reference to the fact that schools are expecting to spend £8.6m more than delegated budgets, meaning that current balances will reduce from £11.1m to £2.5m which was a concerning issue. He pointed out that part of the reason for the drawdown on school balances was due to the high level of nationally agreed NJC pay awards. As it has always been this Administration's budget approach to try and provide in full for known pay commitments to delegated school budgets, he recommended that part of the contingency budget be allocated to meet this increased cost to schools, estimated to be around £800k.

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 8.1 that the budget monitoring report be received and the budgetary position and appropriate corrective action taken be noted;**
- 8.2 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;**
- 8.3 that part of the contingency budget be used to meet the increased pay cost to schools caused by the NJC pay awards, estimated to be around £800k.**

9. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24 UPDATE

Cabinet considered a report providing details of the latest projected outturn of the capital programme as at 31st December, 2023 in respect of the 2023/24 financial year.

The current capital programme is based on information available as at the end of December 2023. Appendix A indicated a forecasted net spend of £70,752k compared with a working net budget of £139,013k, giving a -£68,261k variance.

The net budget includes 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. Appendix B detailed the main variances within each department.

Reference was made to the amazing projects being undertaken by the Council including the YMCA in Llanelli and the designing and building of new schools, despite all the challenges.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 9.1 that the capital programme update report be received;**
 - 9.2 that the new projects be noted and agreed, to be funded from current year capital charges**
- 10 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 urgent items of business.

11 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED, pursuant to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007, that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items as the reports contained exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

12. DISPOSAL OF PARC DEWI SANT, JOBSWELL ROAD, CARMARTHEN

Following the application of the public interest test it was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED**, pursuant to the Act referred to in Minute 11 above, to consider this matter in private, with the public excluded from the meeting as disclosure would put the Authority at a material disadvantage in any subsequent negotiations with third parties and potentially harm the public purse.

Cabinet considered a report providing details of a revised offer in connection with the disposal of Parc Dewi Sant, Carmarthen.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to proceed with the revised offer as detailed in the report.

13. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FUND – ROUND 4 APPLICATIONS

Following the application of the public interest test it was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED**, pursuant to the Act referred to in Minute 11 above, to consider this matter in private, with the public excluded from the meeting as disclosure would be likely to place the organisations named in the report at an unfair disadvantage in relation to any competitors.

[NOTE: Councillors G. Davies, L.D. Evans, A. Lenny, D. Price and A. Vaughan-Owen, having earlier declared an interest in this item, left the meeting for the consideration and determination thereof. Councillor P.M. Hughes chaired the meeting for this item, in the absence of the Chair.]

Cabinet considered a report providing an overview of applications submitted under the Sustainable Communities Fund (Round 4) which is funded via the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the projects identified be awarded funding, as detailed in the report.

CHAIR

DATE

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