

CABINET

MONDAY, 17TH JANUARY, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor E. Dole [Chair]

Councillors:

C.A. Davies, G. Davies, H.A.L. Evans, L.D. Evans, P.M. Hughes, P. Hughes-Griffiths, D.M. Jenkins and J. Tremlett

Also in attendance:

Councillor D.M. Cundy

The following Officers were in attendance:

W. Walters - Chief Executive

C. Moore - Director of Corporate Services

J. Morgan - Director of Community Services

G. Morgans - Director of Education & Children's Services

P. Thomas - Assistant Chief Executive (People Management & Performance)

N. Daniel - Head of ICT and Corporate Policy; Interim Head of Planning

J. Fearn - Head of Housing, Property & Strategic Projects

R. Hemingway - Head of Financial Services

J. Jones - Head of Regeneration

L. Rees-Jones - Head of Administration and Law

L. Morris - Senior Press Officer

L. Jenkins - Executive Board Support Officer

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

M. Davies - Democratic Services Officer

J. Owens - Democratic Services Officer

S. Hendy - Member Support Officer [Webcasting]

S. Rees - Simultaneous Translator

Virtual Meeting : 10:00 am - 11:45 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND OTHER MATTERS

There were no apologies for absence. Councillor P.M. Hughes was present from 10.45 a.m.

The Leader and other members of the Cabinet expressed their condolences to the family of the late Councillor Mair Stephens and paid tribute to her contribution to the Council as both Deputy Leader of the Council and Leader of the Independent Group

All members stood in silent tribute to Councillor Stephens.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
Ann Davies	9 – Five Year Capital Programme	The Dyffryn Tywi Cycle Path passes through their farm land.

3. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON THE 20TH DECEMBER, 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on the 20th December, 2021 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.

6. SOUTH WEST WALES REGIONAL ECONOMIC DELIVERY PLAN

The Cabinet considered a report detailing proposals to replace the existing Swansea Bay City Region Economic Regeneration Strategy with the new South West Wales Regional Economic Delivery Plan.

It was noted that whilst the existing Strategy had been in place since 2013, the economic and policy context had changed considerably since that time at both Welsh and UK level, particularly in light of the UK's decision to leave the European Union, the impact of the covid-19 pandemic and changes regionally with the advent of the new Corporate Joint Committees and the preparation of new Regional Frameworks by the Welsh Government setting out visions and high level priorities for each Welsh Region.

In response to those changing circumstances, the four Local Authorities in South West Wales, in partnership with the Welsh Government, had commissioned the development of a New Regional Economic Delivery Plan, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, which included:-

- A thorough analysis of the evidence base on the region's economy, labour market and infrastructure to determine its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats;
- Interpretation of the strategic policy context at local, regional and national level;
- Development of detailed strategic aims and objectives that responded to the economic opportunities for the region and complemented the shared regional vision as articulated in the Regional Economic Framework;
- Preparation of Regional Economic Delivery Plan that included actions that needed to be taken to achieve the vision and objectives.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL THAT the South West Wales Regional Economic Delivery Plan be adopted as the Council's over-arching economic regeneration policy.

7. PRIMARY TOWN CENTRE ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLANS - AMMANFORD, CARMARTHEN & LLANELLI

The Cabinet considered a report on the proposed Economic Recovery and Delivery Plans, post covid, for the three primary towns within Carmarthenshire namely Ammanford, Carmarthen and Llanelli. The plans had been formulated working closely with the Ammanford Task Force, the Carmarthen Town Centre Forum and the Llanelli Task Force, all of which comprised membership of key town stakeholders together with representatives from key internal council departments.

The plans set out the impact of covid, highlighting key issues/opportunities and providing a delivery framework of be-spoke interventions for each centre. If adopted, it was envisaged the plans would be owned and delivered by the stakeholders in the three towns' respective Task Force/Forum with the Council working with potential funders in both Welsh Government and Westminster to lever funding when opportunities arose and to utilise corporate funding identified within the Council's capital programme to facilitate implementation of the three plans.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Economic Recovery and Delivery Plans for Ammanford, Carmarthen and Llanelli be noted and endorsed.

8. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY 2022/23 TO 2024/25

The Cabinet considered a report providing an overview of the Revenue Budget Strategy for 2022/23 and the following two financial years. The report provided details of the budget process, the current Welsh Government provisional settlement and the final settlement timetable and identified the validation and budget pressures that needed to be considered by members in setting next year's revenue budget. The report would also form the basis of the budget consultation process to be undertaken during January and February 2022.

The report indicated that, after adjustments for WG identified transfers, the increase in the provisional settlement for Carmarthenshire was 9.2% (£26.335 million). The Aggregate External Finance (AEF) had therefore increased to £311.957 million in 2022/23 which included £302k in respect of the Social Care Workforce Grant.

It was noted that whilst significant work had already been undertaken in preparing the budget, the report was only an initial position statement which would be updated over the coming months as the budget was further developed, council members were engaged, public consultation took place and the final settlement was expected to be received from Welsh Government on 2nd March 2022.

While the Budget Strategy proposed a Council Tax of 4.4% for 2022/23, in line with the Medium Term Financial Plan, that proposal would be considered as part of the budget finalisation process over the next month and where the Authority received further clarification on cost and grant funding with a view to limiting the Council Tax increase as far as possible. Final budget proposals would then be presented to the Cabinet late February, to ensure a balanced budget was presented to County Council.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

8.1 To note the contents of the report and approve the three-year

Budget Strategy as a basis for consultation specifically, seeking comments from consultees on the efficiency proposals in Appendix A;

- 8.2 To note the unallocated sum of £757k in the current strategy, would be given further consideration at the completion of the consultation, as noted in paragraph 4.4 of the report;**
- 8.3 To approve the proposal to allocate £500k from forecast current year underspends to accelerate current Decarbonisation Plans in the forthcoming year.**

9. FIVE YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME (COUNCIL FUND) - 2022/23 TO 2026/27

[NOTE: Councillor A. Davies had earlier declared an interest in this item.]

The Cabinet considered a report detailing the latest proposals for the Five-Year Capital Programme (Council Fund) 2022/23 to 2026/2027 which would form the basis of the budget consultation process with members and other relevant parties. Feedback from this consultation process, along with any updates on the settlement figures and grant applications, would inform the final Capital Programme budget report which would be presented to the Cabinet on the 21st February 2022 and County Council in March 2022.

The proposed gross expenditure on the capital programme for 2022/23 was £144.844m with the projected funding being £52.249m from the County Council's own resources through the use of borrowing, reserves and general capital grant and the balance of funding of £92.595m coming from external sources. Those figures included projects delayed in 2021/22, mainly because of Covid-19 restrictions, that had been carried over and built into the budgets of future years.

The capital programme was projected to be fully funded over the five years. It included projected expenditure on the Swansea Bay City Region Deal projects against which the Authority would borrow, with the funding being returned from both Welsh and UK governments over a 15 year period (from 2018/19).

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to endorse the report as a provisional capital programme for consultation purposes, including consideration by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee at its meeting to be held on 2nd February, 2022.

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 2021, in respect of 2021/2022. Whilst the scale of Covid-19 response was reducing, the budget position recognised the ongoing financial pressures faced by the Authority as well as the additional funding support provided by Welsh Government.

Overall, the monitoring report forecast an underspend for the year at departmental level of £1,726k with a forecast underspend on the Authority's net revenue budget of £1,279k. At a high level, this was due to a combination of:

- additional Covid-19 related costs and lost income which was largely refunded under the Welsh Government hardship scheme;

- some services were either paused or impacted by lockdown measures and social distancing during quarter 1;
- utilisation of some capital financing underspends, due to some significant pressure points on in-year capital project budgets, approved as part of a separate report.

Cabinet Members noted that during the first half of the year (April – September) additional expenditure and income loss totalling approximately £13 million had been claimed under the Welsh Government hardship scheme.

The Cabinet's attention was drawn to the fact that the risk to Council Tax collection rates and increased applications under the Council Tax Reduction Scheme would continue to be monitored closely, particularly as the furlough scheme had now ended.

The Housing Revenue Account reported a predicted underspend of £1,337k for 2021/22, details of which were provided within Appendix B appended to the report.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 10.1 The Budget Monitoring report be received, and the budgetary position and appropriate corrective action taken be noted.**
- 10.2 Chief Officers and Heads of Service critically review options available to them to limit the forecasted overspend of budgets, whilst recognising the ongoing impact which Covid-19 measures has placed on the Authority's overall budget.**

11. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021/22 UPDATE

The Cabinet received a report which provided the latest budgetary position for the 2021/22 capital programme, as at the 31st October 2021 and detailed new projects for noting and Cabinet approval.

It was reported that departmentally, a net spend of £74,790k was forecast compared with a working net budget of £105,168k giving a -£30,378k variance.

The net budget included the original H.R.A. and General Fund capital programmes approved by Council on the 3rd March, 2021 and slippage from 2020/21 and amendments approved by Cabinet on 25th October, 2021. It was noted that some budgets had also been amended to account for differences in actual grant allocations compared with the anticipated allocations at the time the programme was approved

It was noted that Appendix B detailed the main variances within each department.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 11.1 the capital programme update report 2021/22 be received;**
- 11.2. the new projects as detailed within the report be noted and agreed.**

12. LOCAL TOILETS STRATEGY INTERIM PROGRESS REPORT

The Cabinet considered the Local Toilets Interim Progress Report produced in accordance with the requirements of Part 8 of the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 that placed a duty on each Local Authority in Wales to prepare and publish a local Toilets Strategy for its area and to publish an interim progress report within six months of the 2 year publication anniversary of the original Local Toilet Strategy. In Carmarthenshire's case, as the original strategy had been produced in August 2019, an interim report required publication by February 2022.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Draft Local Toilets Strategy Interim Progress Report be endorsed.

13. POSSIBLE AMENDMENT TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL POLICY

The Cabinet considered a report produced in accordance with the Welsh Government's request for Local Authorities to use their powers under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 on amending the Council's Private Sector Renewal Policy to include Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) for small and medium adaptations without applicants having to undertake a means test.

The report outlined 4 potential options for consideration to respond to the WG's request and recommended the adoption of option 4. If adopted, it was intended that a review would be undertaken on the impact of the proposed change after the first 6 months and provide a further report should any concerns be identified

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Council's Private Sector Renewal Policy be amended to include Disabled Facilities Grants and that option 4 be adopted, with applicants being given a choice of:

- proceeding with option 2, with no means test and 10 years repayment conditions attached to a discretionary DFG or,
- to apply for a mandatory DFG and be means tested

14. NOTICE OF MOTION REFERRED FROM COUNCIL (10TH NOVEMBER 2021) JAPANESE KNOTWEED

Cabinet received a report detailing a Notice of Motion (as amended by Council) on Japanese Knotweed which was referred to the Cabinet by Council on the 10th November, 2021.

The report detailed the powers available to Local Authorities to address the issue of invasive weeds, such as Japanese Knotweed i.e. the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (Community Protection Notices (CPNs) and the main concerns in their use, together with the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 that made it an offence for anyone to cause species to grow in the wild and was enforceable by the Police.

The report further detailed alternative approaches to enforcement by way of a CPN and, given the impact of enforcement action on householders, both in terms of cost and possible criminal sanction, the following options were presented to Cabinet for consideration:-

- Continue with the current practice of advising affected landowners and signposting them to sources of guidance, being the approach adopted by most Local Authorities and;
- Viewing the situation as a commercial opportunity to offer Japanese Knotweed treatment services to the public, either directly on a cost recovery basis or more commercially through a potential trading company. However, expertise in that area would be required to develop and implement.

Concern was expressed about the problems being experienced in the county with Himalayan Balsam and it was felt that any guidance and enforcement action should also contain reference to Himalayan Balsam.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Council continue with the current practice of advising affected landowners and signposting them to sources of guidance

**15. NOTICE OF MOTION REFERRED FROM COUNCIL (15TH SEPTEMBER 2021)
VENTILATION IN SCHOOLS**

Cabinet considered a report detailing a Notice of Motion on Ventilation in Schools referred to Cabinet by Council on the 15th September, 2021.

The report reproduced the Notice of Motion calling on the Welsh Government to urgently consider approving, tendering and funding Ultra Violet and/or High Efficiency Particulate Air Filters in schools

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Notice of Motion be supported.

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