

CABINET

MONDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2023

PRESENT: Councillor D. Price (Chair)

Councillors (In Person):

L.D. Evans

G. Davies

A. Lenny

E.G. Thomas

A. Vaughan Owen

Councillors (Virtually):

G.H. John

J. Tremlett

Also in attendance:

Councillor D.M. Cundy

Also Present (In Person):

W. Walters, Chief Executive;

C. Moore, Director of Corporate Services;

J. Morgan, Director of Community Services;

G. Morgans, Director of Education & Children's Services;

A. Williams, Director of Place and Infrastructure;

R. Hemingway, Head of Financial Services;

J. Jones, Head of Regeneration;

L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law;

D. Hockenhull, Marketing and Media Manager;

C. Higginson, Media Manager;

L. Jenkins, Cabinet Support Officer;

A. Eynon, Principal Translator;

M.S. Davies, Democratic Services Officer;

Also Present (Virtually):

J. Morgan, Head of Homes & Safer Communities;

E. Bryer, Democratic Services Officer.

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen and remotely: 10.00 am - 11.10 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Davies and P.M. Hughes.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interests.

3. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE BY MEMBERS

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

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

5. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY 2023/24 TO 2025/26

The Cabinet considered a report providing the latest proposals for the Revenue Budget Strategy for 2023/24 and the following two financial years.

The report summarised the latest budgetary position and provided an update on the budget validation, spending pressures, the Welsh Government final settlement and the responses received to the budget consultation.

The Cabinet Member for Resources, in presenting the report, commented that whilst Welsh Government's final annual settlement figures would not be published until March 1st 2023 the key components of the Council's budget assumptions and allocations had been reviewed which had resulted in increased budget headroom. Some of the proposals within the original Budget outline had therefore been revisited and further options considered.

The full details of the provisional settlement had been included within the report, but the headline was on all Wales basis. RSG funding for Local Government had increased by 7.9%, with Carmarthenshire receiving an increase of 8.5%.

Whilst this had enabled the catastrophe Local Authorities had feared last November to be avoided very difficult decisions had still to be made. This year's budget choices were considered to be every bit as hard as during the very worst years of the austerity era.

The Cabinet Member for Resources referred to the fact that within the report the Director of Corporate Services had made some adjustments to some of the other figures within the strategy. This, he emphasised, was part of the normal routine, as more and clearer information became available. The current total validation added more than £30m to the budget.

The report maintained the pay assumption from 5% allowed for in next year for both NJC and teaching staff - this being the most significant validation included within the assumptions, and also the most uncertain. It was noted in the report that every 1% on the council's pay bill equated to £2.6m. With the level of industrial action across the wider public sector, the level of nationally set pay awards was the most significant validation included within the assumptions, and also the greatest risk factor.

The Cabinet Member for Resources referred to the consultations which had taken place on the budget proposals between December and January when more than 2,000 people had taken the trouble of completing the survey and sharing their views. He expressed his thanks to all who had taken part in the consultation or responded to the surveys, and in particular for the commitment and engagement of his fellow councillors who had participated in the budget seminars in such a positive spirit. He also thanked the 80 young people from local secondary schools who had visited County Hall to question cabinet members and officers and express their views on what the Council's priorities should be.

The Cabinet Member for Resources advised that a total sum of almost £1.8 million was available to make changes to next year's budget and he suggested that the best possible use be made of this sum by making the following

adjustments to the Budget Strategy which took account of the consultation process and responses to the feedback from both public and councillors:

Firstly, that £1.3million be provided to remove or reduce the 9 specific budget reductions detailed in paragraph 3.2.5 of the report which included:

- keeping St Clears Leisure centre open whilst the Authority worked with the community to set it on a viable financial path;
- restoring a quarter of a million pounds back to children's and youth services to invest in the prevention agenda;
- lessening the impact on both the school music service and learning disability services;
- reducing the financial ask on schools by £700,000, responding to what had been the strongest view given in the public consultation;
- deferring any changes to the rising 4s schools admission policy by a year to ensure wider consultation and allow the proper time to plan any possible changes.

He added that the proposal to charge for parking in nine car parks in smaller towns and villages had also been removed and that a case-for-case assessment would be made during the year.

Secondly, that £385,000 be used to support both hard working families and businesses by restricting the proposed increase in car park charges and school meals to 5%, which was half the current rate of inflation.

Thirdly, in responding to concerns over highways and town centres, that over a quarter-of-a-million pounds be allocated directly toward these priorities. It was recognised that Welsh Government had suffered a significant contraction in its capital budgets, and therefore some of the historical support provided for public realm works had sadly dried up in recent years – this council's choice would, he advised, at least be a partial mitigation. Rather than cut spending on street sweeping and so on, as previously proposed, more would be spent on keeping town centres cleaner and more attractive to visitors and residents alike.

Finally, and importantly, this left sufficient funding available for the council tax increase to be reduced to 6.8% for next year which, the Cabinet Board Member for Resources considered, struck the right balance in terms of protecting vital services which Carmarthenshire's citizens relied upon and looked to the council to deliver each and every day.

The Cabinet Board Member for Resources suggested that adopting these proposals allowed the Cabinet to present a fair and balanced budget to County Council and responded to the views fed back from the consultation. He advised that if all the proposals he had outlined were implemented a sustainable and viable Budget Strategy could be provided which:

- Responses to the consultation;
- Ensured, as far as possible, that service levels and standards were maintained;
- Recognised that residents were finding it hard in the current climate and ensured core services were protected;

- prepared, as far as was possible, the Authority for the uncertainties that may lie ahead.

He therefore moved that the proposed Budget Strategy, with the amendments he had referred to, be approved and recommended to County Council.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED THAT IT BE RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:-

- 5.1 To approve the Budget Strategy for 2023/24, which includes the amendments in paragraph 4.1.4 of the report;**
- 5.2 To approve the Band D Council Tax for 2023/24 of £1,490.97 (an increase of 6.8%);**
- 5.3 To approve the removal of specific savings proposals as identified in paragraph 3.2.5 of the report;**
- 5.4 To approve the restriction of income uplifts to school meals and car parks as identified in paragraph 3.2.5 of the report;**
- 5.5 To approve the discretionary allocation of pressures funding to highways and town centres as identified in paragraph 3.2.5 of the report;**
- 5.6 To approve the Medium Term Financial Plan which will form the basis of future years planning;**
- 5.7. That the Director of Corporate Services, in consultation with the Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources, be delegated authority to make any amendments necessary as a consequence of the WG settlement due on 1st March 2023.**

6. FIVE YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME (COUNCIL FUND) 2023/24 TO 2027/28

The Cabinet considered a report which brought together the latest proposals for the Five-Year Capital Programme (Council Fund) 2023/24 to 2027/2028 taking into account the consultation exercise undertaken and the revenue implications arising from the capital programme.

The Cabinet Member for Resources, in presenting the report, stated that the new programme would see £265m of investment over the next five years, £73m of which was for improving school buildings, £27m for Regeneration projects to boost economic activity, £86m for City Deal backed projects (which included a new leisure centre for Llanelli) and £59m to improve local economic infrastructure and wider environment. He advised that the detailed provisional capital programme had been presented to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee and, following concerns about the lack of provision for flood prevention and the lack of Welsh Government grant funding for decarbonisation measures, the programme had been revised to include further commitments in this area.

The Cabinet Member for Resources commented that the programme included three ongoing transformational projects, each focused on a different primary town area.

- a £19.6m hub (the former Debenhams Store) at the heart of Carmarthen Town Centre which will boost footfall in the town centre as we build back from the pandemic;

- £19m investment to complete the Twyi Valley Path between Carmarthen and Llandeilo;
- the construction phase of Zone 1 of the Pentre Awel development in Llanelli which would create five distinct buildings linked with a “street” space, comprising an aquatics centre, sports hall, multipurpose sports and fitness rooms and gym, education and training facilities, clinical delivery and research and innovation and business space.

In addition to these large flagship projects the Council would continue to support its programmes of investments in infrastructure and the authority’s property portfolio in year five of the programme. Support would also continue for Carmarthenshire’s Schools and Sustainable Communities for Learning. It was pointed out that feasibility works had been ongoing in the 2022/23 financial year on several schools and therefore those projects were not listed as part of this new programme. Furthermore the primary schools in Ammanford, which were part of the programme, were not, as yet, listed as they were part of Mutual Investment Model (MIM) bids and would therefore potentially be delivered in conjunction with partners in the private sector which would be funded through revenue in due course.

The Cabinet Member for Resources added that in addition to the flagship projects outlined, the Authority would seek to continue to support its ongoing rolling programmes of investments in the following infrastructure and the authority’s property portfolio in year five of the programme:

£2.5m for Disability Facilities Grants;
 £250k to improve Road Safety;
 £250k for highways drainage;
 £400k for Bridge Strengthening;
 £600k for ongoing Highway Refurbishment;
 £400k for Public Lighting;
 £500k for Education General Works including adaptations to comply with the Equalities Act;
 £2m for the Strategic Regeneration Project Fund;
 £3m for Capital Maintenance for investment in our property estate.

Collectively, over the next five years, investment in these rolling programmes would amount to over £48m.

It was considered that the proposed capital programme optimised the funding opportunities and maximised the funding from potential external sources. A combination of existing and new schemes in line with the corporate vision would develop the local economy, create jobs, and enhance the quality of life for Carmarthenshire’s citizens and visitors whilst safeguarding resources for future generations.

The Cabinet Member for Resources stated that County Council funding available for this programme was currently estimated at £168m and included borrowing, both supported and unsupported, reserves and direct revenue funding and Capital Receipts from the sale of surplus assets. Capital grants and contributions of £100m would come from external grant funding

bodies. As part of this year's settlement Welsh Government had provided indicative general capital funding figures up to 2024/25. This was reflected in the programme. Funding for years three, four and five of the programme was based on an assumed level of support equivalent to that received in 2024/25 going forward. It was pointed out that Welsh Government funding for 2023/24 was £55K less than previously expected. The overall level of assumed funding in the later years of the programme was slightly in excess of the current commitments. This uncommitted funding would allow flexibility to meet future pressures associated with rising costs and other challenges.

Cabinet was advised that officers would continue to monitor individual schemes and funding availability. Whilst both would need to be closely managed to ensure the schemes were delivered in full the programme was fully funded for the five years.

In conclusion the Cabinet Member for Resources believed that the Capital Programme, as outlined, sought to maximise opportunities and he therefore recommended its endorsement.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL THAT:-

- 6.1 the five-year Capital Programme and funding as detailed in Appendix A to the report, with 2023/24 being a hard budget and 2024/25 to 2027/28 soft/indicative budgets, be approved;**
- 6.2 the programme be reviewed, as is usual, if anticipated external or county council funding does not materialise;**
- 6.3 the Capital Strategy in Appendix C to the report be approved;**
- 6.4 the Director of Corporate Services, in consultation with the Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources, be delegated authority to make any amendments to the programme necessary as a consequence of the final settlement from the Welsh Government due on 1st March 2023.**

7. TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY AND STRATEGY 2023-24

The Cabinet was reminded that as part of the requirements of the revised CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management, the Council had agreed to maintain a Treasury Management Policy detailing the policies and objectives of the Authority's treasury management activities and to also approve a Treasury Management Strategy annually before the start of the financial year to which it related. In addition, under the Local Government Act 2003, the Council was required to approve the Treasury Management Indicators for the coming year.

In accordance with the above requirements, the Cabinet considered the Council's Treasury Management Policy and Strategy for the 2023-24 financial year prior to its formal submission to the Council for final adoption.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL THAT:-

- 7.1 The Treasury Management Policy and Strategy for 2023-24 and the recommendations contained therein be approved;**
- 7.2 The Treasury Management Indicators, Prudential Indicators, Minimum Revenue Provision Statement, the Investment Strategy and**

recommendations therein be approved.

8. TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATOR REPORT 1ST APRIL 2022 TO 31ST DECEMBER 2022

The Cabinet considered an update report on the treasury management activities and the prudential indicators for the period 1st April 2022 to 31st December 2022.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Treasury Management and Prudential Indicator Report for 1st April 2022 to 31st December 2022 be received.

9. COMMUNITIES, HOMES AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT – EMERGENCY SOCIAL HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The Chair of the Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee presented, for Cabinet's consideration, a report on the findings and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group established by the aforementioned Committee to develop an Emergency Social Housing Allocations Policy to address the unprecedented demand being experienced for Social Housing at the present time. He thanked all members and officers who had been involved in preparing the report.

The Leader thanked the aforementioned Task and Finish Group for its report and advised that recommendations 1 and 2 would not require Council approval.

The Cabinet Member Homes and Deputy Leader proposed an amendment to recommendation 2 to replace the words 'approximately one year' with 'up to 18 months' and also recommended that arrangements be made for a Member Development Session on the Emergency Interim Social Housing Allocations Policy.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

9.1 that the report and Recommendations of the Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee's Task and Finish Group established to develop an Emergency Social Housing Allocations Policy be endorsed subject to the amendment outlined and to it being noted that approval of recommendations 1 and 2 by Council was not required;

9.2 arrangements be made for a Member Development Session on the Emergency Interim Social Housing Allocations Policy.

10. HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAMME (HSP) STRATEGY 2022-26

The Cabinet considered a proposed Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy (2022 – 26) for Carmarthenshire which the Council was required to produce by Welsh Government. The strategy detailed the strategic priorities of Carmarthenshire County Council and its partner agencies for homelessness prevention and housing related support services over the coming 4 years (2022-26). It refreshed earlier priorities included in the Local Authority's former homelessness strategy, and the Housing Support Grant (HSG) Delivery Plan for 2021-22. Development of the priorities had been informed by a comprehensive

need assessment exercise which included direct engagement with stakeholders within the Local Authority, providers of support services and service users.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to approve the Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy (2022 – 26) for Carmarthenshire.

11. RAPID REHOUSING TRANSITION PLAN 2022-2027

The Cabinet considered a Draft Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan for 2022 – 2027, as required by Welsh Government, which contained a series of High-Level Actions that would enable the Council to transition to a Rapid Rehousing Approach to make homelessness in Carmarthenshire rare, brief, and unrepeated. The development of Rapid Rehousing clearly placed an emphasis on the provision of housing as a *fundamental element* of recovery from homelessness which could not be resolved with housing alone. It was considered that for Rapid Rehousing to be a success the Council must work in partnership with key services such as health and criminal justice whilst also harnessing the expertise and knowledge of both the third sector and voluntary organisations which provide services that support and help tenants build confidence and a connection within a community.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the draft Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and its Executive Summary be approved and that it be formally submitted to Welsh Government and published on the Council's Website following Welsh translation.

12. 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.

13. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

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 item as the report contained exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

14. RURAL ESTATE UPDATE REPORT

Following the application of the public interest test it was **RESOLVED**, pursuant to the Act referred to in minute no. 13 above, not to publicise the content of the report as it contained exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) (Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the Act). The public interest test in respect of this report outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information contained therein as disclosure as disclosure would unfairly undermine the commercial interests of the Council and individual farmers.

The Cabinet received a report on the present status and condition of the County Council's Farm Estate following recent surveys and the implications of the introduction of The Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations 2021 which would involve farms having to upgrade slurry storage facilities to accommodate at least five months' worth of slurry. As a consequence Cabinet was invited to consider whether the County Council's previous decision (September 2019) to retain the County Farms should be revisited.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the County Farm Estate be retained and managed under the current policy whilst rationalising and considering development and sale opportunities as they arise.

CHAIR

DATE