

CABINET - 6 October 2022

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: I Courts, K Grinsell, T Diccico, M Gough, K Hawkins, D Howell, A Mackiewicz, R Sleigh OBE, L McCarthy and M McLoughlin

Officers: Nick Page, Paul Johnson, Andrew Kinsey, Jenny Wood, Ruth Tennent, Mary Morrissey, Jo Robinson, Tim Browne, Sarah Cheale, Alison McGrory, Austin Rodriguez, Perry Wardle, Andy Duke, Karen Murphy, Caroline Potter, Walter Bailey, David Balme and Jane Game

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declarations of interests were made.

3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No declarations of interest were made.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th of July were presented for information.

RESOLVED

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th of July 2022 be received for information.

5. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2023/24

The Cabinet was provided with an update on Solihull Council's Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme from April 2023.

Members were reminded that each year Full Council had to approve the Council's CTR scheme and that from April 2017 the Council decided that all working age residents who were liable for council tax should pay a minimum of 15% towards their council tax irrespective of income. Pensioners were protected from any changes to local schemes and were not affected by this change.

Officers advised Members that no changes were being proposed or revisions to the Council's CTR scheme for April 2023, and the reasons for this included: -

- a) The support for customers was based on each individual's ability to pay and this means tested approach was fair and equitable;

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- (b) Pensioners continued to be protected under the original scheme rules;
- (c) Collection rates for CTR customers had been achieved in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 and 2021/22. (The collection rate for 2020/21 was less than the pre-Covid collection target and was as a result of the Council's decision to not undertake any recovery action from March 2020 to July 2020); and
- (d) The Council provided a variety of support mechanisms as detailed in section 3 of the report. These support mechanisms were available for any CTR claimant who was suffering financial hardship as a result of their council tax liability. The support mechanisms were in place to offer longer term solutions to help claimants with money management.

The report also detailed caseload, collection rates and support mechanisms.

On receiving the report there was some debate regarding the scheme. Some Members acknowledged that the Council's scheme was better than others but questioned with the cost-of-living crisis and the impact this would have on residents was this the best approach to take. Financial hardship also had a mental health cost, and this should not be overlooked.

It was acknowledged that challenging times lay ahead. It was also important not to overlook the work done by the Financial Inclusion Team, which offered much wider support than just help with the council tax. The scheme helped identify people in need of wider support. Changing the scheme would come at a cost, but not necessarily improve things.

RESOLVED:

That Full Council be **recommended** to approve the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24

6. CARERS' STRATEGY 2022-2027

Cabinet approval was sought for the new Solihull Carers' Strategy 2022-2027.

Members were advised that the new place-based strategy for the Solihull area, was to be jointly approved by Solihull Council and the Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board. It would not be considered an approved strategy until both organisations had formally approved it. The new strategy had been developed with carers of all ages, alongside health and voluntary sector partners.

The aim was to set out clearly and concisely the current position of carers in Solihull, the valuable contribution they make to care and support in the borough, and the priorities for development of support services for them over the next 5 years.

An outline delivery plan was included, to be developed into a detailed delivery plan for each year after approval of the strategy. This would include specific outcomes and delivery timelines as well as lead officers for each action. The delivery plan would remain a live document to take account of new requirements, such as the impact of pending reforms for adult social care and health, and emerging data from the 2021 census and ongoing surveys.

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Members welcomed the strategy and acknowledged the work that had gone in to preparing it. It was essential that the work carers of all ages did was recognised and they were supported, with safety valves in place to offer short breaks/respice care and support for their mental health and wellbeing. The work of community groups and neighbours in supporting carers also needed to be recognised. The point was raised that some carers were unable to work full time, due to their carering responsibilities, and relied on universal credit. It was therefore important to be mindful of how any changes to universal credit could affect these carers.

RESOLVED

- (i) That Cabinet approves the Solihull Carers' Strategy 2022-27; and
- (ii) That Cabinet agrees to delegate responsibility to the Director for Adult Social Care and Director for Children's Services to work with relevant health partners to implement action plan refreshes as necessary in order to deliver the ambitions of the strategy.

7. UPDATE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES FINANCIAL POSITION FOR 2022/23 (IN YEAR) AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FORTHCOMING MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS)

The Cabinet was provided with an update on the Children's Services Directorate / Portfolio financial position and implications for the forthcoming MTFS.

Members were advised that the Children's Services Directorate / Portfolio was facing unprecedented pressures in several business areas. The financial impact of these pressures was unmanageable within the Directorate / Portfolio. While some one-off funds had been secured, the short and medium-term implications of responding to the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) and subsequent Improvement Notice issued by the Secretary of State, the National Panel Review into the deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson and findings of further independent reviews in Solihull were considerable. The work thus far was highly necessary to safeguard and support the vulnerable children, young people, and families in the borough as the Council continued its improvement journey and established a preventative offer.

The report outlined the high-level implications of the current visible pressures and covered:

- (a) 2022/23 Early Financial Forecast.
- (b) Children's Contingency Reserve forecast position
- (c) MTFS 2023/24 to 2025/26 pressures

Whilst the position was an early draft that would need further iteration, the figures provided an indication of the scale of the current position and the MTFS implications. The content of the report would feed through into the Budget Strategy Group and be considered alongside other budgetary pressures in other Portfolios, and general inflationary pressures, which would need to be managed within the overall affordability level.

Upon receiving the report Members thanked Officers for providing a detailed report. The shortfall in social workers was a concern and one which some Members felt needed to be addressed by national government, as the problem was too big for local government to solve alone, and it was a national problem.

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Clarification was sought in relation to the progress of Family Hubs as these were an important preventative measure. Members were advised that although capital funding had been provided, which was welcome, Officers were undertaking further work in relation to the revenue costs required over a five-year period to run the Hubs.

It was noted that potential funding could be available from Fairer Future Funding, and it was important that Health colleagues recognised the role they needed to play in supporting this area of work.

Given the important role early help had to play the Cabinet Member for Children and Education put forward an amendment to allow the allocation of £192,000 from the Budget Strategy reserve to support the implementation of Early Help Level 2.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the financial position for the 2022/23 financial year and the implications for the 2023/24 - 2025/26 MTFS be xx; and
- (ii) That it be noted that the Children's Services pressures have been reported to:
 - (a) 12th September – Children's Services, Education & Skills Scrutiny Board
 - (b) 3rd October – Resources & Delivering Value Scrutiny Board.
- (iii) That the allocation of £192,000 from the Budget Strategy Reserve in 2022/23 to support the implementation of Early Help Level 2 be approved.

8. SOLIHULL CONNECTED REFRESH – DRAFT TRANSPORT STRATEGY

The Cabinet was provided with an update on the refresh of the Solihull Connected transport strategy and asked to approve a public consultation on the draft document.

Members were advised that three options had been considered do nothing, review/refresh or develop an entirely new strategy. A 'refreshed' Solihull Connected remained the preferred option, as the principles, objectives and structure of the current document remained valid within the context of recently issued advice and guidance.

The adopted 2016 Solihull Connected provided a transport strategy that acknowledged the importance of providing a more balanced multi-modal approach to movement. However, increased emphasis needed to be given within the document towards the promotion and priority of active travel and public transport modes, which would be delivered through the development of a Public Transport Vision and greater embedding of the principles of the recently adopted Cycling & Walking Strategy.

Solihull Connected 2016 also highlighted that a different approach should be taken to policy and infrastructure delivery in different areas of the borough, to consider the variation in demography and geography across Solihull. It currently included six area strategies. The principle of having area strategies that were tailored to different parts of

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the borough was still considered to be sound; however, it was proposed that these area strategies be complemented by Town / Local Centre Access Strategies, which would translate the policy and principles of access into specific measures for implementation in such centres.

Members welcomed the Strategy and supported the principles which lay behind the Strategy. A number of points of clarification were sought which Officers responded to.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the commencement of a public consultation on the Draft Transport Strategy, and supporting documentation, in accordance with the approach set out in paragraphs 3.37 to 3.41 of the report be approved; and
- (ii) That it be agreed that delegated authority be given to the Director of Economy and Infrastructure, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make any necessary changes to the Draft Strategy, and / or supporting documentation, prior to commencement of the consultation.

9. KINGSHURST VILLAGE CENTRE REGENERATION

Cabinet approval was sought to undertake early demolition works at Kingshurst Village Centre and to accept external funding to support the project in the event that recent funding applications were successful.

The report detailed the proposals under consideration and the three options that had been considered, as detailed in the report. Members were advised that Option 1 - Appoint Willmott Dixon to undertake an early works package was recommended (section 4.6 of the report) for the following reasons:

- It limited the delay to main contract works and reduced exposure to construction cost risk through further site investigations, service disconnections and diversions prior to main contract works;
- The site would be completely void from November 2022. Demolition of the site and establishment of fencing thereafter would dramatically reduce ASB;
- The properties were still subject to business and council tax rates (with a 100% levy payable from December). Service disconnections and demolition would cease these payments; and
- No additional costs would be incurred for accelerating the programme and undertaking these works.

Upon receiving the report Members sought clarification on a number of points which Officers responded to. Officers confirmed that the Council had not heard whether funding bids detailed in the report had been successful, but as detailed in 6.3 of the report funding was in place to proceed with the works Cabinet were being asked to approve as set out in the recommendation. Which were in line with procurement rules. Members were not being asked to change the base nature of the scheme. A further report would be presented to Cabinet in the coming months which would provide a business case and details of the final scheme.

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RESOLVED:

(i) That approval be given to proceed with early demolition works at Kingshurst Village Centre through the Council's contract with Willmott Dixon (WD), as set out in the body of the report;

(ii) That it be approved that the cost of the work be funded as set out at paragraph 6.3 of the report; and

(iii) That authority be granted to the Director of Economy and Infrastructure and the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, in conjunction with the Leader of the Council, to sign any contractual arrangements associated with the award of grants from the Brownfield Land Release Fund and/or the Levelling Up Fund, should either or both of these bids be successful.

10. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED:

That, pursuant to Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be now excluded from the meeting for the remainder of the business to be transacted, on the grounds that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information in terms of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the said Act.

11. REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AND NEWLY ARRIVED COMMUNITIES

7.50 pm