



Cabinet

Minutes - 4 February 2015

Attendance

Members of the Cabinet

Cllr Roger Lawrence (Chair)
Cllr Peter Bilson (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Steve Evans
Cllr Val Gibson
Cllr Andrew Johnson
Cllr Elias Mattu
Cllr John Reynolds
Cllr Sandra Samuels
Cllr Paul Sweet

Employees

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Nick Edwards | Service Director - City Assets |
| Dereck Francis | Democratic Support Officer |
| Adam Hadley | Group Manager – Democracy |
| Keith Ireland | Managing Director |
| Kevin O'Keefe | Director of Governance |
| Linda Sanders | Strategic Director - People |
| Mark Taylor | Director of Finance |

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**
Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr Phil Page.
- 2 Declaration of interests**
No declarations of interests were made.
- 3 Minutes of the previous meeting (14 January 2015)**
Resolved:
That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 January 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
- 4 Matters arising**
There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

5 **Budget 2015/16 - Outcome of Consultation**

Cllr Andrew Johnson presented a report on the feedback received from the consultation on the 2015/16 budget and the initial responses to the consultation. Amongst the key findings from the consultations were that:

- Protecting children from harm; caring for and protecting the elderly and vulnerable adults; and ensuring there are enough school places were the top three services respondents stated should remain protected from the proposed savings round.
- Neighbourhood service; cultural services; and leisure services were the top three services respondents stated should have no protection from the proposed savings round;
- 25% of respondents stated that they would be willing to volunteer to help to reduce the costs of running services.
- 47.59% of respondents to the consultations said that they would be willing to pay more Council Tax if that rise reduced the level of cuts to services.

Full details of the consultation and analysis were available on line and could be accessed via the link <http://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/article/6168/The-Councils-budget-setting-documents-as-of-4-February-2015>. The key findings would be taken on board and the final response to the consultation would be included in the budget report being prepared for the meeting on 25 February 2015.

Cllr Johnson placed on record his thanks to Cheryl Powell, Project Manager, who had led the work on the consultation process. He also placed on record his thanks to the people of Wolverhampton who participated in the budget consultations. The feedback had been extremely helpful and provided Cabinet with an insight from the public's perspective on the council's savings proposals and what should be taken forward and included in the final 2015/16 budget report.

Resolved:

1. That the responses to the consultation undertaken for the Five Year Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 to 2018/19 be received and noted.
2. That it be noted that the final response would also be fed back to those that participated in the consultation.

6 **2015/16 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 - 2018/19**

Cllr Andrew Johnson presented a further report updating Cabinet on the 2015/16 budget and medium term financial strategy 2015/16 to 2018/19. He reported that the Government had announced the final Local Government Finance settlement. The headline figure would mean that the Council would be £379,000 better off compared to its provisional settlement figure. Following an anticipated required adjustment relating to the New Homes Bonus top slice that was distributed during the financial year it was estimated that the Council would be £100,000 better off than assumed at the time of the provisional settlement figure.

Cllr Johnson drew Cabinet's attention to a projected net overspend of £3.3 million on the revenue budget for 2014/15. This was primarily as a result of an increase in the numbers of Looked After Children (LAC) placements. He reported that as part of the strategy to address the challenge posed by increasing LAC numbers, the Families R

First programme continued to make progress, with LAC numbers beginning to reduce since December 2014. He also reminded Cabinet of the working party comprising himself, the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Children and Families as well as an employee LAC Board that were concentrating on this difficult area, including drilling down into individual cases. Likewise, an Adult Social Care Savings Board had been established, chaired by the Director of Finance to closely monitor savings proposals in that area and to ensure budgets are correctly controlled. The budget report on 25 February would quantify the amount that would need to be put into these two big service areas.

Cllr Johnson also highlighted the sections of the report setting out pay related and demographic pressures on the budget. He also indicated that he was hopeful for some good news from the Government regarding Localised Business Rates and an extra grant for the council relating to business rates. Again this would be reported on in the budget report to Cabinet on 25 February 2015.

Resolved:

1. That the changes to the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 to 2018/19, previously approved by Cabinet on 22 October 2014 be approved.
2. That the key budget parameters be approved.
3. That authority be delegated to the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) to agree the composite rate for employer's contributions with West Midlands Pension Fund.
4. That it be noted that the Council is now faced with finding further savings totalling £40.6 million over the next four years, with an immediate focus on identifying as much of the projected £3.5 million deficit for 2015/16.
5. That it be noted that the Council continues to undertake detailed analysis in order to identify and predict the likely number of Looked After Children in future years. Ensuring the safeguarding of Looked After Children is of utmost importance to the Council. The work that is being undertaken would help inform the level of savings that may be achieved in this area in 2015/16 and beyond; a significant reduction and reprofiling of these savings is anticipated. A further update would be reported to Cabinet as part of the final budget report on 25 February 2015.
6. That it be noted that in order to balance the 2015/16 budget it is anticipated that £3.5 million of general balances would be required, unless further savings are identified. If the Council were to use £3.5 million of general reserves to balance the budget in 2015/16, this would breach the Council's policy of maintaining a minimum of £10 million in general reserves.
7. That it be noted that further detailed technical work would continue prior to the next update to Cabinet on 25 February 2015, with the aim of reducing the call on general reserves as much as possible to ensure that the Council's policy of maintaining a minimum of £10 million in general reserves is not breached.

8. That it be noted that work would start immediately to identify additional savings to address the projected £15.6 million budget deficit for 2016/17. Savings required may be in excess of the projected budget deficit in 2016/17 in order to replenish general reserves to £10 million. An update on progress will be reported to Cabinet in June 2015.
9. That it be noted that it is particularly challenging to project key assumptions over the medium term period, however they have been adjusted based upon the information available at present and professional judgement. Budget assumptions therefore remain subject to significant change, and could result in alterations to the financial position facing the Council.
10. That it be noted that a new Adult Social Care Savings Board is to be established, and would be chaired by the Director of Finance, to monitor performance and delivery of previously approved Adults savings.

7 **Scrutiny Review of Welfare Reforms - Unclaimed Benefits**

Cllr Rita Potter, Chair of the scrutiny review group was in attendance at the meeting for this item. She gave a brief introduction to the report containing the findings and recommendations from a scrutiny review into of Welfare Reform – Unclaimed benefits.

She also reported that she wanted to make sure information, advice and support was available in the city to help the most vulnerable to find out about and claim their right benefit entitlement. She also wanted to send out a clear message to everyone who was struggling to make ends meet, working or not, about the advice on benefits and credits and the support that was available to help them and their families to get through difficult periods and back on their feet and into employment where possible. She also placed on record her thanks to all the witnesses and employees who had contributed to the review.

Cllr Andrew Johnson thanked Cllr Rita Potter and the rest of the scrutiny review group for an excellent piece of work and their review report. He took Cabinet through the proposed Executive's response to the findings and recommendations of the scrutiny review.

Resolved:

1. That the report of the review group be received and the following recommendations be noted:

R1 To request the City's Inclusion Board to receive the report of the review group and to consider the feasibility of developing a partnership forum to oversee development of a co-ordinated advice and support strategy for the City.

The aim of the partnership forum would be to focus on unclaimed benefits, in-work and out of work, to maximise incomes and defend benefit entitlement in the City.

The review suggests the following are considered for inclusion in terms of reference:

- a. To develop options for a hub and spoke framework and a coordinated. Advice and support strategy relating to income maximisation and defending benefit entitlement.
 - b. To carry out a mapping exercise of existing mechanisms for access to information, advice and support relating to benefits and income maximisation across the City.
 - c. To consider operational issues: process, communication, support accessibility and equality monitoring.
 - d. To align advice and support for welfare rights and benefits with employability and skills and link into existing signposting, advice and guidance networks.
 - e. To identify and prepare joint funding bids for advice and support in the City.
 - f. To promote case studies to the wider public to raise awareness and encourage people who may recognise themselves in the scenario to seek advice and find out if they could be claiming benefits or back claiming if there has been a genuine problem or mistake made.
- R2 To accelerate delivery of the Wolverhampton Digital Inclusion Strategy and Customer Services Strategy to enable access to the use of social media, information portals and mobile devices as tools to promote income maximisation, to signpost job seekers and people on benefits to relevant and accurate information.
- R3 That each Community Hub should develop information stations which offer advice about benefits, work training and volunteering opportunities, and that a pilot hub be developed to provide advice and support 'drop in' sessions at Ashmore Park Community hub.
- R4 That City Direct continues to develop and update the website relating to advice and support about benefits and income maximisation. That work with customer focus groups is undertaken to review what the Council website holds and that issues arising from research and development are built into future service planning.
- R5 That an internal canvass of Council employees is undertaken to recruit volunteers with awareness of benefits and working in a social care environment. Welfare rights training is available for volunteers and the Councils staff volunteering policy enables employees two days per annum to work with the CAB or other voluntary sector organisations.

R6 That partners work to develop evaluation of volunteering work to give recognition of the additional skills, experience and confidence that volunteering can afford individuals and as a pathway into employment which can be taken into account as part of the claimant commitment when seeking employment opportunities.

R7 That the Welfare Rights Team develop the work with law students in defending benefit entitlement and contact Wolverhampton University and College to discuss students from health and social care training courses getting involved. That students be offered opportunity to receive training and work experience in a volunteer capacity relating to benefit maximisation.

R8 The Inclusion Board receives the response and considers the implications of the Department of Works and Pensions Freedom of Information analysis relating to the impact of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) sanctions in Wolverhampton.

2. That the executive response to the review recommendations be approved.

3. That the Cabinet response be referred to Scrutiny Board for it to track and monitor the implementation of the agreed recommendations.

8 **Anti-Social Behaviour Service - Authorisations to Support TUPE Transfer**

Cllr Elias Mattu reported that at the meeting on 12 November 2014 Cabinet approved proposals on a preferred modal for the future delivery of the city's Anti-Social Behaviour Service. In order to formally progress implementation of the proposals he now sought further required authorisations for the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) transfer of staff and associated services currently delivered by the Council to Wolverhampton Homes.

Resolved:

1. That the Council enter into a Business Transfer Agreement dealing with the transfer of employees from the Council to Wolverhampton Homes.

2. That the Council enter into a Service Contract setting out that Wolverhampton Homes would provide services to the Council in respect of anti-social behaviour.

3. That the Council enter into any ancillary agreements necessary for transfer of employees to Wolverhampton Homes.

9 **Appointments to Outside Bodies**

Cllr Roger Lawrence proposed a number of appointments of Council representatives to serve on outside bodies, companies, boards and trusts.

Resolved:

1. That Cllr Phil Page be reappointed as the Council's representative to serve on the Bilston Relief in Need Charity for a period of four years expiring in 2019.

2. That Alderman Neville Patten replace Alderman Carpenter as one of the Council's representatives on the Wolverhampton Buildings Preservations Trust until the Annual Meeting of the Council in 2015.
3. That the appointment of Dr Keren Jones, Service Director, City Economy as a Director to the Board of the i54 Management Company in the place of Nick Edwards, Service Director, City Assets be approved and she be indemnified in her role on the Company.
4. That the appointment of Dr James McElligott, Director of Education onto the Board of the Wolverhampton Youth Zone to the vacancy occasioned by the retirement of former Chief Executive, Simon Warren be approved and he be indemnified in his role on the Company.
5. That Anthony Ivko, Service Director, Older People be appointed as a Governor on the Shadow Board of the Royal Wolverhampton Hospital NHS Trust