

CABINET

THURSDAY, 24 AUGUST 2017

PRESENT: Councillors Simon Dudley (Chairman), David Coppinger (Vice-Chairman), Phillip Bicknell, Carwyn Cox, Derek Wilson, Natasha Airey, MJ Saunders, Samantha Rayner.

Principal Members also in attendance: Christine Bateson, Lisa Targowska and Stuart Carroll

Also in attendance: Councillor Lynne Jones

Officers: Alison Alexander, Rob Stubbs, Russell O'Keefe, Karen Shepherd, Andy Jeffs and Kevin McDaniel

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Evans and Rankin.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That:

- i) The Part I minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2017 be approved.**
- ii) The Part I minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Regeneration Sub Committee held on 25 July 2017 be noted.**
- iii) The Part I minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Local Authority Governors Appointments Sub Committee held on 27 July 2017 be noted.**

APPOINTMENTS

None

The Lead Member for Children's Services commented that the council was proud of all the young people in the borough who had received their GCSE results earlier in the day. Results provided by the schools showed 80% had received a level 4-9 in the new grading system for English and Maths, against a national average of 72%. At A-levels 78% had achieved A*-C against a national average of 77%. She congratulated all young people, particularly those Children in Care. She thanked the hardworking staff and teachers at borough schools. The figures would be verified by the government in January 2018 and a report would come to Cabinet in March 2018.

The Chairman echoed the Lead Member's' comments, congratulating those who had got the results they had worked for and reminding those who had not done so well that hard work and perseverance would get them a long way in life.

On behalf of Cabinet, the Chairman also sent best wishes to Pat McDonald, the former Labour candidate in Maidenhead.

FORWARD PLAN

Cabinet considered the contents of the Forward Plan for the next four months and noted the changes that had been made to the plan since the last meeting. In addition it was noted that:

- The report 'Property Company,' scheduled for Cabinet Regeneration Sub Committee in September 2017, would be deferred to the October 2017 meeting.

CABINET MEMBERS' REPORTS

A) ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION

Cabinet noted that the report had been withdrawn because the purpose of the item had been superseded by an amendment to the General Permitted Development Order 2015 which secured the same effect. The Lead Member reported that Mark Newcombe had attended the Planning and Housing O&S Panel and had been supportive of the proposal. Following further checks of the legislation, the item had been withdrawn.

B) SCHOOL CATERING - REQUEST TO GO TO TENDER

Cabinet considered permission to seek proposals for a new school meals contract to run from 1 August 2018.

The Lead Member explained that 12 schools were currently involved, a further 8 would be informing the borough in September 2017 if they also wished to be included. The contract helped small schools in particular to get the best deal. The proposal was cost neutral for the borough as schools bought back the service.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Cabinet notes the report and approves:

- i) **The procurement of a new catering contract for schools.**

C) TELEPHONY OPTIONS

Cabinet considered an upgrade of the council's telephone system at a capital cost of £273,000. The Lead Member explained that this was the next stage in the Delivering Differently program for Libraries and Resident Services. Following extensive research, the proposal was to upgrade the current system. This would take less time to introduce and enabled the council to work with a known supplier. It was also more cost effective. A project manager would be on-site for the duration of the upgrade over one weekend, to resolve any issues.

The current system was 12 years old. The council received between 600-1400 calls per day and therefore needed a system to meet the demand and allow flexibility. The upgraded system would allow information to be recorded directly and stored straight away. Abandoned calls could be returned and those on hold would be told where they

were in the queue. Staff had done well to improve the performance in relation to calls answered in 60 seconds from 60% earlier in the year to the current figure of 89%. The system would also bring benefits for staff. It was planned that the upgrade would be in place by the end of November 2017.

The Principal Member for HR, Legal and IT commented that the proposals were much needed and would make a significant difference to both residents and staff. She was supportive as the proposals would allow more efficient and flexible working, including the taking on of contingency staff when required. Both HR and IT would be looking how flexible working could be promoted; this was the first step. A contract strategy, flexible working strategy and IT infrastructure plan would be worked on over the next year.

It was confirmed that both the software and hardware would be upgraded. The Lead Member for Finance explained that the council was undertaking a capital investment with a variety of revenue implications, one of which would be the confidence with which the council would be charging Optalis and Achieving for Children for selling its availability., It would not change the value of the investment, but the council would be generating a confident return from it.

Councillor Jones stated that she was very supportive of the proposals. She asked for confirmation that the system was flexible enough to change with any changes made in the council and was robust enough to cope with future demand, rather than being a stop gap. The Lead Member confirmed that this was the case and that the number of licences could increase or decrease as necessary.

The Chairman highlighted the detailed questions that had been submitted by the Chairman of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and that detailed answers had been provided by officers.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Cabinet notes the report and:

- i) Approves capital budget of £273,000 in 2017/18 to upgrade the existing customer service centre and wider council telephony system.**
- ii) Notes the continued improvement in telephony performance, and requests quarterly updates on contact centre performance as part of the Performance Management Framework.**

D) FINANCIAL UPDATE

Cabinet considered the latest financial update. The Lead Member explained that of the £2.2m set aside to respond to unexpected issues, the council had hitherto not needed to spend much of the total. In contract the revenue account was projected to run £1.2m ahead of the targets set. This meant the council was £1m ahead overall in terms of the impact on reserves. The figure of £1.2m was predominantly related to volume driven aspects of Children's Services, as opposed to inefficient or ineffective delivery of services. In Adult Social Care the volume issue was running below what had been anticipated therefore this offered some mitigation. In the Communities and Place directorates, both anticipated balanced budgets at this stage.

The Lead Member highlighted that the council had agreed a budget including substantial tactical investments in excess of £75m during the course of the year.

Some of those investments were not happening as quickly as had been originally anticipated, therefore it was more likely than not that the council would be borrowing less than £70m.

In relation to business rates, the Lead Member highlighted a number of important new initiatives. A new Business Rate Relief for public houses was being proactively promoted to 89 public houses identified as fitting the guidelines. A new Discretionary Relief Scheme was focussed on Business Rate payers whose rateable value was less than £200,000 but whose bill had increased by more than 12.5% in the last year due to revaluation. The council's policy was being revised to make this clear and would be actively promoted; 34 businesses had already been identified and would be sent an updated application form in September 2017.

The Lead Member reported that, in agreement with officers and members of the Budget Steering Group, it was anticipated that the budget would be brought forward by 2-3 months. This was important as local authorities faced a number of challenges and it would allow issues to be discussed before the budget approval process began in the new year. A report would be presented to Cabinet in October 2017 to include savings, a capital expenditure plan and borrowing expectations for 2018/19.

The Lead Member for Adult Services explained that each year when the budget was set it took into account a number of cases that were yet to be determined, for example challenges from other local authorities as to which council was responsible for paying for an individual's care. The council had won three cases recently therefore the budget was not underspent and no-one was losing out on any care. Overall the council was spending more on Adult Services.

The Lead Member for Culture and Communities commented that since the promotion of Andy Jeffs to Executive Director, a new Head of Revenues and Benefits had been appointed. Business rate collection rates continued to be good.

The Executive Director confirmed that a response had been drafted for the Lead Member to agree, to respond to CAMRA in relation to rate relief for public houses.

The Principal Member for Neighbourhood planning and Ascot & the Sunnings welcomed the rate relief for small businesses, particularly retail, as there were a number affected in her ward.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Cabinet:

- i) **Notes the Council's projected outturn position for 2017-18 and mitigating actions to address service pressures.**
- ii) **Approves the addition of a £173,000 grant funded budget to the capital programme to repair potholes across the Borough (details in paragraph 4.22).**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes place on items 8-9 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1-7 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

The meeting, which began at 7.30 pm, finished at 8.19 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....