

CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a virtual Meeting of the **Cabinet** held on **Thursday, 11 June 2020 at 10.00 am**

PRESENT:

Mr SF Young (Leader)
Mrs PA Bell
Mrs A Burns
Ms D Earl
Mr KA Little
Mrs S Sanderson
Mr DE Southward
Mr P Thornton
Mrs C Tibble
Mrs J Willis

Officers in attendance:

Chief Executive, Executive Director - Corporate, Customer and Community Services, Executive Director - Economy and Infrastructure, Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer), Chief Fire Officer, Director of Public Health, Chief Legal Officer (Monitoring Officer), Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director - People, Leadership Support Officer - Labour Group, Leadership Support Officer - Liberal Democrat Group, Professional Lead - Democratic Services and Communications Manager

The Chair began the meeting by saying a few words on behalf of Cumbria County Council to all the residents and communities of Cumbria.

He thanked everyone most sincerely for all that the public had done to support one another, and their communities, during COVID-19.

This had been, and continued to be, an unprecedented time and we were all still coming to terms with the impact of Coronavirus on our lives, our families, our communities and of course on our businesses and our economy.

Coronavirus was probably the biggest and most difficult challenge that most of us have faced in our lives and it continued to have an unknown level of impact on us all.

Despite all this Cumbria could be proud in the way that it had come together. Everyone had worked hard to protect and support the most vulnerable in our communities and every single resident had had some role to play in this.

So on behalf of Cumbria County Council the Chair wanted to say 'thank you'.

Coronavirus isn't something that would go away quickly and when we do eventually come through this we would face a very different kind of life.

Whatever that would be, the one thing I know for sure was that Cumbria's communities would still be here for one another, as would Cumbria County Council, to continue to offer its help and support to those who needed it most.

PART 1 ITEMS CONSIDERED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

99 ROLL CALL FOR MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no apologies for absence.

100 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest made on this occasion.

101 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that, the press and public be not excluded for any items of business on the agenda today.

102 MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2020 be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

103 STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CABINET MEMBERS

Councillor Keith Little – Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport made a statement about Grizebeck.

Back in 2018 the Department of Transport invited the County Council to bring forward a business case for the upgrade of the A595 at Grizebeck; this business case was submitted to the Department in April 2019. In line with DfT guidance, the County Council worked with Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to identify £2.25m of local match funding using their Local Growth Fund on the basis it would be spent by March 2021.

Unfortunately, DfT had not been able to reach a decision on this application yet, which had resulted in a position whereby the full Growth Deal allocation cannot be spent by March 2021 and the LEP had been advised of this.

This is a major setback for the County Council and the scheme and the Cabinet Member would be raising this with the local MP.

The Cabinet Member – Highways and Transport also made a statement on Emergency Active Travel. The County Council had recently been allocated Government funding for emergency active travel measures. This funding could be used to implement temporary cycling and walking measures such as pop up cycle lanes.

In Cumbria the indicative funding for tranche 1 was £233,000, which was approximately £40,000 per district. The second tranche would be available later in the summer, and would be for more permanent cycling and walking schemes.

Cumbria County Council had been working with local members and district council representatives to prioritise a long list of potential schemes. Once confirmation had been received on whether the bid was successful, work would begin to implement the temporary schemes in each District area.

In addition the District Councils had received an allocation of European funding for reopening high streets safely and the County Council was working with the Districts Councils to identify how the funding could be used to support the safe reopening of high streets and other commercial areas.

Councillor Patricia Bell then made a statement about the Black Lives Matters Campaign, which had brought international attention to race equality and this had come at a time when Public Health England had published data on the impact of Covid-19 on Black Asian and Minority people.

The issues raised by Black Lives Matters gave added impetus to Cumbria County Council to press ahead with its Equality agenda, and will inform the paper already planned to come to Cabinet in September on the Council's equality objectives.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Members for their statements.

104 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no petitions, public questions, or statements made on this occasion.

105 REFERRALS FROM LOCAL COMMITTEES

None for this meeting.

106 REFERRALS FROM SCRUTINY

None for this meeting.

107 CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCILS RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Cabinet Members had before them a report from the Chief Executive, which provided an overview of the Council's response to the Covid-19 epidemic to date.

The Chair referred to the amount of detail contained in the report, which he did not intend to go through in particular detail during the meeting. There were likely to be further important matters over the coming months in relation to Covid-19 that Cabinet would wish to be updated on.

However, he gave the Cabinet Members the opportunity to make any specific points for their portfolios.

Councillor Deborah Earl - Cabinet Member Public Health and Community Services highlighted the Emergency helpline which had been launched (with partners) by the County Council in March and had taken thousands of calls to help people with shopping, prescriptions and emergency food. None of this would have been possible and as successful without the thousands of volunteers who had helped in all of the communities. Community groups across the County had been amazing and were still all working hard now. The Cabinet Member thanked everyone involved with this helpline.

The Cabinet Member said the Public Health team had been at the forefront throughout this pandemic and were now leading the way with the local, test, track and trace system and assisting schools and other organisations with infection control. This work had been led by our Director of Public Health Colin Cox whose leadership from day one had been exemplary.

She thanked the Director of Public Health and also all staff at Cumbria County Council for their hard work, and dedication to help the residents of Cumbria.

Councillor Patricia Bell - Cabinet Member for Health and Care started by thanking all those people who work in health and care, in the private and public sector, on the front line and in the back room, for their hard work and dedication in these difficult times; for the extra shifts and extended hours worked, often beyond the call of duty, whilst balancing this with the need to manage their own lives and the lives of their families through lock down.

The council's response to the pandemic had been characterised by strong partnership work and system leadership, with health partners locally, NHS England, the third sector, district councils and wider partners.

The council had been able to maintain its care services and had not, like some other councils, found it necessary to enact the care act easements.

The council had led a multiagency multi group and 24/7 response cell, which among other things had coordinated a process for managing admissions to care homes to minimise the spread of Covid-19.

The council had responded quickly in providing a supportive response to the wider social care market and established mechanisms to collate vital intelligence on things such as the supply of PPE and staffing shortages. By sharing information on a daily basis it had been possible for care providers to support each other.

Cumbria Care, the County Council's own care service had been at the forefront of the council's response to Covid-19, delivering care to some of the county's most vulnerable residents both at home and in care homes. The staff had been brilliant not only in delivering personal care but in ensuring care home residents had been able to stay in touch with family and loved ones.

Currently, the situation in care homes appeared to have stabilised with lower number of homes which were Covid-19 positive and lower infections rates for staff and residents.

Councillor Sue Sanderson- Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning thanked everyone in schools, in the council and all partners for their hard work and support to ensure everyone had done their best for all our children since the beginning of the crisis.

A strategic education group was set up to oversee the temporary closure of schools and the setting up of hubs to provide education and childcare initially for vulnerable children and children of key workers.

These had remained the priority now with the addition of specific year groups defined by the government. These hubs reflected how Cumbria worked through clusters and working together. They proved very effective and had assisted in supporting wider opening of schools.

Cumbria County Council assisted with the Free School Meals vouchers which challenged everybody's creativity and energy, and also the responsibility for the digital devices. The Cabinet Member confirmed that Cumbria County Council had received 1000 laptops for distribution. The Cabinet Member thanked the County Council's Communications team for all their hard work keeping members, schools, families and governors informed on national and local briefings.

As wider opening began, Cumbria County Council supported schools throughout providing risk assessments, support from the Health and Safety team and professional advice. On 8th June 235 schools had confirmed they were opening, 3570 pupils attended which was about 7% of the school population and the highest proportion were children of keyworkers.

The next challenges to be faced would be the summer holidays and the return to school in September. A meeting with head teachers was planned in the near future to discuss this.

Councillor Anne Burns – Cabinet Member for Children's Services reported that at the start of the lockdown the Children and Young People's

services undertook a complete risk assessment of the Council services and assigned a RAG rating to the children and young people open to these services.

Throughout the pandemic Cumbria County Council had managed to maintain contact and to visit those children and young people, either virtually or by way of a visit. In all circumstances where visits were deemed necessary the required safety measures were applied.

The priority for Cumbria County Council was to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people were supported. Cumbria County Council had also continued to work with other professional networks to share best practice and learning.

Children's Rights Officers had maintained close contact with all youngsters leaving care to ensure the young people had food, accommodation and everything they needed to live independently.

The County Council had also maintained support for Foster Carer's and those families that had adopted children and those currently going through the adoption process.

The Cabinet Member paid tribute to all of the staff working in Children's Services for their hard work and dedication to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people have been safeguarded during this crisis.

Children have been at the centre of the decision making responsibility in Cumbria and this would continue.

Councillor Celia Tibble – Cabinet Member for Environment said it would be difficult in a few minutes to convey the true extent of the work done by the teams that sit under her portfolio. Whilst the waste and health and safety teams had been quite prominent, there were others, like the countryside and trading standards teams who had quietly gone about their work.

No surprise that health and safety had been a significant element of the County Council's response - the Council had both legal and moral duties under the Health & Safety at Work Act and remained strongly committed to provide safe services and safe arrangements for all staff, elected members and contractors that worked on behalf of the Council.

The Cabinet Member drew attention to the central role of the health and safety team, throughout the pandemic, and also to the Waste Service, in particular HWRC's which had been severely impacted by the Coronavirus – Covid-19 Pandemic.

The Cabinet Member gave grateful thanks to those teams who had worked so hard, and who continued to work through these unprecedented times.

Councillor Keith Little – Cabinet Member for Highway and Transport began by paying tribute to all the Cumbria County staff, everyone had played their part during this crisis and had provided excellent services to the residents of Cumbria.

The Highways and Transport teams had now returned to operational work. Some of the transport teams had been redeployed to the hubs, where, for example, instead of transporting children and young people to schools and colleges, were delivering PPE kit to areas of need throughout the County, along with food and medical supplies.

Highways staff had maintained the urgent safety response to road traffic accidents throughout the pandemic and the Rights of Way Officers had been working hard to ensure routes remained open to the public whilst taking daily exercise.

Councillor Janet Willis – Cabinet Member for Customers, Transformation and Fire and Rescue started by saying that each Thursday evening she, like many others, had been going out to clap for the NHS and key workers, but also for many of the other unsung heroes, such as the staff at Cumbria County Council and in Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service.

Within the Fire and Rescue Service services had been adapted to ensure they supported the Council and communities, such as the delivery of PPE, food and medical supplies. In recent weeks, they had also been working with South Yorkshire and Lancashire Fire and Rescue Services in dealing with a number of serious wild fire incidents.

The Cabinet Member also paid tribute to the staff within the People Management Team and the IT Teams, who had worked tirelessly behind the scenes to support and enable the transformation of the County Council services to allow it to continue to function. The IT had upgraded the VPN network support from 400 users per day to 5500 users.

The Cabinet Member thanked all staff and said she had not underestimated to role everyone had played during these unprecedented times.

Councillor David Southward – Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Property said Paragraphs 46 to 48 of the published report summarised the actions taken during the pandemic that related to his portfolio.

He highlighted a number of key issues being faced as the restrictions of lockdown were eased.

The Covid-19 Pandemic had had a devastating effect on the economy of Cumbria as it had on the national economy, the European economy and across the whole world. It would be many months, perhaps years before the true extent was known.

The Cabinet Member paid tribute to the genuine collaboration across the county in response to the pandemic. The Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership had led the Business and Economic Response and Recovery Group, ably supported by Cumbria County Council, the district councils, Cumbria Tourism, the Lake District National Park Authority, the NHS Trusts, and the Police.

The Cabinet Member said there were many facets to the economy of Cumbria but he specifically chose three to brief Cabinet on: tourism, farming, and the nuclear industry.

Lastly, turning to the county council's own building projects, the Cabinet Member was pleased to report that nearly all of the sites were fully operational again with the contractors' management teams undertaking to abide by the government's Site Operating Procedures.

The Council had worked to support the economic response throughout the pandemic supporting the work of the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership who were leading the Business and Economic Response and Recovery sub-group of the SCG. Throughout the epidemic the Council had had a strong focus on continuing to progress those key projects and programmes that would be so central to the economic recovery of the county.

With greatly increased home working a number of council premises have been closed to both the public and staff. The property team had worked to ensure these buildings had been safely managed and maintained in line with statutory compliance requirements. A small number of the Council's main offices had remained open for essential staff use throughout, with reduced use the buildings had required amended maintenance regimes and also enhanced cleaning in response to Covid-19. The property and facilities management team had also been working in anticipation of the easing of lock-down restrictions to develop

measures to enable buildings to be brought back into use safely when the national and local situation allows for this.

When lock-down came into place the Council took the difficult decision to temporarily suspend construction works under the capital programme until we could be confident that the contractors could operate safely with social distancing in place to safeguard their workers and the wider public. As government issued further guidance for the construction sector and as the contractors demonstrated their plans to ensure social distancing the Council had been able to recommence work on a number of construction sites which was enabling projects important to our communities to be delivered.

Councillor Peter Thornton, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance said that listening to these accounts and looking at the scale of what this Council had done it was difficult to believe that all this had happened in such a short space of time.

The Deputy Leader thanked the Finance team for their hard work on trying to work out the cost of the pandemic for the Council, and he acknowledge the difficulty they faced in putting a price on all of this.

It is difficult to understand the battles yet to be faced and how long this struggle is likely to last for. However, he made three points about Cumbria County Council's financial position.

Firstly, the position of Cumbria County Council was in line with the majority of County Councils across the country, who were all facing similar challenges and were reporting broadly the same figures, in proportion to their budgets. Cumbria was not alone in its financial challenge

It had been estimated, by the Local Government Association, that the Council sector as a whole would need almost 13 Billion pounds to meet this challenge. Just to remind members, Councils had so far received 3.2 Billion along with various other ring fenced grants.

Cumbria's share of this was just over 25 Million against a best estimate of 47 Million in total costs, leaving a gap of 22 Million.

Government Ministers had assured all Councils that they would be compensated for Covid related costs and Cumbria County Council was relying on this assurance.

The Chair thanked all Cabinet Members for their presentations.

RESOLVED, that the report be received and noted.

108 2019/20 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT PROVISIONAL YEAR END RESULTS

Cabinet considered a report from the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer), which set out the Council's provisional year end results for 2019/20 covering the Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Treasury Management activities. This report linked to the Q4 Council Plan Delivery Plan Performance Report which would be reported in July.

The Chair invited the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance to present the report and move the recommendations.

The financial context for the Council was extremely challenging. Since 2011/12, the Council had agreed a total of £272million of savings in setting annual revenue budgets. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) which emerged in the fourth quarter of 2019/20 would be felt for many years to come and it added another layer of uncertainty and challenge to the funding and the provision of local public services.

It was, therefore, positive to report that at the end of Q4, against a net revenue budget of £394.453m, the provisional outturn position for the Revenue Budget at the year end was a balanced budget.

This report emphasised that this Council was in a strong and stable financial position as it entered the current year, on 1 April. That would be important when the Council made the case to the treasury as to the assistance Cumbria would need to meet the current extra costs.

The Deputy Leader reminded members that numbers were provisional at this stage, pending the external audit. He then outlined the key messages and moved the report.

RESOLVED, that Cabinet:

- a) Note the Revenue Budget at the provisional outturn for monitoring purposes of £394.453m as a result of the transfers from the Inflation and Contingency budget and agreed transfers to and from reserves (set out in Appendix 1).
- b) Note the provisional outturn Revenue Budget year end position of a balanced budget, this is after the drawdown of £1.044m from the Covid-19 reserve.
- c) Note progress in delivering the new savings for 2019/20 of £22.730m; a total of £17.056m (75.0%) of these 2019/20 savings have been delivered by 31st March 2020.

- d) Note the General Fund balance at 31st March 2020 of £15.056m after mitigations. This is consistent with the level of General Fund Balance at 31st March 2019.
- e) Approve the addition of £1.103m to the Capital Programme 2019/20, as detailed in paras 38 - 40, funded from specific grants and contributions.
- f) Approve the virements of £0.190m to the Capital Programme 2019/20 as set out in para 41.
- g) Note the provisional outturn for the Capital Programme 2019/20 of £90.891m against a current capital budget of £108.229m (excluding Accountable Bodies) resulting in a variance of £17.338m as set out in Table 8 para 43.
- h) Note Treasury Management activities during 2019/20 have operated within the treasury limits set out in the Council's Treasury Policy Statement and Treasury Strategy Statement and the Prudential Indicators set by Council in February 2019.

2020/21 Capital and Revenue Budget Monitoring – Update

- i) Approve the addition of £19.502m external funding to existing schemes in the 2020/21-2024/25 Capital Programme as detailed in para 57.
- j) Approve the allocation of £9.625m of Additional Pothole Action Fund to the local committees, as detailed in para 58.
- k) Approve the addition of a £0.150m externally funded new scheme to the 2020/21-2024/25 Capital Programme, as detailed in para 59.
- l) Recommend to Council the reprofiling of £12.136m from the 2020/21 Capital Programme into future years, as detailed in para 56.
- m) Recommend to Council the addition of £3.805m of new schemes to the 2020/21-2024/25 Capital Programme, as detailed in para 60.

The meeting ended at 11.00 am