

CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the **Cabinet** held on **Thursday, 18 November 2021 at 10.00 am at Cumbria House, Botchergate, Carlisle**

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:

Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director - People, Executive Director - Corporate, Customer and Community Services, Chief Fire Officer, Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer), Assistant Director for Highways and Transport, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Leadership Support Officer - Labour Group, Leadership Support Officer - Liberal Democrat Group, Professional Lead - Democratic Services and Communications Manager

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

160 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence on this occasion.

161 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest made to this meeting.

162 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

163 MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meetings held on 14 October 2021 and 21 October 2021 be agreed with the following amendment:-

Cabinet Minutes - 21 October

On Minute No 155 – Response to National Highways' Statutory Consultation - A66 Northern Trans Pennine Project – add the following paragraph:-

'Mrs Sanderson raised a concern about the experience of residents in the south of the county, particularly in relation to the issues of community severance on the A590 which had been identified by National Highways in their own reports. Mrs Sanderson was pleased that National Highways' were detouring round the communities on the A66.'

164 STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CABINET MEMBERS

The Leader made a statement about the Structural Change Order which the Government had made available to all Councils affected by Local Government Reform, for comment. He confirmed the comments from Cumbria County Council were submitted yesterday and that all members had been given the opportunity to comment via the political groups.

165 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no questions, petitions or statements at the time of despatch

There were also no referrals from Local Committees or Scrutiny to the meeting today.

166 DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP) 2022-2027

The Deputy Leader presented a report which would be the last Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) presented to Cumbria County Council.

In February of this year, Council agreed the 2021/22 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan which was developed during significant uncertainty around the impact both financial and non-financial of the COVID-19 pandemic. This year the cost of dealing with COVID-19 had yet again applied pressure on the Council's budget and on its finite resources, trying to protect the most vulnerable and support communities.

The forecast as at Quarter 1 was to have a balanced budget at year end with COVID-19 related and other pressures being offset by underspends and with a £596,000 in year transfer to the Financial Volatility Reserve which was a key assumption for the consideration of the budget position for 2022/23.

There was ongoing uncertainty around the future funding strategy and funding mechanisms for local government. The Autumn Statement and Spending Review 2021 was announced on 27 October which brought some clarity but the overall financial impact would not be known until the Local Government Financial settlement was received next month.

Members wanted to ensure that Cumbria County Council had a sustainable budget to transfer across to the new unitary authorities, once operational.

Following the publication of 'Building Back Better; Our Plan for Health and Social Care' on 7 September, Government announced that it intended to pay for additional health and social care funding through the introduction of a 1.25% Health and Social Care Levy based on National Insurance contributions from 1 April 2022. The working assumption at this stage of budget planning for 2022/23 was that the additional costs of implementing the changes proposed would be fully funded.

Even in this, the Council's last year, Cabinet remained focussed on protecting the most vulnerable and supporting Cumbria's communities and that was why the consultation document asked for feedback from the public on a proposed 1.99% increase in the County Council's share of Council Tax for general purposes in 2022/23.

In addition, the Council also proposed to increase the Adult Social Care Precept by 1% to support Adult Social Care Services. If Cabinet agreed the recommendations this morning, the consultation document would be launched after the meeting.

This Council had continued to secure investment for a wide range of major capital projects that would provide real and long-term benefits to Cumbria. Funding had been secured to the value of £134million to support the Carlisle Southern Link Road and St Cuthbert's Garden Village project, £400,000 pounds had been secured from DfT to develop an outline business case for the Kendal Northern Access Route; and as part of Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal Cumbria County Council had secured £20million for major improvements at Carlisle Railway Station.

The Deputy Leader formally opened the budget consultation process and moved the recommendations as set out in paragraphs 21 to 23 of the report to Cabinet for approval.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services spoke about the tremendous pressures being experienced in both the Children's Services and Adult Social Care directorates. Pressure was building on staff in all services areas and the Council needed to look again at the Workforce Strategy to ensure it was still relevant.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Property spoke about the effect of Brexit on the labour market in Cumbria.

RESOLVED, that

- (1) Members note the revised Budget Gap position of £12.251m for 2022/23, and the proposals identified within this report to provide a balanced budget for 2022/23 (Year 1 of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2022-2027);
- (2) On the basis of the balanced budget proposals set out in this report, Members approve consultation with the public on the level of Council Tax for 2022/23 of a 1.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 1% increase in Adult Social Care Precept;
- (3) That Members note the revised Budget Gap for planning purposes only for the period 2023/24-2026/27 which results in additional savings of £34.369m. The detail on how these savings will be delivered will be developed and delivered by the two new unitary councils. The County Council Medium Term Financial Plan 2022-2027 will set out a requirement to find total savings of £46.620m (being £12.251m for 2022/23 and then £34.369m for 2023/24-2026/27).

167 CABINET WORKING GROUP - LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Cabinet considered a report from the Executive Director – Corporate, Customer and Community Services, which sought approval from Cabinet to establish a Cabinet Working Group on Local Government Reorganisation.

Following the announcement on 21 July 2021 by the Secretary of State that he intended to move forward with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Cumbria which would see the establishment of two new unitary authorities, the seven councils across Cumbria had been working to develop and deliver a joint LGR Programme to implement the Secretary of State's decision.

An LGR Programme Board whose membership consisted of the Chief Executives of the County Council and six District Councils had been established. The LGR Programme Board and the SRO for the Programme were responsible for providing overall leadership for the programme and

ensuring it achieved its objectives, delivered the projected outcomes and realised the benefits in the timescales set out.

A Cumbria Leaders Oversight Forum whose membership consists of the Leaders of the County Council and six District Councils had been established. The Forum would provide political leadership input from all seven sovereign Councils into the shape and direction of the LGR Programme.

A number of service-based Themes had been established as part of the programme structure. These were responsible for reviewing the existing services within their scope and leading on the development of options to ultimately be considered by the joint committees and shadow authorities in advance of vesting day, to ensure service continuity. All existing Council services were included within a theme.

The role of the Leaders Oversight Forum, Programme Board, the service-based Themes and functional Workstreams was to coordinate activity across the seven councils but they had no decision-making authority. Formal decision-making rested with the seven Councils until joint committees were established and subsequently the Shadow Authorities were elected, and the usual governance arrangements of the individual Councils were not impacted by the establishment of the Leaders Oversight Forum, Programme Board or the Themes and Workstreams.

In order to provide a forum to ensure there was political oversight and leadership for the County Council's input into the LGR Programme it was recommended that a Cabinet LGR Working Group be established. This Working Group would enable officers working on the LGR Programme to ensure Cabinet members had full engagement with the LGR Programme and provided a forum for Cabinet members to input and contribute to the Council's involvement which was separate from existing structures so does not impinge on the work of Cabinet in relation to the delivery and transformation of County Council services.

It is not intended that the Cabinet LGR Working Group would be a decision-making body and any decisions would be made by members or officers (as appropriate) under usual governance arrangements.

The proposed Terms of Reference of the Cabinet LGR Working Group were included in the report.

RESOLVED, that Cabinet approve the establishment of a Cabinet Working Group on Local Government Reorganisation in line with the Terms of Reference as set out in the report.

168 STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE

Cabinet had before it a report from the Chief Fire Officer which set out the approach adopted by Cumbria Fire and Rescue Authority and sought sign off of the Statement of Assurance 2020/21.

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England set out the requirement for all fire and rescue authorities to provide assurance annually on financial, governance and operational matters.

To demonstrate this, the Framework required that each authority must publish an annual Statement of Assurance.

As a county fire and rescue service, the functions of the fire authority were exercised by Cabinet.

The Framework set out 3 areas on which assurance was required: financial, governance and operational. As a county fire and rescue service, there was much reliance placed on County Council records as opposed to those that were fire and rescue service specific. This was particularly so for the financial and governance arrangements.

The Statement of Assurance provided assurance to members, statutory officers and the public that the service was being run in accordance with appropriate governance, financial and operational standards. The Chief Fire Officer was satisfied that the Statement of Assurance presented to Cabinet was an accurate and robust reflection of arrangements in place across Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service.

RESOLVED, that

- (1) Cabinet approve the Statement of Assurance 2020/21.
- (2) Cabinet authorise the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member to make any necessary changes to the Statement of Assurance prior to publication.

169 THE ENGLISH NATIONAL CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL SCHEME – THE CUMBRIA SCHEME 2022/23

Members considered a report from the Executive Director – Economy and Infrastructure which set out proposals for the Cumbria Scheme for 2022/23 including the reimbursement rate to be paid to transport operators.

A mandatory national bus concession for older and disabled people had been in place since 2001. The concession had gradually been extended since its introduction and since April 2008 had provided free off-peak local bus travel to eligible older and disabled people

The ENCTS covered anyone who had an ENCTS pass who travelled on an eligible journey on an eligible service. An eligible journey was a public service bus between 09:30 and 23:00 on weekdays and any time bank holidays and weekends.

The Council's scheme covers the Mandatory elements and also included Discretionary elements. The proposed scheme was the same as the current 2021/22 scheme for 2022/23.

The Council was required to publish the scheme each year. Legislation provided a mandatory process by which the scheme should be reviewed each year, including the requirement to negotiate the reimbursement rate with requisite transport operators. This paper and the resulting approved Scheme was part of that consultation process.

The Leader drew attention to the area covered by the scheme and the fact that although Cumbria County Council applied the scheme to some areas in Scotland, and there were reciprocal arrangements, he was not sure this was well advertised and understood by members of the public. He would raise this with Borderlands.

RESOLVED, that Cabinet

- (1) Approve publication, of the 2022/23 Cumbria Concessionary Travel Scheme as set out in Appendix 1 which maintains the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) basic reimbursement rate at 58%.
- (2) Agree to publish the 2022/23 Scheme with the same Eligibility Criteria as the current scheme.
- (3) Agree that following publication of the 2022/23 scheme any non-substantial amendments can be approved by the Executive Director - Economy and Infrastructure in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, the Leader of the Council and the Deputy Leader of the Council.

The meeting ended at 10.45 am