

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD AT COUNTY HALL AND ON ZOOM ON TUESDAY, 27 FEBRUARY 2024

PRESENT

County Councillor J Gibson-Watt (Chair)

County Councillors J Berriman, J Charlton, R Church, S Cox, S C Davies, P Roberts and D A Thomas

In attendance: County Councillor AW Davies and J Brautigam

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors M J Dorrance and D Selby and from the Interim Director of Environment. County Councillor Sian Cox had advised that she would be late joining the meeting as she had to attend a meeting as a school governor.

2. MINUTES

The Leader was authorised to sign the minutes of the meetings held on 6th and 13th February 2024 as correct records.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported.

4. LLANGEDWYN C. IN W. SCHOOL - OBJECTION REPORT

Cabinet was advised that 16 objections had been received during the statutory objection period. The report set out the objections and the Council's responses to them. Officers confirmed that no new issues had been raised in the objection process and recommended that the Council proceed with implementation of the proposal to close Llangedwyn C. in W. School from the 31st August 2024, as outlined in the Statutory Notice for the reasons set out in the report.

County Councillor Aled Davies spoke as the local member. He placed on record his thanks to the staff and governors past and present who had done so much to support pupils. He also noted that there was parental choice as to which school transferring pupils would attend. It was confirmed that staff from the Admissions and School Transport teams would explain the options open to the parents. Officers confirmed that they would address at the issues Councillor Davies had raised in his written submission.

In response to comments from colleagues on the Cabinet about the process set out in the School Organisation Code, the Cabinet Member for a Learning Powys advised that he had made representations to the Minister on the School Organisation Code with respect to pupil numbers.

Having had confirmation that no new issues had been raised during the objection period Cabinet

RESOLVED to approve the proposal to close Llangedwyn C. in W. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to Llanfechain C. in W. School.

The Cabinet member for a Learning Powys advised that as part of the transformation process for the Llanfyllin catchment area, proposals on Bro Cynllaith would be brought to Cabinet after Easter.

5.	FINANCIAL FORECAST FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024 (AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2023)
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Cabinet noted that the projected outturn position was £3.0 million of general surplus with a further £0.1 million to be transferred to specific reserves. It was noted that £0.8m of the risk budget would be applied to mitigate some of the pressures in Children's Services.

71% or £12.4 million of cost reductions of £16.5 million approved as part of the Council's budget for 2023-24 had been delivered to date with a further 21% (£3.7 million) assured of delivery by Heads of Service. £1.2 million (7%) were unachieved and were unlikely to be delivered in this financial year.

The report also noted that schools were forecast to draw £6.0 million from reserves leaving a forecast school reserve balance of £0.6 million by 31 March 2024. The Director of Education outlined the support that was offered to schools.

The Chair of the Finance Panel, County Councillor Aled Davies, reported the Panel's recommendation that Panel would appreciate early sight of, and regular updates on schools delegated budget 2024/25, from the initial submission by schools in May, through to budget approval.

The report also set out details of virements, including £400,000 to fund repairs to potholes.

RESOLVED

- 1. That Cabinet note the current budget position and the projected full year forecast to the end of March 2024.**
- 2. The virements set out in section 5.1 of the report are approved, to comply with the virement rules for budget movements as set out in the financial regulations.**

6.	CAPITAL FORECAST 2023-24, AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2023
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Cabinet received a report on the financial position of the Council's capital programme for 2023/24 as at 31st December 2023.

Cabinet welcomed the £0.17 million received from Welsh Government for flood alleviation schemes at Plasnewydd, Pontfaen and Legar Brook, and the £0.34 million received for a nature habitat management project at Welshpool Golf Club and working through the Powys Nature Partnership with Llais y Goedwig, RSPB Llyn Vyrnwy, and the Canal and River Trust.

7.	RETAIL, LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY RATES RELIEF SCHEME IN WALES 2024-25
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Cabinet considered the adoption of a Business Rates Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief scheme for financial year 2024-25, to support Powys businesses with the ongoing economic challenges including increased inflation rates, by granting rate relief compliant with Welsh Government guidance. 40% grant would be available to eligible businesses. Businesses would have to apply but the Income and Awards team would be proactive in encouraging businesses to apply. Details would be sent to all Councillors.

RESOLVED

- 1. That a Business Rates Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief scheme 2024-25 be established in accordance with section 3 of the report.**
- 2. Applications for Business Rates retail, leisure, and hospitality rates relief 2024-25 under the scheme referred to above shall be delegated to and determined by the Portfolio holder for Finance in consultation with the Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer).**

8.	SEVERN VALLEY WATER MANAGEMENT SCHEME UPDATE
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Cabinet considered giving approval for the Council, in its capacity as Lead Local Flood Risk Management Authority (LLFA) and as Chair of the River Severn Partnership, to support the Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales and Shropshire Council in jointly overseeing a programme of public consultation on the approach to developing the Severn Valley Water Management Scheme ("SVWMS").

The Environment Agency had invited both Shropshire Council and Powys County Council to form part of the Joint Project Board, along with Natural Resources Wales. The Board would help to shape the strategic direction of the project and its future delivery.

RESOLVED to approve the Council's role in supporting public consultation for the SVWM scheme.

9.	GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE HEART OF WALES PROPERTY SERVICES (HOWPS) WORKING GROUP
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Cabinet considered the recommendation of the working group established by the Governance and Audit Committee to look at the establishment and operation of Heart of Wales Property Services (HoWPS).

Mr John Brautigam who had chaired the working group presented its findings. He asked for a correction in the notes, with the reference to MNAs on page 3 replaced by Memorandum and Articles of Association. The Working Group had highlighted need for an independent chair and for more training for local authority officers taking on the role of board member.

Mr Brautigam and the Working Group were thanked for their work. The recommendation was accepted and the findings would inform any future partnerships with third parties.

Mr Brautigam advised that a further report would be coming soon on the transition of HoWPS back to the Council.

10.	GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE HIGHWAYS TRANSPORT AND RECYCLING WORKING GROUP
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Cabinet considered the recommendation of the working group established by the Governance and Audit Committee to look at the Internal Audit reports on Highways Transport and Recycling and the action plans implemented by HTR in response.

Mr John Brautigam who had chaired the working group presented its findings. He reported that the working group had been satisfied that a good deal of progress had been made and that this had been confirmed by follow up reports from SWAP. He thanked officers for the exceptional level of co-operation.

Officers confirmed that the working group's recommendation in respect of AMX had been accepted and that a specialist officer was in post. The Data Map recommendation had also been accepted. Data Map was used by the GIS Team that worked throughout the Council and officers agreed that it would be worth sharing this with the wider membership.

Officers advised that Scrutiny recommendations were put on a tracker, monitored and reported regularly to SLT.

11.	CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING BOARD ACTIVITY UPDATE
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County Councillor Sian Cox joined the meeting at 11.58.

Cabinet received the report of the Corporate Safeguarding Board. The report would be considered the Health and Care Scrutiny Committee on 8 March and not as noted on the report.

Cabinet was also updated on the outcome of the Joint Inspection Review of Child Protection Arrangements which had been published at the start of February. The report gave assurance that the child protection arrangements in the county were robust. An action plan responding to the review was being developed.

The Cabinet Member for a Safer Powys commended the high completion rates for mandatory safeguarding training and noted the difference that Children's Services were making was reflected in the lower number of children on the child protection register.

12.	DELEGATED DECISIONS TAKEN SINCE THE LAST MEETING
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Cabinet noted the delegated decisions taken by portfolio holders since the last meeting.

13.	FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME
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Cabinet noted the forward work programme. Members asked for the Asset Management Policy and reports on Sustainable Powys to be scheduled. Cabinet was advised that there would be no meetings during April in the pre-election period before the Police and Crime Commissioner elections.

14.	EXEMPT ITEMS
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RESOLVED to exclude the public for the following item of business on the grounds that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information under category 5 of The Local Authorities (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007).

15.	SEWERAGE AND WATER TREATMENT RECHARGES - CHANGES FOR 2024-25
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Cabinet considered the confidential report on recommended changes for the recovery of costs incurred by the Council in managing, maintaining and where necessary replacing sewerage and water treatment systems, serving residential properties originally built by the Council. The Head of Housing confirmed that residents affected would be contacted and given a breakdown of the costs so they could see what work had been undertaken. Officers were thanked for their work on this.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Council recharges tenants and residents – unless otherwise provided for in the deeds of properties not owned by the Council - served by sewerage and wastewater treatment plants the full cost of maintaining the system serving their home.**
- 2. That bespoke payment options (allowing for payments to be made over a period of up to ten years) are offered for those households for whom the 'Major Works, Improvements and Replacement' element of the total**

recharge for 2024-2025 is substantially above the recharge for 2023-2024.

- 3. That for major works and replacements, the costs in respect of tenanted properties are incorporated into the overall HRA Business Plan Major Works and Improvements.**
- 4. That for major works and replacements, the costs in respect of privately owned properties are recharged to the property owners in respect of works to their properties, and in accordance with the provisions of the deeds to their property.**

County Councillor J Gibson-Watt (Chair)