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| CABINET | <i>Gloucestershire County Council</i> |
| 31 January 2024 | |
| Minutes | |

**PRESENT
MEMBERSHIP:**

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| Cllr Stephen Davies | - Cabinet Member for Children's SafeGuarding and Early Years |
| Cllr David Gray | - Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning |
| Cllr Philip Robinson | - Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Bus Transport |
| Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE | - Leader of Council |
| Cllr Carole Allaway-Martin | - Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care Commissioning |
| Cllr David Norman MBE | - Cabinet Member for Fire, Community Safety and Libraries |
| Cllr Lynden Stowe | - Cabinet Member for Finance and Change |
| Cllr Dom Morris | - Cabinet Member for Highways and Flooding |
| Cllr Stephan Fifield | - Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care Delivery |

Apologies:

1. Apologies

Cllr Wendy Thomas, Chair of the Bus Improvement Scrutiny Task Group was unable to attend the meeting.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

4. Questions at Cabinet Meetings

9 Public Questions were received. Supplementary questions were asked on the following:

Question 1 – David Redgewell asked what progress could be made between the County and City council to try to sort out the issues at Gloucester Transport Hub and improving the real time information provided.

Cllr Philip Robinson replied that the difficulties were ongoing and that he would speak to officers to ask for further communication from the City Council.

Question 4 – David Redgewell asked what work was being carried out with the real time information displays and whether there were plans to put those displays in place at Gloucester Railway and Bus Station and maintain the information displays at Cheltenham Spa.

Cllr Philip Robinson stated that there was a wider budget for the real time information system and that it was very much a part of the BSIP plan. The Cabinet Member would provide a more detailed response on the points raised. He noted that in some areas the Council was not responsible for the real time information, for example at the Railway Station. In regards to a possible sale of the Gloucester Transport Hub, he stated that he was not aware of anything relating to that.

Question 5 – David Redgewell stated that he was pleased to see money for bus shelters and asked what discussion had taken place with district councils to renovate and restore the rest of the County's bus stations.

Cllr Philip Robinson referred to the Bus Improvement Scrutiny Task Group and outlined the wider discussion of all the interested bodies to make improvements. The Enhanced Partnership Board had met in the last week.

Question 6 – David Redgewell asked what meetings would take place with passenger groups.

Cllr Philip Robinson replied that there was a real emphasis on partnership and there had been a discussion at the Enhanced Partnership around how to engage with passenger groups and further discussion would be had on that.

Question 8 – David Redgewell asked what progress was being made on the projects outlined in his question on Cheltenham Spa with Western Gateway Transport Board, Stonehouse, Bristol Road and Charfield station. In addition, he highlighted that the 84/85 was an important bus service and asked what progress had been made on retendering that route?

Cllr Philip Robinson referred him to the written answer that had been provided to his initial question. Cllr Robinson added some additional specific details, stating that

the business case had been submitted by Stroud District Council in conjunction with Stonehouse Town Council and the Council was awaiting on a decision. In relation to the Charfield site, he stated that the Council was being lobbied on that point and did contribute to that route, but was a relatively junior partner. As discussions continued more information would be made available.

24 Member Questions were received. Supplementary questions were asked on the following:

Question 9 – Cllr Colin Hay suggested that the average cost for an authority to come out of a rating of ‘inadequate’ was over £100m which was more than the Council had budgeted for. He asked whether this explained why it had taken longer than it should have done to make improvements in Childrens Services?

Cllr Stephen Davies replied that £100m was an approximation and that they believed they had the right budget to do the job.

Question 10 - Cllr Colin Hay asked if the cabinet member agreed that the figure from Government was woefully inadequate and demonstrated the Government’s contempt for local government.

Cllr Lynden Stowe disagreed and replied that the Government had to manage its budget and that the Council had previously received generous settlements.

Question 11 – Cllr Colin Hay identified wages of council workers not increasing in line with inflation and asked whether the cabinet member would agree that they would be looking to be recompensated for that in the future.

Cllr Lynden Stowe replied that this was the Member’s personal view but reminded him that pay agreements were negotiated nationally.

Question 12 – Cllr Colin Hay asked whether the Cabinet member agreed on the importance of equalities and diversity training and would he distance himself from the comments made by Secretary of State regarding ‘expenditure on discredited equalities training’.

Cllr Lynden Stowe replied that training on equalities and diversity was important but also needed to be kept in proportion. He suggested that in other authorities where a distorted emphasis on one area could lead to a lack of funding on service delivery.

Question 13 – Cllr Colin Hay asked about the £45m deficit on the DSG and the increased deficit hidden by statutory override in the next two years.

Cllr Philip Robinson replied that the override was extended for another 3 years up to April 2026. He referred to the budget document that identified this as a risk and suggested that if the override was not extended then any deficit would need to be met. The deficit was much larger now and he highlighted that any removal of the override would have a significant impact across all Councils.

Question 15 – Cllr Jeremy Hilton referred to exit interviews carried out with staff and their concerns about IT equipment. He asked whether the information would be better collated in a format that allowed the data to be presented in a way that would show how many people might have concerns in an area such as IT.

Cllr Lynden Stowe replied that it was important that officers read each comment and built up a picture to act from.

Question 22 – Cllr Roger Whyborn asked would the cabinet member note that his question on the scrutiny task group recommendation covered a much wider area than the response he had been given. He hoped that the response to the report consider that.

Cllr Philip Robinson replied that the task group had taken time to put the report together and form recommendations and that it needed a well considered response and not a rushed one. Project Coral was well underway and the County Council had supported it. In relation to the Bus Services Improvement Plan, the progress would be monitored against the aims of the BSIP and not the recommendations of the task group.

Question 24 – Cllr Jeremy Hilton asked if it would be good to freeze parking fees for the next year.

Cllr Lynden Stowe replied that the member's remarks were noted and outlined that the budget papers outlined the current thinking.

5. Bus Improvement Scrutiny Task Group

- 5.1 Cllr Roger Whyborn presented the task group's report in the absence of the Chair Cllr Wendy Thomas. He outlined the background to the task group's work and explained that the group had met with a wide range of partners including bus and community transport providers. He detailed the recommendations that the group had made, with a number of them relating to improved communication. He thanked the members for their work on the group.
- 5.2 Cllr Philip Robinson thanked the task group for the report and stated that he felt it was a clear report that reflected the group's growing understanding of the subject. He referred to the BSIP and the work that he had done as Cabinet Member which had mirrored the journey that the task group had been on. He welcomed the report and the recommendations and would take time to consider them. He did outline that many of the recommendations were already being implemented or would be able to be put into place with relative ease.
- 5.3 He reflected on the context behind the establishment of the task group and the challenges that were being faced at that time. Since then, there had been

financial support from government and the introduction of recovery funding and actions in response to Covid. He provided details of the work underway and the initiatives that presented a much-improved situation for buses. A detailed response to the recommendations would be provided.

6. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28

- 6.1 Cllr Mark Hawthorne and Cllr Lynden Stowe sought Cabinet approval to recommend the MTFS, 2024/25 revenue and capital budgets and precept to Council.
- 6.2 Cllr Lynden Stowe provided details of the proposals which included a recommendation for a Band D council tax rate of £1,599.82 for 2024/25, an increase of 4.99%.
- 6.3 The draft 2024/25 budget was published for public consultation on 7th December 2023. The results of the consultation were detailed in appendix 2 to the report.
- 6.4 The MTFS proposals were scrutinised by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10th January 2024, with notes from the meeting included at appendix 3 to the report.
- 6.5 Cllr Alan Preest was invited to present the views of the scrutiny committee. He thanked the Cabinet members for engaging with the process and thanked all scrutiny members for their comments and input to make the meeting a real success. In addition, he thanked the officers for attending the meeting and providing the committee with information as well as supporting members throughout the day.

He drew Cabinet's attention to the summary section of the minutes that outlined some key areas of feedback at the end of the day. These include:

- Concerns relating to the Public Rights of Way DMMOs budget.
- The need for increased investment into solar panels.
- Concerns over how sensitive issues were addressed within the budget, relating to children in care and the use of funds from the Energy from Waste facility.

In summary it was acknowledged that some difficult financial years were expected and the challenge for local government over the next 5 to 10 years would be how to meet increased demand for services with the same resources.

- 6.6 The detailed MTFS proposals were set out in appendix 1 to the report. This reflected the changes to the funding assumptions arising from the Provisional Settlement announced in December 2023. Notably the MTFS proposals included:

- A proposed revenue budget for 2024/25 of £610.425m (a net increase of over £43 million compared to 2023/24).
 - A future capital programme totalling £501.1 million, including £84.85 million of new investment.
- 6.7 The MTFs document (appendix 1) also included a Section 25 Statement, which included the Section 151 Officer's review of the proposed budget. The Section 151 Officer had concluded that the level of reserves were adequate, and that the financial standing of the Council was sound in the context of the key risks.
- 6.8 Cabinet received details of the budget increases by service area as detailed within the report.
- 6.9 The papers included the Equality Impact Assessments which supported the decision making process.
- 6.10 Cllr Stowe explained that there was expected additional funding from central government in the coming days that would lead to an amendment of the budget recommended to full Council. A recommendation was added to the report for Cabinet to delegate authority to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Deputy Leader/ Cabinet Member for Finance and Change to make further changes to the draft budget in response to additional funding allocated to Gloucestershire County Council in the final financial settlement from HM Government.
- 6.11 Cabinet Members outlined the work that was being carried out and the prudent decisions being made to ensure that the Council was financially sound. The Leader of Council reflected on the position of other councils and thanked members and officers for the development of the budget. He reflected on the Energy from Waste plant and the impact of that decision on the current budget in order to allow for continued investment.
- 6.12 Having considered all of the information, Cabinet noted the report and

RESOLVED to:

1. To consider the outcome of the budget consultation as set out in Appendix 2 and the report from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) in Appendix 3.
2. To approve the MTFs and final revenue and capital budget for 2024/25 for recommendation to County Council, including all the proposals set out in the annexes of the detailed MTFs (Appendix 1).

3. To note the schools funding allocations, the provisional local government finance settlement and forecast reserve movements as summarised in this report and set out in the MTFS.
4. To recommend to Council a revenue budget of £610.425 million, a band D council tax of £1,599.82, and consequential precepts on District Councils.
5. To note the Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy & Investment Strategy as set out in Annexes 7 & 10 of the detailed MTFS.
6. To delegate authority to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Deputy Leader/Cabinet Member for Finance and Change to make further changes to the draft budget in response to additional funding allocated to Gloucestershire County Council in the final financial settlement from HMGovernment.

7. Financial Monitoring Report 2023/24

- 7.1 Cllr Lynden Stowe provided an update on the Quarter 3 forecast for the 2023/24 County Council's Revenue and Capital Budgets
- 7.2 The forecast revenue year-end position for quarter 3 of the 2023/24 financial year was an overspend of £757k. This was a favourable movement of 600k compared to the £1.357 million overspend reported to Cabinet in November (Quarter 2).
- 7.3 The largest variances were the £8.586 million forecast overspend in Children and Families, offset by favourable variances of £6.214 million in Economy, Environment & Infrastructure, and £2.693 million in Technical & Countywide budgets.
- 7.4 The overspend in Children and Families continued to be primarily against the external placements budget, due to increasing numbers of children in care and the cost of placements due to limited market availability, both of which were national issues.
- 7.5 The council was forecasting delivery of £16.328 million of savings in 2023/24, against a target of £21.101 million in 2023/24 (77.38%).
- 7.6 The forecast outturn position for Capital 2023/24 was £159.225 million, against the budget of £157.433 million, giving a forecast advanced delivery of £1.792 million.
- 7.7 The overall capital programme was recommended to increase by £5.564 million, as set out in section C of the report.
- 7.8 Having considered all of the information, Cabinet noted the report and

RESOLVED to:

1. Note the forecast revenue year end position based on Quarter 3 forecasts for the 2023/24 financial year, which is an overspend of £757k.
2. Approve the revised drawdown of £2.892 million from the Pay & Prices reserve for the 2023/24 pay award, as set out in paragraph
3. Note the forecast delivery of £16.328 million of savings against a target of £21.101 million in 2023/24 or 77.38% of target.
4. Note the forecast capital year end position of £159.225 million against a current budget of £157.433 million.
5. Approve an increase in the capital programme of £5.564 million as detailed in section C.
6. Note Section D Treasury Management Prudential Indicators

8. Corporate Peer Challenge Final Report

- 8.1 Cllr Mark Hawthorne reported the findings of the Local Government Association's (LGA) recent Corporate Peer Review of Gloucestershire County Council.
- 8.2 It was explained that the Council had invited a team of peers from across Local Government to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge of Gloucestershire County Council. Corporate Peer Challenges were facilitated by the Local Government Association, and are one of the ways in which the sector could hold itself to account and drive improvement.
- 8.3 In addition to assessing the strength of our governance, our financial stability and our capacity to deliver our priorities, the Council asked the LGA to assess two key areas:
 - How well are we leading partners in delivering growth in Gloucestershire
 - How effectively are we using our corporate resources to drive improvement in our priority areas.
- 8.4 The report gave the Council substantial assurance that the Council was well run, understood its communities, and had a clear vision and priorities for the council and County. Importantly, in an environment where lots of councils were struggling with financial viability it found that the Council's financial management was robust and the Council was building on a stable foundation.

- 8.5 As expected, the peer team also made some recommendations as to how the Council could improve and take plans to the next level. The Leader outlined those recommendations and the steps being taken in relation to them as detailed in the report.
- 8.6 With regards to ICT, there had been a challenging period of transition, strengthening infrastructure against the demands of the pandemic. The Council continued its commitment to improve and develop ICT and had established an Oversight Board.
- 8.7 The Leader thanked the Members and Officers who gave up their time to be part of the peer team.

Having considered all of the information, Cabinet noted the report and

RESOLVED to:

Formally record its thanks to the team that undertook the Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2023.

Accept the findings and recommendations arising from the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Review of Gloucestershire County Council and support the development by officers of an action plan to be brought back to Cabinet for approval on 10 April 2024.

9. Fourth annual update to the climate change action plan

- 9.1 Cllr David Gray provided an annual update of progress with the Gloucestershire Climate Change Strategy and sought approval of the updated five year action plan.
- 9.2 He outlined the commitment of the Council to addressing climate change and demonstrating the role of leaders to encourage residents and organisations at all levels to take action. The report highlighted the actions that were being taken.
- 9.3 Cllr Gray provided an overview of a range of activity being undertaken in this area including tree planting where he felt there was real momentum. He provided details of the installation of e-chargers, as well as the impact of the new cycle spine. He thanked the residents for their understanding regarding any disruption caused by the introduction of schemes. He highlighted the importance of active travel and referred to the BSIP which had been discussed earlier in the meeting. The opportunities brought about by the Energy from Waste solution were also referred to.
- 9.4 He concluded that this was integrated into everything the Council was doing and that there was a joined-up approach across services.

- 9.5 The Council was working with partners to have a big impact on CO2 emissions. There had been marked drop in emissions in 2020 which was attributable in large part due to the impact of the COVID pandemic and the assorted lock downs. In 2021 emissions had bounced back towards the longer term trend as the economy and society had “re-opened”. The long term trend of reducing emissions in the county continued with emissions now down 34.8% since 2006.

Having considered all of the information, Cabinet noted the report and

RESOLVED to:

1. Note the overall emissions for the County Council and for Gloucestershire outlined in this report.
2. Note the progress and planned key actions outlined in Annex 1 (Progress on 2021/22 actions to date).
3. Approve the five-year Action Plan in Annex 1 to be reported to Climate Leadership Gloucestershire.

10. Gloucestershire County Council Workforce Strategy 2024-2027

- 10.1 Cllr Lynden Stowe sought approval for a refreshed Workforce Strategy which will support the delivery of the Council Strategy ‘Building Back Better in Gloucestershire’ 2022 to 2026.
- 10.2 The Workforce Strategy was designed to support the delivery of the council’s Building Back Better in Gloucestershire Strategy, setting out how the Council would ensure a workforce within Gloucestershire County Council which was best equipped to effectively deliver on the Council’s strategic priorities and services.
- 10.3 The Workforce Strategy was structured under the pillars of Capacity, Capability and Culture. The sections under each of those pillars helped to describe what the council planned to focus on achieving over the period until 2026, from being recognised as a modern, attractive employer which could recruit and retain the right people; to developing a positive, diverse and inclusive culture and developing people. The vision as set out in the strategy was for Gloucestershire County Council to be “a great place to work for everyone” and the strategic approach provided the council with a clear pathway to achieving this.
- 10.4 189 staff members were currently studying towards the completion of various apprenticeships.

Having considered all of the information, Cabinet noted the report and

RESOLVED to:

1. Approve the Workforce Strategy set out in appendix one.
2. Delegate authority to the Director of People and Digital Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Change to develop an implementation plan aligned to business planning for the Human Resources service

11. To seek Cabinet approval to carry out public consultation on GFRS's resource configuration within the Community Risk Management Plan

- 11.1 Cllr David Norman sought Cabinet approval to carry out a public consultation in respect of the preferred option outlined in this paper with regard to the configuration of the Fire and Rescue Service in order to meet the priorities of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2022- 2026.
- 11.2 He introduced a detailed and comprehensive paper which outlined that the GFRS Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2022-2026 had clear strategic objectives based on scenario modelling with reference to the current and future fire cover provision in line with the "Response Arrangements" Objective ensuring the Service had the right resources at the right time in the right place, mitigating risk and managing demand.
- 11.3 Modelling was undertaken in November 2022 by Operational Research in Health (ORH), In addition, GFRS conducted regular reviews of its emergency response cover arrangements thorough risk analysis of previous incidents, fire safety audits, safe and well visits, and future risks that could lead to emergency incidents in the future.
- 11.4 Four options had been put forward to Cabinet. The preferred option was option 3 to retain staffing levels at all existing stations and establish a new day shift station at Cinderford. Details were laid out in the report as to how this would strengthen fire cover and increase Safe and Well visits. The cost of the option was detailed in the report.
- 11.5 The second part of the consultation was around moving shift patterns across the whole service. To maximise opportunities for GFRS, modelling was carried out on a 12 hour day/night shift pattern. 12-hour shifts would lead to more proactive work time. Removing the change over time from 18:00 to 21:00, would allow crews to maximise time spend carrying out Prevention and Protection work within the community during this time frame. In response to a question it was explained that other Fire Authorities had taken the same steps having anticipated the same benefits.

Having considered all of the information, Cabinet noted the report and

RESOLVED to:

Approve the carrying out a public consultation on its preferred option for enhancing the ability of the Fire and Rescue Service to deliver the outcomes set out in the Community Risk Management Plan, as set out in this report.

12. Gloucestershire County Council's (the County Council) Adult Social Care (ASC) Fairer Contributions Policy review

- 12.1 Cllr Stephan Fifield sought Cabinet approval to carry out a consultation process with residents which will inform Gloucestershire County Council's (the County Council's) plans to amend the Adult Social Care (ASC) Fairer Contributions Policy (attached as appendix 1), including charging illustrations for consultation.
- 12.2 The Council had agreed to review its ASC Fairer Contributions Policy (currently called the Fairer Contributions Policy non-residential care/personal budgets) in October 2022. The policy assisted people to know what they would be charged for adult social care non-residential services. It had not been fully reviewed and updated since 2016.
- 12.3 In order to inform the review, the cabinet report sought approval to carry out a 12 – week consultation process with residents, beginning February 12. The cabinet report appendices (6 and 7) included illustrations to support with the consultation process.
- 12.4 The potential financial impact had not been built into the 2024 – 2025 medium term financial strategy (MTFS), however this would need to be included in future years MTFS processes, in particular for 2025 - 2026.
- 12.5 Cllr Carole Allaway Martin explained that the Consultation Institute had been providing advice and that the planning of the consultation planning has incorporated the learnings from the initial 6-week pre - engagement which took place between 06 July – 15 September 2023 . Particularly in regard to bettering engagement with seldom heard groups, for example by increasing engagement channels, utilising existing relationships, and embedding coproduction methods into the design and delivery of the consultation.

Having considered all of the information, Cabinet noted the report and

RESOLVED to:

Approve the plan for a 12-week consultation with residents which will inform the proposed options to amend the ASC Fairer Contributions Policy.

13. School Admission Arrangements for 2025/26 Academic Year

- 13.1 Cllr Philip Robinson sought Cabinet approval to determine the School Admissions Arrangements for 2025 - 26, including the Co-ordinated Admissions Schemes for all schools and Academies, the Admission Arrangements for Community & Voluntary Controlled Schools and the Protocol for pupil admittance over Published Admission Number (PAN) for Community & Voluntary Controlled Schools and Service Personnel.
- 13.2 School admissions were an important part of the Council's work; there needed to be a transparent, consistent system that parents and carers could have confidence in. The Government regulates admissions through its statutory School Admissions Code 2021.
- 13.3 The Council had to determine the admission arrangements for entry to community and voluntary controlled schools in the following academic year, every year. The 2025 admission arrangements were almost unchanged from previous years.
- 13.4 The Council must also prepare a co-ordinated admissions scheme for all maintained schools and academies so that parents only need to apply once – this included applications for infant/ primary schools for the reception year, transfer from infant to junior school and secondary schools at Year 7. This did not apply for In Year applications.
- 13.5 The process was required to go out to full consultation every seven years and that had been done. The feedback had been positive with a recognition that this was a fair and transparent process.

Having considered all of the information, Cabinet noted the report and

RESOLVED to:

That Cabinet approves the School Co-ordination and Admission Arrangements as set out in the documents referred to below:

Appendix 1 - The Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme for 2025 for all Primary/Infant/Junior/Secondary Schools and Academies

Appendix 2 - The Admissions Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Primary/Infant/Junior Schools and Secondary School for 2025

Appendix 3 - Protocol for pupil admittance over published admission number for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for 2025

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

Appendix 4 - School Admissions guidance for children of UK service personnel and crown servants for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

Appendix 5 Results of the Consultation

Leader of Council

Meeting concluded at 11.55 am