

**MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING
HELD AT 10:00AM, ON
TUESDAY 19 APRIL 2022
SAND MARTIN HOUSE, PETERBOROUGH**

Cabinet Members Present: Councillor Fitzgerald (Chair), Councillor Steve Allen, Councillor Ayres (virtually), Councillor Coles, Councillor Hiller, Councillor Simons, Councillor Walsh

Cabinet Advisor Present: Councillor Bisby (virtually), Councillor Howard (virtually), Councillor Gul Nawaz

67. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies for absence received from Councillor Cereste and Councillor Bashir.

68. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

69. MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETINGS HELD ON 21 FEBRUARY 2022

The minutes of the Budget Cabinet meeting held on 21 February 2022 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

70. PETITIONS TO CABINET

There were no petitions presented to Cabinet.

STRATEGIC DECISIONS

71. SUSTAINABLE FUTURE CITY COUNCIL STRATEGY – DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

The Cabinet received a report in relation to the Council's Sustainable Future City Council Strategy.

The purpose of this report was to seek Cabinet endorsement for the '*Sustainable Future City Council Strategy*' and the continuation of developing the strategy further.

The Council's Chief Executive introduced the report and identified that the strategy established how the council could meet its sustainability targets. The strategy was built on reports from the previous year, focused on reviewing the way the council worked and becoming outcome focused with a medium-term financial outlook. It was noted that the financial situation of the council had improved since the report was written and that the financial help from national government was not needed.

Members were informed that the strategy would look at the culture and ways of working in the council, with officers and Members focused on a new core set of priorities. These priorities would drive decision making, resource allocation and be outcomes led. The

Chief Executive outlined the strategy as an outcome-led model with the creation of business units targeted at developing a decision-making process that was focused on the key priorities set by the council.

Cabinet Members debated the report and in summary responses to questions raised included:

- In response to a query regarding the interaction of business units with current directorates, it was noted that the business units would have essential strategic and operational targets to help deliver key priorities. The units would bring together essential functions into one area and a single director with accountability for meeting those targets.
- Members praised the work on the budget and discussed how the strategy met the challenges set by the Independent Improvement and Assurance Panel (IIAP). It was noted that the administration worked collectively to get a grip of the financial situation and the focus would now be on long-term targets.
- The sustainable future of the council needed to balance the desires of Members along with addressing the financial plan and aligning decision making with those outcomes.
- Members were advised that to overcome the challenges of delivering this strategy, cross party collaboration needed to continue to maximise its impact. It was also noted that central government were constantly reviewing the council's financial situation and that the IIAP would continue to support the council in this.
- Members were told of the involvement of the IIAP in producing this strategy. It was highlighted that this was a collective effort across the organisation, with ongoing support from the IIAP in a well-engaged and collaborative manner.
- Members were advised that Local Government Association (LGA) support was being sought for new Members, with the focus on member development and training in this area. Training would be provided via a range of platforms, including seminars and access to other councils who were in a similar position.
- The importance of ongoing reviews and scrutiny was emphasised, with Members playing a key role in setting the long-term goals and outcomes.
- Members acknowledged the creation of the Chief Executive Delivery Unit and discussed who the roles would be delegated to. It was advised that on the advice of the IIAP, someone with experience from working across councils had been brought in to help implement the Improvement Plan. However, the ongoing focus would be on developing skills and expertise in-house, creating multi-disciplinary teams from across the council, focused on delivering the key priorities of the council.
- Members discussed the importance of Member development and training as some Members were not sufficiently aware of issues before they put forward alternative arguments. Considering this, Members discussed the role of the opposition and suggested that they were not as engaged as they should be.
- It was noted that the cabinet decision making process would also benefit from Member development, which would make the process clear for all Members.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

1. Endorse the Direction of Travel for the 'Sustainable Future City Council Strategy' and the continuation of developing the strategy and plans further.
2. Notes that this document is considered 'live' and will be subject to further updates as the Council formalises its requirements.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

To provide Members with an overview of the current position, challenges and range of approaches that could be taken to develop a sustainable future city.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

There were no alternative options considered.

72. PETERBOROUGH SUSTAINABLE COUNCIL – REVIEW OF THE BUDGET SETTING PROCESS.

The Cabinet received a report in relation to the upcoming budget setting process.

The purpose of this report was to provide Cabinet members with an opportunity to review the draft timetable for the upcoming budget setting process.

The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report and praised the work spent on delivering the budget, even though it was initially opposed. Further thanks were given to officers, the IAP and the finance team for their contributions.

Cabinet Members debated the report and in summary responses to questions raised included:

- It was discussed whether the Financial Stability Working Group (FSWG) was suitable for the budget setting process, given the level of participation from all parties. Members acknowledged that there had been resistance from the opposition in the past. It was hoped that with Member development, greater cross-party collaboration would follow.
- It was raised that there needed to be an avenue where the opposition could put forward an alternative to be voted on before the budget reached its final stage. Therefore, Members recognised that the budget setting process would need to be reviewed.
- The council's Monitoring Officer advised that the paper was one to note and that any amendments of the constitution being considered would need to be agreed by Full Council.
- Members discussed the impact that government intervention may have on the council.
- Further discussion highlighted the value of Member development in line with the budget setting process where members would have more opportunities to contribute and object.
- Members were advised that the budget was set in difficult circumstances, not unique to Peterborough. It was noted that the risks of government intervention had been explained to all members. It was acknowledged that the discussions at council highlighted the need for Member development and training across all groups.
- Members acknowledged that the budget setting process needed to be reviewed, with the timetable for completion starting sooner so that universal support could be achieved.
- The Section 151 Officer advised that if amendments were made to the budget process, it would be helpful if the terminology used was clearer. This would

ensure that the documents within the financial strategy would be easier to understand.

- Members discussed alternative budget propositions and what was required for an alternative budget to be put forward. They acknowledged that the finance team would produce an alternative budget on behalf of members if necessary.
- The council's Monitoring Officer advised that Members were free to speak about political issues during in purdah but were not permitted to use council resources to make any electioneering statements.
- Members acknowledged this and suggested that politics would always play a role in decision making. It was suggested that the opposition's response to the budget was "playing politics".
- The Section 151 Officer was asked about their role and stated that they made sure the council set a balanced budget. After questioning, they maintained that the council was not bankrupt, and it was noted by Members that the council was focused on financial sustainability.
- The Leader reiterated that the council was on the road to financial recovery.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED** to note:

1. The areas proposed for improvement following discussion of the budget setting process at FSWG on 15th March 2022.
2. The legal requirements for setting a balance budget.
3. The new proposed process for the Council budget setting meeting.
4. The proposed timetable for developing the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Budget setting process for 2023/24.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

To provide Cabinet members with an opportunity to review the draft timetable for the upcoming budget setting process.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

There were no alternative options were considered.

Chairman
10.00am to 11:00am
19 April 2022