

Minutes of the Cabinet

**Thursday 8th August, 2024 at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley**

Present:

Cabinet Members

Councillor P Harley (Chair)

Councillor P Bradley (Vice-Chair)

Councillors P Atkins, I Bevan, S Clark, J Clinton, D Corfield, A Goddard, S Phipps and D Stanley.

Opposition Group Members nominated to attend the Cabinet

Labour Group: Councillors S Ali, A Aston, J Cowell, J Foster, P Lowe, S Mughal and P Sahota.

Liberal Democrat Group: Councillors R Priest and E Stafford

Councillor S Keasey (Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee) attended the meeting by invitation.

Observers

Councillors B Collins and K Westwood

Officers

B Heran (Deputy Chief Executive), M Bowsher (Director of Adult Social Care), L Fulci (Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services) – via MS Teams, K Jones (Director of Housing and Communities), H Martin (Director of Regeneration and Enterprise), I Newman (Director of Finance and Legal), M Farooq (Lead for Law and Governance - Monitoring Officer) and H Mills (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

Together with other officers and 4 members of public.

14 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors C Bayton and K Casey.

15 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor J Cowell declared a non-pecuniary interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, in Agenda Item No. 5 (Review of Housing Finance) as a Council tenant.

16 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15th July, 2024, be approved as a correct record and signed.

17 **2024/25 Revenue Monitoring and updates to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy**

A joint report of the Deputy Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Legal was submitted on the latest forecast revenue and capital outturn for 2024/25, and to consider changes to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Capital Programme.

In presenting the report, the Cabinet Member for Finance, Legal and Human Resources (Councillor S Clark) indicated that there had been a slight improvement to the latest forecast as a result of contributing factors which included the current spending controls, limited cost of borrowing and implementation of charging for the Green Waste Collection Service. It was emphasised that with the continued rise of adult and children's social care and pressures from loss of income, the financial outlook remained challenging, therefore proposals to increase car parking income, savings from Dudley Council Plus, the closure of Brooke's Bar and Bistro and increased contributions from the Public Health Grant had been incorporated into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

Further savings proposals, which were subject to scrutiny, had also been included which related to the removal of public subsidy paid to Stourbridge and Halesowen Town Halls.

The Director of Housing and Communities responded to questions concerning the implementation of service and facility charges and in doing so indicated that charges were anticipated to be effective from October 2024.

The Leader (Councillor P Harley) responded to comments raised by Councillor S Ali concerning the Council's financial position and lack of reserves and in doing so commented that the report provided an improved financial outlook and he was confident that a balanced budget would be set in March 2025.

Members of the Opposition Groups commented positively on the proposal to override spending controls to allow funds to be released from the Community Forums Grant to pay for the costs of Christmas trees, lights and switch on events, as outlined in paragraph 14 of the report.

In deliberating the proposals in relation to Halesowen and Stourbridge Town Halls, whilst it was regrettable, Members of the Opposition Groups welcomed the opportunity to scrutinise the topic to ensure community access continued and to review all options before a formal decision was made.

Opposition Group Members, whilst expressing disappointment regarding the closure of Dudley Council Plus, appreciated the proposed local community hub model which would provide a welcomed locally focused service.

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Legal and Human Resources (Councillor S Clark) and the Leader (Councillor P Harley) responded to questions raised by Councillor S Keasey concerning the mismanagement of Brookes Bar and Bistro and the proposed increase to car parking charges. It was confirmed that following comments made by the Environment and Regeneration Select Committee, car parking charges would be implemented at a slightly reduced cost with varied rates across the Borough determined by footfall.

Resolved

- (1) That the forecast variance to the budget in 2024/25 and the delivery of savings, as set out in the report, be noted.
 - (2) That the Council be recommended to approve the savings as set out in paragraph 10 and Appendix C to the report.
 - (3) That the new savings, as set out in paragraph 12 and appendix D to the report, be approved as a basis for scrutiny.
 - (4) That the proposed override of spending controls, as set out in paragraph 14 of the report, be approved.
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18 **Review of Housing Finance**

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Director of Housing and Communities and the Director of Finance and Legal on the findings of the Housing Stock Condition Surveys and associated compliance with the Decent Homes Standard, and the recommendations for a revised 2024/25 Housing Capital Programme to ensure compliance with the Decent Homes Standard, following discussions at the Housing and Safer Communities Select Committee on 1st August, 2024.

Resolved

- (1) That feedback from the Housing and Safer Communities Select Committee on 1st August, 2024, be received and noted.
 - (2) That the Council be recommended to approve the proposed Housing Capital Programme.
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19 **Dudley Borough Cultural Strategy**

A report of the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise was submitted on the proposed Dudley Cultural Strategy and Action Plan.

Members commented positively and fully supported the strategy and the benefits that would be achieved following implementation.

The Leader (Councillor P Harley) and Deputy Leader (Cabinet Member for Communities, Climate Change and Economic Delivery) (Councillor P Bradley) responded to questions and comments made by Members of the Opposition Groups concerning the need for cross directorate and external partnership working to further develop and enhance the strategy; the need for Councillor engagement in the development of the action plan and clarification as to the level of support that was provided to support the global Geopark.

Resolved

- (1) That the Dudley Borough Cultural Strategy and Action Plan, as set out in Appendices 1 and 4 to the report, be approved.
- (2) That the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, Climate Change and Economic Delivery, be authorised to implement the strategy and align the spend of available grant funding with its delivery.
- (3) That the Castle Hill Vision, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report, be endorsed.
- (4) That the 2020 Art in the Public Realm Strategy be noted and a review to align the strategy with the Cultural Strategy and other relevant strategies/policies, be approved.

20 **Issues arising from Overview and Scrutiny/Select Committees**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

21 **Questions from Members to the Leader (Cabinet Procedure Rule 2.5)**

No questions were raised under this agenda item.

The meeting ended at 6.55pm

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL