

MINUTES of a meeting of the CABINET held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Whitwick Road, Coalville, LE67 3FJ on TUESDAY, 31 JANUARY 2023

Present: Councillor R Blunt (Chairman)

Councillors R Ashman, R D Bayliss, T Gillard, K Merrie MBE, N J Rushton and A C Woodman

Officers: Ms A Thomas, Mr J Arnold, Mr A Barton, Miss E Warhurst, Mr G Hammons, Mrs A Crouch, Ms R Haynes, Mr R Kyei, Ms S Thirkettle and Mrs R Wallace

61. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received.

62. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

63. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2023 were considered.

I was moved by Councillor K Merrie, seconded by Councillor R D Bayliss and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2023 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings.

Reason for decision: To comply with the constitution.

64. MINUTES OF THE COALVILLE SPECIAL EXPENSES WORKING PARTY

The Business and Regeneration Portfolio Holder presented the report to members and acknowledged the time which the working party had spent considering the draft budget, for which Cabinet had been grateful. It was noted that the working party had been expected to produce a balanced budget without an increase in the level of precept.

Councillor T Gillard wished to move that the wording of the recommendation be amended to request that Cabinet “considers” rather than “agrees” the recommendation from the working party. This was seconded by Councillor N Rushton and is reflected in the recommendations below.

The amendment was put to the vote and was supported unanimously.

Councillor J Legrys requested to speak in order to clarify proceedings at the meeting of the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party. Councillor J Legrys stated that the working party had been tasked with making cuts to expenditure and had worked closely with the finance team, however had felt that they did not have sufficient time to cover the issue in detail. It was noted that the working party had provided a series of recommendations but that the working party was now “past its sell by date” and that cross-party collaboration would be required to reach a resolution regarding the next steps. Councillor J Legrys expressed a hope that Cabinet would be able to reach a decision of how money would be spent within the Coalville Specials area. The Leader thanked Councillor J Legrys and agreed that at present the working party and its remit was not fit for purpose and

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acknowledged that should the Conservative administration remain after the election, the improvement of the functions of the working party would be a priority.

The Portfolio Holder wished to thank Councillor J Legrys and members of the working party for their efforts.

As the Portfolio Holder of whom the working party was previously under, Councillor A Woodman wished to note that he concurred that reforms would be necessary. Councillor Woodman also drew attention to the minutes of the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party whereby a member had claimed that Coalville Town Football Club had been a “profit making organisation”, however, Councillor Woodman disputed this and had confirmed with the Chairman of the club that of the last five years which were ‘non covid’, the club had run at a loss.

The recommendations as amended were formally moved by Councillor T Gillard, seconded by Councillor N Rushton

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The minutes of the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party held on 24 January 2023 be noted by Cabinet.
2. Cabinet considers that the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party precept be increased by the maximum allowed without triggering a referendum.

Reason for decision: So that the recommendations of the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party can be considered.

65. ROBUSTNESS OF BUDGET ESTIMATES AND ADEQUACY OF RESERVES

The Corporate Portfolio Holder presented the report and noted that this was a report of the Head of Finance which would be considered at Council. It was highlighted that there had been a positive opinion on the robustness of the budget and the adequacy of reserves.

It was moved by Councillor N Rushton, seconded by Councillor K Merrie and

RESOLVED THAT:

The S151 Officer’s advice set out in this section 7 of the Appendix be noted by Cabinet, and the content of this report as part of proposing to Council the General Fund Budget Report 2023/24, Housing Revenue Account Budget 2023/24 Report and the Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 be carefully considered by Cabinet.

Reason for decision: To meet the requirements of the Section 25(1) of the Local Government Act 2003.

66. CAPITAL STRATEGY, TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2023/24

The Corporate Portfolio Holder presented the report and outlined the key changes in the capital strategy which would be to improve the governance and the process of managing schemes through their project lifecycle. It was noted that new schemes will be funded through business rates as opposed to borrowing.

It was moved by Councillor N Rushton, seconded by Councillor R Blunt and

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RESOLVED THAT:

1. The attached Council report (Appendix A) be endorsed and recommended by Cabinet to Council for approval at its meeting on 23 February 2023.
2. Authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Corporate Portfolio Holder, to make amendments to the report to improve its accuracy prior to consideration at Council on 23 February 2023.

Reason for decision: To meet the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Government.

67. GENERAL FUND BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2023/24

The Corporate Portfolio Holder presented the report and noted the inflationary pressures of 10%+ on some services, and also highlighted the risks on the level of funding from the government in the medium term. The Portfolio Holder wished to congratulate the Leader on the council tax freeze which had been in place for 14 years. It was noted that Cabinet considered it important to freeze the level of council tax for all residents during challenging financial times and proposed a balanced budget for the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party area without increasing the precept.

It was moved by Councillor N Rushton, seconded by Councillor R Bayliss and

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The attached Council report (Appendix A) be endorsed by Cabinet and recommended to Council for approval at its meeting on 23 February 2023.
2. The Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Corporate Portfolio Holder, be delegated authority to make amendments to the report to improve its accuracy prior to consideration at Council on 23 February 2023.

Reason for decision: To allow the Council to approve the 2023/24 budget.

68. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET AND RENTS 2023/24

The Housing, Property and Customer Services Portfolio Holder presented the report, and highlighted the inflationary pressures which the authority would be under. It was noted that whilst inflation stood at 10%, there had been a government cap on rent rises of 7% but that this would be absorbed for vulnerable tenants by a rise in benefits which matched inflation.

It was moved by Councillor R Bayliss, seconded by Councillor A Woodman and

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The attached Council report (Appendix A) be endorsed by Cabinet and recommended to Council for approval at its meeting on 23 February 2023.
2. The Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Corporate Portfolio Holder, be delegated authority to make amendments to the report to improve its accuracy prior to consideration at Council on 23 February 2023.

Reason for decision: To allow the Council to approve the 2023/24 budget.

69. COMMUNITY SCRUTINY - FUEL POVERTY TASK & FINISH REPORT

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The Housing, Property and Customer Services Portfolio Holder presented the report and noted that he had been glad to see Scrutiny carry out this piece of work.

Councillor T Eynon requested to speak and informed the meeting that there had been much to welcome within this report. It was noted that the report covered both the Council's housing stock and also privately rented stock within the community. It was noted that the authority would be changing the housing management and housing asset management plan to consider more clearly the link between fuel poverty and carbon reduction. Councillor T Eynon noted that private tenants find it very difficult to complain and that services for private tenants would be changed in order to be less complaints driven, and that this would be facilitated by the Environmental Protection team accessing data on EPC ratings and that the authority had begun to contact private landlords in order to address the problem of many properties not attaining minimum efficiency standards.

Councillor T Eynon raised concerns that some of the funding appeared to be coming from the Disabled Facilities Grant and that there would be no strategy, delivery plan or effective performance management or monitoring arrangements. It was asserted that a fuel poverty strategy would need to bring information together, update it and monitor it but that would not lead to extra work and could be drawn from existing data.

It was moved by Councillor R Bayliss, seconded by Councillor A Woodman and

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Task and Finish group be thanked for their work on this issue by Cabinet.
2. The suggested Scrutiny recommendations and the responses to those recommendations are as set out below:
 - Scrutiny Recommendation 1
The Council should adopt a locally agreed measure and consider individuals or households to be in fuel poverty when after they spend the required amount to heat their home, households are left with a residual income below the official poverty line. A subset of this measure would include those households that reside in a property with an EPC rating of 'D or below.

It was moved that Cabinet did not support this recommendation.

- Scrutiny Recommendation 2
The Council is invited to develop and deliver a fuel poverty reduction strategy and associated delivery plan, alongside effective performance management and monitoring arrangements.

It was moved that Cabinet did not support this recommendation.

- Scrutiny Recommendation 3
The Council is invited to consider its approach to both its housing investment programme and its commitment to addressing fuel poverty, and specifically a 'fabric first' approach to ensure that all properties in the first instance are brought up to an EPC rating of C or above.

It was moved that Cabinet did not support this recommendation.

- Scrutiny Recommendation 4

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The Council is invited to evaluate the robustness of its housing stock management, investment and repairs programme and in the delivery of this, consider action to improve its engagement with tenants.

It was moved that Cabinet did not support this recommendation.

- Scrutiny Recommendation 5
The Council is invited to develop a more robust data base to:
 - Support a more comprehensive understanding of the incidence and drivers of local fuel poverty.
 - Improve understanding of the condition of the local housing base of local authority, social and private rented sector housing.
 - Inform and support the monitoring of Council interventions and policy decisions.

It was moved that Cabinet supports this recommendation.

- Scrutiny Recommendation 6
In order to better develop capacity to drive the improvement in housing standards and energy efficiency, Members invites the Council to consider the potential to recruit a dedicated private rental sector officer/team. This may be a 'locally owned' resource, or the Council may explore the potential for securing joint arrangements with a neighbouring council(s).

It was moved that Cabinet supports this recommendation.

- Scrutiny Recommendation 7
As part of its work in addressing fuel poverty, the Council is invited to consider the potential for improving its communication on these matters, with communication and engagement seen as a key element of any wider Council led approach. As a minimum, the Council may wish to ensure that all frontline officers and customer service contacts have access to up to date information and are able to efficiently signpost residents to additional support, advocacy, or referrals.

It was moved that Cabinet supports this recommendation.

3. The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Property and Customer Services to speak with Councillor T Eynon outside of the formal meeting.

Reason or decision: To accord with the constitution.

The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 5.28 pm

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