

Minutes of the meeting of the CABINET held on TUESDAY 2 JUNE 2020 at 6.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Marland (Leader of the Council).

Councillors Baume, Darlington, Middleton, Nolan, O'Neill and Wilson-Marklew.

Officers:

M Bracey (Chief Executive), T Aldworth (Deputy Chief Executive), S Bridglalsingh (Director Law and Governance), S Richardson (Director, Finance and Resources), P Brown (Head of Democratic Services), N Hutchin (Joint Head of Finance [Deputy Section 151 Officer]), A Rulton (Joint Head of Finance [Deputy Section 151 Officer]) and S Heap (Committee Services and Scrutiny Manager).

Also Present:

Councillors Bradburn, P Geary, Gilbert, Jenkins, McLean, Rankine and Walker.

**C01 MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 10 March 2020 be approved and signed by the Leader of the Council as a correct record.

**C02 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

None declared.

**C03 ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Leader made announcements:

- (a) Welcoming Councillor Baume to the Cabinet and thanking Councillors Gowans, Long and Priestley for their past service as Cabinet members;
- (b) Thanking staff colleagues and all key workers, including staff in the emergency services for their dedicated work during the Covid-19 Pandemic;
- (c) Expressing sympathy to all those residents who had lost loved ones as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic;
- (d) Thanking the Cenotaph Trust for unveiling a pillar at MK Rose dedicated to the Covid-19 pandemic and undertaking to hold a commemorative event when circumstances permitted; and

- (e) Advising that the Civic would be lit both tonight and on Saturday in purple in support of the Black Lives Matter and I Can't Breathe campaigns and to show that the Council believed that all lives mattered, particularly recognising the significant impact on many ethnic minority communities across the world of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

**C04 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

None received.

**C05 COUNCILLORS' ITEMS**

None received.

**C06 COUNCILLORS QUESTIONS**

- (a) Question from Councillor Jenkins to Councillor Middleton (Cabinet member for Resources)

Councillor Jenkins commended the Council's staff and other key workers, including the emergency services in Milton Keynes and paid tribute to those who had died of Covid-19 and their relatives.

Councillor Jenkins asked Councillor Middleton how the Cabinet had decided on the criteria for allocating the discretionary fund provided by Government to support local business and how it met the needs of specific local businesses

Councillor Middleton explained that the Cabinet would be considering the criteria for the allocation of the third tranche of Government funding for small and medium size businesses.

Councillor Middleton indicated that in order to allocate the funding quickly as possible the criteria for the allocation had been designed over the last two, or three weeks taking account of the Government's Guidelines and in consultation with the local business network. As a result, it was intended that the funds would be allocated to those businesses which had not been included in the previous allocations, mainly businesses renting space in shared premises.

Councillor Middleton emphasised that the Council was trying to support as many businesses as possible within the limited funds available.

Councillor Jenkins pointing out that there were over 14,000 small and medium size enterprises in Milton Keynes with under 25 employees, asked Councillor Middleton, as a supplementary question, what steps was the Council taking to ensure that support was available to as many of those businesses as possible.

Councillor Middleton, acknowledging that it was Government and the Bank of England that was supporting larger businesses and also funding the furlough scheme, believed that the Council had done a good job within the circumstances to support the small and medium size business community.

Councillor Middleton explained that the funding made available to the Council by Government was limited, so the Council was having to make some difficult decisions as to which businesses would benefit, while still trying to maintain as much flexibility within the Government's eligibility criteria as possible.

Councillor Middleton indicated that the Council would continue to lobby Government for further funds to support local businesses and invited support from the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Groups.

(b) Question from Councillor Gilbert to Councillor Darlington (Cabinet member for Public Realm)

Councillor Gilbert indicated that he wished to be associated with the announcements made by the Leader thanking staff colleagues and all key workers for their dedicated work during the Covid-19 Pandemic, expressing sympathy to all those residents who had lost loved ones and thanking the Cenotaph Trust for unveiling a pillar at MK Rose dedicated to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Councillor Gilbert also paid tribute to the Council's contractors who had continued to deliver services during the lockdown, specifically those who had continued to collect refuse including on public holidays.

Councillor Gilbert, referring to the slow speed at which the Council had reopened the household waste and recycling centres, the problems being experienced with the telephone booking system and the delays in introducing an online booking system, asked Councillor Darlington to explain what steps were being taken in order that as many residents as possible could safely dispose of the waste that had built up during lockdown.

Councillor Darlington paid tribute to the Council's Waste and Recycling Teams who had continued to deliver a weekly service to a consistently high standard, despite the increased quantity of waste, during lockdown which had seen them work long hours as well as over weekends and public holidays.

Councillor Darlington indicated that the household waste and recycling centres were reopened on 18 May 2020, similar to most other councils in the area. The Council had tried to put measures in place to maintain social distancing and avoid residents having to experience long queues and crowded Tips.

Councillor Darlington also indicated that the Council had worked closely with Thames Valley Police on how best to manage the opening of the Tips.

Councillor Darlington recognised the wait and the problems that residents had experienced when booking appointments by telephone, together with the issues which had arisen at the testing stage for on-line bookings. However, she suggested that it was better to delay the introduction until the on-line system was robust, rather than introduce one which did not work.

Councillor Darlington reported that 7.5 thousand residents had managed to use the waste sites since reopening and the Council had received a number of compliments about the sites were being managed and it seemed that at least a number of the residents using the Tips appreciated that the booking system was for their safety.

Councillor Darlington thanked resident for their patience and emphasised that the on-line booking system would be launched as soon as it was robust.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Gilbert, suggesting that the telephone booking system appeared not fit for purpose, asked Councillor Darlington if it was possible to publish to all councillors the performance metrics being used to measure the performance of the booking arrangements so that councillors were aware of the improvements in performance anticipated with the introduction of an on-line booking system.

Councillor Darlington indicated that there had been a considerable backlog of waste caused by the forced closure of the Tips and the increase in waste resulting from more people working from home, over and above the traditionally high levels at this time of year which had put pressure on the booking system.

Councillor Darlington undertook to write to all councillors setting out the measures being undertaken to improve the service, which would include on-line booking once the system was robust.

(c) Question from Councillor Rankine to Councillor Middleton (Cabinet member for Resources)

Councillor Rankine, referring to the largely unknown financial crisis that could be facing the Council and the fact that the Council's budget for 2020/21 was set at a time of full employment, asked Councillor Middleton if he thought it would be prudent to review the various scenarios that could be facing the Council, including planning for an emergency budget, in case it became necessary.

Councillor Middleton referring to the implication that money was plentiful when the Council set its Budget in February 2020, reminded Councillor Rankine that the Council had faced over £155m worth of cuts over the last 10 years, so money had never been plentiful and tough decisions had been made.

Councillor Middleton indicated that it was as a result of the tough decisions by the Administration and financial prudence that the Council was in a stable financial position and there was no need to bring forward an emergency budget in the current circumstances. However, some modelling was being done to assess the risks likely to be faced by the Council in the medium term in light of the pending recession.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Rankine, referring to the level of General Fund Reserves available to the Council, asked Councillor Middleton if he would consider using some of those Reserves to support local jobs, help those struggling to pay Council Tax, so protecting future Business Rate income streams.

Councillor Middleton reported that as part of the current budget planning, with the support of the Chief Executive and the Director Finance and Resources the Administration was reviewing all budgets and levels of spending in anticipation of the predicted recession. He therefore encouraged fellow councillors to show some patience to allow time for the impact of the recession to be assessed which would allow informed decisions on any use of reserves.

(d) Question from Councillor Walker to Councillor Marland (Leader of the Council)

Councillor Walker thanked all who had supported the response to Covid-19 at what had been a difficult time.

Councillor Walker referred to the falling death and infection rates arising from Covid-19 and the easing of the lockdown restrictions and welcomed the commitment in the Council Plan to an Economic Recovery Plan and other measures to support the community.

Councillor Walker, recognising the potential for further spikes in the Covid-19 infection rates, asked Councillor Marland if he was considering a review to identify the strengths in the Council's response to Covid-19, along with those areas of the response which could be improved in readiness for any further spikes in infection rates.

Councillor Marland indicated that he did not consider it appropriate for the Administration to judge its own performance and it was a matter for the Council's scrutiny function to constructively review how well the Council performed in its response to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Councillor Marland undertook to support any review and provide information on the approach and actions taken and also consider any recommendations arising.

Councillor Walker indicated that he believed that the Administration and officer colleague should be undertaking a review of their own performance and agreed that the scrutiny function should also be carrying out a review.

Councillor Walker thanked Councillor Marland for the levels of cross party working over the last few months in addressing the response to Covid-19 and gave a commitment to continue the cross party working arrangements given the public health crises facing Milton Keynes and the potential for further waves of Covid-19.

Councillor Walker recognised the importance of allowing the Administration and officer colleagues sufficient freedom to make the right decisions in the interest of Milton Keynes.

Councillor Marland took the opportunity to thank Councillor Walker (Leader of the Conservative Group) and Councillor McCall (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group), together with Councillors Jenkins and Carr for their help with the Council's response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, particularly the constructive challenge they had provided.

#### **C07 REFERRAL FROM STRATEGIC PLACEMAKING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 4 MARCH 2020**

##### Independent Flood Report

The Cabinet considered a referral from the Strategic Placemaking Scrutiny Committee held on 4 March 2020, which had considered the Independent Flood Report about the surface water flooding events in August 2018.

Councillor P Geary (Chair of the Strategic Placemaking Committee) introduced the referral and thanked Councillor Wilson-Marklew for the response provided, noting the time that had elapsed since 4 March 2020 and the flooding event itself. The report had been considered in detail by the Scrutiny Committee on 4 March 2020, including seeking the views of members of the community affected.

Councillor Geary indicated that the frequency of such events were only likely to increase, causing a greater proportion of Milton Keynes to be at risk from flooding in the future. He set out the Committees' two recommendations, which formed the referral:

- “(i) That the Cabinet lobbies for and looks to secure funding so that Milton Keynes can be ‘engineered’ to be as resilient as possible to future flooding events.

- (ii) That lessons learnt from past flooding events be taken into account in the development of new areas.”

That Cabinet received a written response from Councillor Wilson-Marklew and noted that a dedicated coordination group covering the Lead Local Flood Authority, Highways Authority and the Planning Authority had been established to review ‘engineering resilience’ for water management and its findings and outcomes would then be reviewed at the Flood and Water Management Group and shared with key stakeholders including The Parks Trust, Anglican Water and Internal Drainage Board.

It was also noted that the Council had recently recruited a Sustainable Urban Drainage Officer to provide advice for planning applications regarding water engineering resilience and a second Sustainable Urban Drainage Officer was to be recruited shortly. This would give the Team sufficient capacity to review past flooding events, together with details of any outstanding lessons learnt and enable the Council to explore/bid for potential national and regional funding.

RESOLVED:

That the written response provided by Councillor Wilson-Marklew, the (Cabinet member for Climate and Sustainability) be noted.

#### **C08 MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL PLAN**

The Cabinet considered the Council Plan (2016-22). Councillor Marland (Leader of the Council) introduced the item, indicating that the Council Plan and associated Delivery Plan which was introduced in 2016, set the Council’s strategic objectives. Councillor Marland reiterated that a target population of 500,000 people was based on the greater Milton Keynes area as opposed to the Council’s boundaries and was not intended to be achieved until 2050.

Councillor Marland explained that the Plan had been updated in the context of the many challenges associated with the Covid-19 Pandemic and reflected on some small but significant changes, referencing the six key priorities, such as a managed budget and the Covid-19 Recovery. Of note in the delivery plan were, a Covid-19 Economic Recovery Plan, Action on Climate Change, making Milton Keynes affordable for all and a Brighter Future for Bletchley.

The Cabinet heard from Councillors Jenkins and R Bradburn during consideration of the item.

Councillor Jenkins noted the opportunity for further debate at Council and welcomed the focus on domestic abuse. She also outlined the importance of scrutiny, referring to the number of Scrutiny Committee Chairs allocated to each group, speculating as to the effectiveness of scrutiny from the Liberal Democrat Group, given the partnership agreement with the Labour Group.

Councillor Bradburn thanked the Council for its response to the ongoing pandemic and reflected that whilst the Council Plan remained ambitious the Council had to be realistic and focused on its key objectives, including child poverty and a balanced budget.

In response, Councillor Marland noted the many pressing issues facing the Council, including resilience to any localised virus outbreaks, child poverty and the long-lasting economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which to his mind were of greater importance than the number of committee chairs allocated to each Political Group.

RESOLVED:

That the Council be recommended to approve the revised Council Plan 2016-2022.

**C09 PROVISIONAL REVENUE OUTTURN: GENERAL FUND REVENUE, HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT, DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT, CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND COVID-19 FINANCIAL UPDATE**

The Cabinet considered the Provisional Revenue Outturn, based upon income and expenditure at 31 March 2020. The item was introduced by Councillor Middleton (Cabinet member for Resources), who thanked Council staff for their work during 2019-20, in achieving a very modest overspend of £150,000 against an overall budget of around £200 million.

Councillor Middleton reflected on the Council's careful, measured and prudent approach over recent years which had left it in a good position to face the future. Some service areas had however, faced challenges, including looked after children, and homelessness and temporary accommodation where there was a £3.6 million overspend, attributed to continuing high levels of demand.

Councillor Middleton thanked Government ministers for the additional £13.5 million funding received to support the Covid-19 response, enabling the Council to support communities in a variety of ways, including the funding of a partnership with Milton Keynes Food Bank, purchase of additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for local care homes, additional funding for rough sleeping placements and support to local businesses.

Councillor Middleton spoke about the future of local government finances, and the impact of Covid-19, noting the very significantly changed financial landscape since the Council's budget was set in February 2020. He thanked finance colleagues for preparing the update in respect of the projected economic impact of Covid-19 and set out the modelling of various scenarios which projected a shortfall for the Council over the next 4 years of between £27.5 and £55.5 million. Given the very challenging picture, the Council would continue to lobby Government through the Local Government Association for a fair financial settlement.



The Cabinet heard from Councillor Bradburn who referred to his experience as the chair of Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee, including the difficulty in planning for meetings, and the budget setting process for 2021-22, considering the very uncertain financial picture. He extended an invite to all councillors to the first meeting of the Committee in July and committed to working transparently to achieve a balanced budget.

Councillor Middleton thanked Councillor Bradburn and endorsed his invitation to all members to either participate in, or observe the July meeting and understand the Council's financial position.

RESOLVED:

1. That the General Fund Revenue Account outturn of £0.158m overspend be noted, together with the associated management actions.
2. That it be noted that General Fund Revenue Account planned savings of £5.259m have been achieved (83.12% of the annual savings target), leaving a shortfall of £1.068m (16.88).
3. That it be noted that the outturn on the Housing Revenue Account is break even, after an increase in the transfer to reserves, together with the associated management actions.
4. That the Dedicated Schools Grant surplus carry forward of £2.096m be noted, together with the associated management actions.
5. That the reserves position be noted.
6. That it be noted that the total outturn spend on the Capital Programme is £552.883m to date, of which £108.346m relates to expenditure in 2019/20.
7. That the current position of the 2019/20 tariff programme be noted.
8. That the overall debt position of the Council at the end of 2019/20 be noted.
9. That the Treasury Management decision be noted.
10. That the virements to the original budget be noted.
11. That the current high-risk vacancies areas be noted.
12. That the procurement waiver decisions be noted.
13. That the financial costs incurred to date in dealing with the response to COVID-19 be noted, together with the Period 1 financial summary position and projected impact on the Medium Term Financial Plan be noted.
14. That the position regarding the financial contributions received from the Casino be noted.

## **C10 LOCAL AUTHORITY DISCRETIONARY GRANT SCHEME 2020/21**

The Cabinet considered the Local Authority Discretionary Grant Scheme 2020/21. Councillor Middleton introduced the item, highlighting the urgent nature of the decision. He explained that the revised scheme was in response to a third tranche of funding received from Central Government and the Council's desire to pass on money to affected small and medium sized businesses without delay.

Councillor Middleton also explained that the revised scheme made provision for a number of businesses who were not entitled to support from funding allocated via the first two funding tranches, such as market traders and businesses in small offices and flexible workspaces who paid business rates via their rent, as opposed to directly.

Councillor Middleton indicated that the funding available was less than £2 million and that he expected such a modest amount to be outstripped by the demand. In response, businesses that had received no other emergency funding would be prioritised and Central Government would be lobbied for further additional funding.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Local Authority Discretionary Grant scheme as set out in Milton Keynes Local Authority Discretionary Grant Scheme be agreed and approved.
2. That due to the urgency of the decision, in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16(j), the call-in procedure shall not apply.

## **C11 ANNUAL APPOINTMENT OF ADVISORY GROUPS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

The Cabinet considered the Annual Appointment of Advisory Groups and Outside Organisations. Councillor Marland introduced the item, explaining that the Cabinet appointed Councillors to represent the Council on a range of bodies and advisory groups.

Councillor Marland confirmed that there were no vacancies but any that might arise throughout the year were delegated to the Monitoring Officer to appoint to, in consultation with himself and other Group Leaders.

RESOLVED:

1. That the appointments to the various organisations, advisory groups and strategic partnerships for 2020/21 be approved.
2. That the Director Law and Governance, in consultation with group leaders, be authorised to agree appointments to any vacancies that occur.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 7.33 PM.