

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

CABINET

These minutes are draft until confirmed as a correct record at the next meeting.

Thursday, 9th September, 2021

Present:

Councillor Kevin Guy	Leader of the Council, Liberal Democrat Group Leader
Councillor Dine Romero	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Communities and Culture
Councillor Tim Ball	Cabinet Member for Planning and Licensing
Councillor Richard Samuel	Deputy Council Leader (statutory) and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Resources
Councillor Sarah Warren	Deputy Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate and Sustainable Travel
Councillor David Wood	Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Tom Davies	Cabinet Member for Adults and Council House Building
Councillor Alison Born	Cabinet Member for Adults and Council House Building
Councillor Manda Rigby	Cabinet Member for Transport

50 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair (Councillor Kevin Guy) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Chair invited all Cabinet Members to introduce themselves.

The Chair also informed the meeting that speakers will have their opportunity to address the Cabinet before questions from public and Councillors.

51 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Senior Democratic Services Officer drew attention to the evacuation procedure with health and safety notice.

52 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

54 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

There was none.

55 STATEMENTS, DEPUTATIONS OR PETITIONS FROM PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS

Susan Charles read out a statement on behalf of Helen Dudden *[a copy of which is attached to the Minutes as Appendix 1 and on the Council's website]* where she questioned availability of accessible housing for a powered wheelchair user.

Susan Charles read out a statement *[a copy of which is attached to the Minutes as Appendix 2 and on the Council's website]* where she highlighted the risks that bicycles, electric scooters, skateboards etc. used on the pavements have on the vulnerable people.

Ceris Humphreys read out a statement *[a copy of which is attached to the Minutes as Appendix 3 and on the Council's website]* where she asked the Cabinet to restrict all HGVs traffic through Bath.

Martin Grixoni addressed the Cabinet by saying that he was proud to live and work in Bath, and the Council and its officers did work hard to get the best out of the area. However, he was concerned at some of the directions and priorities that the Council took where, in his words, they made it difficult for disabled people to access an increasing number of places. Martin Grixoni also said that he received a feedback from some residents about the state of the city streets. Martin Grixoni claimed that, aside from rough sleepers, there were people begging which was a hassle for tourists and businesses. Martin Grixoni felt that, in his view, these people should be better controlled, and dealt with.

Martin Grixoni also criticised the Council about Cleveland Bridge progress.

Councillor Vic Pritchard addressed the Cabinet by suggesting that the disabled residents were affected due to the lack of blue badge parking at the city centre. Councillor Pritchard also said that City Centre Security Measures have had adverse effects on the blue badge holders and invited the Cabinet to abandon the decision made in July this year and instead to allow a degree of access for blue badge holders.

Councillor Pritchard added that, in terms of the Clean Air Zone, there was no evidence to suggest that Nitrogen Dioxide reduction was a direct result of the CAZ, and it could be more to do with the COVID-19 lockdown and people still working from home, the closure of Cleveland bridge, and people being away for summer holidays, resulting in fewer cars on the road than normal.

56 QUESTIONS FROM PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

There were 38 questions from Councillors and no questions from members of the public.

[Copies of the questions and responses, including supplementary questions and responses if any, have been placed on the Minute book as Appendix 4 and are available on the Council's website.]

57 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS CABINET MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 20th July 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

58 CONSIDERATION OF SINGLE MEMBER ITEMS REQUISITIONED TO CABINET

There were none.

59 MATTERS REFERRED BY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY BODIES

There were none.

60 SINGLE MEMBER CABINET DECISIONS TAKEN SINCE PREVIOUS CABINET MEETING

The Cabinet agreed to note the report.

61 CLEVELAND BRIDGE UPDATE AND OPTIONS REPORT

The Chair invited Councillor Manda Rigby to read out her statement.

Councillor Rigby read out the following statement:

'Firstly, I'd like to thank the officers for their officers' report, but more specifically, I think we owe them huge thanks for the exceptional way this work on the bridge has been done.

The Cleveland Bridge renovation is a very significant project for this Council. This is a 200-year-old bridge, never intended for this volume and weight of traffic, and the mitigations put in place in 1927 are also struggling to handle the wear and tear.

We are replacing degraded concrete, ensuring that the iron work is sound, and waterproofing to prevent any further damage caused by water ingress.

We aren't at the end point yet, but despite: COVID cases, materials being delayed, and more work than anticipated once the scaffolding was up; we currently hope to reopen the bridge to cars, as well as pedestrians, cyclists and emergency vehicles, 3 months after it shut as planned, which would be an amazing achievement.

I can't think of any other project of this scale, and on a Grade 2 listed structure, anywhere in the country that has come in anywhere near on time.*

In the interim, we have been working hard on what to do next, and I'd like to share my thoughts on progress so far, and what I'd like to see happening next.

The current situation is that: on completion of the works, the weight limit which was in place prior to them will expire, and there will be no limits on the type of traffic which can use the bridge, unless we manage to get such a limit put on it.

This is because it forms part of the primary route network, therefore decisions about its usage are not in our hands.

Whilst appreciating the officer report in front of us tonight, which outlines several ways forwards, and understanding the rationale behind why it was written in this way, I think it does not go far enough. We need to be bolder in looking at absolutely all options in front of us.

One of the existing proposals is a strategic study with regional partners – where all the region's authorities examine plans for cross region transport, specifically looking

at the best way to get freight to and from the M4 to the Southern ports, and there may well be a plan for a different North South link proposed.

Work on this Western Gateway project is currently ongoing, but the amount of time this will take is counted in decades not years. We can't assume regional agreement will be reached and we can't just wait for this to be the solution.

The people of Bath can't wait another 10-15 years for relief from through traffic HGVs.

Because there is the rub. In order to change the status of the road and take it out of the Primary Route network, Wiltshire Council has to agree. Despite our best efforts, such agreement does not appear to be achievable, not even for temporary diversions during work.

This is a great shame.

A lot of the A350 route has been widened to dual carriageway now, at great public expense. It does not pass immediately by anywhere near as many houses to get from the M4 to the South coast, and those it does pass are not primarily Listed. It is mainly on the plain, not in a valley trapping pollution.

We are not in the business of exporting our problems elsewhere, but we are in the business of standing up for our community, and to us, it is only right that all parts of the network, including Wiltshire, take their fair share of traffic.

It is unreasonable to have had the amount of money spent on upgrading their roads, way in excess of any grant for Cleveland Bridge, and then not to take the HGVs.

Indeed, if they continue to refuse to do this, we will all suffer, as within a much shorter period of time, we will be back to closing the bridge for repairs again.

It was never meant to carry this volume and this weight of traffic, and remember, this is about through traffic using Bath as a rat run, not those lorries delivering goods into Bath.

The £3.5m we are spending from the public purse now will need to be spent again in 10-15 years' time if HGVs go back to pummelling the bridge as before. It would be so much better to fully fund a permanent solution.

So, what can we do? The answer is: we have looked and will continue to look at all mechanisms possible.

We have already sought advice on whether we could reintroduce tolling and set it at a level which would deter the heaviest vehicles, could we use any other charging mechanism for just one class of vehicle?

In terms of TROs – a traffic regulation order which is necessary to change the rules on a certain road – although the attempted TRO weight limit one failed in 2012, after a legal challenge from Wiltshire, a lot has changed since then. The climate emergency has been declared and millions of pounds have been spent on upgrading Wiltshire roads. It stands a better chance of success now than it did.

A TRO based on air quality may fail as it would be considered double jeopardy, with charges already in place via the CAZ, but we don't yet know what the future of the CAZ will be once we get all the data necessary, so this option should also be explored.

A TRO based on protecting the heritage asset? If there's a place in the UK where this should be possible, its Bath, with its overarching World Heritage status and its new Great Spas of Europe World Heritage listing as well.

It's possible that none of these might work, I must make you aware of that, but they definitely won't work unless we try them and give them our very best resource.

If we don't manage to find a mechanism to reduce HGVs using Bath as a through-route, then it won't be for the want of trying every possible way. We are fighting for cleaner air, reduced through traffic and a better environment.

Whilst acknowledging and noting the officers report, I'd welcome amendments moved to instruct myself and officers to progress all the mechanisms possible to limit

HGVs, for the benefit of all in Bath, and support our neighbouring authorities to get further funding where adaptations to their roads would make it better for HGVs to use them. I am convinced that there must be a solution which gives a net benefit to the region, I am equally convinced that keeping with the status quo is not the right thing to do.

If we can restrict HGV through traffic, it will benefit the whole city and the surrounding area. Doing nothing is not an option.'

The Chair invited Councillor Richard Samuel to read out his statement and move the revised recommendations.

Councillor Richard Samuel read out the following statement:

'Bath has many traffic problems that bedevil the city. The fact of inconvenient geography and the historic UNESCO setting precludes the by-passes many other similar cities have built. The lack of sufficient bridges and the impossibility of building new ones for vehicles is a further problem. Added to which the situation is the situation of the city in a deep valley bowl with strong planning and environmental designations in place.

In the past 50 years another problem has crept up on the city and those of us who are concerned for its care and protection are faced today with dealing with it. That problem is the centralised distribution and delivery arrangements our economy demands and the dominance of large supermarkets. These arrangements are serviced by increasingly large HGVs of up to 44 tonnes and if the government has its way will soon be followed by the 48 tonne megalithic lorries as used in continental Europe. Here I use the term megalithic to describe not only the size but also the outdated form of freight distribution they represent.

The impact of HGVs on the historic city of Bath is corrosive. Road surfaces are damaged constantly by the hammering they take from these beasts, historic structures have been hit, the sheer difficulty of manoeuvring these HGVs causes congestion and delays. In a nutshell Bath's street were not built for these giants. But there is another insidious problem. That is the pollution these vehicles emit both NOx and CO2. The former has a serious impact on health for residents along roads where these vehicles travel. NOx emissions have undoubtedly fallen in recent years as cleaner vehicles have been introduced and that of course was one of the reasons for introducing the Bath Clean Air zone that I campaigned for in 2017. Nationally it is estimated that HGVs emitted 19.5m metric tonnes of CO2 per year – the second largest emitter after private cars. The non-monetarised dis-benefits such as impacts on physical or mental health have never been quantified as far as I am aware but arguably these are the most important issues for the community.

I now turn to the direct impact on my ward of Walcot. The London Road from Batheaston roundabout to Cleveland Place takes the highest volume of HGVs in the city. It also has the highest levels of NOx. But the most serious impact is on the quality of life for the thousands of residents who live on or near London Road. Their quiet enjoyment is daily disturbed by the continuous roar of HGVs. Cycling on the carriageway is unpleasant and at times unsafe. Life as a pedestrian whether walking with children to school or going to work is a dispiriting polluted experience.

It is our duty as councillors in cabinet, and for me as a ward councillor to say on behalf of my and Bath's residents enough is enough. It is time to put an end to the daily procession of oversized lorries through our historic streets and in particular over the historic Cleveland Bridge. This report has considered some options but for me it does not go far enough, and I cannot support it in its current form. I say this because I am long enough in the tooth to recognise something being kicked into the very long

grass. The Western Gateway study whilst welcome is in essence the do-nothing option. When it does report if it gathers support then it will be a long time before a better safer route to the east becomes a reality. I therefore propose that the cabinet note this report for now but call for further work to examine more radical options to control and limit the use of Cleveland Bridge by HGVs.'

Councillor Richard Samuel moved the following recommendations:

The Cabinet to agree that the Council should continue to:

- 1) Work with Wiltshire and Dorset Councils and the Sub-Regional Transport Board (STB) Western Gateway to complete a strategic study into north-south connectivity between the M4 and the Dorset Coast with an aim of making the A350 the strategic route and limiting HGV use of Cleveland Bridge as part of the Governments Road Investment Strategy 2 (2020-25).
- 2) Assess and review the position after completion of the study, recognising that any investment that would resolve the core issue would be considered, at the earliest, as part of the Road Investment Strategy 3 which covers the period 2025-30. The study would also inform discussions between BANES and the other stakeholders. It is considered that this approach is the one most likely to result in a positive outcome for both B&NES and the other stakeholders involved.
- 3) Continue to make representations to Government about the need to improve the traffic situation at Cleveland Bridge, highlighting the changes to road conditions within Bath and the wider area since 2012 such as the changes to the A350 as part of the planned improvement and upgrade and the introduction of the Clean Air Zone in Bath.
- 4) Officers are requested to:
 - A. Prepare a draft Traffic Regulation Order seeking to restrict HGV movements over Cleveland Bridge in order to preserve or improve the amenity of the area through which the road runs, in this case the grade 2* listed Cleveland Bridge structure and environs including the London Road and Bathwick St, in accordance with the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.
 - B. Investigate and consider any other options that may exist for achieving a similar end to a TRO and report on both actions including the draft TRO to the November meeting of this Cabinet.
 - C. Consult with appropriate heritage and amenity groups in Bath including Residents' Associations in the course of preparation of the TRO.

Councillor Manda Rigby seconded the motion.

Councillor Alison Born commented that Cleveland Bridge has been closed to repair the damage to the structure, caused by vehicle sizes weights and volumes that could not have been anticipated at the time that the bridge was built. The current closure has caused significant disruption, but the repairs could not have been done when the bridge was open, and importantly, the full extent of the damage would not be assessed. Councillor Born also said that the bridge was not designed to carry today's traffic and the repairs have been essential to safeguard the structure and uses of the bridge. The Cabinet would need an assurance that the bridge would not be subject to more repairs in the future due to heavy HGV traffic, and for those reasons Councillor Born suggested that the officers should commission an external consultants to examine the bridge at the end of works, and reporting its predicted longevity under the scenarios of an 18 tonnes limit.

Councillor Dine Romero commented that HGVs travelling through and around Bath have been a concern for residents across the city not just around the bridge itself with more HGVs on roads in Southdown, such as on Whiteway Road have been reported. Councillor Romero asked for an assurance that the full consequences for all residents in the city and around the city would be considered before implementing any long-term measures restricting heavy lorries across this bridge.

Councillor Tom Davies agreed with the comments made by other Cabinet Members on this matter and added that the inevitable damage of the bridge, caused by HGVs in the past, would continue to happen, and that the Council must do everything to stop HGVs using Cleveland bridge, and to find a solution that would work for all.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Cabinet agreed to:

- 1) Work with Wiltshire and Dorset Councils and the Sub-Regional Transport Board (STB) Western Gateway to complete a strategic study into north-south connectivity between the M4 and the Dorset Coast with an aim of making the A350 the strategic route and limiting HGV use of Cleveland Bridge as part of the Governments Road Investment Strategy 2 (2020-25).
- 2) Assess and review the position after completion of the study, recognising that any investment that would resolve the core issue would be considered, at the earliest, as part of the Road Investment Strategy 3 which covers the period 2025-30. The study would also inform discussions between BANES and the other stakeholders. It is considered that this approach is the one most likely to result in a positive outcome for both B&NES and the other stakeholders involved.
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 - B. Investigate and consider any other options that may exist for achieving a similar end to a TRO and report on both actions including the draft TRO to the November meeting of this Cabinet.
 - C. Consult with appropriate heritage and amenity groups in Bath including Residents' Associations in the course of preparation of the TRO.

62 BATH CLEAN AIR PLAN- UPDATE

Councillor Sarah Warren introduced the report by saying that Bath's Clean Air Zone (CAZ) was an important public health measure, introduced because levels of harmful nitrogen dioxide in Bath were above legal limits.

CAZ went live on 15th March this year and the Cabinet would be updated quarterly on progress, and this was the first quarterly report covering the period from April to June of this year.

The update has covered a very short period, and over that time traffic levels were initially extremely low, and an average of 10% down on the equivalent period of 2019

over the quarter. These were still early days, but air quality was improving with some promising signs following CAZ introduction.

Councillor Warren took the Cabinet through the highlights of the report.

And added that, in the wider context, CAZ was just one of sustainable transport measures, aimed either at enabling alternatives to driving into the city centre, or reducing the emissions of those vehicles that do. The Council would encourage all drivers to be aware of the impacts of air pollution, and to think about each journey. By choosing an alternative means of transport, people have the power to directly help reduce air pollution and protect their own and their neighbours' health. People could also consider upgrading their vehicle to a more modern and less polluting one – bearing in mind that there were still grants and loans available to support those whose vehicles are chargeable in the CAZ.

Councillor Sarah Warren moved the recommendations.

Councillor Dine Romero seconded the motion by saying she was pleased to see this report with a general trend downwards of nitro dioxide concentration levels although it was disappointing that the concentration levels in 8 locations have remained above the legal limit, with one site showing an increase.

Councillor Romero added that she was glad that her concerns over displaced traffic have been taken seriously but the results have not fully reflected residents' experiences on roads in Southdown Ward.

Councillor Romero asked for an assurance that mitigating measures would be considered if the findings that more HGVs and other traffic were indeed in Southdown Ward roads.

Councillor Richard Samuel said that he was encouraged that there were some improvements in air quality, yet it was far too early to draw firm conclusions. Traffic patterns during March-June period this year were unrepresentative because many businesses were closed, schools were operating erratically and opportunities to travel were limited. Also, it was unclear if the Council was required to achieve full compliance by December 2021, or March 2022, or some other date to be announced, and some clarity about next steps should be given.

Councillor Samuel congratulated officers and Cabinet Members involved in the process so far.

Councillor Tom Davies welcomed the report by saying that the Council have been moving in the right direction with CAZ with an optimism that future quarterly reports would show gradual improvements in terms of the air pollution levels in the city.

Councillor Tim Ball also welcomed the report by saying that the Council have been moving in the right direction in terms of the reduction of nitro dioxide levels in the city. Councillor Ball expressed his concerns on the level of traffic in Pennyquick Lane, in particular with number of lorries using this road.

Councillor Sarah Warren added that the Council would continue to investigate any issues that were raised in line with the investigation process, as set out in the report and should set a breakdown of any vehicles which might be making a detour, and what has caused an increase in traffic.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Cabinet agreed to:

- 1) Note the successful launch and implementation of the CAZ during a global pandemic, the success in upgrading the local scheduled bus fleet and the successful response to the Financial Assistance Scheme to bring forward the replacement of non-compliant vehicles.
- 2) Note the positive progress which has been made towards improving air quality and associated public health outcomes, together with increasing the proportion of compliant vehicles entering the CAZ and discharging the Ministerial Directions.
- 3) Delegate authority to the Director of Place Management to make any non-material changes to, and authorise the adoption of, the Bath Clean Air Zone Charging (Variation) Order, and for it to have effect from the date of sealing.
- 4) Note the performance of the scheme against the scheme financial model, ensuring it covers its costs of operation and avoids placing an additional burden on the Council and local taxpayers.

63 CLIMATE EMERGENCY PROCUREMENT & COMMISSIONING STRATEGY

Councillor Richard Samuel introduced the report by saying that the Council has spent £200m each year in purchasing goods and services, and alongside the changes in procurement being introduced by the government it was appropriate to revise our policies with the strong imperative of carbon reduction. Councillor Samuel suggested that the Council would seek the assurance from its suppliers that they were doing everything to minimise carbon emissions along the supply chain. Some consequential changes to other Council policies would follow in due course. Councillor Samuel also added that that full reports would be brought back on concrete successes in carbon reduction and sustainability through this policy. The first report would be brought before the Cabinet towards the end of 2022.

Councillor Richard Samuel moved the recommendations.

Councillor Sarah Warren seconded the motion by saying this Council has an excellent track record on sustainable procurement, having worked closely with award winning local company Fresh Range in the past to procure school meal ingredients locally, in a pilot which has been used as a national case study in the Parliamentary Inquiry into improving food procurement, and cited as best practice in the National Food Strategy. The report has provided the framework for innovative practice across the whole range of Council procurement, stepping outside the bounds of business as usual, and stepping up Council's response not only to the climate emergency, but also to tackle modern slavery, by using its influence throughout our supply chain.

Councillor Tim Ball also welcomed the report and thanked the officers who were involved in procurement process.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Cabinet agreed to:

- 1) Adopt the B&NES Procurement & Commissioning Strategy – “Think Climate, Think Local, Think Innovation”,
- 2) Delegate authority to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources to update the Strategy to reflect future changes to the national statutory framework.

64 QTR 1 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE UPDATE 2020/21

Councillor Richard Samuel introduced the report by saying he has introduced new requirements for regular financial reporting (quarterly) so that residents could see with complete clarity how the Council's finances were standing up, whether the Council was under or overspending, in the interests of complete transparency and accountability. The corporate performance update was another report of transparency and accountability to the residents which would become a really useful tool and an official record of what the Council does and what the Council was accountable for. Also, the residents would be able to see what was happening in their community.

Councillor Samuel thanked Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team for bringing this report before the Cabinet.

Councillor Richard Samuel moved the recommendations.

Councillor Tom Davies seconded the motion by saying that the first strategic performance report has marked a very special moment for the Council, and anyone involved in organisational management and reporting in an organisation. This was Council's commitment to transparency about the delivery of services against his key strategic and it would allow residents to hold the Council to account based on the information in the report.

The Chair also thanked Chief Executive and his team on this report.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Cabinet agreed to:

- 1) Note progress on the delivery of the Corporate Strategy and key aspects of the Council's service delivery, details of which are highlighted in report.
- 2) Indicate any other key service areas to be highlighted and included in the strategic indicator report.
- 3) Receive update reports on a quarterly basis.

65 PROPOSED PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDERS TO RESTRICT ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN PUBLIC SPACES IN BATH AND MIDSOMER NORTON

Councillor Dine Romero introduced the report by saying that proposed Public Space Protection Order would address street drinking and anti-social behaviour associated in all wards of Bath and Midsomer Norton and would introduce wider discretionary powers to deal with nuisances or problems which harm the local community's quality of life. This was a new order to replace the one which expired in October 2020. As this was a new order, a full 12-week consultation was required. This has determined that there was still significant public support from those who responded for this measure for both Bath and MSN including Midsomer Norton Town Council, and from local Councillors. Councillor Romero also thanked the officers for the hard work. replaced previous legislation

Councillor Dine Romero moved the recommendations.

Councillor Tim Ball seconded the motion by welcoming the Public Space Protection Order for Bath and Midsomer Norton. Councillor Ball also said that this Order was intended to ensure that people can use and enjoy public spaces, living safely from

anti-social behaviour. An order would specify an area where activities would be taking place that were detrimental to the quality of life of those in the area and could impose conditions and restrictions on people using the specified area.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Cabinet agreed to:

- 1) Consider the outcomes of the consultation on a Public Space Protection Order to restrict street drinking in Bath and Midsomer Norton, as set out.
- 2) Consider the legal criteria for adopting PSPOs, as set out in Paragraph 4 of this report, and particularly the test set out in paragraph 4.1
- 3) In the light of 1) and 2) above make the Bath City Order and Midsomer Norton Order as set out in Appendix 1 of the report
- 4) Request the Head of Legal Services or an authorised signatory on their behalf to sign and seal the Bath City Order and the Midsomer Norton Order.
- 5) Request the Director of People and Policy to undertake publicity relating to any agreed Order and ensure the impact of the PSPOs is kept under review
- 6) Request the Bath and North East Somerset Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership to receive regular monitoring reports on the impact of the PSPOs, including equalities impacts, and updates on support and treatment available for people who misuse alcohol including street drinkers.
- 7) Thank those who were involved in the consultation process including Midsomer Norton Town Council and publicise the outcomes of the consultation.

66 2022/23 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Councillor Richard Samuel introduced the report by reading out the following statement:

'The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is not the council budget – that will come later when more detail about government funding appears in the autumn and leads to the budget and council tax setting in February. The MTFS is however an important health check on the pressures and opportunities facing the council in the medium term and describes actions the council may need to take to balance our finances.

I made it clear on taking office that it was my intention that the council live within its means throughout the whole of this administration's term. That means balancing the books and not spending more than we receive in income, grants and tax. So far, we are on track to achieve that objective for the third year in a row having done so in 19/20 and 20/21. This is an outcome that was never achieved by the previous administration whose waste and inefficiency made me determined to try to do better. This latest MTFS highlights the severe challenges ahead. These have just been added to by the government in their Health and Social Care taxes. Whilst the detail of how this will affect local government remains opaque what we know already is that the employers NI changes will add 750k to our wage bill at a stroke roughly equivalent to 1% on council tax. At this stage we are also unclear how the changes which, are broadly beneficial for most residents requiring care, will be funded. I have to give this stark message. There is no money to top up any shortfalls in government funding. Our finances are already at their limit following government underfunding of covid pressures – another hollow Tory promise. To use a hackneyed phrase – there is no magic money tree.

Turning back to the MTFS Cabinet will recall that to deal with the extreme conditions caused by the pandemic it was necessary to draw from reserves to in effect cash

flow our funding. That draw down must be repaid and is a key component of the MTFs. At the same time, we are currently experiencing a big increase in social care service requests which were fewer during the 2020 lockdowns. Predicting future demand is a fraught process as is what the government's intentions for local government finance in the medium term. The MTFs identifies that potentially £28m will need to be saved over the next five years. It seems at times that the council like others is in perpetual Kafkaesque cycle of continuous cuts where no exit ever arrives.

Within the plan great uncertainties exist about the government's funding plans for local government. We do not know at this point what will be said about social care precepts and council tax capping limits. What we do know is that by avoiding progressive tax rises to pay for health and social care the burden has been placed on working age adults with the imposition of regressive national insurance increases. Everyone should pay for care not just those who are working that is fair but then Tories have never cared about fairness in society.

At a high level what we are trying to do is to match the council's corporate priorities with the finance available. As things stand today there is highly limited scope for service growth and investments are going to be necessarily confined to those that essential or externally funded or where additional income or savings can be made. Sadly, our residents are going to have accept that a period of government-imposed austerity is already here and is likely to continue.'

Councillor Richard Samuel moved the recommendations.

Councillor Kevin Guy seconded the motion by thanking Councillor Samuel and team of officers for bringing this report before the Cabinet, and for the hard work since the start of the pandemic.

Councillor Tim Ball also thanked Councillor Samuel and officers for the role they continued to play in ensuring strong financial position during these challenging times.

Councillor Alison Born added that that the Social Care funding (about £1.8bn), which was announced this week, would go to adult social care for each of the next three years. The NHS would get five times that amount, yet no immediate support has been announced for social care. After years of cuts to local authority budgets, social care funding was at a very low base and services were reaching crisis point.

Councillor Born added that services did not have sufficient staff to assess people in a timely manner, nor to provide care when people needed. Increasing numbers of people were in the community without support and there were problems with staff shortages. Councillor Born also said that staff working in social care would also have to pay additional national insurance, which would reduce rather than increase their pay, and would not help with social care staffing situation.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Cabinet agreed to approve the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

Chair _____

Date Confirmed and Signed _____

Prepared by Democratic Services