

Cabinet

Monday 13 January 2025

PRESENT:

Councillor Evans OBE, in the Chair.

Councillor Laing, Vice Chair.

Councillors Aspinall, Briars-Delve, Coker, Haydon, Penberthy and Cresswell.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Dann and Lowry.

Also in attendance: David Haley (Director Children's Services, Children, Young People and Families), Tracey Lee (Chief Executive) Steve Maddern (Director of Public Health [Virtual]), David Northey (Service Director for Finance), Jamie Sheldon (Senior Governance Advisor) and Gary Walbridge (Strategic Director Adults, Health and Communities).

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 3.29 pm.

Note: The full discussion can be viewed on the webcast of the City Council meeting at www.plymouth.gov.uk. At a future meeting, the Council will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

82. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

83. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held 09 December 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

84. **Questions from the Public**

There were no questions from members of the public.

85. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

86. **Children's Services Update**

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader of the Council, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) introduced the item and highlighted the following:

- a) The financial position for Children's Services had continued to be challenging due to the key pressures of increased cost of placements for children and a national shortage of foster carers resulting in an increase of children placed in

residential care and a small number of children being placed in expensive unregulated settings;

- b) The Family Homes for Plymouth Children Programme was in place to address care and placements outcomes for Children in need as well as to reduce costs overall in the following ways:
 - I. The recruitment of more PCC foster carers;
 - II. Supporting current foster carers to support children with more complex needs
- c) Some progress had been made for a small number of children who had been in residential care and were being supported to move into family placements with council foster carers;
- d) Progress had been made in regards to the reduction in the use of unregistered placements with only three children currently utilising this type of placement;
- e) Autumn 2025 was the expected date for the opening of Council children's residential homes.

Cabinet agreed to note the report.

87. **Local Government Finance Settlement Update**

Councillor Tudor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) introduced the report and highlighted the following:

- a) It was predicted that this would be the last year of annual financial settlements, multi-year settlements would provide a welcome supersession;
- b) The Local Government Association had been an instrumental component in the attainment of multi-year settlements;
- c) National Government had determined that a restoration of financial distribution predicated on levels of deprivation would take place during the incumbent administration's term;
- d) The current settlement had been favourable to the Council in the following areas:
 - I. An Increase in the Social Care Grant;
 - II. The Social Care Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund had been maintained albeit with some reductions;
 - III. A new Recovery Grant had been issued;
 - IV. A new Children's Social Care Prevention Grant, a ring-fenced grant worth £1.4 Million, had been introduced;

- V. The total grants received in the annual settlement had increased from £78 million to £91 million.

David Northey (Service Director for Finance) highlighted the following:

- e) Whilst multi-year settlements had not occurred as of yet, a springtime fiscal event had been promised to local authorities which would begin the process of multi-year settlements;
- f) The New House Bonus had been forecast for deletion, however it had remained in place and offered £32,000;
- g) The Revenue Support Grant, the value of which had been dwindling in past years, had contradictorily seen an upturn of 1.7%, in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI);
- h) Although the financial settlement was only existent in draft form, the indicated settlement placed the Council in a balanced financial position.

The Council agreed to note the report.

88. **Council Tax Base Setting and Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/26**

Councillor Penberthy (Cabinet Member for Housing, Cooperative Development and Communities) introduced the report and highlighted the following:

- a) 85.2% of dwelling within Plymouth were situated within bands A-C, 8.3% band D and 6.2% in band E-G. It was important to note that when reporting Council Tax increases, national media reported against the national average of Band D, which produced with low fidelity the situation for most living within the City;
- b) Changes instigated in 2024 to the amounts levied as Empty Homes Premiums and Second Homes Premiums, which enabled the Authority to charge more, would begin to take effect in 2025;
- c) Given a 97.5% collection rate, Council Tax was forecast to contribute £150 million to the budget;
- d) The current proportion of the local budget which was comprised of Council Tax compared against the same report in 2010 indicated the tax-burden had shifted towards local government and, to that extent, more deprived areas of the country;
- e) Large sections of the report were dedicated to Council Tax Support as it had been an unusually busy year in terms of benefit payments transferred to individuals within Plymouth, specifically higher numbers of Universal Credit and Legacy benefits. Council Tax Support Schemes would not be changing in the subsequent year in order to facilitate the operation of the uptake of these complicated mechanisms and to ensure recipients were sufficiently provided for given the concurrent economic background;

- f) Effectively 20% of the population of Plymouth received Council Tax Support, most of whom were of working age, demonstrating the low-wage economy of the locality.

David Northey (Service Director for Finance) added:

- g) That whilst a technical paper, it was critical that Cabinet and Council review the document in order to render educated analysis of the resource assumptions evident within the final budget documentation.

That Cabinet agreed to recommend to Council –

1. The Council Tax Base for 2025/26 of 76,557 equivalent Band D dwellings as set out in the report.
2. The continuation of the current Council Tax Support scheme and Exceptional Hardship Scheme for 2025/26 with no updates.

89. **Draft Budget Report 2025/26**

Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) introduced the report and highlighted the following:

- a) This was anticipated to be the last budget predicated on a yearly financial settlement;
- b) The paper clearly illustrated the impact additional funding and resources which were availed to the Council and the actions required to mitigate continuing rising demand pressures in all areas;
- c) Large amounts of additional funding had been provided to numerous service areas to bridge the gap in funding, including:
 - I. an additional £12 million to Adult Social Care;
 - II. an uplift in funding to coordinate the response to homelessness within the community, including the provision of emergency accommodation;
 - III. Extra funding provision of £19 million for Children's Social Care and School Transportation costs;
- d) Overall funding, a culmination of revenue Support Grant, Council Tax receipts and business rates, had increased;
- e) £5 million of reserves were drawn-down to render a balanced budget;
- f) The cost of resources, i.e. directorate budgets, had seen an increase of £17 million;
- g) Net additional cost pressures and adjustments total over £50 million pounds, offsets from resources and grants therefore indicates £14 million of savings would be needed;

- h) Whereas the budget may appear superficially dour, public services had not been cut and various services, such as Active Leisure and public libraries remained committed to and key policies such as Net Zero goals were to be maintained.

David Northey (Director for Finance) added the following:

- i) Having provided a balanced-budget was a very positive achievement;
- j) The £13.9 million of savings required to offset pressures were comprised of £10 million of savings with the further £4 million from re-articulation of existing service funds, primarily budget clean ups, which could be achieved relatively easily;
- k) This budget before Cabinet was the draft and that final settlement figures would be introduced in February 2025;
- l) Identified high-risk areas still remained in place and further transparency and forbearance were required to manage these areas.

Councillor Haydon (Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Libraries, Events, Cemeteries and Crematoria) added:

- m) Not only were service levels being retained, in terms of public library provision, services had been expanded. St Budeaux Library had expanded its operating hours and days.

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) added:

- n) Finances being allocated to budgets in reference to the staffing of Educational Healthcare Plans (EHCPs) was appreciated, as it aided in the reduction of anxiety experienced by children, parents and carers.

Councillor Penberthy (Cabinet Member for Housing, Cooperative Development and Communities) added:

- o) The housing crisis experienced by Government during the preceding 21 months was still ongoing and the budget continued the commitment towards support for housing development;
- p) The additional £724,000 granted for homelessness provision would be utilised for targeted prevention work, which has previously proved highly efficacious in providing carry-on savings both financial and humanitarian;
- q) These two decisions displayed a commitment to the Plan for Homes and higher quality housing outcomes in the future.

Councillor Briars-Delve (Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change) added:

- r) The additional £300,000 invested in the Grass-Cutting team last year yielded great results, with the amount of grass cutting which occurred doubling within the year. Continued patronage would capitalise on this foundation;

- s) Continued outlay into the Climate Emergency Investment Fund, an essential component of Net Zero and decarbonisation policies, would yield further savings for the Council across various departments. It was calculated that £500,000 of energy efficiency savings had been garnered through this fund last year and similar savings would continue;
- t) The £65 million from the Capital Programme linked to Net Zero projects was a large amount for the ambitious project.

Councillor Aspinall (Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care) added:

- u) The increased budget of £750,000 allocated to the Public Health Unit was welcomed as it would ensure integral preventative work, such as smoking prevention, within the community.

Councillor Tudor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) added:

- v) Conceptualisation of the sheer scope and scale of Local Government budgets was a potentially onerous task and the more Cabinet Members and Councillors comprehended its complexity and immensity, the higher the propensity for constituents and taxpayers to understand in kind.

Cabinet agreed to:

1. Note the report, and that it was subject to change in line with any Final Settlement adjustments and changes required as proposals are developed.
2. Recommend the Report to the Budget Scrutiny Committee

90. **Fees and Charges**

Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) introduced the item and highlighted:

- a) In general, as the cost of providing services increases, so in turn do the discretionary fees and charges to cover these costs.

David Northey (Service Director for Finance) added:

- b) The uplift of 5% was greater than Consumer Price Index (CPI) figures of 1.7% generated by the Office for National Statistics, however the figure was compensatory for overall uplifts which had been rising across the year. In addition, certain factors within the CPI, specifically labour costs, were rising quicker than the index as a whole and those factors disproportionately impact the Council to a much greater extent.

Cabinet agreed to:

- I. The uplift of discretionary fees and charges by at least 5% + rounding, from 1 April 2025.

91. **Leader's Announcements**

Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) made the following announcements:

- a) The National Government had introduced a framework for anticipated sub-national economic development, amongst other development, with the publication of the English Devolution White Paper in which was the proposal to form 'Strategic Combined Authorities';
- b) The Council was tasked with the construction of a case proposal to highlight the Authority's aspiration, within the framework of numerous combined authorities within the South West, for the manner in which its economic development would proceed, i.e. marine development and the Dockyard, to strategically negotiate for resources with other combined authorities;
- c) Economic Development growth was already a key facet of the current administration's goals and had resulted in £28 million of income generated, and investment pipeline of £5.5 billion pounds, capital investment secured of £280 million and 7,000 jobs secured. These factors had resulted in the PricewaterhouseCooper survey awarding the City the number one place in the country for growth;
- d) Further investments in the community included: £23 million in Millbay Port Facilities, £32.5 million into a new diagnostics centre at Colin Campbell Court, the continued development of the Derriford District Centre receiving £91 million of investment, £25 million of Freeport funding, £7 million to Oceangate marine innovation zone, the Bowhays direct development currently underway which received £8 million, £10 million dedicated to Tinside refurbishment, Mount Batten centre redevelopment and Foulston Park development, the refurbishment of the Guildhall receiving £8 million, the Civic Centre which received £75 million investment and £53.4 million approved for development projects at Millbay, Embankment Road and Weston Mill;
- e) The plan for the national Government's Strategic Combined Authorities was, in essence, a mechanism for strategic cooperation between local organisations to draw down cash and power from Westminster. It was not a plan to combine Local Authorities into a single "super-council", as reported in the media, but another layer in which to cooperate.

92. **Cabinet Member Updates** (Verbal Report)

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) made the following announcements:

- a) Offered gratitude for the contributions made by the community who donated Christmas gifts for care leavers and their children. Over 250 gifts were received as well as donations purchasing specific gifts and Christmas dinner;
- b) Congratulations was passed on to two retired Foster for Plymouth carers, Dave and Coleen Healy, who received British Empire Medals in the King's New Year's Honour's List;

- c) The three annual 'You Can Do It' Awards ceremonies for children in care and care experienced young people took place in September and November with record numbers of nominations and attendees. 1,231 nominations were received and over 200 Children, young people, carers and their guests attended;
- d) Christmas at the Box had been a very successful time, with 452 guests attending the sold-out 'Breakfast with Santa' event;
- e) New exhibitions opening at the Box in 2025 included: 'John Lyon's Carnavalesque' on 08 February, 'Windrush in the Far South West' from 18 January and Osman Yousefzada's 'When Will We Be Good Enough' which was operating until 09 March and the Jeremy Deller project "The Triumph of Art";
- f) The Devonport Community History day at The Box had been a success, with over 200 people attending, 60% of whom were visiting for the first time.

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) made the following announcement:

- g) Examination results from 2024 had displayed promising results. Early Years outcomes for 2024 improved on the previous year with 66.7% of children achieving an overall good level of development, moving the City closer to the national average of 68%. Phonics Screening Check outcomes continued to remain strong at 81.2% in 2024, above the national average of 80%. Key Stage Two results for Reading, writing and mathematics combined had improved again on the previous year.

Councillor Penberthy (Cabinet Member for Housing, Cooperative Development and Communities) made the following announcements:

- h) Three separate Housing schemes under the Plans for Homes had recently been opened within the Authority:
 - I. Sterling House in Honicknowle. This was a complex of 25 high-quality affordable dwellings which had been in development for some time in cooperation with Livewest. The housing had been taken up by families and eight veterans;
 - II. Colebrook Road in Plympton. This property commenced construction before the Covid-19 Pandemic however the developer unfortunately incurred bankruptcy. Having been restarted with £300,000 funding from the Council, 43 affordable homes were made available.
 - III. Broadland Gardens was the first time the Council had developed homes itself in around 40 years. Previously used as a youth centre, the previously derelict land now homed 10 dwellings.

93. **LGA Update**

Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) made the following announcements:

- a) The Local Government Association (LGA) was deeply involved with the English Devolution White Paper and stated “the LGA's position is that every Council in England needs to be able to secure Devolution but that it works for them, their local economies and their residents and, whilst different areas will have strong views on what devolution looks like, genuine Devolution of powers and resources can play a huge role in promoting inclusive economic growth, creating jobs and improving public services”;
- b) Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA, had been heading the Independent Commission on Social Care and had been calling on the voice of Local Government to take a prominent role in the review of social care.