

Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at online meeting on Thursday 25 February 2021 at 2.30 pm

Present: Councillor David Hitchiner, Leader of the Council (Chairperson)
Councillor Felicity Norman, Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairperson)

Councillors Ellie Chowns, Pauline Crockett, John Harrington, Liz Harvey and Ange Tyler

Cabinet support members in attendance Councillors John Hardwick, Peter Jinman and Alan Seldon

Group leaders / representatives in attendance Councillors Terry James, Jonathan Lester, Bob Matthews and Trish Marsh

Scrutiny chairpersons in attendance Councillors Elissa Swinglehurst, Carole Gandy and Jonathan Lester

Officers in attendance: Director for economy and place, Acting Deputy Chief Executive, Acting Deputy Chief Executive (S151), Director for adults and communities, Head of Corporate Performance, Assistant Director Safeguarding and Family Support, Interim Head of Legal Services and Head of care commissioning

69. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Davies.

70. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

71. MINUTES

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2021 and 28 January 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

72. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 5 - 8)

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 1 to the minutes.

73. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS (Pages 9 - 10)

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 2 to the minutes.

74. HEREFORDSHIRE MARKET POSITION STATEMENT 2020-2025 FOR ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

The cabinet member adults and communities introduced the item and highlighted some of the key points. She thanked the adults and wellbeing scrutiny committee for reviewing the document and their recommendations were set out in an appendix to the report.

In discussion of the report cabinet members noted that:

- The document covered services the council commissioned, the wider market and how to respond to the needs of communities in the future;
- The design of the document was well received;
- Unpaid carers made a huge contribution and a review of the carers strategy was currently underway to make sure they had access to the right services and support;

- Officers had explored the reasons for placing individuals out of county, while some of these placements might be down to being unable to meet specific needs within the county, other individuals chose to be placed further away to be near family members;
- It was important to have the right choices and options available to support individuals to remain as independent as possible for as long as possible;
- The document would help care providers to make good investment decisions to develop their businesses and work effectively with the council;
- Plans were being developed to provide some council-owned care facilities as it was important to have a balance of provision;
- The document highlighted the role that family members and communities could play in providing support structures;
- improvements to help those with care needs and their families understand the system and the options available were welcomed;
- it was recognised that while care at home would often be the best outcome this might not always be the case.

The chairperson of the adult and wellbeing scrutiny committee reflected on some of the comments from the committee. She noted that the majority of the recommendations made by the committee had been accepted and that many had already been actioned. The committee had acknowledged that it was not a statutory requirement to produce this document but recognised the value of it and praised officers for their work on it. Overall the committee was impressed with the level of engagement with providers and the proactive way the council was working with the market to ensure resilience and adequacy to meet the needs of residents now and in the future.

Group leaders were invited to present the views and queries of their group. The document was widely supported and praised for its design. It was noted that:

- care should be taken in the language used so that it was not too business focussed and it was suggested that references to 'beds' should be replaced with 'placements';
- home care providers should be well monitored to ensure the quality of the care provided;
- it was not known how many individuals were placed in Herefordshire from outside the county but it was not believed to be a high proportion;
- support for carers was important as they were valuable assets;
- support was needed to help individuals move to properties which were more suited to them to allow them to continue to live independently as an alternative to a care placement;
- there was support for keeping individuals in a family environment where possible;
- it was recognised that the coronavirus pandemic had made people reconsider their situations;
- the challenges of the aging population were recognised.

The cabinet member health and adult wellbeing thanked those present for their contributions and undertook to make final adjustments to the wording of the document where possible prior to publication of the final version.

It was resolved that:

- a) cabinet approves the attached draft Market Position Statement 2020-25 in appendix a; and**
- b) that cabinet approves the response to the scrutiny recommendation in appendix b.**

75. QUARTER 3 BUDGET & PERFORMANCE REPORT

The cabinet member finance and corporate services introduced the item. It was noted that this was a backward looking report on quarter 3. Budget pressures were generally due to the impact of covid and had been encountered across the council in one way or another. The cabinet member noted the support in the form of grants that had been received from the government which was currently expecting to cover about 70% of the budget pressures. The council continued to discuss some of the detail of government support packages with the relevant departments and had conducted quite an intense in year savings programme. The coronavirus had also impacted on progress on the capital programme as summarised in the report.

The cabinet member explained that performance was being measured against the three main sections in the county plan and against the delivery plan.

Cabinet members highlighted progress and challenges within their respective portfolios and thanked officers and partners for their work during the pandemic.

Group leaders were invited to present the views and queries of their groups. It was noted that:

- work on promoting Herefordshire as a staycation destination had been a success, some of the media work had been paused due to the additional lockdown but was ready to resume this year;
- the cyber centre building on the Hereford Enterprise Zone had been completed and the next stage was to recruit occupants for the building, working with the University of Wolverhampton, as soon as covid restrictions allowed;
- it was suggested that while the completion of the cyber centre and shell store developments were welcome, they would have benefitted from delivery of the southern link road for improved access;
- the reduction in the number of looked after children was welcomed and the cabinet member children and families confirmed that numbers were continuing to go down;
- it was suggested that an item on the planning system be include in future reports to highlight the number of applications currently on hold due to the moratorium on housing resulting from phosphate levels;
- a query was raised regarding a news article on the Herefordshire dedicated schools grant, the S151 officer advised that the article was believed to be factually incorrect and that the grant was one of the few in the country to be balanced. A written response would be provided with further details.

It was resolved that:

Cabinet reviewed performance and financial outturn for quarter 3 2020/21, as set out in appendices A - I, and has not identified any additional actions to be considered to achieve future improvement.

The meeting ended at 4.18 pm

Chairperson

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 25 February 2021**Question 1****Mr A Lowther, Whitchurch****To: cabinet member, environment, economy and skills**

The lack of space for businesses to expand in, or to move to, Ross has been a problem for many years. It has now reached a level not seen in decades; to the best of my knowledge there are no industrial units for sale or rent in Ross at all, and only one very small plot on difficult ground on which one could build.

We have hundreds of new houses being built in Ross, what provision is being made to provide land for businesses to start, to grow or to move to Ross so residents can work locally and businesses, who would prefer to remain local, do not have to set up or expand outside of the county?

Response

We recognise the critical contribution Ross one Wye and the other four market towns make to the county's economy as a whole, and are fully committed to supporting the growth of the towns. As you mention in your question, we need to ensure that within Ross on Wye, as with all of the towns, that we seek to achieve a balance between housing growth and employment growth enabling people to live and work locally, providing the conditions for existing businesses to develop as well attracting new investment.

To understand local needs and opportunities in each of the market towns the council has commissioned the development of Economic Development Investment Plans to support recovery from Covid 19 and enable their future growth. Through local consultation and engagement the development of the Ross on Wye Economic Development Investment Plan is considering the need/ demand for additional employment land in the area, including how council owned sites such as Model Farm could be utilised. The council has undertaken detailed investigations into the development of a phase one Enterprise Park on the Model Farm site, but the very significant costs of the proposed scheme do not represent value for money at this time. Therefore, part of the focus of the Economic Development Investment Plan is to consider alternative opportunities to develop this and/ or other sites in the town.

Question 2**Mr J Brechtmann, Kingland****To: cabinet member, environment, economy and skills**

As the housing moratorium moves rapidly towards the two year landmark, and the catastrophic social and economic devastation caused by this becomes more evident do Herefordshire Council have any explicit plans to help support and protect the local highly skilled and valuable construction sector and its ancillary services?

Many good businesses, through no fault of their own, are missing many years worth of planning approvals with a significant loss of work and the consequent impact upon both jobs, skills and inward investment in Herefordshire. The economic development harm seems to have been overlooked but should be of grave concern to us all, not least the loss of section 106 monies, New Homes Bonus and potential investment in innovative green advances for homes - plus the diminishing housing delivery and vulnerability this creates for our communities.

Response

The council is very much aware of the very significant impact that the current restriction on planning approvals has had on the local economy for the past 16 months, and we agree that this is of grave concern. We very much value the local construction sector, and share the frustration of local construction businesses that they are having to bear the brunt of the costs of this problem, when the best available evidence shows the construction industry is contributing significantly less to the phosphate problem than other sectors.

Unfortunately no direct funding support is available to support affected businesses at this time, however we are urgently working with national government and numerous partners including the Environment Agency, Natural England, Welsh Water and the Wye & Usk Foundation Rivers Trust to identify solutions to reduce the level of phosphates in the river Lugg so that headroom can be created to allow development again. For example, and in addition to our joint efforts with partners on the Nutrient Management Board, the council is currently leading a £3m innovative project to establish a number of integrated wetlands in the River Lugg catchment area. These wetlands will further reduce phosphate levels in the special area of conservation and will lead towards easing of the restrictions. The council is also exploring the potential to purchase and repurpose land with high phosphate loads within in the river Lugg catchment area as a further solution to reduce phosphate levels.

Additionally the council is finalising a new interim phosphate delivery plan and will shortly be beginning work on a new Supplementary Planning Document on river pollution. The phosphate delivery plan will be published shortly and will include a new phosphate calculator to help calculate the phosphate loads of new developments, a suite of proposed mitigation measures to assist developers to help offset the phosphate load from developments, and also to develop a potential phosphate trading platform as a further and alternative solution to offsetting phosphate loads.

The Council has had to lead on these initiatives in the absence of more central support, whereas elsewhere in the UK where similar problems have arisen it has been the government agencies that have taken the lead. We continue to press for more action from regulatory partners, and more support from local MPs.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for your considered reply. We are aware of, and appreciate, the complex work that is taking place to create headroom for development, although we remain concerned about the slow pace and 'risk averse' approach to housing development - despite the apportionment evidence showing that new housing is responsible for less than 0.2% of the phosphate load annually. Construction is fundamentally important to the county for jobs, housing delivery, revenue, skills, innovation and investment.

Can the council please confirm a scheduled timetable for the removal of the moratorium on housing? This is desperately needed to enable local companies to plan ahead and potentially save jobs and businesses, many of which are already being lost or suffering under intolerable trading conditions not of their making.

Response

The cabinet member environment economy and skills responded that she appreciated the situation was having a very difficult impact on construction companies in the county and this was very much regretted. The cabinet member explained that it was difficult to set out a specific timetable because it depended on progress that the council could make on the measures it was taking in the absence of as much action from partners as the council would ideally like. She

assured the questioner that the council was working as hard as possible to press ahead with schemes such as integrated wetlands and a phosphate trading system. A written response with detail on the current timetable was promised.

The cabinet member infrastructure and transport also made a response stating that he understood the frustration but that the council did not have control of the agencies that were responsible for monitoring the phosphate levels and general health of the rivers. The council continued to lobby local MPs to push for more intervention from the government.

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 25 February 2021

Question 1

Councillor Nigel Shaw, Bromyard Bringsty Ward

I was pleased to hear that the Councils contractual disputes with Amey have now been settled. Can the cabinet member confirm the total sum already released from the settlement reserve for road repairs and also the sum remaining in the settlement reserve which, I presume, he now intends to be spent on road repairs additional to the annual plan in the coming financial year?

Response

A sum of £5.545 million has already been released from the settlement reserve. The balance on the reserve is £3.3 million. Cabinet will consider the best options for releasing the reserve now the dispute has been settled.

Supplementary Question

Can the Cabinet Member reassure councillors that this sum will be spent to rectify those issues for which it was awarded in respect of matters pertaining to the Amey contract?

Response

The cabinet member finance and corporate services responded that the funds would be spent in a value for money way. The council now had a number of different ways for determining value for money and would be looking at the council's priorities for the best way to spend the funds and how to get the best return for the people of Herefordshire. The detail of how this might be done was yet to be determined.

The cabinet member transport and infrastructure added that he would be making the case to spend as much of these funds on his portfolio as possible.

