

MINUTES of the meeting of Cabinet held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday 18 December 2009 at 11.00 am

Present: Councillor RJ Phillips (Chairman)

Councillors: LO Barnett, AJM Blackshaw, H Bramer, JA Hyde, JG Jarvis, PD Price and DB Wilcox

In attendance: Councillors WLS Bowen, PJ Edwards, TM James, RI Matthews and PM Morgan

49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor JP French, Cabinet Member Corporate and Customer Services and Human Resources.

The Chairman formally advised Cabinet of the resignation of Councillor ACR Chappell as the Labour Group Leader and stated that Councillor UA Attfield would take up the role. The Chairman, on behalf of those in attendance, expressed his appreciation for work and commitment given by Councillor ACR Chappell in his role as Labour Group Leader over a significant period of time.

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

51. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Prior to consideration of the agenda, Cabinet received presentations on Herefordshire's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) results 2009 and on the outcome of the Care Quality Commission's (CQC) assessment of the adult social care services which had been announced the previous week.

In relation to Herefordshire's CAA results, the Corporate Policy and Research Manager highlighted to Cabinet key references from the first round of the new area and organisational assessments. Herefordshire's area assessment (which gauged how effective public services were in working together and with partners in other sectors to meet needs across the county):

- acknowledged that the Council, NHS Herefordshire and partners had publicly provided a '*detailed and frank assessment of the county*' with '*real efforts being made .. to improve the way organisations talk to people and get their feedback*'.
- acknowledged the close working between the Council and NHS Herefordshire, and the associated improvements in services and better outcomes for people.
- did not give rise to any surprises because all the key issues had been identified in the self-evaluations and, where these had highlighted area for improvement, the inspectors had been satisfied that appropriate actions were being taken to deal with them; this was why there were no red flags (areas of concern not being addressed).
- did not award the county any green flags (awarded nationally for outstanding achievement from which other areas could learn)

- but did highlight many positive areas in terms of what was being done or achieved, including in relation to health, crime, housing, the environment and the economy.

The Council's organisational assessment was assessed as:

- performing well in Managing Performance (3 out of 4) (a significant improvement) with the Council having a good understanding of the needs of its citizens and sound plans to meet future challenges.
- performing adequately in its Use of Resources (2 out of 4). The Commission acknowledged improvements in the Use of Resources, but the test had been made much tougher than in previous years; the assessment did, however, say that the overall value for money was provided and that robust decision-making processes were in place.

In taking these two previous areas of assessment together, the Council was deemed to be performing adequately overall, with the explanation that the Commission would need to await the results of planned major improvements before a higher rating could be given. The Commission's summary was that the Council was on a springboard for improvement.

Compared with other local authorities in the region, Herefordshire Council:

- was one of six out of the 13 top-tier authorities to be rated 3 (performing well) for Managing Performance (the other authorities were rated 2);
- was one of the eight out of 13 to receive a rating of 2 (performing adequately) for Use of Resources (the other authorities were rated 3).

In terms of the Area Assessment, whereas Herefordshire had received neither red nor green flags, three of the 13 top-tier authorities in the region had received green and six red.

In discussion Cabinet noted that whilst Children's Services and Adult Social Care had improved it was acknowledged that improvement work was ongoing. The work undertaken by Herefordshire Housing was acknowledged and it was noted that the Chairman would write to the Chairman of Herefordshire Housing in recognition of the improvement made in delivering services to citizens. The role of scrutiny and its recommendations to Cabinet was noted.

The Associate Director of Integrated Commissioning (Acting DASS) drew Cabinet's attention to the assessment of the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the independent regulator of health and social care to the Council's Adult Social Care (ASC) services. The assessment:

- Stated that ASC service was performing well.
- Advised that of the outcomes measured, six were performing well with three noted as performing adequately.
- Highlighted the following issues as positive; the robust management of Putting People First and Safeguarding; the deep partnership with health and the potential to tackling issues collectively and the major improvement in market management and commissioning.
- Reflected nervousness about the limited track record. A self assessment to be carried out from May 2010 would provide an opportunity to evidence activity and build upon the existing solid foundations.

In referring to the current challenges to performance, the Cabinet was advised that; a safeguarding inspection could take place anytime from April 2010; it was recognised that there were variances in the Care Homes market which needed to be addressed; funding was stretched.

In discussion Cabinet acknowledged that increasingly difficult decisions would be made in the future about service delivery and improvement due to limited available budget. The importance of the hospitals, their use and effective bed management was emphasised.

Cabinet noted the content of both presentations.

52. PROVISIONAL 2010/11 LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE SETTLEMENT

The Cabinet Member for Resources introduced the report which outlined the provisional 2010/11 Local Government Finance Settlement which provided for an increase of 4% in Formula Grant in the last year of the Comprehensive Spending Review to an overall position of £57.584million. The report additionally outlined the process leading to the setting of council tax at full Council on 5 March 2010. The Cabinet Member advised that confirmation of the 2010/11 Local Government Finance Settlement was expected after 6 January 2010.

The Director of Resources welcomed the provisional 4% increase but emphasised that this figure could be reviewed in light of the prospect of worsening public sector funding issues. He advised that the projected 3.9% increase in council tax accounted for within the Medium Term Financial Plan would not be achievable and that a probable lower level at which the council tax would be set would add to the Council's financial pressures. The Director highlighted to Cabinet the Personal Care at Home Bill currently under consultation, which would place additional pressures on the area based grant and on Adult Social Care, the possible impact of which was currently being scoped.

The Chairman drew Cabinet's attention to the potential added financial burden to local authorities' current budgets with the possible introduction of free personal care, and especially so to areas of maturing population such as Herefordshire. Representation was being made by local government Leaders to Government on the Personal Care at Home Bill. The need to be mindful of monies to and spend from the area based grant was also highlighted.

RESOLVED

THAT:

- (a) The 2010/22 settlement be noted; and**
- (b) The timetable for setting the Council Tax be agreed.**

53. JOINT STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2009

The Chairman introduced the report which outlined the key findings from the latest Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), a document produced jointly with NHS Herefordshire.

The Director of Public Health, the Corporate Policy and Research Manager and the Associate Director of Integrated Commissioning (Acting DSS) collectively presented the report. It was stated that the JSNA:

- provided a fuller understanding of the main health and social care needs of the people of Herefordshire and went beyond the current legal requirement for these assessments to identify health and social care needs.
- was a living document which would incorporate timely information (e.g more refined ward profiles) upon which informed judgements could be formed in relation to future decisions about plans, programmes and budget allocations.

- summary as well as the full document (both written in plain English) would be made available publicly and circulated widely; there would also be public access to technical appendices via electronic links on the web-site.
- provided a common starting point for dialogue and a common understanding of issues, the basis on which partner organisations and communities could work together to tackle the areas of greatest need and reduce inequalities.

Cabinet commented on the usefulness of the JSNA in informing decisions relating to the prioritisation of resources, as well as its value in raising awareness within communities and with voluntary and third sector partners (including parish and town councils) about needs and the choices that had to be made in trying to meet them .

Responding to a question relating to ambulance response rates, the Director of Public Health stated that work was being undertaken with colleagues to overcome operational problems and build in appropriate local solutions commensurate with the problem. The rurality of the county was acknowledged as a challenge to the ambulance service; however the deterioration in response rates was not, in the view of the Director of Public Health, due to the amalgamation of ambulance services. The Chief Executive commented that the Primary Care Trusts, as the commissioners of the ambulance services, were working collectively to consider realistic and affordable ambulance response times which needed to be co-ordinated with such initiatives as First Respondents. An assessment was required to define the best responses to differing situations and to ensure that the ambulance service was appropriately available. Cabinet requested that localised ambulance response rates continue to be made available.

Responding to a query relating to the high rates of young people who smoke, drink alcohol and get drunk, the Director of Public Health advised Cabinet that work was being undertaken in schools to encourage changes in behaviours.

RESOLVED

THAT:

- (a) the key findings form the latest Joint Strategic Needs Assessment by noted; and**
- (b) regard should be had to the key findings in future plans, commissioning of services and budget decisions.**

54. INTERIM REPORT ON SHARED SERVICES

The Assistant Chief Executive, Legal and Democratic presented the report and drew Cabinet's attention to substantial progress of both the Shared Services and Herefordshire Connects Programmes. Cabinet was advised that a multi-disciplinary, multi skilled transition team was being established, drawn from the three partners, to progress key activities. In delivering the Shared Services project potential savings of between £3.4million to £5.4million had been identified. It was acknowledged that there would be an impact on staffing, however it was hoped that this would be minimised and that the Council would remain an employer of choice. Cabinet was advised that a communications management plan had been developed to provide regular communications to staff and stakeholders.

During discussion Cabinet acknowledged that similar shared services arrangements were being developed across the public sector and that a planned approach to deliver savings would help protect public services and functions to the county's citizens. Cabinet stated that it was imperative that high quality services continued to be delivered

during a period of change. In response to a question raised, the Director of Resources confirmed that all Herefordshire Connects savings were projected to be made over the next three financial years.

RESOLVED:

THAT Cabinet

- (a) Note progress made on Shared Services; and**
- (b) Note that a further key decision report will be brought forward by the end of the financial year setting out options and timelines for the transition to shared services.**

55. HEREFORDSHIRE AND WORCESTERSHIRE WASTE ARRANGEMENTS

RESOLVED that the item be deferred to a Cabinet Meeting to be held on 7 January 2010.

56. INTENTIONS PAPER - BROADBAND IN HEREFORDSHIRE DEVELOPING A COUNTY APPROACH

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Community Services presented the report which sought Cabinet's approval to the approach for addressing the challenges of Broadband in the county as outlined in the report's accompanying intentions paper. Cabinet was advised of broadband importance to the county in enabling businesses to be competitive and communities to access services. The intentions paper outlined a target for improvement and the options for enhancing broadband coverage. This includes improved IT infrastructure and instigate a community based solution based on pilot areas in a number of geographic locations. Cabinet was advised that the vision for 2012 was for all homes and premises in the county to have affordable access to broadband at speeds of 2Mbps. The vision for 2015 and 2020 was for significantly higher broadband access and download speeds. The Head of Economic and Community Services acknowledged that the vision was ambitious however the focus on speeds would support the future delivery of Herefordshire's public services.

The Chairman stated that he had met with leaders from other rural authorities to discuss broadband in the context of rural areas, which had not in his opinion been addressed in the recent Government publication 'Digital Britain'. Rural authorities were collectively lobbying Government to address this issue which was crucial to the quality of life of citizens and the economic wellbeing of rural areas.

RESOLVED:

THAT:

- (a) the approach to be addressing the challenges of Broadband outlined in the Intentions Paper be agreed; and**
- (b) it be noted that the Intentions Paper forms the basis of a paper for wider circulations.**

57. JOINT CORPORATE PROPERTY STRATEGY

The Cabinet Member for Resources introduced the report on the Joint Corporate Property Strategy (2009-12) which had been discussed and agreed by the Board of NHS Herefordshire (NHS) on 17 December 2009. It was stated that the Joint Corporate Property Strategy supported the organisational improvement and greater efficiency requirements of the Council and NHS. The process, key components, aims, benefits and next steps were outlined in a presentation given by the Head of Asset Management and Property Services and it was stated that such a joint approach was believed to be the first in the country. The strategy's vision would be delivered through a hub and spoke model, the hub being the strong shared administrative centre based at Plough Lane, the spokes being a series of co-locality offices based around the Market Towns and Golden Valley. Other components would complement the property portfolio e.g Town Hall and Shire Hall.

In discussion Cabinet:

- welcomed the purchase of the Plough Lane site at such a competitive price.
- Acknowledged the future savings in CO2.
- Recognised the opportunity for surplus land to be considered for different uses in the future.
- Noted the maintenance costs and back log of work required on the existing property portfolio.

Responding to questions raised assurance was provided by the Director of Resources that the timing of the disposal of surplus property would be considered carefully in order to optimise the capital receipts. The Chief Executive additionally advised Cabinet that the funding for the various projects within the programme of works was not dependent on the monies raised through the disposal programme. The Head of Asset Management and Property Services advised that the authority maintained a register of Council properties containing asbestos.

RESOLVED

THAT: The Joint Corporate Property Strategy be approved.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED :

That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12(A) of the Act as indicated below.

This item disclosed information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

58. COMMUNITY NETWORK UPDATE

This item sought the endorsement of Cabinet to the recommended supplier from the Community Network Procurement project.

Cabinet endorsed the results of the procurement exercise and approved the awarding of the contract for the supply of Telecoms (Infrastructure and Connectivity) to the supplier recommended in the report.

The meeting ended at 1.00 pm

CHAIRMAN