

MINUTES of the meeting of Cabinet held at Council Chamber, The Shire Hall, St Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Thursday 1 December 2016 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor AW Johnson (Chairman)
Councillor PM Morgan (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors H Bramer, DG Harlow, JG Lester, PD Price and P Rone

Cabinet support members in attendance Councillors BA Durkin, JA Hyde, NE Shaw and EJ Swinglehurst

Group leaders in attendance Councillors RI Matthews and AJW Powers

Scrutiny chairmen in attendance Councillors WLS Bowen

Other councillors in attendance: Councillors PE Crockett, J Hardwick, D Summers and EPJ Harvey

Officers in attendance: Alistair Neill, Geoff Hughes, Jo Davidson, Martin Samuels, Claire Ward and Josie Rushgrove

60. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

61. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

62. MINUTES

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

63. YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2016/17

The cabinet member for young people and children's wellbeing introduced the report. He noted that very few children in Herefordshire were involved in youth offending and that the general picture was encouraging. The levels of both offending and reoffending in Herefordshire had decreased.

The head of west mercia youth offending service outlined the purpose of the youth justice plan and the information it contained.

The cabinet member for health and wellbeing noted that the clinical commission groups (CCGs) across the west mercia area were not represented on the youth justice service management board and had not signed the plan. She asked whether the youth offending service was receiving the necessary support and commitment from health bodies. The

head of west mercia youth offending service responded that the west mercia area covered 7 CCGs and that they all made a resource contribution. In Herefordshire for example a post was seconded from CAMHS to provide mental health support. He reported that a representative from Shropshire CCG had recently agreed to join the board and would act as a conduit for the other CCGs in the west mercia area.

A group leader noted that the second highest number of offences in Herefordshire had been for drug related offences and asked what was being done to address this. The head of the youth offending service stated that drug offences were generally the second or third most common offence in all the areas the service worked across and that specialist support was in place.

A group leader asked how many of the young offenders in the report were looked after children. The head of the youth offending service reported that 12 of the 65 young people recorded were looked after by Herefordshire Council and that a further 13 were looked after by other authorities.

A cabinet support member noted the potential for work with parish councils on reparation projects and asked how the service was reaching out to parish councils. The head of the youth offending service responded that the example set out in the youth justice plan had been circulated through the parish council network. He asked that councillors raise awareness of such projects with their parishes.

A scrutiny chair asked if the youth offending service had known about the looked after children in Herefordshire placed by other authorities. The head of the youth offending service confirmed that they had known as the home authority of the young person would have had to refer them to the service in Herefordshire. He also stated that children's homes were required to notify the authority in which the young person was resident as well as the authority providing care when dealing with young offenders.

Resolved that:

- a) the Youth Justice Plan be recommended to Council for approval.**

64. ADOPTION REPORT AND ADOPTION SERVICE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The cabinet member for young people and children's wellbeing introduced the report. He noted that the adoption service was performing well and had been judged as good at its most recent inspection by Ofsted. A total of 29 children were adopted in 2015/16 which was an unprecedented number. The cabinet member stated that the council should be proud of the reputation of its adoption service but that it should not be complacent. He noted that the work of the service supported objectives in the children and young people's plan and reduced costs to the council.

The adoption service manager outlined the adoption process. She explained the stages each child would go through and noted that adoption would only proceed if it was demonstrably in the best interests of the child. Court proceedings were sometimes lengthy and it could take time to find suitable adopters, especially when the child had complex needs. As a result the manager noted that the figures in the report represented a snapshot of the point children had reached in the process. Some of the children who had adoption orders granted in 2015/16 would have first been considered for adoption in previous years.

The adoption service manager reported that overall there had been a national downturn in the number of children approved for adoption by the courts but that Herefordshire had

seen an increase over the same period. The number of people coming forward as potential adopters had decreased both nationally and locally.

The cabinet member for health and wellbeing welcomed the report and congratulated the service on their performance. She noted the positive benefits for the children concerned and for the council in terms of lower draw on resources. She encouraged officers to continue working towards an outstanding rating in future inspections.

A group leader asked which agencies were responsible for cases failing to meet the target for stage 1 of the process and what the reasons were. The adoption service manager explained that at stage 1 the council would request information on potential adopters which included criminal records checks from relevant police forces, medical reports and references from a range of different sources. She stated that as stage 1 was adopted led the onus was on the potential adopter to provide the information requested. She reported that in general checks with the local police force were completed promptly but that where a potential adopter had lived outside the area or abroad this could take much longer.

A group leader asked how many cases that reached court were refused. The head of looked after children replied that although precise details were not at hand the numbers were very small as it was usual to reach that stage in the process without having explored all other avenues.

The cabinet member for infrastructure asked if cases of siblings needing adoption presented a particular problem and what the impact could be if placements broke down. The head of looked after children responded that it was sometimes difficult to find families willing to adopt multiple children at the same time. Where the sibling group was more than 2 children it was especially difficult. The adoption service would always consider the impact of separation of siblings and whether it would be appropriate to maintain contact between siblings adopted separately. If it was judged important to maintain family links then children could remain looked after.

The cabinet member for young people and children's wellbeing stated that children came into the adoption system for a wide variety of reasons.

A cabinet support member asked if the adoption service reviewed social media when considering the suitability of prospective adopters. The adoption service manager stated that this was not currently a formal part of the process although information would sometimes be brought to their attention. The reviewing of social media content was being discussed by adoption agencies nationally but there were many issues that would need to be considered in any policy change. The manager noted that adopters were given advice in training about the use of social media after the adoption to protect both children and their birth families from inappropriate or unwanted contact.

The leader asked what the current average length of time to achieve adoption was. The adoption service manager referred to the figures given in the report namely that the overall average was 21 months but that this included some extreme outliers which skewed the figures.

The leader asked if the progress of adopted children was tracked and compared to other children. The adoption service manager explained that once the adoption was complete the child was treated as though they were born into that family and no specific tracking of this nature was in place. Adoptive families were encouraged to contact the service if they needed help and support after the adoption. National research showed that adoption was the best outcome for children in most cases.

A cabinet support member noted that Herefordshire had excellent foster carers so that where there were delays in the adoption process this did not mean that children were not receiving care and support.

The leader thanked the adoption team for their work and recognised the service as a source of pride for the council.

Resolved that:

- a) the performance of the adoption service as outlined at appendix A to the report be reviewed, risks to achievement of objectives were noted and relevant mitigating actions approved; and**
- b) the statement of purpose attached at appendix B to the report be approved.**

65. 2017 / 18 CAPITAL BUDGET

The leader expressed his thanks to all those who had contributed to the formation of the capital budget report. The contents of the report being self-explanatory he asked for feedback from the meeting.

A group leader noted that Herefordshire Council had higher debt as a percentage of net revenue budget than all other unitary authorities. He asked if this was being carefully monitored. The head of corporate finance responded that the borrowing included investment in schemes such as the energy from waste plant which were expected to generate returns for the council in the future. Total borrowing was below the council's threshold and officers were comfortable that the borrowing was affordable.

A group leader asked if a final cost package for the city link road could be provided when the scheme was complete and whether the recommendations made by the external auditor in relation to accounting had been noted. The head of corporate finance responded that monthly updates on the city centre transport package were provided to the Local Enterprise Partnership and that this information could be shared. She confirmed that the recommendations of the external auditor had been noted.

A group leader asked that in future the spend on packages be separated out into the constituent elements and profiled separately. The wording and bundling of the packages needed to be consistent to allow comparison. The head of corporate finance replied that the next capital budget monitoring report would include the requested level of detail.

Resolved that:

- a) the schemes detailed in Appendix 2 be recommended to Council for inclusion in the capital budget.**

66. HEREFORDSHIRE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The cabinet member for economy and corporate services introduced the report. He thanked all who had contributed and given feedback on the strategy. He reported that consultation had taken place in all the market towns apart from Kington and with key local partners. The general overview and scrutiny committee had commented on the strategy and a summary of its recommendations was included as an appendix to the report. The cabinet member stressed that engagement with partners would continue after the adoption of the strategy.

The cabinet member explained that the strategy was composed of two parts, the economic vision and the pitchbook. He stated that the strategy was deliberately aspirational and recognised the need to attract private sector investment.

The chief executive reported that he had regular meetings with major employers in the county. He stated that during a recent meeting with one such company the desire for a clear vision for Herefordshire had been clearly expressed. Companies wanted to see opportunities for investment identified and schemes promoted to attract people to live and work in Herefordshire.

The cabinet member for economy and corporate services highlighted a number of projects that the council had already supported and the impact they had had. He stated that the list of projects in the strategy would change and develop over time. The strategy was aspirational and it had to be recognised that some projects might not ultimately be delivered.

The economic development manager explained that the proposed strategy had built on the previous iteration covering the period 2011 to 2016, with a shift to looking at opportunities for private sector investment. The new strategy would help the council to share and promote its priorities to key partners. There would be ongoing engagement with investors and the community. The economic development manager stated that all specific council funding referred to in the strategy had previously been before cabinet or full council.

A scrutiny chair commented that the council appeared to have largely withdrawn from the tourism sector in the county, leaving other agencies to take the lead. The economic development manager stated that the council continued to work with partners on developing the tourism sector, particularly on securing investment to deliver new elements.

A scrutiny chair asked what options were being considered for development of rail travel in the county, highlighting the level of service at Leominster station. The economic development manager stated that the council was working with partner agencies to deliver improvements to rail services such as investment in the car parking provision at Leominster station.

A scrutiny chair asked what would happen if the government did not deliver the required funding for the university project. The economic development manager responded that contingencies were being put in place. The chief executive added that he expected the position on the university to become clear in the near future and remained optimistic that the government funding would be secured.

A group leader stated that the council should give support to start-ups and small businesses as these were a critical element of the local economy. He also stated that the council should support businesses to make use of emerging technologies. The economic development manager confirmed that the council would be seeking to bring higher paid jobs to the area and that technology would be a key aspect of this.

The leader noted that publishing the strategy would not in of itself deliver any projects but that being able to demonstrate the council's ambitions was important. The strategy would draw together the different strands of investment into a coherent way forward.

A cabinet support member asked why there had been less input and aspiration from some of the market towns. The economic development manager responded that it had been a difficult process to find suitable projects to include in the strategy. They needed to be of a scale and type to be attractive to outside investors. The council would continue

to work with communities in and around the market towns to develop projects which could be added to the strategy in future.

A group leader commented that the strategy was focussed on Hereford City but that there had been a lack of involvement from Hereford City Council. He argued that some of the projects could be located in the market towns to spread development and that consultation with the market towns should have been started earlier in the process.

The cabinet member for economy and corporate services responded that the strategy had been widely supported and that engagement was continuing with communities in the market towns to develop suitable projects. He stated that some projects might not meet the criteria for inclusion in the economic developments strategy but would still be pursued.

A group leader asked what the main reasons were for companies not moving to Herefordshire. The economic development manager stated that Herefordshire had a good offer but needed to market this more. He noted that the main obstacle to relocation was the cost of new development. The leader commented that he was not aware of any one specific reason which deterred businesses from coming to the county but that Herefordshire had a reputation as a beautiful area to visit but not perhaps a place to do business.

Resolved that:

- a) the Herefordshire Economic Vision attached at appendix 1 be recommended to full Council for adoption as the county's economic development strategy;**
- b) delegated authority be sought from Council to make technical amendments to the strategy during the period 2017 to 2021 on factual matters such as: updating of statistics, replacing images, and reflection of projects approved by cabinet within each aim of the strategy.**
- c) the investment pitch book contained at appendix 2 be approved; and**
- d) authority be delegated to the economic development manager to make technical amendments to the investment pitch book on matters such as: typographical errors, replacement of images, statistical information, project information and programme timetable.**

The meeting ended at 11.30 am

CHAIRMAN