

MINUTES of the meeting of Cabinet held at Council Chamber, The Shire Hall, St Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Wednesday 21 September 2016 at 2.00 pm

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, NE Shaw and EJ Swinglehurst

Group leaders in attendance Councillors TM James, RI Matthews and AJW Powers

Scrutiny chairmen in attendance Councillors PA Andrews and WLS Bowen

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

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

31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

33. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 15 September 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chairman.

34. FOUR YEAR FUNDING SETTLEMENT

The head of corporate finance presented a report on the proposed four year funding settlement for Herefordshire. She highlighted that:

- the multi-year deal had been offered to all councils
- it only included the grants set out in the table in paragraph 10 of the report
- if accepted, the deal provided a minimum guaranteed funding envelope
- the deal would require the council to demonstrate that it could set a balanced budget up to 2020 and the approach to this was set out in the draft efficiency statement included as appendix 3 to the report
- the deal excluded a number of other grants such as the Better Care Fund (BCF)
- the LGA supported the multi-year approach and

- the majority of other authorities had accepted or intended to accept the offer.

In the ensuing discussion the following comments were made:

The chairman of the general overview and scrutiny committee stated that while there were concerns over some aspects of the settlement, the deal was the best available at the current time. The general overview and scrutiny committee had recommended acceptance of the settlement but encouraged cabinet to pursue all other avenues for additional funding.

In response to a question from a group leader the head of corporate finance confirmed that the cap on increasing council tax was expected to remain in place until 2020.

Should the rural services grant be received as anticipated then the preference would be to spend it on areas for which it was intended.

The council's LEP partners, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin councils, were intending to accept the deal as were a number of district councils within the west midlands combined authority area.

Central government reserved the right to change the level of funding in exceptional circumstances, even after the deal was accepted.

The council would seek assurances on its position in year 5 of the financial strategy period, as there was a high degree of uncertainty over levels of funding.

Resolved

That:

- a) cabinet recommends to Council acceptance of the four year central government funding settlement for 2016-17 through to 2019-20.**

35. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR THE PERIOD 2016-2019

The cabinet member economy and corporate services introduced a report on the proposed communications strategy for the period 2016-2019. He noted that it built on the previous strategy. The aims of the strategy were to maximise engagement with residents and businesses, provide support for officers and members and to promote the key council messages.

In response to a question the cabinet member economy and corporate services confirmed the rebranding would be carried out in a cost efficient way.

The communications manager confirmed that the council logo would remain largely the same, with adjustments to facilitate increased digital use. She went on to say that the shift to the new branding would happen gradually which would help minimise costs.

With reference to the proposed new advertising and sponsorship protocols, a group leader queried which third parties were currently advertising with the council and how much revenue this brought in. The communications manager stated that nothing specific was in place for digital platforms at present, but that this was an area for future development. The cabinet member economy and corporate services stated that a number of third parties already advertised via the council in other ways, for example on signage on roundabouts and on the rear of parking tickets. He stated that full details could be provided in writing.

A group leader stated that he was pleased to see the improvements that had been made following feedback from the general overview and scrutiny committee.

In response to a query from a group leader the solicitor to the council confirmed that the constitutional review would seek to clarify what is meant by 'the council' in the various contexts in which it is used in communications.

In response to a question from a group leader the communication manager stated that research into the approach of other councils had been carried out ahead of the strategy review and that the document now proposed included similar headings to those used by other councils.

Resolved

That:

- a) the communications strategy 2016 to 2019 at appendix 1 to the report be approved; and**
- b) the accompanying communication protocols at appendix 2 be approved.**

36. INTERIM POSITION STATEMENT UPON HOUSING DELIVERY

The cabinet member, infrastructure introduced a report on the interim position statement upon housing delivery. The council acknowledged that it could not currently demonstrate a five year housing land supply. The reasons for this were known.

The team leader strategic planning made the following comments:

He reminded cabinet members that policy SS3 of the adopted core strategy provided the framework for addressing a shortfall in housing delivery against the target figure. The policy indicated that priority would be given to increasing housing supply by:

- a partial review of the local plan; or
- the preparation of new development plan documents (DPDs); or
- the preparation of an interim position statement utilising evidence from the strategic housing land availability assessment.

A partial review of the local plan was not recommended as it had only recently been adopted. This approach would require the identification of additional strategic allocations which were unlikely to be deliverable in the short term and would consequently not address the current undersupply.

Work was underway to bring forward documents such as the Hereford Area Plan which would help to address the shortfall.

The interim statement provided a positive message on housing delivery in the county, using technical evidence and working with neighbourhood planners.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

- the statement would be publically available and would be presented as relevant evidence at future planning appeals
- consultation would take place on the Hereford Area Plan in due course

- officers were aware of recent comments by Welsh Water regarding infrastructure requirements and that the council would be engaging with them at the highest level and seeking to influence the imminent investment round
- in the opinion of officers the council would need to demonstrate a five year land supply for at least three years before the requirement for a 20% buffer could be removed
- demand for housing was linked to economic growth

In response to a question from a group leader the team leader, strategic planning stated that the 20% buffer would not lead to provision of additional housing above the core strategy target but reflected the need to catch up on previous under-delivery. The housing trajectory was weighted towards the latter stages of the plan period to reflect infrastructure constraints in the earlier stages.

He went on to say that the interim position statement would provide relevant evidence for planning decisions and at appeal hearings but that the lack of a 5 year land supply would continue to be an important consideration.

In response to a question from a group leader the team leader, strategic planning stated that updating the monitoring report of housing sites required considerable resource so it was difficult to update it more frequently. The monitoring report would be subject to scrutiny at planning appeals and as such it was important that the document was compiled by professional officers. It was also noted that neighbourhood planners often contacted the planning office to make enquiries about the status of allocated housing sites in their area and so they could not be relied upon to provide information.

The cabinet member, infrastructure stated that there was an issue with non-delivery of sites and that there was no mechanism to force developers to progress sites with extant planning permission. He went on to say the national policy was failing to deliver the housing growth needed and that he would be writing to local MPs to lobby for changes to the national planning policy. It was hoped that neighbourhood and area plans due to be adopted would go some way to address the lack of development.

In response to a question from a cabinet support member the cabinet member infrastructure stated that adoption of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) had been placed on hold. It was intended that the experience of other councils that had already introduced CIL would be monitored. It was noted that some councils had set nil rates for CIL.

Resolved

That:

- a) **the draft interim position statement upon housing delivery (at appendix 1) be approved; and**
- b) **the need for such a statement be reviewed on an annual basis or earlier if it was clear that the council was able to demonstrate the existence of a five year supply of available housing land.**

The meeting ended at 3.11 pm

CHAIRMAN