

**Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at Three Counties Hotel, Belmont Road, Belmont, Hereford, HR2 7BP on Thursday 3 June 2021 at 2.30 pm**

**Present:** Councillor David Hitchiner, Leader of the Council (Chairperson)  
Councillor Liz Harvey, Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairperson)

Councillors Felicity Norman, Pauline Crockett, Gemma Davies, John Harrington, Ange Tyler and Diana Toynbee

Cabinet support members in attendance Councillors Jenny Bartlett

Group leaders and representatives in attendance Councillors Peter Jinman, Toni Fagan, Terry James, Jonathan Lester and Bob Matthews

Scrutiny chairpersons in attendance Councillors Elissa Swinglehurst, Jonathan Lester and Phillip Howells

Officers in attendance: Chief Executive, Interim DCS, Acting Deputy Chief Executive (S151), Director for adults and communities, Interim Head of Legal Services and Acting Assistant Director for Regulatory, Environment and Waste Services

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Ellie Chowns.

**2. OPENING REMARKS**

The leader of the council welcomed Councillor Diana Toynbee in her new role as cabinet member children's services, safeguarding and corporate parenting and noted a number of changes to cabinet portfolios.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

**4. MINUTES**

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 April 2021 be approved as a correct record.

**5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

There were no questions from members of the public.

**6. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS (Pages 5 - 6)**

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

**7. DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT NOTICE**

The chief executive introduced the report and explained the improvement notice and work that had take place to date to address the issues raised. The report set out the intended cycle of reporting on progress, commitments to openness and engagement and details of the resources required for success.

The cabinet member children's services, safeguarding and corporate parenting commented that she looked forward to meeting the improvement advisor, who had already established a good relationship with the service.

In discussion of the report cabinet members noted that:

- The membership of the improvement board was quite a large group, the council had taken advice from the improvement advisor and examples from other councils that had received an improvement notice to identify good practice;
- Work was taking place to get the right people around the table for particular subject matters, for example health partners, and a lot of other groups would feed into the board;
- A separate forum was being put in place where the improvement advisor would speak directly to young people so that they could contribute in a safe space;
- If improvements were not secured this would have a detrimental impact on young people and particularly those from certain backgrounds so the equality impact assessment needed to be tightened up;
- The role of the chairperson of the children and young people scrutiny committee was under discussion, the improvement advisor recommended that the chairperson should keep a degree of independence so they would join the first meeting of the strategic board and then review future participation;
- There were already a number of strong advocates on the board but consideration would be given to including a parent and/or citizen advocate, a representative of foster carers, someone from the voluntary sector and a cross section of young people including care leavers;
- The agenda papers and minutes of the strategic board would be published to the website as much as possible but the meeting itself would not be public as some confidential information would need to be discussed.

Group leaders and representatives were invited to present the views and queries from their group. It was noted that:

- The input of those people who had had bad experiences was important, the helpline that had been set up was receiving information from across the county and it was good that people were coming forward;
- It was important that sufficient resources were in place and the council should seek additional support from central government;
- There were some reservations about the size and makeup of the improvement board and the reporting lines between the various groups;
- It was important that improvement was sustained in the long term.

The chairperson of the children and young people scrutiny committee spoke on the role of scrutiny and the steps being taken to ensure there was capacity for the committee to receive reports from the improvement board. The arguments for and against the scrutiny chair being a member of the improvement board were noted and a decision would be taken on this after the first meeting.

The cabinet member children's services, safeguarding and corporate parenting concluded the debate and stressed the need to get things right and rebuild trust in the services. She encouraged any councillors with concerns to contact her or one of the senior officers involved.

**It was unanimously agreed that:**

- a) The improvement notice is noted;**
- b) Cabinet reflects upon the establishment of an improvement board and what role it will play in ensuring that the improvements set out in the improvement notice are achieved.**

## 8. Q4 BUDGET & PERFORMANCE REPORT

The cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning introduced the item and highlighted a number of key points in the papers. The final outturn for 2020/21 was reported as a £38k overspend, which represented only 0.02% of the net budget in a year which had seen £16m of unbudgeted cost pressures due to the pandemic. Cabinet members heard that:

- Progress on the capital programme had been hampered by covid but a new programme manager was being recruited to drive forward the programme to deliver benefits across the county;
- Borrowing had reduced by £3m, with reduced debt and increased council investments;
- Significant financial support had been passed to local business and the work of the finance team to swiftly process grants was recognised;
- Over 80% of planned savings had been delivered despite the pandemic, however it would be a huge challenge to deliver savings in 2021/22;
- A lot of work had gone into developing performance measures for 21/22 but there were significant risks from covid even after mitigation measures.

Cabinet members commented on the key achievements in their portfolio areas and focus for the future. The many varied challenges of the covid pandemic were noted and thanks expressed to council staff, partners and communities across the county for the exceptional efforts made.

The cabinet member health and adult wellbeing particularly commended the outgoing director of adults and communities and noted that the support of communities had been essential.

Group leaders and representatives also commended council staff for their hard work during the pandemic and noted the achievement of a very small overspend for the year. It was also noted that:

- Efforts to bring high paid jobs to the county were supported and it was suggested that larger villages could look at council owned land for use by small businesses, the council was undertaking a survey of its assets with a view to forming a plan for retention, transfer or disposal for each;
- There was no evidence yet of significant problems with non-payment of council tax and business rates although it was expected to be a difficult year ahead, anyone struggling to pay was encouraged to make contact with the council or with organisations that could provide help and support;
- It was encouraging to see projects such as the shell store and cyber centre coming to fruition;
- Concerns were expressed regarding the booking system in use at recycling centres but the portfolio holder felt that the benefits outweighed any downsides including reduced queuing and financial savings;
- The waste journey needed consideration as councillors had been made aware that recycling did not always end up in the right place, it was suggested that this could be a topic for scrutiny;
- The performance against the environment priority looked weak and needed focus including looking at partnership working and bringing forward training on the climate and ecological emergency;
- There was concern that the council would have to find even more savings in the next year;
- The impact of covid on learners was a concern for the future of the county.

The leader of the council concluded the debate by noting the challenges of the year ahead.

**It was unanimously agreed that:**

- a) Cabinet having reviewed performance and financial outturn for year end 2020/21, as set out in appendices A – H, had not identified any additional actions to be considered to achieve future improvements; and**
- b) Cabinet agree the set of measures in appendix G, for use for reporting on delivery plan progress in 2021/22.**

The meeting ended at 4.36 pm

**Chairperson**

## COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 3 June 2021

### Question 1

**Councillor Nigel Shaw, Bromyard Bringsty Ward**

**To: cabinet member, finance, corporate services and planning**

The Herefordshire Council Planning Peer Review Final Report followed visits in late November and early December 2020. Now that nearly six months have passed will the cabinet member responsible provide an update on the short term priority (within six months) recommendations, identifying any achievements, and confirm the status of the seven longer term recommendations?

### **Response**

The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) peer review report was received in January 2021. Since this time the managers have been holding workshops with the teams and I know that Cllr Harrington has been working with the managers to ensure that as many of the recommendations as possible can be implemented.

In relation to the five short term recommendations I can confirm that:

- Recommendation 1 was completed in March, as the team developed a Local Plan review timetable by the end of February. Work has also commenced on visioning workshops with the cabinet members and a number of evidence based reports required for the review are being or have been commissioned already in accordance with the Local Plan timetable.
- Recommendation 2 has been partially addressed in that the Forward and Neighbourhood Planning Teams have now been collocated with the Development Management Teams. This has allowed the Planning Service to refocus on its joint mission statement and combine its resources more effectively, to set out a clearer vision for what we want the Planning Service to achieve. This will be developed further in line with the review of the service.
- Recommendation 3 concerning member training will be undertaken as part of the training refreshment programme approved at full council last week.
- Recommendation 4 has also been addressed as the task of monitoring the Five year Housing Land Supply has been reassigned to two technical officers which has speeded the data collection and collation process. This year the council passed the Housing Delivery Test the first time since its inception in 2017/18 and therefore there is no Housing delivery Action Plan to monitor.
- Recommendation 5 concerning an Enforcement Action Plan has been delayed by the recent increase in planning application workloads but will be produced by the Autumn

I can also update on the seven medium term recommendations which have also been considered.

- Recommendation 6 has been met as the Forward Planning & Neighbourhood Planning Teams have now been collocated with the Development Management Teams, and are being managed under one Assistant Director.
- Recommendation 7 concerns the overall planning work programme, resources and budget of the Planning Service. The options to do things differently in this area are still being considered. However, I can report that the resources in the Neighbourhood Planning Team have been utilised to assist with the development of two new Supplementary Planning Documents.

- Recommendation 8 concerns the review of procedures to help manage demands on resources and budgets, which is still in progress alongside Recommendation 6. However, I am aware that progress has been made on discretionary charges which will help address some of the income shortfall to the budget.
- Recommendations 9 to 12 are still being considered and will be completed by the Autumn and following discussions with the new Planning Committee Chairman.

I also share your desire for there to be a robust action plan in place to implement the recommendations made by PAS and I have set up a meeting with Cllr Harrington and officers so that I can be updated on the detail of PAS implementation. I do recognise that the planning service has been managing a heavy workload recently and I am determined to ensure that the changes underway result in a better service experience for members of the public and an improved work experience for our staff. Neither of which can happen too quickly, in my opinion.

### **Supplementary question**

I thank the Cabinet member for Finance, Corporate Services and Planning for her reply and I take this opportunity to wish her well on her on assuming additional responsibilities for planning.

I appreciate the comprehensive reply and now recognise that the PPR was only delivered in January. I congratulate the planning team on the actions taken to date . I would direct the cabinet member to Recommendation 5 and share concern that the current resource is considerably hard pressed and, I understand, only able to progress a minimal number of priority issues as determined by the head of planning. If the member shares my concern might she promise to review resourcing in this area as a matter of her own priority? I appreciate that budgets may be being managed by a recruitment freeze but there are consequences to the environment and the public's perception of the Authority as a result of inaction.

### **Response**

I would like to thank Councillor Shaw for his supplementary question and assure him that I share his concerns about ensuring that the planning service has the resources that it needs to fulfil its responsibilities, and also assure him that I will be paying the closest attention to the resourcing of the area and will be making it a high priority to understand exactly what the position is now and the work that's already underway to progress the recommendations of the past review and I welcome any questions on progress against that at a future meeting.