

Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held as an Online only meeting on Thursday 30 April 2020 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, Gemma Davies, John Harrington, Liz Harvey and Ange Tyler

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

Group leaders in attendance Councillor Jonathan Lester

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

Officers in attendance: Chief executive, Director for economy and place, Director for children and families, Solicitor to the council, Chief finance officer and Director for adults and communities

137. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies from members of the cabinet.

138. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

139. MINUTES

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

140. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 5 - 6)

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

141. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

There were no questions from councillors.

142. REPORT ON THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS EPIDEMIC

The chief executive spoke on the report, highlighting the actions taken by the council independently and in conjunction with partners locally, regionally and nationally. Points noted included:

- Challenges in sourcing personal protective equipment (PPE) with the council using around 18,000 facemasks per day, gloves, aprons and goggles were also being used where appropriate;
- Local companies had adapted their manufacturing capabilities to produce hand sanitiser within a week of the council's request;
- The council was working closely with care homes and was in a comparatively sound position compared with other areas of the county, the situation was being closely monitored as Herefordshire was behind the peak curve regionally;

- The council was making use of technology to hold virtual meetings and recognised the opportunities this presented in reducing unnecessary travel and reducing pollution from traffic;
- Systems imposed from central government had generally been less effective than measures designed and implemented locally, this was being communicated back to the government;
- The council had the lowest known staff sickness levels across the region;
- Many staff had been redeployed to assist with the response to the virus, for example car parking charges had been suspended which allowed key workers to park as close as possible to their point of work and released enforcement staff for other duties;
- In the long term it would be necessary to get a vaccine distributed across the county, in the interim full hygiene protocols including washing hands, social distancing and where appropriate in specific roles, use of PPE remained key tools;
- The resource implications were enormous for councils across the country and the impact was still being calculated, councils were signalling that the additional costs could not be met indefinitely without extra funding and would be pressing the government in this regard.

Following the presentation by the chief executive the meeting observed a minute's silence in remembrance of those who had lost their lives to the coronavirus.

In discussion of the chief executive's report the cabinet noted that:

- £45.5m worth of grants had been approved to businesses across the county, the council had been unable to reach a number of businesses that might be eligible for grants and would be sending letters out in the following days to encourage them to make contact;
- Planning applications continued to be registered and validated, site notices had been suspended initially but had now been reinstated with appropriate social distancing measures for staff and the first virtual planning committee meeting had been scheduled for 12 May;
- Close working with the care home sector had resulted in a relatively small number of cases in comparison with other parts of the country, a proactive approach was supporting care providers with infection control processes and the council had submitted its model to the Local Government Association as an example of best practice to inform work across the country, however Herefordshire was behind the regional peak curve;
- The chief executive and other senior officers continued to provide regular updates to cabinet members.

In considering comments and questions from group leaders the members of the cabinet noted that:

- All groups expressed their sadness at the loss of life and their pride in and gratitude for the work of council staff, emergency services and volunteers around the county;
- There was recognition of the tremendous amount of work to be done to reboot the local economy, ward members with knowledge of local businesses who had so far not been in touch with the council regarding grants could forward details to smallbusinessgrants@herefordshire.gov.uk;
- The vast majority of councils had not yet reopened household recycling centres as they were concerned about the unnecessary travel this might encourage, Herefordshire council was making plans on how centres might open including appropriate traffic management and safe working practices for staff;
- There had been no increase in reported fly tipping since the closure of the household recycling centres and bin collections had been maintained.

The chairperson of the children and young people scrutiny committee expressed concern over the level of take up of schooling among vulnerable children. The director for children and families expressed his thanks to everyone supporting children and families and explained that although attendance by vulnerable children had increased since the Easter holiday numbers were still very low. The council was working with schools and other settings to encourage attendance. The council continued to provide transport where required but families were generally heeding the national and local message to stay at home.

The chairperson of the adults and wellbeing scrutiny committee welcomed the comprehensive report and extraordinary efforts by staff, residents, volunteers and key workers. She asked that the council consider how the good practice that had been developed in response to the virus could be captured and consolidated.

Cabinet members noted the need to look beyond the economic impact and the way that the council and health partners had worked together to tackle the virus. They highlighted:

- The benefits of leisure and cultural services for physical and mental health with huge numbers joining the library to make use of online services during the lockdown;
- Working with businesses, charities and the third sector to further develop the good relationships that had been established;
- The need to continue rolling out broadband access, especially in rural areas, to improve connectivity;
- The need for continued liaison with all councillors.

The leader proposed a recommendation that group leaders be asked to consider how the different groups on the council might work together to ensure that learning from the current crisis was captured. The recommendation was seconded by the cabinet member environment, economy and skills.

It was agreed that:

- a) cabinet reviewed the progress made in delivering the response to Covid-19 in Herefordshire and determined that group leaders be asked to consider how the groups might work together to ensure that lessons from this crisis were captured.**

143. TREATMENT OF WEST MERCIA ENERGY PENSION LIABILITY

The cabinet member finance and corporate services introduced the report and explained that the proposed changes were intended to give West Mercia Energy a better book position when it came to winning business by moving the pension liability to the books of the four owning authorities' respective pension boards. Each of the owning authorities needed to agree the proposal. The financial situation for the council was unchanged as the owning authorities were already liable for the pension arrangements.

In considering comments and questions from group leader the cabinet noted general support for the proposal and that the company continued to buy energy and manage costs for the owning councils and a growing number of other customers. It was hoped this step would help to win more customer.

It was agreed that:

- (a) Cabinet, on condition that the Executives of Worcestershire County Council, Telford & Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council agreeing to the same recommendations, agrees:**

- a. To remove the responsibility for the discharge of its function in relation to the pension deficit liability in relation to former WMS employees (including Compensatory Added Years Benefits) as identified in this report from the business of the WME Joint Committee with effect from 1 April 2020;
- b. To allocate the pension deficit liability identified in recommendation a above to a new employer within the Shropshire County Pension Fund, called 'WMS Pension';
- c. To establish a joint committee pursuant to section 101(5) of the Local Government Act 1972, with Worcestershire County Council, Telford & Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council known as the WMS Pension Joint Committee and delegate responsibility with effect from 1 April 2020 to the WMS Pension Joint Committee to discharge the functions of Herefordshire Council relating to the pension deficit liability from former WMS employees (including Compensatory Added Years Benefits) as set out in Appendix A allocated to the WMS Pension employer within the Shropshire County Pension Fund;
- d. To approve the proposed governance arrangements set out in Appendix A, and that the Council's appointed Executive Members to the WMS Pension Joint Committee shall be the Leader of the Council and the current Council representative(s) on the West Mercia Energy Joint Committee;
- e. To delegate authority to the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151) to progress and agree the arrangements as set out in this report, including a relevant payment mechanism and finalise a Joint Agreement for the WMS Pension Joint Committee incorporating the terms set out in Appendix A, in consultation with Section 151 Officers from the remaining Owning Authorities.
- f. To approve the treatment of the WME asset share to be fully funded with effect from 1 April 2020 using IAS19/FRS102 actuarial assumptions with the resulting additional cost of this funding option allocated to the WMS Pension employer within the Shropshire County Pension Fund.
- g. To delegate authority to the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151) to agree the final figures, of which estimates are set out in the resources implications section of this report, and in consultation with the Section 151 Officers from the remaining Owning Authorities.

The meeting ended at 4.24 pm

Chairperson

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 30 April 2020**Question 1****Ms S Sumner, Fownhope****To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport**

Are the road repairs to the B4399 between Fownhope and Mordiford continuing during the lockdown because we need to come out of this crisis with something like the village we normally live in? Also is there an expected end time for the repairs and what is it?

Response

I am committed to ensuring the reopening of the B4224 as soon as possible when we have completed the significant repairs to the road damaged by Storm Dennis. We have not as yet had confirmation that we will receive government funding for all of the repair works (including the repairs at Fownhope) that are needed following Storm Dennis and this may mean that the council will have to fund these works from our own budgets which would be a significant pressure and may mean that we need to review our current capital programme to delay or stop current programmed capital work. The Leader of the Council has written to our local MPs requesting their assistance to secure this and I would ask residents and local businesses to consider doing the same.

However, given the urgency of the B4224 works these schemes will progress as part of the council's response to the emergency situation. I have agreed officers will continue to use their emergency powers and the repairs of the landslip on the B4224 at Lechmere Ley will therefore commence as soon as possible. The detailed design works to repair the retaining wall at Stone Cottage on the B4224 will also be progressed and I can assure you that we are exploring all opportunities to enable the road to be reopened as soon as possible. I am hopeful that this could be achieved by early autumn and I will be pushing to get all works completed as soon as possible with a view to bringing this forward.

Question 2**Mr R Palgrave, How Caple****To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport**

Is there a revised schedule for the review of transport strategy for Hereford, which was originally intended to report at the end of July 2020?

Response

Work on Hereford Transport Strategy review is continuing to programme and it is currently anticipated that a report setting out the outcome of the review will be produced on programme by end July. This will be then be considered by cabinet to determine next steps and this will be the subject of a governance decision in due course.

