

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