

Report of the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee: The Local Plan

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: 26th January 2023

Report by: The Statutory Scrutiny Officer

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to notify the Cabinet of the report and recommendations from the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee on the Local Plan; a review of the development of a new Local Plan for Herefordshire, made at its meeting on 19th January 2023 and to request an Executive Response.

Recommendations

- a) That the report on the Local Plan; a review of the development of a new Local Plan for Herefordshire made by the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 19th January 2023 be noted.
- b) That an Executive Response to the scrutiny findings be prepared for consideration by the Cabinet within two months.

Alternative options

None proposed; it is a statutory requirement for the Cabinet to be notified and consider reports and recommendations made by a scrutiny committee.

Key considerations

1. Scrutiny committees have statutory powers to make recommendations to the Executive, and the Executive (Cabinet) has a statutory duty to respond. They may also make reports and recommendations to external decision making bodies.
2. Scrutiny recommendations are addressed to the Cabinet, as the main Executive decision making body of the council (or, where appropriate, an external agency).
3. Cabinet is being asked to note the scrutiny report / recommendations and that an Executive Response to the scrutiny recommendations be prepared for consideration by the Cabinet within two months.
4. The minutes of the meeting of the scrutiny committee provide the record of the scrutiny committee's consideration of the issue and the scrutiny recommendations made during the meeting.
5. The scrutiny committee will be notified of the Executive Response made in respect to the scrutiny recommendations and may track the implementation of the Cabinet decisions and any actions agreed. This enables the scrutiny committee to track whether their recommendations have been agreed, what actually was agreed (if different) and review any outcomes arising.

The Herefordshire Local Plan

6. The Herefordshire Local Plan will set out the Council's land-use policies and proposals for the period up to 2041 and will replace the existing Herefordshire Core Strategy, which was adopted in October 2015. The Local Plan will set out a strategy for the scale and distribution of growth across the County and will cover issues such as housing provision, the economy, retail and town centres, infrastructure provision and environment protection. It will set out the policies by which planning applications will be determined.

Scrutiny Review of the Local Plan

7. On 21st September 2022 the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee considered the development of the new Herefordshire Local Plan, including the consultation and options for the development of the Plan. As part of its review the committee considered the initial results which were emerging from the Local Plan Options consultations undertaken during 2022 and details of the scope and methods used during the consultation process.
8. At the end of this meeting, the committee drew together some key points that it would like the Cabinet and the planning directorate to take into consideration in the ongoing development of the Local Plan proposals. These are set out here in the attached scrutiny report of the committee, which was agreed by the committee at its meeting on 19th January 2023.

Witnesses to the Inquiry

9. The scrutiny committee has questioned the following Cabinet Members and planning officers during its inquiry;
 - Councillor David Hitchiner - Leader of the Council.
 - Councillor John Harrington - Cabinet Member Infrastructure and Transport.
 - Councillor Ellie Chowns - Cabinet Member for Economy and Environment.
 - Samantha Banks - Neighbourhood Planning Service Manager.

10. The minutes of the meeting are available [here](#)¹.
11. The conclusions of the scrutiny inquiry are contained in the scrutiny report, attached at Appendix 1.

Procedure for Recommendations from Scrutiny Committees

12. Where scrutiny committees make reports or recommendations to the Cabinet, as soon as this has been confirmed, these will be referred to the Cabinet requesting an Executive Response. This will instigate the preparation of a report to Cabinet and the necessary consideration of the response, the technical feasibility, financial implications, legal implications and equalities implications etc.
13. Where scrutiny committees make reports or recommendations to full Council (e.g. in the case of policy and budgetary decisions), the same process will be followed, with a report to Cabinet to agree its Executive Response, and thereafter, a report will be prepared for Council for consideration of the scrutiny report and recommendations along with the Cabinet's Response.
14. Where scrutiny committees have powers under their terms of reference to make reports or recommendations to external decision makers (e.g. NHS bodies), where they do this, the relevant external decision maker shall be notified in writing, providing them with a copy of the committee's report and recommendations, and requesting a response.
15. Once the Executive Response has been agreed, the scrutiny committee shall receive a report to receive the response and the committee may review implementation of the executive's decisions after such a period as these may reasonably be implemented (review date).

Community Impact

16. In accordance with the adopted code of corporate governance, the council is committed to promoting a positive working culture that accepts, and encourages constructive challenge, and recognises that a culture and structure for scrutiny are key elements for accountable decision making, policy development and review. Topics selected for scrutiny should have regard to what matters to residents. There has been a drive to improve the scrutiny function at Herefordshire, further to the Rethinking Governance review undertaken in 2021-2022.

Environmental Impact

17. There are no direct environmental impacts connected with this report or the outcomes it seeks to deliver. Initiatives and programmes to promote a healthy weight will likely have a positive impact on the environment e.g. food sustainability, reduced carbon admissions, increased active travel. This was considered in the consideration of this issue by the scrutiny committee.

Equality Duty

18. There are no specific equalities impacts.
19. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

¹ <https://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/documents/g8828/Public%20minutes%20Wednesday%2021-Sep-2022%2010.30%20Environment%20and%20Sustainability%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=11>

20. A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –
- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
21. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying ‘due regard’ in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.

Resource Implications

22. This report provides notification to Cabinet on the scrutiny report and recommendations, which have been referred to the Executive (Cabinet) for an Executive Response.
23. The Cabinet is requested to provide an Executive Response within two months, at which stage, in considering its response, a full assessment of resource implications should be undertaken.

Legal Implications

24. Section 9F (2) (b) of the Local Government Act 2000 provides that a scrutiny committee can make reports and recommendation to the Executive with respect to the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the Executive.
25. Section 9F (2) (e) of the Local Government Act 2000 provides that a scrutiny committee can make reports or recommendations to the Executive on matters which affect the authority's area or the inhabitants of that area.
26. The scrutiny report provides the scrutiny recommendations of the committee to be made to the Executive (Cabinet).
27. The Cabinet is requested to provide an Executive Response within two months, at which stage, in considering its response, a full assessment of legal implications should be undertaken.

Risk management

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
There is a reputational risk to the council if the scrutiny function does not operate effectively.	The arrangements for the notification of recommendations from the scrutiny committees and agreement of an Executive Response should help mitigate this risk.

28. The Cabinet is requested to provide an Executive Response within two months, at which stage, in considering its response, a full assessment of risk implications should be undertaken.

29. The Executive will then need to assess the risks arising from any executive decisions made in respect of the scrutiny committee's recommendations.

Consultees

The Cabinet Member Finance, Corporate Services and Planning.

The Cabinet Member Infrastructure and Transport.

The Chairperson of the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee.

Appendices

Appendix 1:- The Herefordshire Local Plan scrutiny report; a review of the development of a new Local Plan for Herefordshire report of the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee 19th January 2023.

Background papers

The minutes of the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny 21st September 2022.

<https://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/documents/g8828/Public%20minutes%20Wednesday%2021-Sep-2022%2010.30%20Environment%20and%20Sustainability%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=11>