

Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Thursday 20 July 2023 at 10.00 am

Cabinet Members Physically Present and voting:

**Councillor Jonathan Lester, Leader of the Council (Chairperson)
Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst, Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairperson)**

Councillors Graham Biggs, Harry Bramer, Barry Durkin, Philip Price and Pete Stoddart

Cabinet support members in attendance

Councillors Dan Hurcomb and Nick Mason

Group leaders / representatives in attendance

Councillors Ellie Chowns, Liz Harvey, Terry James and Bob Matthews

Scrutiny chairpersons in attendance

Councillors Ellie Chowns, Pauline Crockett and Toni Fagan and Liz Harvey.

Officers in attendance:

Director of Resources and Assurance, Corporate Director - Economy and Environment, Corporate Director Community Wellbeing, Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer and Director of Strategy and Performance

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Carole Gandy and Cllr Ivan Powell.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Nick Mason declared a disclosable pecuniary interest under agenda item 8, Strategic Investment Proposal in the Central Ward; a member of his immediate family would shortly be entering the employment with the Wye Valley Trust at Hereford Hospital.

13. MINUTES

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

14. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

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

15. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 2 to the minutes.

16. REPORTS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Feedback from the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee (CCSC) on the Review of the New Hereford Library and Learning Centre Location was considered under agenda item 7.

The Leader of the Council thanked the CCSC for their work in forming the recommendations put forward to the Cabinet at their meeting held on 19 July 2023.

The principle points were presented by the chairperson of the CCSC:

- The committee recognised there were merits in the proposal to bring the Shirehall back in to public use as a library, however there were concerns raised over significant financial risks and many questions remained unanswered.
- The committee felt there were insufficient evidence on which to reach the decision to cancel the Maylord Orchards Project.
- Scrutiny needed to be assured that all relevant factors had been given due consideration in the decision-making process.
- The review had not fully responded to its own terms of reference in particular the financial assessment.
- Focus on financial viability and value for money.
- Concerns were explored regarding the quality and depth of consultation with key stakeholders and the potential implications of development at new facilities in the Shirehall on other operators already existing in Hereford.
- Lack of timely publication and partial provision of information were raised.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services gave a correction to the figures quoted by him at the CCSC meeting held on 19 July for the value of the Shirehall. It was confirmed the current value of the Shirehall is £519,900 with the Maylord Orchards valued at £7.5 million.

There were no other reports from scrutiny committees for consideration at this meeting.

17. REVIEW OF NEW HEREFORD LIBRARY AND LEARNING RESOURCE CENTRE LOCATION

Cabinet Members considered a report setting out the outcome of the Review of Potential Locations for the Library and Learning Centre and to recommend a preferred option.

The Cabinet Member for Community Services and Assets introduced the report and highlighted a review had been undertaken of 12 possible sites which had been shortlisted to the Shirehall and Maylord Orchards for a more extensive review.

As part of the review a range of key stakeholders and partners including the Stronger Towns Board (STB), the Cultural Partnership and Joint Action for Herefordshire Libraries had been engaged.

It was noted that the STB had said that should Cabinet agree to take the Shirehall forward as the preferred location they would be willing to consider a revised full business case proposal. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that this was not made clearer in the responses given to public questions.

Whilst the report recognises that both locations had merit, the Shirehall offered a greater potential in creating the original vision of the project to establish a cultural hub. It would bring a prominent heritage asset back into use, it complements the world class museum due to be developed on the other side of the city and would deliver a much better overall outcome for supporting the regeneration of the city centre.

Having taken into consideration the views of the Political Group Consultation (PGC) and the recommendations from the CCSC, the Cabinet Member put forward an amendment to the recommendations set out in the original report.

b) The decision to relocate the Library and Learning Centre to the Maylord Orchards site is paused during the development of a Full Business Case for the Shirehall proposal;

Cabinet Members discussed the report and it was noted that:

- The scrutiny recommendation was partially accepted and the wording of the proposal to be put to the Cabinet amended to pause. However the Cabinet asserted that they wished to indicate their preferred location for the new library, acknowledging that this preference is subject to the outcome of the full business case for the Shirehall. Cabinet Members accepted all other recommendations made by CCSC.
- By 'pausing' rather than cancelling, the project would remain on the capital programme but no further work would be undertaken. Once the full business case for the Shirehall was completed. Cabinet could recommend the necessary change to the capital programme if they wished to proceed with the Shirehall option.

Group leaders gave the views of their groups. There was support for exploring the Shirehall as an alternative location for the library project but concerns were raised about the accessibility and acoustics of the building and whether it could be made welcoming and energy efficient. Concerns were raised about the impact of pausing the Maylord Orchards project at a late stage of development and whether the report presented to Cabinet contained the evidence base on which to make a decision to select the Shirehall as the preferred location.

In response to the points and queries raised Cabinet Members confirmed that a full business case would be prepared for the Shirehall and that this would be compared with the existing Maylord Orchards option. The Leader of the Council highlighted that the Shirehall is a listed building and confirmed that decarbonisation would be considered and opportunities to develop green space in the vicinity of the Shirehall would be investigated.

Concluding the discussion, the Leader of the Council noted the comments made, but restated the Cabinet's preference of the Shirehall as the preferred option subject to a full business case being undertaken which demonstrates that the funding is in place and that other areas of concern are addressed.

It was unanimously resolved that:

- a) Cabinet agree that following the strategic review conducted the preferred new location of the Library and Learning Centre is the Shirehall;**
- b) The decision to relocate the Library and Learning Centre to the Maylord Orchards site is paused during the development of a Full Business Case for the Shirehall proposal;**
- c) A full business case for the Shirehall development to be progressed (to include the library works and all enabling works) and reported back to Cabinet in October 2023 where these will be considered against existing plans for Maylord Orchards; and**
- d) Delegated authority is given to the Corporate Director for Community Wellbeing in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community Services and Assets to take all operational decisions (within a to c above) and as is necessary to develop the Full Business Case, and to submit the Project Adjustment Request to the Hereford Towns Board and the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC), if required.**

18. STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PROPOSAL IN THE CENTRAL WARD

Cabinet members considered a report to agree the principle of Herefordshire Council investing in a project where the council is in partnership with Wye Valley Trust. The Leader welcomed the Associate Director of Education / OD and Workforce Transformation, Wye Valley Trust who was in attendance at the meeting.

The Cabinet Member Economy and Growth introduced the report, the principal points were raised.

- One of Herefordshire Council's priorities as set out in the County Plan 2020-2024 is to strengthen partnership working across Herefordshire and to become an enabler for economic growth by considering different ways of working with businesses/partners in Herefordshire. The proposed provision would provide an exemplar facility which would facilitate partnership working across patient and service user groups, charities, the voluntary sector, public service and the education sector. It would provide opportunities to partner with other organisations to create a vibrant learning space in Herefordshire.
- The cost of the overall project was in the region of £10.5m and there was a funding gap of approximately £6m. The Trust have approached the council to see if a strategic investment partnership could be looked at to enable the project to progress onto a capital build.
- The community would be able to use the centre with training and development on offer to Herefordshire residents, helping retain higher level skills within the County thus growing the economy.

Cabinet members discussed the report and it was noted that:

- The heads of terms would be agreed on the basis that there are no revenue budget pressures on the council and the investment model would be prepared as part of that business case.
- The arrangement would be revenue neutral and no risks had been identified at this early stage, as the proposal develops the risks would be assessed and addressed in the business case.

Group leaders generally welcomed the report, positivity was drawn to the reduction in patients needing to travel out of the County to specialist hospitals for treatment and skills development and investment in the Health Service.

In response to queries it was noted that;

- it was not known if any other hospitals in adjoining authorities had similar facilities but this would be researched.
- a full business case would be conducted which would set out options for funding the project and include environmental impact assessments.
- the cabinet were encouraged to take on board lessons learned from previous shared accommodation with health partners.

It was unanimously resolved that;

- a) authority is delegated to the Director of Resources and Assurance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Growth to sign Heads of Terms between Herefordshire Council and Wye Valley Trust for a partnership to enable development of an Education Centre at Hereford County Hospital;**
- b) Cabinet authorises the development of an options appraisal to inform a full business case of an investment model most appropriate to allow the project to**

progress and bring that back to cabinet for further authorisation in autumn 2023; and

- c) authority is delegated to the Director of Resources and Assurance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Growth to take all operational decisions relating to the above recommendations.**

19. STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PROPOSAL ON A SPECIAL PURPOSE SITE IN THE DINEDOR HILL WARD

Cabinet Members considered a report to agree the principle of Herefordshire Council investing in an initiative where the council is in partnership with Hereford and Worcester Group Training Association Ltd (HWGTA) to enable further development of vocational work based skills across the county.

The Leader welcomed the Chief Executive of HWGTA who was in attendance at the meeting.

The Cabinet Member Community Services and Assets introduced the report and highlighted:

- HWGTA had been training apprentices and delegates to develop skills, knowledge and behaviours for 56 years, making a significant contribution to the Herefordshire economy. The centre had been so successful that it had outgrown its current operating centre and there was a requirement for a new centre to enable growth.
- HWGTA approached the council to see if the council would like to explore an investment opportunity with the association based on some shared objectives around developing local people, increasing skills in the county and ultimately driving up productivity and economic growth.
- Herefordshire Council's County Plan had some clear objectives around skills development and work with organisations to be more creative in how the Council use and share its collective assets, increase local investment, encourage the development of new businesses and explore new methods of financial support.
- By enabling HWGTA to grow and develop through investment, jobs will be created and a more local skilled workforce will develop which in turn will attract business opportunities into Herefordshire.

Cabinet members discussed the report and it was noted that:

- The cabinet were supportive of the proposal and that it aligns with the county plan, addresses the skills shortage and it would bring better paid jobs to Herefordshire.
- It was suggested the recommendation be amended to explicit that a full business case would be produced and for it to include a full environmental impact assessment.
- It was highlighted that more communication was needed in advertising that apprenticeships are not just for the young but for all ages.
- The heads of terms would be agreed on the basis there are no revenue budget pressures on the council and that the investment model that would be prepared as part of the business case would also be on the basis there were no budget pressures. No risks had been identified as the proposal was at a very early stage.

Group leaders welcomed the report. In response to queries raised it was noted that;

- Dialogue between the council, HWGTA and Skylon Park had been ongoing since 2020 and the project was now at a point where it is able to progress;

- As part of the Big Economic Plan the council would engage with businesses to understand their challenges and how best the council can support them.
- The full business case would consider the equality dimensions in terms of the training opportunities that are provided but the detail would sit within the HWGTA business model.

It was unanimously resolved that:

- a) authority is delegated to the Director of Resources and Assurance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Assets to sign Heads of Terms between Herefordshire Council and HWGTA for a partnership to enable further development of vocational work based skills across the county;**
- b) Cabinet authorises the development of an options appraisal to inform a full business case of an investment model most appropriate to allow the project to progress and bring that back to cabinet for further authorisation in autumn 2023; and**
- c) authority is delegated to the Director of Resources and Assurance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Assets to take all operational decisions relating to the above recommendations.**

The meeting ended at 12:10.

Chairperson