

Cabinet**Thursday, 25 June 2020, Online only,
10.00 am****Present:****Minutes**

Mr S E Geraghty (Chairman), Mr A T Amos,
Mr A I Hardman, Mr M J Hart, Mrs L C Hodgson,
Ms K J May, Mr A P Miller, Dr K A Pollock,
Mr A C Roberts and Mr J H Smith

Also attended:

Mrs F Oborski and Mrs M Rayner

**1981 Apologies and
Declarations of
Interest**

None.

**1982 Public
Participation**

None.

**1983 Confirmation of
the Minutes of
the previous
meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

**1984 Covid-19
Response and
Restart Update**

The Leader's opening remarks set out the ongoing priorities of reducing infection and supporting the most vulnerable members of the community whilst moving forward to restart services that would be tuned to people's needs.

Each Cabinet Member highlighted action taken and plans for their service areas as set out in the report and the main points raised were:

- The continuation of services for adults during lockdown meant that there had been no easing of the Care Act
- The work being undertaken to embed best practice from the response to Covid-19, including embracing a '7-day working' pattern, with thanks being expressed to staff who had worked in this way with colleagues in the NHS during the height of the pandemic
- The Cabinet member for Highways gave details of the schemes planned for the phase 1 allocation of the Active Travel Fund, which included cycle lanes

between Redditch and Bromsgrove, Stourport and Kidderminster and at Evesham

- The latest data showed that traffic was currently at 80% of pre-lockdown levels
- The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing stressed that the virus was still active and people needed to be mindful, as the economy was opened, to remain vigilant and keep social distancing where possible
- Libraries and museums were due to reopen in a phased approach with clear protocols and social distancing in place. An announcement on the relaunching of wedding and notices of marriages was expected in the near future
- the majority of schools had continued to operate throughout the pandemic for vulnerable children and those of key workers. Pupils were returning as per the Government guidelines despite the challenges arising from Worcestershire's 2 tier and 3 tier system.

The following details were provided in response to questions from Members outside the Cabinet:

- whether the number of tests for Covid-19 could be increased – the Cabinet Member reported that people were still being encouraged to test at centres and at home. He agreed to provide details on exact numbers of tests
- Details were requested about arrangements for the Local Outbreak Plan and the Cabinet Member advised the Covid 19 Local Out-Break Engagement Board would be 'the workhorse' which would assist in any outbreaks of Covid-19 with senior elected Members from all Districts being representatives. Details of the plans would be put onto the County Council website soon once documents were finalised
- Whether the Cabinet Member was in favour of some of the money that was being bid for to go towards helping cycling proficiency – the Cabinet Member responded that he would investigate whether some of the funds could be applied in this way
- When the remaining Household Recycling Centres would reopen – the Leader responded that work was continuing to reopen these as soon as practicable
- Whether there was any further information to that provided by the Leader at OSPB on the support available for children who did not have access to

computers at home. The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills confirmed a further application had been made to the Department for Education for devices for disadvantaged children and young people. It had been confirmed that Worcestershire County Council would receive 11057 devices and 379 4G wireless routers for children with a social worker and care leavers, plus 111 devices and 72 4G wireless routers for children specifically in year 10 in local authority maintained schools

- Further to a query about whether Traveller Services had been provided during the crisis, the Cabinet Member for Communities responded that the Council had a Gypsy Traveller county wide policy. Visits had been made to check up on Travellers that had set up in Worcester. There had been a 'light touch' approach during the virus and lockdown.
- In response to a query about the level of reporting of domestic and sexual violence during and after the lockdown, the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing responded that the issue of domestic and sexual abuse had been raised at a previous Safeguarding Board. The figures had shown that incidents had actually decreased during lockdown but were now starting to increase as people had the opportunity to report incidents. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families added that analysis had been carried out for children which showed an increase but the level/threshold of what was being reported had reduced, which meant less need for intervention, but this was currently being looked at
- A member from outside the Cabinet welcomed the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills visiting schools during lockdown and expressed the hope that in the future the local Member could be advised of these visits with the opportunity of joining the CMR, as the link between the local Member and schools was important.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- (a) **Noted and endorsed the action taken by the Council in relation to Covid-19 restart planning to date;**

**1985 Covid-19
Economic
Restart Plan**

- (b) Noted the revenue expenditure incurred by the Council to date, receipt of further Government grant and that further updates will be presented to Cabinet in due course;**
- (c) Approved the setting up of a One Worcestershire central PPE store hub for care providers and charges to care providers at cost only, and any other costs claimed from Government;**
- (d) Used the information in this report as the background for reporting to Council about the urgent decisions taken at the meeting of Cabinet on 26 March 2020.**

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure introduced the report which summarised the information available so far about the impact of the Coronavirus outbreak on the local economy and gave details of recovery plans involving the County Council and partner organisations.

The Cabinet Member wanted to allay people's fears regarding the link between 5G broadband and the Covid-19 outbreak and although he understood the concerns did not believe there to be a link.

The Leader commended the work of the LEP and the importance of the Midland's Engine to bring in experts to respond rapidly to bid for resources and connect across the region to work on cross border issues.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills noted a report by Worcestershire Apprenticeships which stated that apprenticeships were going from strength to strength. Despite the fact that of 526 apprenticeships across Worcestershire all but six had stopped, Worcestershire Group Training Association was keeping learners learning and the Association was working closely with employers to ensure learning continued within the furlough rules.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Services asked for clarity for businesses on whether the package of loans amounting to £3.5 million were grants or loans that the Council would expect to be repaid in due course. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure

responded that the particular circumstances would have to be matched to the appropriate business and stated the Government's concern was to get bounce back loans in place very quickly with relatively flexible circumstances for repayment.

The Leader followed up by stating grants would support and stimulate businesses and the Council wanted to support businesses of the future as well as those which were struggling through these difficult times. The Leader encouraged businesses to make contact through Worcestershire Business Central who would pick up and deal with any queries.

In response to a suggestion from a Member outside the Cabinet, The Leader agreed to ensure that information about grants, loans and support for businesses would be available on line through various portals. He also agreed to provide details of business support and relevant contact details to all County Councillors.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

(a) Noted and endorsed the action taken by the Council in supporting the County wide activity of the Covid – 19 Economic Response, Recovery and Resilience Group, and the work to date on the Economic Recovery Plan;

(b) Accepted the Open For Business Board's recommendation to approve £3,574,500 of the Open for Business reserves to be used to fund grants to support local businesses as part of the economic restart planning.

(c) Would continue to review the resources required to support the restart through the Open for Business Board in accordance with Financial Regulations, as set out at paragraphs 19 and 20 of the report.

The Leader introduced the report, summarised the content and put on record his thanks to the organisations across the spectrum, at every level, in delivering the

Financial Outturn

budget to such a small margin of error at the end of this financial year.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Services commented that some attention should be paid to the large amount of bad debt that had been accumulating from self-funding pickups and although in the past this has sometimes been written off, had now become a significant figure on the books. The Cabinet Member confirmed he was working with the Director of People to work up a new model to respond to these cost pressures as in the medium term the situation was not sustainable for the Council.

The Cabinet Member stated that Covid-19 had, had a volatile effect on financial markets but the Council's pension scheme had benefited from the equity protection insurance it had taken out and over the last three years had improved to be slightly ahead of where it would be expected to be and the pension fund currently sat at 91% full funding.

In response to a query about additional business rates income, the Leader reported that there had been a bonus through business rates, which he suggested would be put into risk reserves. In the meantime, the Government was being lobbied by local authorities to establish an income guarantee fund to address the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This would ensure that any loss of income on the collection fund would be met by Government.

The Leader referred to the CCN report which highlighted the lower levels of income projected Council Tax and Business Rates receipts and reiterated that if an Income Guarantee was set up by Government it would enable the Council to draw on this money rather than fall upon the preceptors in the next financial year. He also reported that currently in terms of the immediate financial situation the Council had received more grant than it had spent

It was noted that in paragraph 78 on page 40 of the report the amount claimed was omitted from reference to claims on CCGs and NHS England. The Chief Financial Officer advised this figure should be £1.6million.

The Leader was asked about preparations for a potential second wave of the coronavirus. He responded that the Bronze, Silver and Gold structures would be retained while continuing with the testing regime and bringing the Board forward to manage any local outbreaks. The Local Outbreak Plan the Council would submit to Government

would set out how the response to any spikes would be managed. The Leader reiterated with regard to the potential fall off in business rates and rise in unemployment or necessity for council tax support for residents, Members of Parliament had written to Government to make the case for an Income Guarantee Fund.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- a) endorsed financial performance for the year ending 31 March 2020 and the unaudited Annual Financial Report and Statement of Accounts 2019/20;**
- b) approved updates to earmarked reserves and general balances as detailed in paragraphs 51 to 59 of the report,**
- c) Considered the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2019/20 for comment before final approval was sought from the Audit and Governance Committee; and**
- d) Noted the emerging financial issues for the Council with regard to 2020/21 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**1987 Review of
Delivery Model
for Medical
Education
Provision**

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills presented the report which set out a revised timetable for the review of the delivery model. It had not been possible to meet the planned deadlines and time frames as agreed at the Cabinet meeting in January due to the restrictions of lockdown.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- (a) noted the impact of Covid-19 on the review of Medical Education Provision;**
- (b) approved the revised timetable for the development of the new delivery model of Medical Education Provision, including the Medical Education Service;**
- (c) approved the continuation of the current Medical Education Service within the same**

functions and capacity for the academic year starting in September 2020; and

- (d) would receive a further report to consider proposals and recommendations for the new delivery model of Medical Education Provision following design and co-production work.**

**1988 Scrutiny Report
- Care Work as
a Career**

Councillor Liz Tucker presented the report and stated she appreciated the response from Cabinet in accepting all but two of the recommendations.

Cabinet Members agreed that this was an excellent report and recognised the amount of work done by the voluntary sector and care workers.

Councillor Tucker suggested that there could be a change in the title of Care Worker, there was a discussion around this and the Cabinet Member for Environment suggested the sector should be consulted as to whether they would prefer to be known by another name. This was supported by the Leader

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- (a) received the Scrutiny Report on Care Work as a Career, together with the response from the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care; and**

- (b) noted the Scrutiny Report's findings and recommendations and adopted the response of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility as the way forward.**

The meeting ended at

Chairman

