

Cabinet
Thursday, 24 June 2021, County Hall
10.00 am**Present:****Minutes**

Cllr Alan Amos, Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cllr Matt Dormer, Cllr Simon Geraghty (Chairman), Cllr Marcus Hart, Cllr Adam Kent, Cllr Karen May, Cllr Tony Miller and Cllr Andy Roberts

Also attended:

Cllrs Mel Allcott, Laura Gretton, Peter Griffiths, Matt Jenkins, Richard Morris and Richard Udall.

**2036 Apologies and
Declarations of
Interest**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Adrian Hardman.

**2037 Public
Participation**

None.

**2038 Confirmation of
the Minutes of
the previous
meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2021 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

**2039 Children's
Homes and
Semi
Independent
Accommodatio
n**

Prior to discussing the report, the CMR for Children and Families informed Members that since its publication, a national independent care review report, Case for Change, had been published. This independent review stated three key priorities including supporting families and the wider community, helping families stay together by building relationships and finally, keeping children safe. Cllr Roberts noted positively that Worcestershire were already implementing these priorities.

Cllr Roberts commented that the report discussed underlying prejudice experienced by those in care. He encouraged members to reflect on this and not to underestimate the challenge this presents to young people in care.

During consideration of the report, it was suggested that resources should be focused on the Supporting Families First approach as detailed in para 21. The approach aimed to assist families in remaining together as outcomes for children who are separated from their families are generally poorer than for those who remain

with their families.

Members noted that it was Council's responsibility to encourage people within the community to become foster carers. It was vital to ensure that children brought into the care system were provided with safe, secure homes.

Concerns were raised regarding the use of semi-independent homes located outside of the local authority. It was queried how the Council maintained communication and involvement with these homes to tackle any problems when they arose. It was clarified that although these homes were not strictly under the supervision of the County Council, the Council may still intervene if issues arise.

It was noted that occasionally, children were required to be placed in private homes outside of the County at a cost to the Council. This became necessary if a young person had particular special requirement which could not be met by services within the County.

The possibility of allocating new resources to kinship carers was discussed. The plans were under review as detailed in the report.

A non-member of Cabinet requested that local Councillors be kept informed when issues occur within homes in their division. The Cabinet member commented that, due to the sensitive nature of the issues at homes, a cautious approach was taken over the information which was communicated. Additional effort would be made to engage with members in the future regarding such matters, providing that this did not compromise the safety of children.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- a) Noted the Sufficiency Strategy as approved by the Board of Worcestershire Children First and the evidence base contained in it for the policy approach to achieving the legal duty;**
- b) Noted the success and expansion of the Edge of Care service and the growing demand for good quality local semi-independent accommodation;**
- c) Agreed to cease operating Green Hill Lodge as a children's home under its existing registration and agreed to the consideration of its future use being undertaken within the all**

age disability service development;

- d) Agreed to the proposed change in statement of purpose for Oak House to become a semi-independent provision;**
- e) Agreed to cease operating Hill View as a semi-independent provision, and**
- f) Following agreement of the recommendations (c) and (d) above, authorised the Director of Children’s Services to finalise the consultation documentation and undertake such consultation as was required.**

2040 Blakedown Rail Station Car Park Extension

The Cabinet Member for Highways presented the report, which set out plans to increase the capacity for car parking at Blakedown rail station by up to 120 spaces. Work was underway to establish the actual capacity and provision would be included for electric vehicles and cycles.

Consultation would be required before any final decision was made on the plans. Pre-application public engagement was scheduled prior to the submission of the planning application. Residents would therefore be given the opportunity to comment on the plans.

Members praised the environmental consideration undertaken for this project. Additionally, the extra parking spaces would help to alleviate congestion in the local area and encourage more people to choose travel by rail rather than by car. The additional capacity would also help to prevent drivers from parking on residential roads.

During discussion of the report, members suggested that a strategic approach should be taken towards car parking charges in the area due to demand for parking in Wyre Forest and Hagley.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- (a) Noted the progress to date and authorised the continuation of the works, including surveys, necessary to progress the Blakedown Rail Station car parking scheme;**
- (b) Endorsed the allocation of funding to purchase the land for the rail station car parking scheme from the Capital Budget for**

Railway Station Upgrades;

- (c) Authorised the completion of a pre-planning public engagement and the preparation and submission of a Planning Application for the Blakedown Rail Station car parking scheme;**
- (d) Authorised the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure and the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change to acquire the land or part thereof necessary to deliver the scheme (shown red in Appendix 1 to the report) through negotiation if possible and, if not possible, in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport, to make a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) to acquire the land and rights required for the project, and further authorised the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change to approve any Statement of Reasons in relation to the land, that must accompany any CPO submitted for confirmation to the Secretary of State and noted that this will be approved prior to the making of any CPO;**
- (e) Authorised the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport to finalise the design of the car park and links to the station;**
- (f) Authorised the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure to award contracts and to enter any other such agreements as were necessary to complete the car park within the funding envelope; and**
- (g) Authorised the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure to award contracts and to enter into any other agreements as were necessary to manage the car park once it became operational.**

**2041 Revenue and
Capital Budget
Monitoring -
Financial
Outturn**

The Leader presented the report and commented that despite the challenges faced over the past year by the community, businesses and services, there had been an underspend by £800,000 at the end of the financial year for 2020/2021. The underspend would be allocated to restore general fund balances back up to £13,000,000.

The Leader attributed much of this success to the support provided by the government. Further financial

resource had been allocated by the government for the forthcoming financial year. He highlighted proposals for usage of balances and reserves as outlined in paras 46 and 47 of the report.

During consideration of the report, members acknowledged the significant financial support provided to local government in response to the pandemic. Members also praised the Council's collective hard work over the past year in successfully managing the finances throughout the pandemic.

Attention was drawn to investments detailed in the report which would positively benefit communities, including the divisional fund and to the two-year extension of the local members capital highways fund.

The Leader was pleased to inform Cabinet that the County Council had been recently shortlisted for the Public Finance Awards for achievements in financial reporting and accountability.

Further to budget scrutiny proposals in January, members were encouraged to look for opportunities for income generation which could be used to support services. Proposals would be welcomed from all members.

Members queried whether the divisional fund could be raised from the present rate of £10,000 to £12,000 to help members to support their local communities which were recovering after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Leader confirmed that he would monitor the spend of the divisional fund throughout the year before considering a change in the amount.

RESOLVED that Cabinet

- (a) Endorsed financial performance for the year ended 31 March 2021 and the unaudited Annual Financial Report and Statement of Accounts 2020/21;**
- (b) Approved updates to earmarked reserves and general balances as detailed in paragraphs 42 to 49 of the report;**
- (c) Considered the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2020/21 for comment before final approval was sought from the Audit and Governance Committee; and**

(d) Noted the use of grant funding from Central Government in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020/21.

The meeting ended at 11.13 am.

Chairman