

Minutes of the Cabinet

County Hall

Thursday, 23 September 2021, 10.00 am

Present:

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

Also attended:

Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Laura Gretton, Cllr Matt Jenkins,
Cllr Josh Robinson and Cllr Peter Griffiths

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated),
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 July 2021 (previously circulated).

(Copies of documents A and B will be attached to the signed Minutes).

2047 Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Apologies had been received from Cllr Matt Dormer.

Cllr Marc Bayliss declared an interest in Item 7, The Establishment of Museum Charitable Body, as a Member of Worcester City Council, as the Museum was a joint service.

2048 Public Participation

None

2049 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed to be an accurate record of the last meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

2050 School Sufficiency and Organisation for the Pershore Area

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education introduced the report and explained the changes in the Pershore pyramid. Pershore High School had become a secondary school as it has taken pupils in year 7 from this September and a number of first schools had converted to become primary schools. The area now had a range of First, Middle and Primary schools and some schools were finding it difficult to be sustainable.

The Cabinet Member pointed out a mistake that had been corrected in appendix 8, where the last table should be labelled St Nicholas.

The County Council had been approached by the local schools to look at the pyramid, so Cabinet was being asked to approve a pre-publication consultation which should take place between the 11 October and 26 November. There were a range of implications to consider when schools changed their arrangements, not least the financial cost of the change which was estimated to be around £4million pounds.

Three processes were being considered. Process one was the preferred option with transition in line with natural progression and all changes being made by September 2024. The other processes would create more upheaval and could possibly leave the Council open to challenges.

This change has been requested by schools, and MPs, Local Members and Parish Councils had been briefed. A report would return to Cabinet in February 2022 to publish a formal statutory consultation proposal to be decided later in the spring. There would be due regard to the public equality duty and a comprehensive consultation would occur.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families confirmed that in the near future the situation would not be sustainable in terms of finance or curriculum and there was a consensus for change. He confirmed that the needs of young people with special educational needs would be fully taken into account.

A question was asked about how catchment areas would be affected and whether they would be reviewed. The Cabinet Member with responsibility agreed they would be reviewed along with Home to School Transport requirements, especially as a new secondary school was being planned for Worcester and was likely to impact the Pershore area.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- a) approved a pre-publication consultation with stakeholders on the proposal for a coordinated change of age range to align schools in the Pershore Education Planning Area to a single, two-tier (primary and secondary) system of education;**
- b) supported Worcestershire Children First to continue to manage this change and coordinate the consultation with families, residents, and other stakeholders; and**

- c) **agreed to consider a report of the consultation findings and full proposals in February 2022.**

2051 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans

The Cabinet member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport gave an introduction to the report and explained how the County was creating a modern integrated and co-ordinated transport network. The capacity of all forms of transport needed to be increased due to the County's increased economy and population. Road capacity would be increased but at the same time alternative forms of transport would be made more attractive.

The report detailed the process for adopting local walking and cycling infrastructure plans which were linked to the active travel objectives in the LPT4. A bid had been submitted to the Department for Transport for almost £200,000 for the production of four plans around the County, a further plan had been developed using the Council's resources, and further plans would be developed when funding became available.

The budget for walking and public rights of way had been doubled in the last year to over £1 million. £800,000 was also obtained from the Government's active travel fund and the levelling up fund, and the major road improvement fund had been used to improve transport routes in the County for cyclists, pedestrians and cars.

A Member from outside the Cabinet commented that he was glad actions were being taken with regards to active travel but felt that it was nowhere near enough. He felt that at some point policies had to be introduced which would be detrimental to car users but they needed to be given a real alternative by improving walking, cycling and bus routes. This would tackle congestion as well as having environmental benefits. The Cabinet Member responded that although it would be good to reduce car usage it was important to encourage people to take actions rather than impose behaviours on people.

A question was asked about why the Upland Grove Park Bromsgrove link had been delayed until 2022. A written answer would be provided after the meeting.

It was commented that it was unclear what plans would be going out to public consultation and when that would be. The lack of a walking and cycling plan for Worcester City was also thought to be a huge gap and that it was a bit premature to cite Kepax Bridge as an achievement as there was no infrastructure plan for Worcester City. There were also concerns about the use of the Canal towpath for cyclists as it had originally been designed for boats, now accommodated walkers and was a biodiversity corridor and had various problems for cyclists. It was hoped that cyclists would be involved in any consultations.

A point of clarification was made that the Worcester News had reported that the County Council were proposing to surface the Canal Tow Path between Worcester and Malvern. What was being proposed was a resurfacing of the canal towpath between Diglis and Sixways and secondly a bid had been put to

the Department of Transport for capital funding for detailed design of the Worcester to Malvern cycle way.

Members of the Cabinet made the following comments:

- The Cabinet Member and officers were commended for their work in this area.
- Policies should not be introduced which were detrimental to car users. All forms of transport were being encouraged and coexistence should be encouraged. The level of investment was welcomed and Kepax Bridge, was felt to be of great benefit to the area.
- One Cabinet Member felt it was great to see this report on the Cabinet agenda. He pointed out that future infrastructure plans were considering walking and cycling needs and new routes would then need to be linked up with the current infrastructure in the best way possible. It was also pointed out that the good quality of roads in the County helped cyclists.

The Leader concluded that although the report was about delegation it was important to understand Worcestershire's excellent track record and levels of investment with regard to walking and cycling. All modes of transport were being improved at the detriment of none.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- (a) authorised the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport to approve individual Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans for public consultation and modification; and**
- (b) authorised the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport to adopt individual Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans for implementation.**

2052 National Bus Strategy - Agreement of Bus Service Improvement Plan

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport stated that an ambitious Passenger Transport Policy had been adopted by the Council in 2019. This had been put on hold but was now being put into effect. It was felt that buses were an effective alternative to cars and were a green form of travel.

A bus service improvement plan was a huge challenge but would attract further Government funding. The Council had already applied for a scheme for Zero emissions buses and had passed the first hurdle. The Passenger Transport Strategy was already in place and foresaw all the major elements in the National Bus Strategy. The Improvement Plan would mean a major transformation of bus services throughout the County with improved timetables and real time information readily available and an improved infrastructure of

bus stops and shelters; however congestion would need to be addressed to allow for punctual services.

The Service Improvement Plan would be delivered through the enhanced partnership. Multi operator or multi modal tickets would be an exciting development and would create a fully integrated service and cross county boundary services would be considered. The Council worked closely with Community transport operators and the Vale Passenger Transport Group was thanked for the work they do around Evesham.

The Cabinet member for Corporate Services gave details of the Bromsgrove on demand bus service pilot scheme and explained that feedback was showing it was proving very popular. Overall, he felt that the bus service improvement plan would be of benefit to all residents.

Cabinet Members were excited about the improvement plan and the pilot scheme in Bromsgrove and mentioned how improved bus services helped reduce social isolation. The Cabinet Member and Council staff were thanked for their work in this area, although it was noted that clarity was needed about who would be providing the infrastructure such as bus shelters in rural areas and also that there was a significant challenge in integrating cross border bus routes as improvements in that area had been sought for years and proved very difficult to achieve. It was explained that although responsibility for bus shelters had previously been with varying bodies a policy was now in place to allow the County Council to take responsibility for them.

Comments and queries from Members outside the Cabinet included:

- The Vale of Evesham transport group had concerns about the hopper service. The Cabinet Member said he was aware of the concerns and would discuss it outside the meeting,
- Mention of the statutory enhanced partnership was welcomed but it was hoped that the improvement plan would actually make a tangible improvement to people's journeys,
- The fragile state of a lot of the bus companies was seen as a concern and it was hoped that the Council had a positive working relationship with them. The Cabinet Member assured the meeting that there was a positive working relationship between the County Council and bus operators,
- There was a concern about whether there would be enough money from the Government to implement the necessary improvements and that the Council would have to find further funding,

- It was agreed that bus improvement was needed as the quality of the current service was poor,
- It was queried what had gone wrong with home to school transport? The Cabinet Member agreed to provide a written answer as that was not the subject of the report.
- It was hoped that bus users would be involved in the improvement process. The Cabinet Member reminded the meeting that an extensive consultation had been undertaken two years previously for the Passenger transport policy and any necessary additional consultation would be undertaken.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- (a) committed to development of a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), setting out a vision and priorities for the future of bus services in Worcestershire and will be a high-level bidding document used to secure capital and revenue grant funding from the Department for Transport (DfT);**
- (b) authorised the CMR to approve the Bus Service Improvement Plan and operational policies with appropriate development and consultation schedules before adoption having regard to the National Bus Strategy and Worcestershire Passenger Transport Strategy;**
- (c) Authorised the CMR to approve the Statutory Enhanced Partnership, following the creation of the Bus Service Improvement Plan;**
- (d) acknowledged the potential impact on other DfT funding opportunities (not public transport related), should it be decided not to develop an Enhanced Partnership; and**
- (e) acknowledged that Worcestershire County Council’s Bus Services Improvement plan will be based on the previously agreed Worcestershire Passenger Strategy.**

2053 Establishment of Museum Charitable Body

In the absence of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families explained that Covid-19 had caused difficulties for volunteers supporting museums. To help

the situation a charitable body had been set up which would give the volunteers a level of autonomy as well as drawing in money.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- a) Authorised the Council's involvement in the establishment of a charitable body that would support fundraising for the City and County museums; and**
- b) Delegated authority to the Strategic Director of People in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities, to enter into all necessary legal agreements to establish the charitable body.**

2054 Adult Social Care - Local Account

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care explained that it was a statutory requirement for the Council to publish the Local Account each year. It has been a challenging year but despite the pandemic the service has been modernised. Improvements included the Here2Help service which had been rapidly set up and social workers making additional efforts to keep in contact with service users. Reablement also continued to promote peoples' independence.

RESOLVED that Cabinet endorsed the improvements Adult Social Care have made in 2019/2020.

2055 Revenue and Capital Monitoring

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Finance (who is also the Leader of the Council) introduced this financial monitoring report up to month 4 and also looked to the future. The situation was broadly in balance with just a small overspend of £1million. The Leader paid tribute to the Government who had stood behind Local Authorities and provided the necessary resources to manage the pandemic and help support recovery. The Council was in robust financial health.

RESOLVED THAT CABINET:

- (a) Endorsed the conclusions of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Finance, concerning revenue budget monitoring up to 31 July 2021;**
- (b) Approved that the underspend on treasury costs set out at paragraph 42 totalling £5 million is transferred to the Financial Risk Reserve**
- (c) Noted the financial impact and forecast for COVID-19 expenditure;**
- (d) Noted the current progress regarding savings plans approved by Council in February 2021; and**

- (e) **Noted the report on borrowing and lending transactions during 2020/21 detailed in paragraphs 55-56 and Appendix 7.**

The meeting ended at 11.30am

Chairman