

Cabinet**Thursday, 22 September 2022, County Hall,
10.00 am****Present:****Minutes**

Cllr Simon Geraghty (Chairman), Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cllr Marcus Hart, Cllr Adam Kent, Cllr Karen May, Cllr Richard Morris, Cllr Tracey Onslow, Cllr Andy Roberts and Cllr Mike Rouse

Also attended:

Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Matt Jenkins, Cllr Steve Mackay, Cllr Richard Udall and Cllr Dan Boatright

**2111 Apologies and
Declarations of
Interest**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Adrian Hardman.

**2112 Public
Participation**

None

**2113 Confirmation of
the Minutes of
the previous
meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 July 2022 were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

**2114 Open for
Business
Programme**

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills introduced the report. The Open for Business programme had been operating for a number of years; this report was asking Cabinet to support three projects:

- A. Visit Worcestershire – As the County’s Destination Marketing Organisation, Visit Worcestershire played an important part in promoting and supporting the tourism economy in the County and encouraging people to stay and spend money in Worcestershire. The funding requested was £1,459,500 for the next three years.
- B. Workforce Resilience – To help with worker education and engaging with employers to help with apprenticeships and training. Certain groups such as Care Leavers would be targeted. The funding requested was £1,297,079.
- C. Business Worcestershire – To provide support to local businesses as EU funding comes to an end. The project would involve working with the District

Councils who would be receiving funding. The funding requested was £3,364,071.

The commitment to Open for Business had been emphasised in the refresh of the Corporate Plan and the three key projects would help the Worcestershire economy to grow and highlight that the county was a brilliant place to live and work.

Other Cabinet Members supported the recommendations and were delighted to support apprenticeships and business start-ups, especially those focussing on innovation and technology. There was also appreciation that care leavers would be targeted for help.

In response to a query about whether there was some risk involved in the Business Worcestershire programme as it would be the Districts who were receiving a lot of the money for the programme; the Cabinet Member responded that the County Council had good relationships with the Districts and all agreed that the project would be most successful if they worked collectively.

It was recognised that by helping the economy and supporting people with training and into work, residents' aspirations and outcomes would improve, which would have a major impact on wellbeing. It was understood that the four Corporate Plan themes interlinked.

A Member from outside the Cabinet supported help for tourism but queried if increasing the amount of tourism would increase congestion in the County. He felt that there should be support for businesses but that needed to go hand in hand with projects moving towards net zero. It was pointed out that accessibility into the County was improving, with projects which were helping sustainable transport such as new or improved railway stations. Moving towards net zero was important to the Council. The Government had announced support packages to businesses around their energy costs, but in the long term more work should be done to help businesses become as energy efficient as possible.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- (a) Delegated responsibility to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills to oversee the implementation of the Open for Business**

2115 Implementing the DfE Multiply Programme

programme and approve future business cases for such investment, from the Open for Business Reserve and/or the Open for Business Capital Programme, up to £0.5 million per project;

(b) approved the Governance Structure of the Open for Business Board as set out in this report; and

(c) noted the schemes already completed and underway as part of the Open for Business Programme and its successes to date and approved relevant reserve and capital programme allocations to be spent on the proposed projects as listed in this report, namely Business Worcestershire, Visit Worcestershire, and Workforce Resilience.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills introduced the report, explaining how important numeracy skills were to everyone in their everyday life. The Multiply Programme had the potential to help thousands of adults who lacked basic numeracy skills, to gain confidence and qualifications equivalent to a GCSE, in Maths. The programme would also give skills to parents, to enable them to help their children with schoolwork.

It was pointed out that helping adults with basic education would enable adults to have better outcomes in life and therefore help improve the health and wellbeing of the residents of Worcestershire.

In response to a query the Cabinet Member agreed to speak to a specialist about whether specific help would be offered to those with dyscalculia.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- a) Noted the submission of a Worcestershire Investment Plan to the Department for Education (DfE), to deliver the Multiply Programme in Worcestershire as part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF);**
- b) Endorsed the content of the Worcestershire Investment Plan, as summarised in paragraph 9,**

2116 Award of the Contract for Kepax bridge and Adjustments to the Capital Programme

which outlines how Worcestershire County Council will deliver the £2.68M Multiply programme over a 3 year funding period between 2022 – 2025; and

- c) Delegated the implementation of the plan to the Strategic Director for People in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills.**

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills introduced the report, explaining that the Kepax Bridge was part of a suite of significant infrastructure projects. Other projects included the Southern Link Road, the Upton Roundabout, Parkway, Kidderminster Station and Hoobrook Link Road. It was recognised that there had been some criticism of the project but the bridge would improve walking and cycling routes and allow a bridge at the other end of the city to Diglis Bridge. The cost of the bridge had substantially increased but an estimated target price was now available, with the increase being due to increased steel prices and labour costs. The report detailed how the increased costs would be covered.

Other Members of Cabinet supported the bridge as it encouraged active travel, opened up the green spaces, and linked the town and countryside. The bridge would continue Worcestershire's strong track record of investing in infrastructure, which in turn helped improve the lives of Worcestershire residents. It was pointed out that the Diglis Bridge and the Southern Link Road had previously had their critics but the benefits were realised once the projects had progressed.

A Member from outside the Cabinet pointed out that initially £1.5 million had been allocated, and then a further £2.5 million, along with £1million from the Getting Building Fund so a total of £5million and now a further £10.9million extra was proposed. She asked why the cost kept increasing. She also pointed out that when she had previously asked if money could be moved from the highways budget to help with a children's home she had been told no, so it now seemed contradictory that money was being moved from capital programmes and the highways maintenance budget to help fund the bridge. She felt certain issues should be considered: Government guidance said walking and cycling bridges should be 4 metres wide but Kepax would only be 3.5 metres; and also how would active travel be encouraged

each side of the bridge. In response it was clarified that the initial amounts of money were never the full cost of the bridge but just the starting point, and Worcester City Council were not being asked for any additional funding. With regard to the width of the bridge it was felt that 3.5 metres was sufficient, as proved by Diglis Bridge which was not 4 metres, and to increase the width would further increase the cost. With regard to changes to the budget it was clarified that the money was remaining within the highways capital budget. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families said he had been supportive to the idea of moving money between budgets and it was still an ambition to do that.

Another Member explained that he was not against the bridge but had queries which had not been answered. The queries were that he was concerned over the rising costs and the fact that they could increase further; he wanted the best return for the capital employed. He was also concerned at the lack of connectivity to the west where there were no new cycle routes.

A further contribution from outside the Cabinet commented that the business case for the bridge originally said that the project was medium value for money and he wondered what it now was. There was concern that so much money would be spent on this project resulting in less being available for other projects to help with modal shift. The response was that in the cost benefit analysis the costs had risen but also the benefits. Modal shift would be helped as better access would be facilitated from the west to the north side of the city. Thousands of people were getting benefits from walking along the riverside so the bridge offered health as well as tourism benefits.

The Leader stated that as thousands of new homes were being built around Worcester, new infrastructure was needed and all cost increases would be challenged, but the queries were not a reason to delay the project as any further delay would increase costs further. The increase in capital money to this project did not mean a cut to road and pavement maintenance. It was known when the budget was set that there would be an increase to capital costs which was why a reserve had been included. It was not always possible to provide projects to budget but it was important to press forward with this project in order to grow the economy of Worcestershire sustainably.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

2117 Major Road Network Schemes (North West Worcestershire Corridor and A44/A4538

- a) Requested that Council approves amendments to the Capital Programme necessary to progress the Kepax Bridge scheme, including the virement of funds previously allocated as part of the approved Capital Programme along with additional sources of funding from Worcester City Council and the Towns Fund; and,
- b) Authorised the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills to award construction contracts and enter into any other such agreements as are necessary to progress delivery of the Kepax Bridge scheme, within the approved funding envelope.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills introduced the report, explaining that ambitious plans were being developed to increase the capacity of roads in two areas of the County. The corridors were important for local growth with the improved infrastructure required due to the increase in the number of homes in those areas. The outcome of the work would be a business case to prove why the Government should support the projects.

It was clarified that the cost of £300,000 was for initial work, not the final project and support would need to be gained from local MPs to lobby for more funds. Local members would be engaged and asked to provide feedback about any concerns.

Cabinet Members were happy for the work to be investigated and for suggestions to be made about reducing congestion. Work also needed to be done on how demand for roads could be reduced. The project was seen as a good example of Worcestershire researching solutions and looking at the long term. All modes of travel needed to be considered and any contracts which were awarded would be subject to a competitive process. The project was not necessarily about building new roads but about improving existing routes so that excess traffic was not using rural routes. It was agreed that the project was looking at proposals to

improve residents lives in future.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- a) **Noted the overall concepts of both the North West Worcestershire Corridor (NWWC) Scheme and the A44 / A4538 scheme and progress made to date;**
- b) **Approved the further development and submission of the Strategic Outline Case (SOC) of the NWWC Scheme to Midlands Connect in Winter 2022 / 23;**
- c) **Approved the further development of the SOC for the A44 /A4538 and for this to be shared with Midlands Connect;**
- d) **Supported the continued progress of business cases for both schemes towards Outline Business Case stage, including identifying the timetable for stakeholder engagement, planning permission, land acquisition and funding mechanism for the schemes;**
- e) **Supported continued engagement with Midlands Connect and the Department for Transport to secure their ongoing support for the schemes and exploring any funding opportunities for the development of the business cases; and**
- f) **Approved the use of up to £0.360 million from the Strategic Infrastructure Fund revenue reserve in order to deliver the Outline Business Cases for these schemes**

**2118 Revenue and
Capital Budget
Monitoring
period 4
2021/22**

The Leader, who has responsibility for Finance introduced the report, with information on the state of the budget and forecasting until the end of the year. The forecast was that there would be some cost pressures of just over £8million in demand led services in adult social care and children's services placements. Post pandemic, the costs of residential and nursing care had increased and the demand for domiciliary care had grown.

Cabinet would be lobbying Government regarding the costs of health and social care and work would be carried out with providers to help people stay in their own homes. Longer term work would be done around prevention and changing health outcomes. In year, contingencies would be used to bring pressures down. It was noted that the draft budget would be considered in January 2023 rather than December 2022 once the Government had made its announcements on grant settlements.

Some positives were that a £21million Transport Capital fund grant had been received from the Department of Transport; £43million would be received for the A38 (subject to the final business case) and education basic need grant had been confirmed for three years with £7.5million for the first year, then £7.1million and £5.3 million. The reform programme was small compared to previous years and £4.65million savings had already been identified.

The Deputy Leader confirmed that corporate governance was important and as they had the information, actions could be taken to mitigate the expected overspend from demand led services.

A comment was made about the £1.8million deficit in Worcestershire Children First in the Educational Psychology service. It was very difficult to forecast what the demand would be in that area because it depended on individual assessments but assurance was given that the budgets were scrutinised.

The Leader pointed out that Worcestershire was not alone in overspending on adult social care as 25 out of 30 councils who were surveyed were currently in the same situation.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- (a) Noted the budget forecast as at 31 July 2022;**
- (b) noted and approved the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) reserves as detailed in paragraphs 24 - 27 and Appendix 2;**
- (c) noted the current progress regarding savings plans approved by Council in February 2022 as**

detailed in paragraphs 50 and 51;

- (d) noted the financial impact and forecast for COVID-19 reserve funded expenditure as detailed in paragraphs 52 and 53 and Appendix 3;
- (e) noted the progress and commitments relating to the Open for Business Reserve, as detailed in paragraphs 54 to 56 and Appendix 4;
- (f) approved the use of reserves as detailed in paragraphs 57 to 61;
- (g) recommended to Council the variations to the Capital Programme as detailed in paragraphs 62 – 68; and
- (h) noted the report on borrowing and lending transactions during 2021/22 detailed in paragraphs 74 and 75 and Appendix 5.

The meeting ended at 11.50am

Chairman