

Minutes of the Cabinet

County Hall

Thursday, 20 July 2023, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Simon Geraghty (Chairman), Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cllr Adrian Hardman, Cllr Marcus Hart (Vice Chairman), Cllr Adam Kent, Cllr Karen May, Cllr Richard Morris and Cllr Mike Rouse

Also attended:

Cllrs Matt Jenkins, Matt Dormer and Emma Stokes (as Chair of the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel) were also in attendance.

Available papers

The Members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2023 (previously circulated); and
- C. A submission from the Library Campaign in relation to Agenda Item 5 which was circulated separately to members of Cabinet and is attached as an Appendix to these Minutes.

2163 Apologies and Declarations of Interest (Agenda item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllrs Tracey Onslow and Andy Roberts.

Cllr Simon Geraghty declared an interest in Agenda item 5 having represented the County Council on the Redditch Town New Deal Board.

Cllr Mike Rouse declared an interest in agenda item 5 as a previous member of the Redditch Borough Council Executive during the early formation of the plans to relocate Redditch Library.

2164 Public Participation (Agenda item 2)

Phil Berry commenting on and questioned the provision of IT services, the calculation of the leases, the access arrangements, the fit-out costs and the repairs to the current Redditch library.

Andrea Berry commented in respect of the potential negative impacts for people with disabilities and in particular the Disability Impact Statement in relation to Redditch Library.

Sharon Burton Fletcher drew Cabinet's attention to some potential anomalies in the evaluations so far and the need for a feasibility study in relation to the relocation of Redditch Library.

The Chairman thanked Phil, Andrea and Sharon for their contribution.

2165 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2166 Adult Social Care - Local Account 2022-23 (Agenda item 4)

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care introduced the report. He highlighted a number of key elements in report over the last year. These included a reduction in the number of people living in long-term residential and nursing care, an increase in people living in supported living and receiving extra care, and an increase in the number of people being supported to live at home. The Council continued to deploy assisted technology to some effect. The 2020/21 census had indicated a decrease in the number of carers in the system. The Council was 2% above the national average for discharge and reablement rates. The Council still had more to do to meet its target for people with learning difficulties in gainful employment. More work was required to improve the Council's systems for direct payments. A new Domiciliary Care Contract had been agreed for the west and south of Worcester. Reablement was a key element in ensuring that the Council addressed the needs of the individual. The provision of Day Care Services had been particularly successful.

He added that an important part of the Local Account was its vision for the future. Key aspects of the vision included embracing partnership working with the NHS, engaging with communities, encouraging communities to do more to combat loneliness and using assisted technology to enable people to live safely and independently. The Council was managing demand by focusing resources on preventative measures to encourage people to be responsible for their own health which resulted in people living longer in their own homes.

He explained that an area of concern was performance levels in safeguarding. A new inspection regime, similar to that in Children's Services was being

introduced. The service could do more in terms of partnership working with the NHS. The Adult Front Door would have a key role promoting independent living. The service also had to do more to listen to the voice of the user. The Council would continue its approach of prevention and independent living in order to generate less demand for Adult Social Care.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Well-being commented that partnership working was a key theme in Local Account. The Council was developing a holistic approach to care in Worcestershire using the integrated care system to develop an integrated approach to health and social care. The Council was placing equal value on physical and mental health well-being, focusing on prevention to reduce the need for care and support and improve health disparities particularly for the vulnerable, disadvantaged or those living with a disability.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport emphasised the important role of transport in Adult Social Care in promoting independent living through good accessible public transport, well-maintained roads and pavements and tackling congestion. In future Local Accounts, more detailed information on the important role of transport would be welcomed. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care recognised the important role of transport supporting Adult Social Care services.
- The emphasis in the Local Account on engaging with the community was welcomed, particularly the important role of assisted technology in helping people to help themselves.
- The impact of fraud was a major concern, particularly the targeted approach on the elderly and those in receipt of care. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care responded that fraud was becoming increasingly sophisticated and he was aware that the police were putting more resources into addressing this issue. There was a clear financial impact on the Council where people who had become victims of fraud became reliant on Adult Social Care.
- The conciseness and brevity of the Local Account meant that it had more impact. The introduction of the Adult Front Door had been a success, enabling easy access to services for people. It was requested that more information be provided in the Local Account on the positive impact of the natural environment on mental health.
- A member from outside the Cabinet queried whether pressure could be put on the relevant bodies to ensure that new housing was built with accessibility needs addressed to avoid costly retro-fits in the future. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care acknowledged the expensive nature of retro-fitting houses but noted that it was a district council responsibility. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being added that the Worcestershire Health Strategy was currently being developed. This Strategy was key to allowing district councils to plan for functional and fit-for-purpose housing.

Cabinet endorsed the improvements Adult Social Care have made in 2022/2023.

2167 Relocation of Redditch Library (Agenda item 5)

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities introduced the report and commented that the relocation of Redditch Library was an important decision for the local residents, library staff and the Council and therefore time should be taken to ensure that all the processes had been followed correctly. He was now satisfied that the parameters set out in the report to Cabinet in October 2022 had been met and the service provided at the new Library would be as good if not better than before. Although the Council worked closely with the Borough Council, this Council had a separate duty to preserve the library service and to protect council taxpayer's money.

He added that members of the Cabinet had received a communication from the Library Campaign that expressed concern about the demolition of Redditch Library and the hastiness of the decision-making process. These concerns did not recognise that a reconfigured fit-for-purpose library would be established nearby or the length of time taken by the Council to listen to the views of local residents through public consultation and engagement sessions, the input from the Corporate and Communities Scrutiny Panel and OSPB, or the time necessary to address the commercial, legal and financial issues.

He stated further that circa 10% of Redditch library users had responded to the consultation. He accepted that the majority of library users and other respondents disagreed with the proposals but emphasised that it had been a consultation exercise, not a referendum and due regard had been given to those views received. The Council, working collaboratively with Redditch Borough Council would ensure that there would be no impact on accessibility and disability as a result of the relocation. The lengthy public consultation meant that it was not possible to argue that local residents would not be aware of these proposals. The plan was to have the new reconfigured library in situ by 2024. Disruption during the construction phase would be kept to a minimum. The plans demonstrated that the proposed allocated space within the Town Hall would be equivalent to the service delivery area of the current library building. He confirmed that the plans had now been formally signed off.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- The origins of the proposals for the demolition and relocation of the library in Redditch could be traced back to a Redditch Place Review in 2017 carried out by Place Partnership. Various consultation exercises on proposals to demolish the library had taken place since then with no opposition expressed to the plans until the recent consultation exercise. The opportunity had been provided on multiple occasions for people to express their views
- The proposals represented a significant investment in Redditch by the Borough Council and assurances had been given by them with regard to the funding arrangements. It was important that there would be no financial detriment to this Council and that the library service provision

would not be reduced. There were many people, especially young people who were very supportive of the plans to regenerate Redditch Town Centre

- The proposals would not impact on the amount of library space available, the services provided, or the library experience and should therefore be supported
- The Chair of the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel commented that the role of the Panel and OSPB was to ensure that all concerns were heard and allow the Cabinet to make its decision based on the best information available. The Board had concluded that there was no compelling evidence that the proposal would result in any deterioration of the library service or its quality. The Board therefore believed that the Cabinet had all the information it needed to make an informed decision
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporates Services and Communication emphasised that the Council had a statutory duty to dispose of land with the best consideration reasonably possible unless the Secretary of State deemed otherwise. It was therefore imperative to protect the Council's property. He considered that the proposal represented best value and that the residents of Redditch would receive a library service equally as good if not better than at present
- The Council had a long history of remodelling and modernising its libraries estate as opportunities arose. This proposal was consistent with that approach in providing the best value from a public space
- Officers had addressed the concerns raised in the consultation and enhanced the proposal in doing so
- It was important to pay attention to the lived experience of disabled people to ensure that it would meet satisfactory accessibility and disability standards
- It was important that Redditch Borough Council met environmental standards in terms of the work to demolish the existing library
- The Library service had moved beyond just lending books towards an asset-based community development approach which enabled residents to access different services at a hub and help prevent social isolation
- The Leader of the Council thanked everyone involved in the scrutiny process for their input. He was satisfied that the proposal met the clear red lines set out by the Council for the relocation of Redditch Library that the library facility should be as good if not better than the existing facility and met the needs of the community and wider Worcestershire. It would meet the Council's statutory duty and provide a better service, integrated with the other services and enable the wider proposals for Redditch to move forward. The Council had listened to the views expressed through the consultation exercise and taken mitigation action where necessary.

Cabinet:

- a) **Noted the proposals for re-locating Redditch Library as part of Redditch's Town Deal Plan;**

- b) **Noted the findings from the public consultation as outlined in paragraphs 35-49 in the report;**
- c) **Noted the suggested solutions for mitigating the concerns raised within the public consultation as outlined in paragraphs 50-56;**
- d) **Noted the detail on meeting the specific commercial, operational and collaboration requirements set out by the County Council;**
- e) **Noted the feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board meeting on the 26 June 2023;**
- f) **Approved the recommendation to support the proposal to re-locate the Library Service to the Community Hub at Redditch Town Hall; and**
- g) **Authorised the Strategic Director for People and Strategic Director for Commercial and Change in consultation with the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities and the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication to finalise the lease agreement(s) and plans to relocate the library service.**

2168 Treasury Management Annual Report (Agenda item 6)

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and commented that borrowing had not been at the level expected because of slippage in and reprofiling of the capital programme. The Council had ensured that it followed the CIPFA Code of Practice. It was important that members of the Council received adequate and regular training on Treasury Management. The training provided would be proportionate to their role. The Council took every effort to mitigate risk by minimising borrowing interest rates balanced with the certainty of that period of borrowing so that borrowing was structured and proportionate for the length of the term.

He added that in terms of investment, it was important that the Council protected the principal sum and therefore any investment decision needed to be prudent to ensure that liquidity was prioritised over and above the optimum rate.

In the ensuing debate, it was commented that treasury management was a very important function because it provided the foundation that enabled the Council to undertake the things it wanted to do. The report highlighted the importance of investing in safe and secure ways.

The Leader of Council paid tribute to Tina Russell, the Chief Executive of Worcestershire Children First and her team as well as Andy Roberts, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families for their achievement in receiving a good overall Ofsted rating for children services safeguarding.

Cabinet:

- a) **Noted and considered the Council's Treasury Management Annual Report 2022-23; and**
- b) **Referred the 2022-23 Treasury Management Annual Report to Full Council for approval in accordance with the Council's Treasury Management Strategy.**

The meeting ended at 11.50am.

Chairman

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The Library Campaign is the national charity that supports public libraries. WCC will be aware that we have expressed considerable concern about the plan to demolish Redditch library.

We remain concerned, and are alarmed that WCC's Cabinet is now expected to make a decision on a clearly unpopular plan with so many issues still unresolved.

We reiterate our on-site observation that public consultation was largely electronic, and that the paper forms were locked away in the library with no indication that any consultation existed, and staff forbidden to mention them unless directly questioned.

However, we note that WCC has decided to accept the consultation as delivering “a very high level of confidence”.

Yet it rejects the overwhelming opposition to demolition (72.3%) that it expresses.

We also note that RBC is pressuring WCC to make a hasty decision by asserting that any delay “will have a significant negative impact on the

funding and deliverability of the Towns Fund and may result in the project to develop the Town Plaza not going ahead”. **This sudden time pressure has been entirely created by RBC**, which has advocated demolition for years. In any case a better, cheaper plan to re-design the library aspect would in no way threaten the whole project. A comparatively modest change, it appears to be well within the latest (4 July 2023) DHLUC guidance.

As it is, the various scrutiny committees have had to proceed with key information promised but not provided. It is still not clear how much of the necessary information has been made available in time for analysis by WCC.

Some of the most frequent comments in the consultation were about the planned new library’s location as such. No tweaking of the library’s design will ameliorate the danger to footfall, which WCC says is an “accepted risk”. Signage etc - still not agreed with RBC - will not make the Town Hall easier to physically access. It is proposed that disabled people will have to resort to shop mobility equipment or Dial-a-Ride. Nothing is suggested for people with limited mobility, small

children, push-chairs etc.

There were also numerous comments - though not invited in the questionnaire - about the whole logic of spending up to £10m replacing a busy, multi-activity library with an empty piazza, exposed to all weathers, with nothing to do but spend money in cafes.

We note with surprise that this, it is claimed, will “develop the town centre into a cultural and leisure destination”. It will do the reverse.

We have asked RBC to produce the documentation underlying the “extensive exercise” it claims (in its Business Plan in October 2022) to have carried out to compare options for the area. It has refused.

We therefore remain sceptical of the value judgements given in the summary chart. This, for instance, says a re-designed library would do little to “*expand the town’s leisure offer to improve the vitality of Redditch’s town centre – and particularly evening – economy*” or to “*improve both residents’ and visitors’*

perception of place in Redditch” and that “This option doesn’t make a significant enough impact on public realm or visual appeal of the town centre”. There is no justification for any of these statements.

We are very unhappy about the poor quality of RBC’s input on environmental concerns, as outlined in the Environment Sustainability Full Impact Assessment.

Above all, nothing has seemingly been done to estimate the greenhouse gas emissions occasioned by the demolition itself. This is rightly said to be “a key consideration” that will seriously affect the target for zero emissions. The Cabinet papers confirm that the current building is in good condition.

Elsewhere in this document, every point but one (nine times in all) is answered by: “However, this project is led by RBC and therefore all risks sit with them” plus some promises from RBC of assessments to come.

This move is not cost-neutral to WCC. A blank cheque is being requested.

WCC has already provided “significant project management expertise” from multiple departments, free, to RBC for 12 months. It now states: “**Further support requirements** from WCC are yet to be costed including ongoing project management and other support services such as IT, Property and Library Services. Ongoing support cannot be confirmed until WCC have received updated project plan outlining the requirements and timeline.”

WCC will also apparently have (1) to contribute to the required “design and directional links incorporated in the new public realm space” and (2) ironically - provide “library outreach activity in the Kingfisher Centre and Public Realm space”, where the library now stands.

We are not confident that RBC can cover the extensive costs of the move, which have not as far as we know been updated to reflect years of inflation. RBC has already spent considerable sums on the Town Hall at its own risk.

Other key information is missing from the Cabinet papers, and is unlikely to have received WCC’s due diligence even if later provided,

including:

- revised floor plan
- updated cost plan for further developments such as IT set up costs, installation of CCTV provision, fit out
- estimate of new furnishings required
- plans for signage and directional links to Town Hall
- effect of Town Hall design (separate entrances for co-located services are expected to reduce footfall to the library)
- updated likely proportional cost of occupation and proportionate charges for common areas

It is frequently stated in the Cabinet papers that much of this unwanted development is to take place “at RBC’s risk”. Given that there is such strong public opposition, WCC would do well to look again at the risks to itself.