

COUNCIL

11 JANUARY 2024

REPORT OF CABINET - SUMMARY OF DECISIONS TAKEN

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

1. The Environment Act 2021 resulted in significant new responsibilities for protection and enhancement of the natural environment. This included a requirement for Responsible Authorities to prepare and publish a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for their strategy area. In June 2023 Worcestershire County Council was appointed by the Secretary of State as the Responsible Authority for preparation of a LNRS for the county of Worcestershire.
2. The main statutory requirements of an LNRS are that it must:
 - a) Agree priorities for nature's recovery;
 - b) Prepare a 'Local Habitat Map' to identify the most valuable existing areas for nature; and
 - c) The Local Habitat Map also identifies specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals.
3. While Responsible Authorities will contribute to the delivery of the LNRS as well as leading its preparation, the County Council will not solely be responsible for delivering the LNRS. This is a role shared with the public, private and voluntary sector partners
4. Preliminary LNRS preparations have been undertaken through habitat mapping and modelling work (to inform the development of Worcestershire's Local Habitat Map) and in engagement with Worcestershire's Local Nature Partnership and relevant Supporting Authorities to produce an "Issues and Options" draft of the LNRS for consultation. Cabinet has authorised the Strategic Director for Economy and Infrastructure to undertake public consultation on the "Issues and Options draft" of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
5. Cabinet has granted delegated authority to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment to approve a Consultation Draft LNRS for the statutory consultation process. Cabinet has authorised the Strategic Director for Economy and Infrastructure to undertake the statutory consultation process of the consultation draft LNRS, including seeking the necessary written approval of Supporting Authorities and the Secretary of State
6. Cabinet has agreed that the Final LNRS be returned to Cabinet for adoption in winter 2024/2025, subject to seeking the necessary permission of the Secretary of State to publish the Final LNRS

Resources Report – Revenue Budget Monitoring – Month 6 (30 September) 2023/24

7. Overall, the Council is forecasting a net £21.9 million cost pressure at the end of the financial year following the use of budgeted risk reserves without further action. The majority of the overspend forecast is located within the specific demand-led areas of Adults and Children’s social care, and Home to School Transport. The forecast has worsened from the £18.2 million cost pressure reported to Cabinet in September. Demand management and savings opportunities are being implemented within the People Directorate and Worcestershire Children First; however co-ordinated cross council action is required to support the closure of the forecasted financial gap.

8. At budget setting, £7 million was identified as likely to be required from reserves to mitigate against 2023/24 pressures. This comprised £2 million risk for Children’s Social Care placements and £5 million risk for non-delivery of savings. Additional business rates income of £4.1 million is also forecast to be received this financial year. The £21.9 million overspend reported is net of these mitigations. The £22.4 million savings and reforms identified in February 2023 have been allocated to directorates and their base budgets reduced by the corresponding amounts. Cabinet has noted the forecast year end position as at 30 September 2023; and the current progress regarding savings plans approved by Council in February 2023.

9. The ring-fenced Public Health Grant is expected to be fully utilised during 2023/24. The Director of Public Health has reviewed the 3-year plan for the use of the Public Health Reserve, the opening balance for 2023/24 being £9.1 million. Of this, £4.4 million is expected to be utilised in year (reduced from an opening expectation of £6.2m reserve use). The latest draft of the plan includes allocation of funding for children’s prevention and early help, youth support, mental health support across children and adult services and health protection activities. Cabinet has noted the current plan for use of the Public Health Reserve.

10. Within the 2023/24 budget as approved by Council in February 2023, an amount of £7 million was identified as likely to be required from reserves to mitigate against 2023/24 pressures.

11. Following the increase in forecast overspend on Home to School Transport, it is proposed to draw down £2 million from earmarked reserves for this purpose. This increases the total forecast use of reserves to £9 million which is included in the period 6 forecast. Cabinet has approved the forecast use of reserves totalling c£4 million relating to the academisation of North Bromsgrove High School which is currently expected to be required in Quarter 4 of this financial year as the school is expected convert on 1 December 2023.

12. Cabinet has approved a number of transfers of reserves to consolidate and centralise the currently unallocated reserve funding into the Finance Risk Reserve. Cabinet has noted the forecast year end position on reserves.

The New Foxlydiate First School

13. A major proposed new housing development in the Foxlydiate area of Redditch will attract families with children, and this will create demand for additional childcare and school places. Typically, a new first or primary school may be required where a housing

development contributes 300 or more dwellings or in areas where no potential school expansions can be identified. The scale of the forecast increased demand means a new first school with nursery is needed. Cabinet has agreed that a new First School in Foxlydiate Redditch will be built to address the impact of new housing.

14. Ahead of the Local Authority consultation on the new school specification, stakeholders were invited to provide their views in a four week-engagement exercise running from 4 July - 4 August 2023. 183 responses were received to the survey. The majority of respondents were residents of Redditch or immediate surrounding area (54%) and/or parent/carers of a school age child (52%) and/or members or staff or Governors of schools or early years providers. Their views were summarised in the Cabinet report. Cabinet has noted the progress made to date on the delivery of a new First School and endorsed the pre-publication engagement with stakeholders undertaken between 4 July and 4 August 2023

15. As the new school will be a free school, the successful Academy Sponsor will need to enter a revenue funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education, with the Education and Skills Funding Agency directly funding the ongoing revenue costs of the school. The DfE currently provides £25,000 for legal expenses to the successful Academy Sponsor. Other revenue funding required for the delivery of the school, for example the support services and project management services, are not yet fully known. It is anticipated these costs will be capitalised against the project, and updates will be made through the usual capital approval route. Cabinet has noted the funding sources identified to deliver the new school.

16. Cabinet has noted that Full Council will consider an increase to the capital programme from £11m to £14.52m in order to deliver a new three form entry first school and nursery, when it met on 9 November 2023. Cabinet has authorised the consultation on the proposed school specification. Cabinet has authorised the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education, in consultation with the Director of Children's Services, to approve the specification having regard to any representations made during the consultation period. Cabinet has authorised the procurement of support services.

17. Cabinet has granted delegated authority to the relevant Cabinet Member and officers for the new Foxlydiate First School subject to Cabinet / Council approval of capital budget including approval of the Academy Sponsor school specification; and the necessary steps to implement the project within the funding envelope agreed by Cabinet / Council including any regulatory consents and contracts required including the completion of a pre-planning public engagement exercise and the preparation and submission of Planning Applications.

Expansion of Car Park at Worcestershire Parkway Rail Station

18. Worcestershire Parkway station, which opened in February 2020, has since the Pandemic, consistently performed above expectations, and is now being used by over 500 000 passengers a year with associated car park demand which is now around 90% full on mid-weekdays. The expansion of the car park at Worcestershire Parkway (The Project) is integral to consolidating these achievements and to enable the further development and expansion of the rail offer.

19. Cabinet has noted progress to date and authorised the continuation of exploratory works, including surveys, necessary to progress the expansion of the Project. Cabinet has endorsed the allocation of funding earmarked within the approved capital programme to secure the land and associated rights shown edged red on the exempt plan (“the Land”) needed for the Project.

20. Cabinet has delegated a number of authorisations to the Strategic Director for Commercial and Change and Strategic Director for Economy and Infrastructure in relation to the necessary surveys of the land, design of the Project and access links to the highway, the development of potential funding models for the construction and operation of the Project, acquiring the Land through negotiation, and adjusting the boundaries of the Land to be acquired.

21. Should it not be possible to buy the Land through negotiation, Cabinet has approved the preparation of a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) to acquire the Land for subsequent approval. Cabinet has noted that it will be presented with a further report to seek approval to enter into any funding agreements to enable the construction and operation of the car park.

Scrutiny Report: Developer Funded Highways Infrastructure

22. In January 2021, the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) agreed that a Scrutiny Task Group should be set up to look at Developer Funded Highways Infrastructure. Cabinet has received the Scrutiny Report about Developer Funded Highways Infrastructure, together with the revised response from the Cabinet Member with Responsibility. Cabinet has noted the Scrutiny Report’s findings and recommendations and adopted the revised response of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility as the way forward.

Adults Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy

23. The Adults Prevention and Early Intervention Social Strategy has been developed in response to the rapidly changing context of health and social care. This five-year strategy is underpinned by the Council’s vision of ‘supporting individuals to live the lives they choose, in a place they call home, connected to people, places and opportunities that are meaningful to them’. The strategy sets out how the Council will achieve its statutory duties whilst enabling residents to achieve the best possible outcomes regarding care and support needs.

24. The Strategy has been developed, and takes direction, from a number of key documents and partnerships including the Council Corporate Plan: Shaping Worcestershire's Future, the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Partnership Assembly, and work with the NHS and other care partners through the Integrated Care System.

25. There are a number of challenges facing Adult Social Care. Demand for Adult Social Care is growing. The number of adults (aged 18-64) requiring care is forecast to increase by 29% by 2038. For people over 65 years predictions are even higher with a forecast 57% increase in people who may require care and support over this period. More people are living longer with long term conditions. The costs of delivering care and support are rising. Nationally there are significant staffing challenges across social care.

26. Without earlier intervention to reduce demand on statutory services, the total spend on services would not only exceed the Council budget but compromise already stretched service provision. The Council therefore needs to embed a prevention approach to achieve a sustainable method to service delivery to ensure that the life chances of Worcestershire residents are improved in identified key priorities

27. Cabinet has noted and endorsed the new Adults Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy 2023-2028. Cabinet has approved commencement of the implementation of the proposed Adults Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy from January 2024.

Adult Social Care Strategy

28. The Adult Social Care Strategy provides a five-year plan which sets out how Worcestershire County Council will deliver Adult Social Care (ASC) with the right support for residents, at the right place and at the right time, whilst working in partnership with local people and being future focussed to ensure sustainable and high-quality services. The strategy sets out how we will achieve our statutory duties whilst enabling our residents to achieve the best possible outcomes regarding care and support needs. The strategy has been developed, and takes direction, from the key documents and partnerships set out in paragraph 24 above.

29. Cabinet has noted and endorsed the new Adult Social Care Strategy 2023-2028. Cabinet has approved commencement of the implementation of the proposed Adult Social Care Strategy from January 2024.

Fair Funding for Schools 2024/25 - National and Local Funding Arrangements for Schools

30. The Council receives funding for schools and designated central services through the Dedicated School Grant (DSG). This is a ring-fenced grant and is allocated by the Department for Education (DfE) in 4 blocks – Schools, Central School Services, High Needs and Early Years. This is based on the DfE's National Funding Formula (NFF) arrangements.

31. It was anticipated that a fully DfE prescribed NFF i.e. a 'hard' formula for schools would be in place for 2024-25. However, the DfE has stated that 2023-24 was the first year of transition to the NFF with the end point being a system in which, as part of its consultation in 2022, to ensure full fairness and consistency in funding, every mainstream school in England is funded through the same national formula without adjustment through local funding formulae. Cabinet has noted the Department for Education policy for school and Local Authority funding for 2024-25.

32. As part of this, schools were given the opportunity to comment on the proposals and there have been no contra indications received from schools on the continuation of the existing arrangements for a further year. The Worcestershire Schools Forum (WSF) formally endorsed the formal recommendation for the Local Schools Funding Formula for 2024-25. Cabinet has noted the involvement of the Worcestershire Schools Forum members and schools during the engagement process. Cabinet has noted the views of the Worcestershire Schools Forum on the Local Schools Funding Formula issues for 2024-25 and other matters.

33. Cabinet has approved the Local Schools Funding Formula for Worcestershire mainstream schools from April 2024 to apply for 2024-25 and other matters to include the DfE Minimum Funding Levels (MFL's) for Primary £4,665; Key Stage 3 £5,824; Key Stage 4 £6,389; Secondary £6,050 having regard to feedback from schools and the views of the Worcestershire Schools Forum, to be based as far as is practicable and affordable upon the Department for Education (DfE) National Funding Formula (NFF) parameters.

34. Cabinet has authorised the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education to make the required submission to the national executive body, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) by 22 January 2024 for the approved Local Schools Funding Formula for 2024-25 taking account of any impact and change on the approved units of resource, Minimum Funding Guarantee and capping arrangements as a consequence of the October 2023 census and other 2023 data changes and the final 2024-25 Dedicated School Grant (DSG).

Visit Worcestershire - Destination Management Plan

35. Visit Worcestershire (VW) is the County's tourism delivery vehicle, coordinating destination marketing, tourism place management, business support and visitor experience.

36. The national 'De Bois' Review, an independent review of Destination Management Organisations in England, recommended a new tourism board structure and accreditation process be implemented by Visit England. Worcestershire is currently only one of twenty-one destinations who have achieved Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) accreditation, achieving official status in July 2023.

37. Gaining LVEP accreditation gives Visit Worcestershire access to additional training, resources, and support from a dedicated Visit England regional lead. As part of the process, each destination must produce an LVEP Growth Plan – which is unique to each destination and focusses key areas of growth and development. The accreditation also requires the publication of a new strategic Destination Management Plan (DMP) for the County.

38. The document outlines a clear vision, with measurable objectives. It is focused on three clear delivery areas which the County Council (with its LVEP status) can work in partnership with local businesses and partners to invest, deliver and co-ordinate activity. The plan is built around three delivery pillars: development, marketing and management. Within each pillar there are actions for the County Council, District Councils, the tourism sector, stakeholders and partners. Actions that are ambitious but deliverable and will make a significant impact over the five years of this plan. Cabinet has approved the Worcestershire Destination Management Plan 2023-2028.

Contact Points

Specific Contact Points for this report

Hazel Best, Assistant Director for Legal and Governance

Tel: 01905 843287

Email: hbest@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda and background papers for the meetings of the Cabinet held on 23 November 2023 and 14 December 2023:

[Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday, 23rd November, 2023, 10.00 am - Worcestershire County Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday, 14th December, 2023, 10.00 am - Worcestershire County Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)