

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 18 March 2025.

PRESENT

Mrs D. Taylor CC (in the Chair)

Mr. R. Ashman CC
Mr. L. Breckon JP CC
Mr. O. O'Shea JP CC
Mr. B. L. Pain CC

Mr J. Poland CC
Mrs. P. Posnett MBE CC
Mrs. C. M. Radford CC

Cabinet Support Members (including via MS Teams)

Mr. B. Champion CC, Mr. C. Smith CC, Mrs. M. Wright CC.

In attendance (including via MS Teams)

Mr. P. King CC.

Apologies

Mr. N. J. Rushton CC and Mrs H. L. Richardson CC

428. Chairman's Announcement

The Chairman noted that it was the last Cabinet meeting before the local elections and thanked all the Cabinet members for their work and for their support to her as Acting Leader.

429. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2025 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

430. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

431. Declarations of interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting. No declarations were made at this time. Declarations were subsequently made in relation to agenda item 10 (Lightbulb Service Business Case) by Mrs. D. Taylor CC as a member of Charnwood Borough Council and by Mr. L. Breckon CC as a member of Blaby District Council, and in relation to agenda item 12 (Management of the County Council's Rural Estate) by Mr. O. O'Shea CC as a member of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council. Minute nos. 437 and 439 below refer.

432. English Devolution White Paper: Local Government Reorganisation.

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Chief Executive, Director of Law and Governance, and Director of Corporate Resources regarding the interim plan for local government reorganisation in Leicestershire. A presentation on the recommended outline of the interim plan was given at the meeting. Both papers are filed with these minutes, marked "Agenda Item 4".

Comments of the Scrutiny Commission, which had considered a report on the matter at its meeting on 10 March, were circulated separately and a copy is filed with these minutes.

In presenting the papers, the Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources highlighted the importance of reorganisation in unlocking opportunities for devolution, the rationale for the recommended approach including financial considerations, initial proposals for local decision-making in a new unitary council, and wide-ranging consultation planned to take place later in the year.

Members of the Cabinet expressed their strong support for a single unitary council for Leicestershire.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the outcome of the early engagement undertaken on the proposals for local government reorganisation including the comments of the Scrutiny Commission be noted;
- b) That the outline of the interim plan be approved for submission to the Government by the deadline of 21 March 2025;
- c) That the Chief Executive, following consultation with the Acting Leader, the Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance, be authorised to finalise the interim plan for submission to the Government provided that this does not change the underlying principles as presented in the report.

(KEY DECISION)

REASONS FOR DECISION:

The letter received from the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution on 5 February set out the formal invitation to all local authorities in remaining two-tier areas and neighbouring unitary authorities to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation and required interim plans to be submitted to the Government by 21 March 2025.

433. Environment and Transport 2025/26 Highways and Transportation Capital Programme and Works Programme.

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport regarding the Department's 2025/26 Highways and Transportation Capital Programme and Works Programme which had been developed in accordance with the overall budget envelopes in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26-2028/29. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 5', is filed with these minutes.

Comments of the Highways and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which had considered a report on the matter at its meeting on 6 March, were circulated separately and a copy is filed with these minutes.

Mr. O'Shea CC commented that the Department was doing its best with the limited resources available and thanked officers for their work.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the comments of the Highways and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;
- b) That the acute financial context in which the 2025/26 Highways and Transportation Capital and Works Programmes (the Programmes) have been developed and will be delivered, as set out in Part B of the report be noted;
- c) That the Programmes be approved;
- d) That the Director of Environment and Transport be authorised,
 - i. following consultation with the Director of Corporate Resources and the Cabinet Lead Members for Highways and Transportation and Corporate Resources, to prepare and submit bids, as appropriate, to secure external funding for delivery of schemes identified in the Programmes;
 - ii. following consultation with the Director of Corporate Resources, the Director of Law and Governance and the Cabinet Lead Member for Corporate Resources, to enter such contracts as is necessary to progress schemes in the approved Programmes to allow early contractor involvement to take place in advance of all external funding required to deliver the scheme being secured, noting the challenges set out in paragraph 22 of the report;
 - iii. following consultation with the Director of Corporate Resources, the Director of Law and Governance and the Cabinet Lead Member for Corporate Resources, to undertake preparatory work as considered appropriate to develop savings as set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and to ensure that further savings are implemented in a timely manner.

(KEY DECISION)

REASONS FOR DECISION:

To highlight the challenging financial context in which the Programmes are being developed and will be delivered.

To enable the delivery of the Programmes for the 2025/26 financial year.

To enable the delivery of large capital schemes using a collaborative approach, to work with contractors to reduce risk and increase cost certainty. Working in this way will also provide necessary assurance to partners and third-party funders contributing to the cost of delivering the Capital Programme.

To enable early work to be undertaken on the development of new savings to address the worsening financial position.

434. The Development of an Updated Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) 2025-2035.

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport regarding the proposed approach to the development of an updated Rights of Way Improvement Plan and seeking approval to undertake public consultation. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 6', is filed with these minutes.

Mr. O'Shea CC encouraged people to take part in the consultation exercise when it commenced in May.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the intended approach to the development of an updated Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) to cover the period from 2025 to 2035 be approved;
- b) That a 12-week public consultation exercise on a draft RoWIP 2025-2035, as set out in paragraphs 43 to 46 of the report be approved.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires relevant authorities to assess and review a RoWIP every 10 years.

An updated RoWIP will enable completion of the action 'S12', set out in the County Council's Cycling and Walking Strategy Action Plan: to prepare a revised RoWIP by 2026.

The Government's statutory guidance recommends that authorities undertake a 12-week consultation on a draft RoWIP to allow for representations to be made.

435. Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Suicide Prevention Strategy 2024-2029 - Outcome of Consultation.

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Public Health presenting the outcome of consultation on the draft Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Suicide Prevention Strategy 2024-2029 and seeking approval of the final Strategy. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 7', is filed with these minutes.

Mrs Radford CC was pleased to note that the Strategy had been welcomed by the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and received strong support during the consultation.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the outcome of the consultation on the draft Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Suicide Prevention Strategy 2024-2029, including the comments of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, be noted;
- b) That the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Suicide Prevention Strategy 2024-2029 be approved.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

It is a requirement that local authorities in England have a Suicide Prevention Strategy/ Plan. Since 2019, all local authorities in England have had such a plan in place.

The Strategy seeks to reduce suicide and support people at risk of suicide in the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland area and has been informed by individuals with experience of suicide, as well as the organisations supporting them.

436. Proposed Submission Draft (Regulation 19) Harborough Local Plan 2020-2041.

The Cabinet considered a report of the Chief Executive regarding Harborough District Council's Proposed Submission Draft Harborough Local Plan 2020-2041 and the comments proposed to be submitted to the District Council as the views of the County Council. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8', is filed with these minutes.

Members noted representations which had been received on the matter from Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC, the member for Gartree, a copy of which is filed with these minutes.

With the permission of the Chairman, Mr. Phil King CC, the member for Market Harborough West and Foxton, spoke on this item. Mr. King CC referred to residents' concerns about the need for highway/transport infrastructure to mitigate the effects of development and his concern that the draft Local Plan in its current form was deemed unsound.

The Chief Executive and Director of Environment and Transport advised that the evidence base for the Local Plan as currently drafted was considered inadequate. Members were assured that officers would continue to assist Harborough DC and seek to help remedy the shortcomings.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the County Council's response to Harborough District Council's Draft Local Plan consultation, set out in paragraphs 34 to 75 inclusive and the appendix to the report, be approved;
- b) That the Chief Executive, following consultation with the Cabinet Lead Member, be authorised to make any minor amendments to the consultation response prior to its submission to Harborough District Council by 6 May 2025.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

The County Council's response will set out key comments for consideration by Harborough District Council in progressing its new Local Plan. It seeks to ensure alignment with the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan, and to influence the content of the Local Plan in the interests of local communities, including ensuring that the Local Plan provides an as robust as possible policy platform for securing the provision of the infrastructure and services required to support its successful delivery.

437. Section 106 Policy and Charging Schedule for Off-site and Significant On-site Biodiversity Net Gain.

The Cabinet considered a report of the Chief Executive seeking approval for the Section 106 Charging Policy and Schedule for monitoring offsite and significant onsite

Biodiversity Net Gain, for use by County Planning Team and Local Planning Authority partners. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the Section 106 Charging Policy and Schedule for off-site and significant on-side Biodiversity Net Gain monitoring be approved for use by the County Council and its partners within the Biodiversity Net Gain partnership.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

The monitoring process will enable partners to meet their statutory obligations and avoid delays in the planning process. It will also ensure that the Council's charges for monitoring work can be secured.

438. Lightbulb Service Business Case.

(Mrs D. Taylor CC and Mr. L. Breckon CC each declared an other registrable interest in this item as members of Charnwood Borough Council and Blaby District Council respectively.)

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Adults and Communities regarding the Lightbulb Business Case and seeking approval for a further extension to the Service Level Agreement with Blaby DC, which hosted the Lightbulb Service in Leicestershire, to enable the Lightbulb Partnership to continue. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda item 10', is filed with these minutes.

Mrs. Radford CC was pleased to note that since publication of the report, Blaby DC (on behalf of the Lightbulb Partnership) had agreed in principle to the transfer of the ceiling track hoist contact into the Service. She hoped that use of the Disabled Facilities Grant by the district councils would be improved in future, noting that some had fully spent the grant and had unmet need whilst others had large underspends.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the comments of the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.
- b) That the latest position regarding the Lightbulb Business Case be noted;
- c) That the response from the district councils regarding the proposed transfer of the Minor Adaptations Service delivered by the Adults and Communities Department into the Lightbulb Service be noted;
- d) That a further extension of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Blaby District Council for the continued delegation of statutory functions from the County Council to the Lightbulb Service be agreed.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

The County Council's SLA with Blaby DC allows a level of delegation of statutory functions of the Local Authority for assessment and provision of services to Blaby DC as part of the Lightbulb Service. The original agreement was due to expire on 31 March

2024. In March 2024, the Cabinet agreed to extend the SLA for a further 12 months, to allow for the conclusion of the review of the partnership and agreement to be reached on the new Business Case.

At the Lightbulb Executive Board meeting held on 24 February 2025, the district councils announced that in light of the recent Government announcements regarding local government reorganisation and devolution, they had decided not to proceed with the implementation of the Business Case. Their view was that with the anticipated changes in the structure of local government in Leicestershire, it was best to continue with the existing Lightbulb Service structure until the position was clearer. In the interim, it is planned to pilot the caseworker model during 2025/26 and partners have agreed to additional top slicing of Disabled Facilities Grants for this.

439. Leicestershire Adult Learning Service Ofsted Inspection Findings.

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Adults and Communities which presented the findings from the inspection of Leicestershire's Adult Learning Service conducted by Ofsted from 14 to 17 January 2025. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the comments of the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;
- b) That the findings from the Leicestershire's Adult Learning Service Ofsted inspection which took place from 14 to 17 January 2025 be noted;
- c) That the actions set out in the Quality Improvement Plan to address and monitor specific areas identified for improvement be supported;
- d) That it be noted that a further report will be presented to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee outlining progress with the actions in the Quality Improvement Plan in due course.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

Good quality adult education supports individual opportunity and life chances and is central to the delivery of strategic outcomes such as economic growth and managing demands on public services. Inspection findings confirm that the Council's adult learning provision continues to be of a high standard and the quality of education is good. Learning activities effectively support adults develop skills and behaviours they need to advance their employment and improve health and wellbeing.

The Quality Improvement Plan, performance monitoring, and challenge through the governance framework will ensure residents continue to benefit from an effective adult education service.

Oversight of service performance by the Council's Executive (Cabinet) is good practice and is central to meeting the expectations of governance within the Ofsted inspection framework.

440. Management of the County Council's Rural Estate.

(Mr. O. O'Shea CC declared an other registrable interest in this item as a member of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.)

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources regarding the proposed response to a Notice of Motion agreed by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council at its meeting on 28 January 2025. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 12', is filed with these minutes.

Mr. Breckon CC commended the report, which refuted the points made in the Notice of Motion.

RESOLVED:

- a) That it be drawn to the attention of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council that
 - i. the management and disposal of the County Council's land holdings is in line with approved policies; and
 - ii. the County Council's Rural estate has grown in the last 10 years and that any land sold or acquired is for good reason;
- b) That it is regrettable that Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council did not seek to understand the position before tabling an uninformed Notice of Motion;
- c) That the County Council hopes that the enclosed report to the Cabinet will enable the Borough Council to have a proper understanding of the proactive management of the County Council's rural estate and its benefits for the residents of Leicestershire.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

To respond to the communication received from Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council on 13 February 2025 regarding its Notice of Motion citing the sale of County Farms.

To advise Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council regarding the management of the County Council's rural estate.

441. Proposed Expansion of Age Range Designation for Oakfield Short Stay School.

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services seeking approval to undertake consultation on an age range change for Oakfield School and, subject to the feedback received, to authorise the Director of Children and Family Services to approve the age range change. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda item 13' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

- a) That consultation on an age range change for Oakfield School, from solely primary age provision to a school for children aged 4 to 16 years be approved;

- b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be authorised to approve the age range change for Oakfield School following the consultation subject to no significant issues/concerns having arisen.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide suitable full-time education to permanently excluded pupils from the sixth day of exclusion under Section 19 of the Education Act 1996.

Children unable to attend a mainstream school, for which the Council has responsibility, must be on roll at a registered school. An age-range change would enable secondary aged children to be enrolled at Oakfield School to receive their education.

There would be no changes to the existing primary age provision, which will remain distinct. Secondary age pupils would not be taught on the same site as the existing primary age provision.

Subject to the outcome of the consultation, authorisation for the Director of Children and Family Services to approve the age range change will enable it to be made swiftly and will ensure that the Council can fulfil its statutory duty, plan the educational provision, and provide certainty to staff.

442. Dates of Council Meetings.

The Cabinet considered a report of the Chief Executive regarding proposed dates of Council meetings up to May 2027. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 14', is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the County Council be recommended to hold meetings on the following dates during the next two municipal years:-

Wednesday 14 May 2025 (Annual meeting)
Wednesday 2 July 2025
Wednesday 24 September 2025
Wednesday 3 December 2025
Wednesday 18 February 2026 (to consider the budget)
Wednesday 13 May 2026 (Annual meeting)
Wednesday 1 July 2026
Wednesday 23 September 2026
Wednesday 2 December 2026
Wednesday 17 February 2027 (to consider the budget)
Wednesday 12 May 2027 (Annual meeting).

REASONS FOR DECISION:

To comply with the Local Government Act 1972 and the County Council's Standing Orders.

443. Items referred from Overview and Scrutiny.

There were no items referred from the Overview and Scrutiny bodies.

444. Exclusion of the Press and Public.

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 3 and 10 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act and that, in all circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information:

“Exception to the Contract Procedure Rules to Provide Temporary Staff for 'Hard to Fill Roles' within the Environment and Transport Department.”

445. Exception to the Contract Procedure Rules to Provide Temporary Staff for 'Hard to Fill Roles' within the Environment and Transport Department.

The Cabinet considered an exempt joint report of the Director of Environment and Transport and Director of Corporate Resources seeking approval for an exception to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules to supply temporary staff for hard to fill posts. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 18' is filed with these minutes. The report was not for publication by virtue of Paragraphs 3 and 10 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

RESOLVED:

That an exception to the Contract Procedure Rules be agreed to enable the Director of Environment and Transport to approve the direct award of contracts to Designated Suppliers identified in the report for the temporary provision of specialist HGV drivers, plant operatives, and supervisors, with the contracts running until 30 September 2026 with a maximum combined spend of £1.6m.

(KEY DECISION)

REASONS FOR DECISION:

The County Council's Contract Procedure Rules (Part 4G of the Constitution) require that, where the estimated value of a contract exceeds £179,087, formal tenders must be invited.

Where an exception to the Contract Procedure Rules is required for contracts over £179,087, Rule 57 (d) provides that the Cabinet's approval be obtained to the exception where this is justified on its merits. The proposed contracts with other agencies outside the corporate contract are expected to have a combined value not exceeding £1.6m, each of which is likely to be over the £179,087 threshold.

The circumstances and financial considerations surrounding the proposal, explained the report, mean that other procurement processes are not possible in order to ensure business continuity.

The Environment and Transport Department has been unable to source all the necessary staff required via the Council's existing recruitment and agency arrangements.

2.00 - 3.48 pm
18 March 2025

CHAIRMAN