

**Minutes of the Cabinet
Wednesday 19th March, 2025 at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley**

Present:

Cabinet Members

Councillor P Harley (Chair)

Councillor P Bradley (Vice-Chair)

Councillors P Atkins, I Bevan, S Clark, J Clinton, D Corfield, A Goddard, S Phipps and D Stanley.

Opposition Group Members nominated to attend the Cabinet

Labour Group: Councillors S Ali, A Aston, C Bayton, J Cowell, Q Mughal, S Mughal, S Ridney and P Sahota.

Liberal Democrat Group: Councillors R Priest and E Stafford.

Officers

B Heran (Deputy Chief Executive), K Graham (Acting Director of Children's Services), M Smith (Head of Commissioning and Support Services), C Heaphy (Interim Director of Finance/Section 151 Officer), H Martin (Director of Regeneration and Enterprise), K Jones (Director of Housing and Communities), T Senior – Interim Lead for Law and Governance - Monitoring Officer) and H Mills (Senior Democratic Services Officer), together with other officers.

99 **Apology for Absence**

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor S Keasey.

100 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor J Cowell declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to agenda item no. 6 – Economic Regeneration Strategy: Progress Update and Activity Plan, as a resident within an area identified as part of the programme of activity.

101 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meetings held on 30th January and 12th February, 2025, be confirmed as correct records and signed.

102 **Dudley Improvement Plan – Organisational Re-Design – Senior Leadership Review**

Cabinet Members considered a report of the Interim Chief Executive on the final senior management structure, which would put in place the strategic capacity and revised spans of control required to deliver the improvements and transformation to Council functions and key strategic priorities. The Interim Chief Executive also confirmed the budget savings as set out in the agreed medium-term financial strategy.

The Leader (Councillor P Harley) and the Interim Chief Executive responded to comments and questions raised by Members of the opposition in relation to the reason for implementing a new organisational structure prior to the appointment of a Chief Executive; the position within the organisational structure of the Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer and whether these levels addressed the concerns previously raised by Members and External Auditors; the need for all Statutory Officers to have a direct link to the Chief Executive; the need for all Directorates and service areas to work collaboratively and for appropriate Key Performance measures to be formed to measure the effectiveness of changes, which should be carefully monitored.

The Interim Chief Executive provided assurance that the new structure would achieve the savings agreed as part of the medium-term financial strategy.

Resolved

That the final senior management structure, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, which fulfils the legal obligation of the Head of Paid Service to determine the staffing arrangements necessary to deliver the Council's functions, be noted.

103 **West Midlands Combined Authority Adult Education Functions**

A report of the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise was submitted on the Department for Education planned amendment of Adult Education Functions to enable the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to fund a new suite of technical qualifications through its adult skills funding. It was acknowledged that the consent of the WMCA and each of its constituent Councils was required before the Order could be made.

Members commented positively on the report, although suggested that subject to the completion of the transfer, a six-month progress update report be submitted for scrutiny, addressing the impact from implementation to the Borough and to ensure the process was working fairly.

Resolved

- (1) That the Council be recommended:-
 - (i) To approve the final draft Order and provide formal consent to the laying of the Statutory Instrument in Parliament.
 - (ii) To delegate authority to the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise to agree to any minor consequential amendments should they arise.
 - (2) That, subject to the completion of the transfer of the function to West Midlands Combined Authority, a progress update report be submitted to a future meeting of the Cabinet.
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104 **Economic Regeneration Strategy: Progress Update and Activity Plan**

Cabinet Members considered a report of the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise in relation to a progress update on project delivery of the Council's Economic Regeneration Strategy since its adoption in March 2024, together with an update on related context and to set out an action plan 2025/26.

Arising from the presentation of the report, Members of the opposition, whilst welcomed the strategy and the work that was being done, commented on the lack of projects identified within the Halesowen area and the need for a more holistic approach.

Members also commented on the need to review timescales in which reports were submitted for scrutiny and subsequent Cabinet approval, to allow sufficient opportunity for Cabinet Members to take into consideration any comments/recommendations raised by the relevant Select Committee.

Resolved

- (1) That the progress against the Economic Regeneration Strategy as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 to the report, be noted.
- (2) That the action plan for 2025-26, as set out in Appendix 3 to the report, on the basis of current known funding and resources, be agreed.
- (3) That the current position in regard to the Place Based Strategy and Integrated Settlement, be noted.
- (4) That the receipt of capacity funding, as set out in paragraphs 21-25 of the report, for externally funded regeneration projects to be utilised in accordance with the respective guidance and funding agreements, be acknowledged, to include:
 - (i) the £200k capacity funding received to date for Long Term Plan for Towns and receipt of a further £200k capacity funding expected at the start of the 2025/26 financial year;

- (ii) £63.8k for Levelling Up projects shared across projects in Halesowen and Brierley Hill;
 - (iii) £500k enabling funding from WMCA to progress projects related to the Place Based Strategy;
 - (iv) the provision of up to £300k to support Council costs in supporting the delivery of the second phase of Metro.
- (5) That, subject to West Midlands Combined Authority Board approval on 14th March 2025, the acceptance of UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) for 2025/26 totalling £3,925,855.71 and the proposed project level outline allocations, as set out in Appendix 4 to the report, be approved and the capital element of the funding, up to a maximum of £1,477,602.28, be included in the Council's Capital programme.
- (6) That subject to the above, £150,000 of UKPSF 2025/26 capital funding be ring fenced to support the delivery of the Dudley Market enhancement project.
- (7) That, subject to WMCA Board approval on 14th March 2025, the commencement of procurement activity for the delivery of UKPSF related activity in 2025/26, in advance of formal contracting with WMCA being finalised to ensure continuity of activity, be approved.
- (8) That the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise be authorised to approve the Council entering into any subsequent deed of variation or change control notice with WMCA relating to UKPSF 2025/26 funding.
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105 **Education Travel Support Public Consultation**

A report of the Acting Director of Children's Services was submitted to request permission for the Local Authority to conduct a consultation exercise in relation to proposals to change the approach to complying with its statutory duties to provide travel support to pupils and students aged 5-16 and post-16.

The Director of Children's Services and the Head of Commissioning and Support Services responded to comments and concerns raised by Members of the opposition in relation to the proposed increase to parents contributions; the welcomed pilot scheme at Sycamore School; whether there was sufficient capacity to deal with the anticipated increase in home-to-school transport appeals and if consideration could be given for the planned dates for the consultation to be extended due to the impending Easter school holidays.

Resolved

That the request to conduct a consultation exercise with regard to the proposed changes to the Local Authority's approach to provide travel support to pupils and students aged 5-16 and post 16, be approved.

106 **Issues arising from Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Select Committee – Bus Franchising Consultation**

The Leader referred to the Bus Franchising Consultation which had been considered in detail at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26th February, 2025. The consultation would conclude at the end of March 2025, with a final decision on franchising expected in May 2025.

The Scrutiny Committee had raised various concerns, particularly regarding the significant financial implications associated with franchising, and further information in relation to this had been requested, which had been noted by Officers from West Midlands Combined Authority and Transport for West Midlands.

107 **Questions from Members to the Leader (Cabinet Procedure Rule 2.5)**

No questions were raised under this agenda item.

108 **Director of Regeneration and Enterprise**

Members conveyed thanks to Helen Martin for her service with Dudley MBC and expressed best wishes for the future.

The meeting ended at 6.37pm

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL