

MINUTES of the meeting of Council held in the Council Chamber, The Shire Hall, St Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Friday 3 March 2017 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor DB Wilcox (Chairman)

Councillors: PA Andrews, BA Baker, JM Bartlett, WLS Bowen, TL Bowes, H Bramer, CR Butler, ACR Chappell, PE Crockett, PGH Cutter, BA Durkin, PJ Edwards, CA Gandy, KS Guthrie, DG Harlow, EPJ Harvey, EL Holton, JA Hyde, TM James, AW Johnson, JF Johnson, JLV Kenyon, JG Lester, MD Lloyd-Hayes, MN Mansell, RI Matthews, RL Mayo, MT McEvelly, SM Michael, PM Morgan, PD Newman OBE, FM Norman, CA North, RJ Phillips, GJ Powell, AJW Powers, PD Price, P Rone, A Seldon, NE Shaw, WC Skelton, J Stone, D Summers, EJ Swinglehurst, A Warmington and SD Williams

Officers: John Coleman, Jo Davidson, Alistair Neill, Martin Samuels and Claire Ward

64. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors MJK Cooper, DW Greenow, J Hardwick, AR Round and LC Tawn

65. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

66. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

67. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Council noted the Chairman's announcements as printed in the agenda papers.

The Chairman also informed members that he had this morning received a letter from Kensington Palace on behalf of the Duke of Gloucester following his recent visit to Ledbury and the Master's House. The letter expressed thanks for the book of photographs presented to the Duke of Gloucester.

Members were reminded of the civic service to take place on 12 March 2017 and encouraged to support this event which included well-known hymns and with singing by the Cantabile Choir.

The Chairman informed members of the departure of Jo Davidson, director for children's wellbeing. This being her last council meeting today, the Chairman spoke on behalf of members and officers in thanking Mrs Davidson for her work over the past seven years.

The Chairman also thanked Mark Taylor, interim director of resources and wished him well for the future. The Chairman welcomed Andrew Lovegrove who was joining as chief finance officer.

68. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 9 - 10)

A copy of the public questions and written answers, is attached to the minutes at appendix 1.

69. MOTIONS ON NOTICE

Council considered the following notices of motion.

Motion 1 – Recognition for the canary girls in the munitions factories in Rotherwas in the world wars.

In moving the motion, Councillor SD Williams made the following points:

- that consideration be given to the erection of a plaque of honour by way of celebrating the achievements of the canary girls
- that his mother and sister worked in the munitions factory along with thousands of other women whose skin turned yellow through exposure to the chemicals, and who experienced arduous and fearful conditions
- the factory was bombed by the Luftwaffe and, as Churchill urged "give us the tools and we'll finish the job", the canary girls worked for the country and should be recognised and honoured and never forgotten

Councillor ACR Chappell seconded the motion and stated that:

- the role of women during wars and conflict was not fully recognised and the importance of their role during World Wars 1 and 2 as well as the Korean War should be recognised
- women as young as 16 came from all over the area to work at the factory and were billeted in the city at a hostel in Redhill and south Herefordshire
- the women risked their lives filling the shells and on several occasions where there were explosions, they were killed and maimed, and saw the death and injury of their colleagues
- in his former role as Chair of the South Wye Partnership, Cllr Chappell installed three commemorative stones and a group was set up with the support of the enterprise zone for a living museum and plans to develop the former shell store, where some 3500 women were identified who worked there. It was expected that there were more women around the world who had not been recognised and it was time for Herefordshire to recognise all those who worked in munitions factories.

Other councillors spoke in support of the motion and the following principal points were made:

- that recognition was better late than never as many women carried out this dangerous work in doing their bit towards the defence of country
- experience of serving on the front line highlighted the skills of the women who worked in the munitions factories
- it was timely that it was world women's day next week, with an exhibition being arranged by the Herefordshire Archives and Records Centre (HARC), and councillors were encouraged to extend this to their wards.
- this was an opportunity for the Enterprise Zone, parishes and community groups to join up in creating formal recognition
- the existing exhibition material needed to be refreshed, noting the heritage aspects and the opportunity to link it to bid to be the city of culture
- many councillors had family members who worked in the factory or who cared for the women in hospital

In addition, a number of councillors commented that these women deserved more than a plaque in recognition of their work and spoke in support of a statue to be commissioned. In response the Chairman reminded council that the motion was to refer to the executive to consider recognition, in the appropriate form.

Councillor DG Harlow, as Cabinet member, economy and corporate services, spoke in support of the motion and thanked members for their comments regarding the Enterprise Zone, which he undertook to take to their agenda for discussion.

Councillor Williams confirmed he had no further comments or amendments to make in reply

The Chairman put the original motion to the vote. The motion was passed unanimously.

RESOLVED

That the council recognise the significant contribution made during the first and second world wars by the canary girls in the munitions factories in Rotherwas and asks the Executive to consider erecting a plaque in Rotherwas to recognise their national role and sacrifices made in the war effort and to honour and remember their important work in the county.

Motion 2 - Hereford eastern river crossing and link road

In moving the motion, Councillor JLV Kenyon made the following points:

- that the proposal was not to oppose the aims of the council or a western route as that was the only way to connect the A49 road to the north and south of Hereford, but was a local solution to a traffic problem. It was understood that many people in the Tupsley ward would support a road to the east of Hereford linking to Rotherwas and the Ledbury road
- the administration's concerns about how this would be received by Westminster was acknowledged; however, the route had been thought through and was sited on a proposed route to alleviate heavy goods and support the development of the rugby club site and which would support people to access the essential services in the city such as the hospital and schools. Traffic modelling showed that the route was robust
- the route was supported by the Enterprise Zone and parish councils were generally supportive, and members were urged to consider this as a simple and common sense solution to a local traffic problem

In seconding the motion, Councillor PJ Edwards made the following comments:

- the proposal was very much about freeing up traffic flow within the city and the immediate surroundings including emergency services traffic and access to education
- it was believed that it would provide growth in business efficiency with links to Rotherwas and the Enterprise Zone
- it would bring improvements in air quality for a third of Hereford residents
- with regard to the major planning application regarding the rugby club on Hampton Dene Road, a key element of the application was the safeguarding of such a route proposed today and therefore the proposal was contained within the planning approval
- this could be an affordable and deliverable solution in a timely manner after many years of waiting, and while the core strategy had to be delivered, this issue also needed attention.

In response, as cabinet member for infrastructure, Councillor PD Price spoke against the motion, making the following points:

- over the past number of years this has been considered as part of the infrastructure proposals. There had been considerable cost involved in developing the core strategy and studies provided evidence to not support it
- the Board of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) had limited resources and had to prioritise projects and although Herefordshire had benefited so far, this could not be assumed in the future
- in the wider scheme, the funding authorities would not see the proposal as a solution and the motion could not be supported as presented

Members speaking in support of the motion made the following principal comments:

- the Belmont to Ross road was poor value for money and would not alleviate problems or improve access, whereas businesses in the Enterprise Zone believed that an eastern bridge would help to get the economy moving
- it was recognised that the strategic plan was to build a bypass to the west in order to link the A49 road. However, the western route would do little for the city or for the people living to the west and the motion was a way of easing the routes to establishments to the east.
- this was a plan for the future once the western route was completed and it would not appear incoherent to the government, and this should be considered before rejecting the motion
- the proposal was a cost effective solution in terms of geography, logistics and populations and suggested forward thinking in relation to the impact of traffic from housing expansion south of the city

Members speaking against the motion made the following principal comments:

- the core strategy approved the western bypass with funding continuing to be sought from Whitehall. The motion would present a muddled and confused message and detract from a decision to give funding
- serious consideration had been given previously to routes both to the east and the west. The Rotherwas access road was a great achievement and the Enterprise Zone provided areas for a bridge but in the fullness of time
- it was necessary for the route to be to the west because of the Lugg Meadows and it would be necessary to find a traffic solution for roads in the east such as Hampton Park Road and Ledbury Road and mitigate impact around Bartestree and Lugwardine
- the focus should be on dispersing business development around the county and the market towns rather than concentrating it into Rotherwas

- serious consideration needed to be given to alternatives to car travel and there were examples of cities looking at alternatives to reduce car numbers that could be explored.

The Leader, in opposing the motion, responded that the government would be asked about funding and that they, along with the Highways Authority and Transport for England would have to prioritise. It would be unrealistic to expect funders to believe that the plan was coherent if it changed from west to east and this could result in no funding at all. It was important to ensure against this. In order to produce economic benefits the solution would be to build in the west; to pass this motion would result in disjointed funding requests and put economic development at risk.

Councillor JG Lester proposed that the question now be put and this was seconded by Cllr BA Durkin. The chairman put the procedural motion to the vote having considered that the item under discussion had been sufficiently discussed.

Members voted in favour of the closure motion. There were no votes against or abstentions.

As the vote was passed the chairman gave the proposer of the original motion a right of reply.

In summing up, Cllr JLV Kenyon said that when the A49 bridge at Greyfriars was opened some 50 years ago, it was predicted that it would not be sufficient, and an additional crossing was still awaited. The motion was clear that this was not about east versus west but about a local common sense solution to a local problem. The fears regarding putting the western bypass in jeopardy were understood and it was recognised that it would bring more houses and make a sustainable authority, but it would not help the traffic. The problem was highlighted recently when storms lifted the roof off the Asda petrol station with the resulting road closure bringing the city to a standstill. The impact of the reduction in people visiting the city centre that afternoon on the economy was brought into question. The traffic flow through the city centre would be helped by two additional bridges and members were asked what would be required for the case for the eastern route to be heard.

The Chairman read the proposal, as published, for the vote.

Eight members present at the meeting demanded a recorded vote.

The motion was lost with 11 votes in favour, 34 against and 1 abstention.

For (11) Councillors TL Bowes, PE Crockett, PJ Edwards, EPJ Harvey, JLV Kenyon, MD Lloyd-Hayes, MN Mansell, SM Michael, AJW Powers, D Summers, A Warmington.

Against (34) Councillors PA Andrews, BA Baker, JM Bartlett, WLS Bowen, H Bramer, CR Butler, ACR Chappell, PGH Cutter, BA Durkin, CA Gandy, KS Guthrie, DG Harlow, EL Holton, JA Hyde, TM James, AW Johnson, JF Johnson, JG Lester, RL Mayo, MT McEvilly, PM Morgan, PD Newman, FM Norman, CA North, RJ Phillips, GJ Powell, PD Price, P Rone, NE Shaw, WC Skelton, J Stone, EJ Swinglehurst, DB Wilcox, SD Williams.

Abstentions (1) Councillor A Seldon

Councillor RI Matthews left the meeting prior to the voting.

70. COUNCIL TAX SETTING

The Leader presented the report and moved the recommendations.

Councillor PM Morgan seconded.

Members made the following principal comments:

- that support for the recommendations was with reluctance but in recognition of the financial position
- that the proposal to consider capital revenue and council tax at the same time was welcomed
- that it be noted that Hereford City Council was not raising its precept this year.

A member asked for clarification regarding any requirement for relevant members to declare an interest as a member of the Fire and Rescue Authority. The solicitor to the council confirmed that this was not required.

A named vote was held. All members present voted for the recommendations with no abstentions.

For (46) Councillors PA Andrews, BA Baker, JM Bartlett, WLS Bowen, TL Bowes, H Bramer, CR Butler, ACR Chappell, PE Crockett, PGH Cutter, BA Durkin, PJ Edwards, CA Gandy, KS Guthrie, DG Harlow, EPJ Harvey, EL Holton, JA Hyde, TM James, AW Johnson, JF Johnson, JLV Kenyon, JG Lester, MD Lloyd-Hayes, MN Mansell, RL Mayo, MT McEvelly, SM Michael, PM Morgan, PD Newman, FM Norman, CA North, RJ Phillips, GJ Powell, AJW Powers, PD Price, P Rone, A Seldon, NE Shaw, WC Skelton, J Stone, D Summers, EJ Swinglehurst, A Warmington, DB Wilcox, SD Williams.

Against (0)

Abstentions (0)

RESOLVED

THAT:

(a) the precepting authority details incorporated in appendices 1 to 5, relating to parishes, West Mercia Police and Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority be approved in accordance with sections 30(2), 34(3), 36(1) and section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended) and that the following amounts be approved for the year 2017/18 in accordance with sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, Regulation 6 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011) :

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| (i) £354,264,513 | being the estimated aggregate expenditure of the council in accordance with section 31A (2) of the act, including all precepts issued to it by parish councils; |
| (ii) £257,389,000 | being the estimated aggregate income of the council for the items set out in section 31A (3) of the act (including revenue support grant); |
| (iii) £96,875,513 | being the amount by which the aggregate at (a)(i) above exceeds the aggregate at (a)(ii) calculated by the council in |

- accordance with section 31A(4) of the act, as its council tax requirement for the year (including parish precepts);
- (iv) £1,433.11 being the amount at (a)(iii) above divided by the amount of the council tax base calculated by the council, in accordance with section 31B of the act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year (including parish precepts)
- (v) £3,826,513 being the aggregate amount of all special items (parish precepts) referred to in section 34(1) of the act;
- (vi) £1,376.50 being the amount at (iv) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (v) above by the amount of the council tax base calculated by the council, in accordance with section 34(2) of the act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no parish precept relates (Herefordshire Council band D council tax, excluding parishes)
- (b) it is agreed that the net tax base (being the gross tax base adjusted for an assumed collection rate) used for setting the budget requirement for 2017/18:
- (i) for the whole council area is calculated as 67,598.21 band D equivalent properties;
- (ii) is allocated to band D equivalent dwellings per precept area as shown in appendix 1; and
- (iii) the individual council tax allocations per valuation band of dwelling by parish (including fire and police precepts) are as set out in appendix 5.

71. LEADER'S REPORT

The Leader thanked Jo Davidson and Mark Taylor on behalf of Cabinet and members for their work, and expressed confidence in Andrew Lovegrove in his new role as chief finance officer.

The Leader presented his report on the activities of Cabinet since the meeting of Council on 3 February 2017 and took questions.

With reference to the sale of smallholdings a member asked what information was being withheld from the public and smallholders that was contained in a report from Fisher German.

In response, the Leader reminded members that it was inescapable that the smallholdings estate was a large asset that benefited a small number of people and that such an asset would not be considered for purchase by the council in the present day. In support of economic development and as custodians of taxpayers' assets, it was necessary to ensure that assets benefited more people. With regard to the Fisher German report, the Leader confirmed that this did not form part of the cabinet member's decision.

This point was confirmed by Councillor H Bramer as the cabinet member for contracts and assets, who clarified that the draft report of 2014 was incomplete and was not relied upon in the decision making.

A member asked the Leader for assurance that there was capacity to manage the expanding number of contracts and associated costs for care provision.

The Leader responded that all reports received from cabinet members and officers stated there was capacity.

Councillor PM Morgan, cabinet member for adults and wellbeing, confirmed that for adults and wellbeing there was capacity although it was necessary to ensure that the right contracts were commissioned and used in the best possible way.

A member welcomed the granting of new leases to Hereford Football Club.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

72. FORMAL QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS TO THE CABINET MEMBERS AND CHAIRMEN UNDER STANDING ORDERS (Pages 11 - 14)

A copy of the member questions and written answers, together with supplementary questions asked at the meeting and their answers, is attached to the minutes at appendix 2.

The meeting ended at 11:22

CHAIRMAN

Public questions to Council: 3 March 2017

Question from Mrs E Morawieka, Breinton.

Question 1

Potential risk to the council.

Herefordshire Council is a joint owner of Hoople Ltd with Wye Valley NHS Trust.

The latest published accounts for the two years to 31st March 2016 state that this company:

1. has accumulated losses of £1.369million;
2. the amount of its pension deficit has gone from £101,000 to £2.097million;
3. its turnover year on year has decreased by 8%.

During the 2015/16 financial year five of the six non-executive directors resigned in just one month and none of them signed their emolument certificates. Would the cabinet member with responsibility for the company please confirm that Hoople Ltd's financial situation poses no risk to the council's current budget or the medium term financial strategy?

Answer from Cllr Tony Johnson, cabinet member corporate strategy and finance

Yes. The council's budget and its medium term financial strategy appropriately reflect the obligations of the operating agreement between the council and Hoople, and the trading relationship is fully disclosed in the council's own financial statements as a related party. The council has, and will continue to work with Hoople to reduce operating costs and improve profitability.

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Question from Councillor Chris Chappell

Question 1

Robert Owen Academy

The Robert Owen 'Free' school has received negative reviews from Ofsted in all areas. Educationalists across the county, questioned why it was allowed to open in the first place. While no blame can be placed on the council for its failures, we do have a duty of care to the students at the school.

Can the cabinet member for children's services confirm:

- a) whether he shares the concerns of many about the Robert Owen 'Free' school, and if he does, to who has he expressed them; and
- b) what safeguarding plans are in place to protect the students, and how can he be sure that their future educational and social needs are met?

Answer from Councillor Jonathan Lester, cabinet member young people and children's wellbeing

There is much to be proud of in our county schools' performance.

However, the educational outcomes at the Robert Owen Academy have been of concern to the council for the past two years. In addition, the Education Funding Agency has issued a financial warning notice to the school, and the recent Ofsted report is a matter of significant concern.

Whilst it is the regional schools commissioner who is responsible for taking action where academies and free schools are underperforming and for intervening in academies where governance is inadequate, the council has overall responsibility for ensuring that outcomes are good.

I can confirm therefore that the officers of the council have escalated our concerns to both the trustees of the school and the regional schools commissioner, prior to and subsequent to the Ofsted report. We will continue to seek assurance from the bodies concerned about their plans for improvement. Whatever the outcome, the council will be focussing on ensuring the best outcomes for the young people.

Question from Councillor Chris Chappell

Question 2

Member and officer relationships

There is concern across the political groups, that councillors are being isolated from officers. A recent letter to councillors telling us how and when to access officers at the Plough Lane offices, was at best unfortunate, and could be seen as being disrespectful to councillors.

Will the leader meet with councillors, outside of group leader's meetings, to hear councillors concerns, and put our minds at rest that back bench councillors concerns are being heard?

Answer from Councillor Tony Johnson, cabinet member corporate strategy and finance

Mutual respect between members and employees should be a cornerstone to the way in which this council works. I understand that, following the adoption by full Council of a revised constitution, the remaining codes are being refreshed. This refresh is being led by the governance improvement member working group, reporting to the audit and governance

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committee who expect to make their recommendation to the annual meeting of Council in May. This work includes reviewing the effectiveness of the existing codes on member and officer relationships and use of council resources by members to ensure that we can all operate effectively in our respective roles, and that in doing so we uphold both the council's own values and the principles of public life. Rather than arrange a meeting outside of this established process, I would encourage any member with views on this matter to contact their own group representative on the working group to enable those views to be taken into consideration.

Question from Councillor Bob Matthews

Question 3

Accommodation contracts

I have been informed by officers that extensive and expensive work is taking place to accommodate council staff members at Elgar House, Holmer Road and Blueschool House, Coningsby Street, Hereford. Can it be confirmed that these jobs were advertised for tenders to be submitted, and if not then why not?

Answer from Councillor Harry Bramer, cabinet member contracts and assets

Councillor Matthews may wish to refer to the cabinet member decisions taken on 2 June 2016 (regarding Blueschool House) and 7 July 2016 (regarding Elgar House), both of which will have been circulated to members as well as having been published on the council's website. These reports provide information about the costs of the works and the method of procurement for a contractor to complete those works. In both cases the lead contractor was procured, in accordance with the council's contract procedure rules, via a framework agreement in order to secure best value for money.

The council requires contractors to demonstrate wider social value, part of which includes benefit to the local economy. In relation to the Elgar House project 52% of the labour and 61% of the total small and medium enterprise (SME) spend was within ten miles of the site. Whilst work continues at the Blueschool House site, indications based on packages of work already let, are that 62% of the labour and 86% of SME spend will be within ten miles of the site.

Question from Councillor Anthony Powers

Question 4

Authority monitoring reports

The most recent authority monitoring report, on the extent to which the council's planning policies are being achieved, is for 2013-14. These annual reports are a mandatory legal requirement, reinforced by the council's own commitment to produce monitoring of the delivery and supply of housing as per Policy SS3 of the Core Strategy. Why is this statutory requirement not being met, and when will the long-overdue reports for 2014-15 and 2015-16 be published?

Answer from Councillor Philip Price, cabinet member infrastructure

The national change from annual to authority monitoring reports was intended to ensure that data is published when available rather than in a single 'set piece' report. To that end key elements of the 2016 data (the five year housing land supply and neighbourhood plan monitoring data) is already available on the website.

Following the council's new website going live this week, we aim to publish before Easter the remaining elements, collated on a single webpage to provide ease of reference. The additional information will include an outline of the programme for preparation of the remaining

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development plan documents, an update on the implementation of a range of core strategy policies, and data regarding section 106 agreement contributions from developers.

Supplementary question

To quote from the summary of relevant legislation on the DCLG website: “local planning authorities must publish information at least annually that shows how the implementation of policies in the local plan is progressing.”

Will the Cabinet member acknowledge that obligation, and now commit the council to publish monitoring reports “at least annually”?

Answer from Councillor Philip Price, cabinet member infrastructure

Up to date monitoring reports will be on the website by Easter. It is not a requirement to produce these as a whole provided they are updated annually.

Question from Councillor Anthony Powers

Question 5

Smallholdings disposal

Following an EIR from the National Farmers Union, and on demand from the Information Commissioner’s Office, the council has finally made public a substantially less redacted version of the 2014 Fisher German report it commissioned on disposal options for the farms estate. There is now clear evidence that the report’s recommendation to the executive - that only a portion of the estate should be sold - was concealed from councillors, the scrutiny committee and its confidential Task and Finish group, the farm tenants and the public, on the spurious grounds of commercial confidentiality. In view of such deplorable behaviour who was responsible for the decision to withhold the Fisher German recommendation, and what confidence can members and the public have in the transparency and legitimacy of any of the executive’s decision-making?

Answer from Councillor Harry Bramer, cabinet member contracts and assets

General overview and scrutiny committee, as part of its policy development work on this matter during the summer of 2015 asked for sight of the draft report, which had not been considered by the executive at that time. Redactions were undertaken then having regard to legal advice.

Members and the public can continue to have confidence in the transparency and legitimacy of the executive’s decision-making because, as was made clear to both the scrutiny committee and cabinet at the time of taking their decision in December 2015, the report referred to was a draft of a report from a review commissioned in early 2014 from Fisher German which was not pursued and was not taken into account by cabinet when they took the decision some 18 months later. As council priorities in light of changing economic conditions, were evolving rapidly at the time, the review and its report were never completed, therefore it would not have been appropriate to take account of an unverified draft report. The monitoring officer confirmed at the December 2015 cabinet meeting that this report had not been taken account of, and there was therefore no requirement to publish.

In accordance with the principles of good decision-making all information which was taken into account by the cabinet was made public at the time the decision was taken – and this continues to be the case.

Supplementary question

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Councillor Bramer continues to assert that the Fisher German report was an incomplete draft. The authors of the report have denied that assertion.

Isn't the truth that your paid £12,000 of tax payers' money for this report, didn't like that it told you, and went to enormous - and unlawful - lengths to bury it from the sight of councillors, the General Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the committee's confidential task and finish group, the tenant farmers and the public?

Answer from Councillor Harry Bramer, cabinet member contracts and assets

No.

Question from Councillor Sebastian Bowen

Question 6

Building maintenance

Can the cabinet member confirm whether the balance of responsibilities between external contractors and in-house staff re building maintenance is the most cost effective, speedily responsive and efficient in its effects?

Answer from Councillor Harry Bramer, cabinet member contracts and assets

The council has outsourced building services since before 2003. The cost effectiveness of these arrangements have been reviewed periodically, the most recent fundamental review having been undertaken in 2012/13 as part of the then root and branch review programme, and which determined to continue outsourcing.

The current contract is scheduled to end in March 2018 and work is underway to prepare for recommissioning; cost effectiveness and balance of responsibilities will form part of those preparations. In considering such changes, necessary qualifications to meet health and safety and insurance requirements; job evaluation of any employee taking on additional responsibilities; and TUPE considerations would be taken into account when assessing continued cost effectiveness.

Supplementary question

I ask that when the contract is reviewed can we ensure that our own staff are permitted to carry out tasks for which they are best trained and capable rather than using outside contractors who tend to be far more expensive, don't know the intricacies of our buildings and are rarely as quickly at the scene as they should be? And can councillors have an input into this review?

Answer from Councillor Harry Bramer, cabinet member contracts and assets

Please refer to the written answer. Work is underway to review the contract.