

Councillors' questions at Cabinet – 28 June 2018

Question 1

Councillor CA Gandy, Conservatives

To: cabinet member, contract and assets

The library service in Herefordshire is extremely valued and can be a life line for some of our most vulnerable residents who do not have the money available to either purchase books or a digital device and who also particularly in rural communities use their library as a meeting place and somewhere to obtain local information. If the decision is taken to outsource Herefordshire Library services what assurances can you give that access to our libraries by the most vulnerable will not change and that rural community libraries will continue to be supported as at present.

Response

The value of the library service is not in question, and drives the need for us to find a way in which the future of these services can be assured in the most cost effective way.

If the recommendations to be considered elsewhere on the Cabinet's agenda today are approved the commissioning of services will be based on the current standard of service.

The front-line delivery of community libraries is provided by local groups and parish councils who provide their time to deliver locally valued services which are important additions to the overall library network across the county. Although as independent from the council these community libraries would not form part of any commissioned service the council currently supports these libraries with training, advice and in some cases IT – also the council pays for the book stock; this support would be maintained through any commissioned service.

Question 2

Councillor RM Matthews, Herefordshire Independents

To: cabinet member, transport and regulatory services

A team of scientists from the University of Exeter and the Barcelona Institute for Global Health have recently announced that they have found a very strong link between the new generation of LED street lighting and breast and prostate cancer. Analysis of four thousand people in eleven regions of Spain established a link between exposure to LED lighting, doubled the risk of prostate cancer together with a 1.5 times higher chance of developing breast cancer.

Can the Cabinet Member inform us if he was aware of these very serious findings, and if so what action is being taken to reassure the public.

Public Health England have also recently raised concerns about the increasing use of LED lighting, which has of course recently been installed throughout this county.

Response

I am aware of the research report, and the media coverage of a statement made by the chief medical officer. It is unfortunate that similar coverage was not afforded to the clarification issued by Public Health England (PHE) some days later which stated "While the chief medical officer's article highlights a theoretical risk of glare to motorists from LED street lighting if it is not installed correctly, PHE anticipates that a vast majority of this type of lighting will be installed with the LEDs recessed or with an appropriate balance of blue light so it does not dazzle drivers". PHE's senior scientific group leader of radiation dosimetry went on to confirm that the references to high levels of blue light damaging the retina refers to blue light in general rather than that emanating from street lights and no risk of eye damage from LED street lighting.

This is an area where there is currently no scientific consensus. The EU's Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks has also undertaken a review of this specific issue and, whilst recognising the need for further research concluded:

"... that there is no evidence of direct adverse health effects from LEDs emission in normal use (lamps and displays) by the general healthy population."

Lighting in Herefordshire has been correctly installed and includes an automated process for dimming the lights through the night.

We will of course continue to monitor research on this subject, but it is pleasing to note that Herefordshire was reported by the Campaign to Protect Rural England as being the darkest county in England with the lowest average light levels.

Supplementary Question

It has been noted that EU have concerns about the issue and that further research will be taking place. What systems does this authority have in place to monitor the research in this issue?

Answer

This issue will continue to be monitored by the Director of Public Health through Public Health England. Further research will be reported on by national professional bodies and networks. Subsequent findings of such research will be monitored and reported on by the Director of Public Health.