

Agenda item no. 6 - Questions from members of the council

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ 1	Councillor PC Jinman, Golden Valley South	In putting together the budget what specific consideration has been given to local, national and international concerns regarding climate change? Many councils have now passed motions declaring a 'climate emergency' and setting targets aiming for them to be carbon neutral by 2030. This requires budgetary measures now given that the budget is for the year ahead.	Cabinet member, infrastructure
<p>Response:</p> <p>I would refer to the responses given to public questions 5 and 6.</p> <p>We have given substantial consideration to climate change through the development of the budget, which includes significant resources to build on our strong performance to reduce countywide emissions to assist in tackling international concerns regarding climate change.</p> <p>The proposed capital programme in 2019/20 includes over £3.2m investment in energy efficiency, invest to save and renewable energy projects. These will continue our investment in solar and photovoltaic energy, improvements to public buildings energy efficiency, warm home grants available to low income households looking to install central heating for the first time, further investment in LED lighting, and a more fuel efficient council vehicle fleet.</p> <p>In addition to our own capital investment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the council is able to use this resource to draw down significant external funding. This includes access to up to 50% capital grants for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, energy efficiency grants for businesses, and significant funding from the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) to support residents with home energy projects. This will not only increase the total available funding for these projects, but will also offer the council better payback periods and improved value for money. • Our proposed budget includes planned revenue expenditure of almost £1m for energy efficiency, active travel and affordable warmth activity. This revenue investment includes utilising £150k of grant funding from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to undertake a detailed project development study for the Hereford Heat Network. 			

MQ 2	Councillor RI Matthews, Credenhill	<p>A list of the Skylon Park Investors shows that thirty eight companies have located there and that thirty four of these were previously based elsewhere in the county. This means only four new companies have moved to the site from elsewhere in the country.</p> <p>Considering all businesses relocating to Government-Approved Enterprise Zones are granted very generous concessions and benefits.</p> <p>Is the cabinet member confident that the budget proposed to Council makes sufficient provision to encourage businesses to move to Herefordshire from elsewhere in the country?</p>	Cabinet member, economy and communications
<p>Response: I am confident that our budget proposals are making the best use of the resources available to the council to encourage economic growth within the county whether by supporting our own highly valued businesses and entrepreneurs to develop and expand or attracting new businesses to the county.</p> <p>When looking to relocate or expand a business will look at a set or criteria unique to them and their circumstances, the decision can be based on access to markets, availability of skilled workforce, work / life balance or a number of other factors and isn't just about monetary incentives. Herefordshire Council can make the county attractive to businesses by making available appropriate land and premises to accommodate businesses seeking to relocate, either locally or from elsewhere in the country, improving infrastructure (such as transport networks and Broadband), and supporting the development of quality housing, education, culture and leisure facilities for those who work in the county.</p> <p>The capital programme includes contributions of over £28m towards the provision of new employment land or specialist business premises across the county. I see the new facilities at the forthcoming Ross Enterprise Park, Shell Store and Cyber Centre developments adding significantly to the existing Enterprise Zone offer in attracting inward investment.</p> <p>The council has been working on bringing a superfast and ultrafast broadband network across the county making the area attractive to businesses in terms of national and global communications. To date 87% of premises in the Herefordshire can access over 30Mbps from a starting point of less than 1%. This will set to increase with the contract with Gigaclear deployment to fibre direct to the premises with fastest connections found in the country. The council also runs a bespoke broadband deployment programme for businesses with EU funding and training programmes on making the most of technologies and connectivity. Total public investment of some £36m over the broadband programme period is within the capital programme.</p>			

Attracting businesses is also about attracting people and families. The council has supported the improvement of Halo leisure facilities, invested directly in libraries, heritage and archives, and the capital programme reflects support for the Courtyard's plans for development. Development of the Old Market has added to the appeal of Hereford and our continued support for the development of higher education in the county will attract associated employment.

I firmly believe that supporting our existing and growing businesses is as important as attracting new inward investment and the number of expanding Herefordshire businesses locating at the Hereford Enterprise Zone is a success that should be recognised.

MQ 3	Councillor ACR Chappell, Hinton and Hunderton	<p>The local authority is obliged to set an annual budget, which takes little account for future planning by parish councils or community groups.</p> <p>Will the Leader write to the Government, to amend the Local Government Finance Act 1992, to allow rural Unitary local authorities, like Herefordshire, to set an element of its budget that will assist parish councils and community groups over a three/five year period to draw down further funding for projects of benefit to rural communities?</p>	Leader
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Response:

We continue to work closely with our local government colleagues and the county's MPs, to lobby for a fair funding allocation for the county. Parish Councils of course have the freedom to set their own precept and are not subject to the same limitations that we as the principle authority are in terms of the level of precept they may set without holding a referendum. This enables parish councils to support activity to meet local needs, whether through direct commissioning of services for their area, collective purchasing by working with neighbouring or like-minded parish councils, or by supporting community activity and groups in their own areas.