

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

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ 1	Councillor PJ Edwards, Newton Farm	In the absence of an accurate response to my question put to Council meeting 12 th October 2018 regards the BBLP contract and selling of Grounds Equipment, please may all Members be informed of vehicles and machines which Herefordshire Council own in relation to the BBLP contract?	Cabinet member transport and regulatory services
<p>Response:</p> <p>The query that you raised in relation to the Leader's report to Council in October did not receive an inaccurate response. Your query, as recorded in the minutes, was whether Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP) would be able to deliver their responsibilities to maintain the council's open spaces and verges given that it was understood that they had sold the equipment they owned required for these tasks and would therefore be reliant on third party contractors. The response confirmed that BBLP remained contracted to deliver this work, which is the case. A further query requested confirmation of the amount of money raised from the sale of equipment; this information was provided on 29 October 2018 (for ease of reference the amount was £21,548.40).</p> <p>As you will appreciate there is a significant amount of machinery and vehicles the council owns in relation to the BBLP contract; rather than produce a lengthy list here I would ask any member wishing to inspect the relevant asset register to email Laura.Lloyd@herefordshire.gov.uk who will be able to assist.</p>			
MQ 2	Councillor A Seldon, Bromyard West	How would the cabinet member for finance and corporate services defend the accusation that his administration proposed an unbalanced budget in 2018-19 by proposing a manifestly undeliverable budget for the Children and Families Directorate in February 2018?	Cabinet member finance and corporate services
<p>Response:</p> <p>The question indicates that Councillor Seldon is suggesting there has been unlawful activity by this administration and this Council given that it is a requirement of law to set a balanced budget. Making such an outrageous accusation, suggests to me either a complete lack of understanding of local government finances and budget setting, or an attempt to grab a headline in view of forthcoming elections; neither explanation reflects well on the questioner.</p>			

Herefordshire Council's budget setting process is well established and robust. This administration's proposals in 2018, as they are every year, were reviewed by scrutiny. The particular financial challenges facing children's services were fully set out and tested by scrutiny, and the director for children's wellbeing confirmed that whilst no cast iron assurances could be given on the saving on this area he had confidence in the work that had been done in relation to the estimates. The budget proposals were reviewed and assessed as lawful by the council's section 151 officer, and debated by full Council before being voted on – a vote in which I note Councillor Seldon supported the very budget proposal that he now says was 'manifestly undeliverable'.

As a councillor active within the Local Government Association (LGA) he will recall that as recently as January this year the LGA was reporting that nearly 90% of local authorities had overspent their children's budget in 2017/18 and there is no reason to believe that the picture will be different at the end of the 2018/19 financial year. I am sure Councillor Seldon would not be intending to suggest all those authorities are similarly to be 'accused'. A further report from the LGA, "Making Sense", in the Autumn of 2018 has highlighted how little control local authorities have over children's care costs. I would be delighted to lend Cllr Seldon my copy if he wishes to cultivate an interest in this area. The reality is that nationally the pressures on children's social care are increasing whilst local government resources have been reducing. At the time the budget was set, and reflected in the medium term financial strategy, the pressures facing children's services were recognised and, as any prudent council would, we maintain close oversight of that budget and ensure that, should it prove necessary, additional resources are made available to support that vital service. Those additional resources are only available to us because of this administration's continued prudent approach to budgeting.

MQ 3	Councillor ACR Chappell, Hinton and Hunderton	There are a number of milestones and other historic items like finger posts and boundary stones across the county that need to be preserved. Will the cabinet Member for Highways, undertake a county wide audit to ensure these items are recorded and not destroyed by highways works and other events?	Cabinet member transport and regulatory services
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Response:

The council considers the protection of historic structures such as milestones and boundary stones to be a valuable part of the historic environment of the county, many of which are listed by Historic England. The council is aware of the potential threat to these features and is working to reduce it. When highway maintenance is undertaken close to these features, care is taken not to remove or damage these markers. If they are found to be in an unstable condition, they are reset and repaired where possible, and we continue to explore external sources of funding to support more proactive management.

The council already holds a significant amount of information about these features, and is working to improve this data. Until recently listed milestones were the only ones recorded on the Herefordshire Historic Environment Record (HHER), which affords them greater protection under the Planning (Listed Building & Conservation Area) Act 1990. In the last few months, we have been working with the Milestone

Society to add data held by them and also adding data from a survey we carried out in 2012/13 to the HHER. Although adding these unlisted structures recorded in the HHER will not afford any additional protection, it will give them greater visibility and attention when it comes to management and protection of them, as is the case for all heritage assets. As a result of this survey and audit work there are now around 300 mile markers recorded on the HHER and this work is still ongoing.

There is always merit in seeking the views and assistance from parish councils as they can contribute valuable local knowledge to this work, and I will ask officers to liaise with Locality Stewards to take those discussions forward at a local level.