

Councillors' questions at Cabinet – 25 June 2019

Question 1

Councillor Nigel Shaw, Bromyard Bringsty Ward

To: cabinet member, finance and corporate services

Can the appropriate Cabinet Member provide a table of business rates and council tax charged by year for the last (say) 10 years?

Response

Yes. I have asked officers to liaise with you to clarify the information that you require given the wide range of variables that exist – for example whether you are seeking information about rates and taxes levied, or collected.

Question 2

Councillor Carole Gandy, Mortimer Ward

To: cabinet member, environment, economy and skills

What plans does the portfolio holder for environment, economy and skills as part of the new administration have to increase the employment opportunities for the people of Herefordshire by encouraging companies providing skilled, well paid jobs to relocate to Herefordshire and thus raise the average wage of Herefordshire workers, which currently lags behind both our near neighbours and well behind the National average.

Response

The average weekly wage within Herefordshire is significantly below the national average (circa 20%). In order to enable the development of the economy, and attract higher value employers, we need to ensure that we have an appropriately skilled workforce, available employment land supported by appropriate infrastructure, and the provision of advice and guidance to business.

The council is supporting the growth of higher education provision to enable the development of a highly skilled workforce. Supporting the development of Hereford College of Arts and the New Model in Technology and Engineering Higher Education Institutes is a significant opportunity to transform our economy, attracting business investment. NMiTE is being developed to attract the national shortage of engineers. We have recently approved the development of the first student accommodation in Hereford, which will provide 178 bedrooms on station approach.

We are also continuing the development of key employment sites, such as the Hereford Enterprise Zone (Skylon Park), and developing the Ross on Wye Enterprise Park. At the Enterprise Zone a £9m Cyber Security Centre is currently being constructed through a Joint Venture with the University of Wolverhampton – creating a specialist facility to support the growth of higher value cyber security businesses and associated jobs. An incubation space

is also being constructed on the Enterprise Zone (the Shell Store), developing specialist facilities to support the development of new businesses.

We also continue to work closely with the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership to provide business support and guide the development of our economy. For example, the Growth Hub (funded through the LEP) provides business support services to businesses across the county. The council also operates grant schemes such as the European funded LEADER programme and the Marches Business Improvement Grant to enable businesses to grow.

In order to help support new and existing businesses to improve their environmental performance, reduce their costs and increase their competitiveness we also offer a range of environmental business support schemes. Some examples of these include:

- The Business Energy Efficiency Scheme - offering free energy efficiency audits and capital grants of up to 50% towards energy efficiency and carbon reduction projects.
- We have recently secured £1.3m of European funding to offer 50% capital grants for renewable energy projects which will help local businesses to reduce costs by generating their own low carbon energy.
- Through our 'Destination Hereford' programme we offer a broad range of sustainable transport support to businesses including, free cycle parking, business travel grants, travel planning support and offering cycle loans and free public transport travel for jobseekers and apprentices to help them access employment.
- The 'Business Futures Forum' is Herefordshire's environmental business support network which supports local businesses to collaborate, share best practice and drive efficiencies.

Supplementary question

I thank the portfolio holder for her response and note that they appear in the main to be concentrated on initiatives relating to Hereford City, initiatives that were well advanced under the previous administration. I also note that it is stated that new businesses coming into the City would be dependent on the appropriate infrastructure being in place. I wait to see what that Infrastructure will be.

However my question was more about what the new administration's plans were to tempt businesses to relocate from other towns and cities into Herefordshire ie selling our County as a place to do business and I do not believe that question has been answered.

Many in the rural areas living outside of the City and market towns have little or no access to public transport and as they make up over 40% of our population cannot be ignored. How will cycling and public transport initiatives benefit such a large proportion of our population, especially as the new administration appears to wish to discourage the use of the car to access the City and its immediate surrounding area where most of the more skilled jobs already in existence and going forward are likely to be based.

For your information to cycle from my ward to Rotherwas would take 2 hours and to walk 7 hours.

Answer

As you are aware the portfolios have only actually been finalised in the last week, so the degree of my new planning is so far fairly basic. We remain committed to getting businesses to relocate but I am also very keen that we do our best to provide opportunities for those who are already in the county to upskill and there will also be a focus on getting about. There are likely to be many changes and I agree that a normal bicycle would take a

long time. We hope there will be further uptake of electric bikes. We are aware with the climate emergency, there will be a lot of re-thinking of how we get about the county and in place like Herefordshire that will be a major challenge. It is an area we will be looking at as it will be of the top priorities.