

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 19 December

Question 1

Councillor Bernard Hunt, Newton Farm Ward

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

Given recent traffic incidents and the continuing increase in traffic fume pollution through Hereford City, can the cabinet tell us when they will be announcing positive policies regarding the County's road infrastructure?

Response

Thank you for your question. Tackling traffic congestion and air quality in Hereford is a priority for me and, together with Highways England who manage the A49, I am actively exploring ways of keeping the county moving. Following my decision in October to review the Hereford bypass and southern link road schemes, the scope of this review has been developed and I anticipate confirming this in a formal decision which will be published next month. This will determine the next steps to be undertaken and a timescale for this work. The review will look at other options including an eastern link / river crossing, removal of traffic signals and emergency incident response arrangements to remove blockages on the city's roads, an electric bus fleet for the urban bus network, a very light rail system and further improvements to cycle and pedestrian provision across the city including safer routes to schools. Meanwhile, I am also progressing an ambitious programme of other improvements to deliver public realm and active travel schemes in Hereford. This includes the provision of a high quality transport hub at the train station, public realm improvements on Commercial Road, Blueschool & Newmarket Street, improvements to the public realm in the High Town area and south wye area. The draft budget for next year allocates funding to progress this work.

Question 2

Councillor Nigel Shaw, Bromyard Bringsty Ward

To: leader of the council

The new, alternative, proposal presented by Cllr. Harrington to the LEP in place of the approved SWTP funding project was rejected by Marches LEP by 8 votes to 1 at their emergency board meeting in November. The proposal however remained "confidential" and has been kept secret from councillors and the public ostensibly because of election purdah rules. Now that the election is over will the Leader, in the spirit of openness and transparency, order the immediate publishing of this document so that we can all examine the alternative proposals that his administration have prepared in secret, without any consultation, and not just the cabal of officers, councillors and LEP board members who were privy to the LEP meeting?

Response

The proposal in relation to SWTP was recommended in a report presented by the LEP Executive not Cllr Harrington. However, I agree that it is important for this paper to be made public and I understand that the LEP will shortly be publishing the paper on their website now that purdah has ended.

Supplementary Question

I thank the Leader for his answer and in re-reading the LEP minutes I note that he stepped out of the meeting while the report was discussed by Richard Ball and Mairead Lane in the presence of Councillor Harrington and again when the decision to reject the proposals was made,

APPENDIX 2

Councillor Harrington curiously substituting for him only during these key moments of the meeting. If the report is a LEP executive report as the Leader states, then the issue of keeping the matter secret during purdah concerns me. The LEP is now a limited company and purdah rules do not apply to such entities. I believe that there is a public interest in transparency about this issue. When and where has the authority recorded its consideration of the public interest in not disclosing this information to provide a full picture? If the suggestion of purdah is a ruse to keep the report secret then I suggest that this is wrong and that the public interest matter is considered urgently by the monitoring officer with a view to ordering immediate publication by close of business tomorrow.

Councillor Harrington gave a solemn undertaking, publicised in this authority's press release of 23 October to provide a decision in respect of the SLR and bypass by the end of this year. I am very concerned that we are still waiting for any indication. Has the Leader warned Cllr Harrington that to renege on his promise to publish his decision would be very naughty, and might see him in receipt of only one lump of fossil fuel for Christmas? Seriously, before the LEP meet on 27 January with a recommendation to cancel the funding agreement, will he publish?

Response to supplementary question

I think you are probably only allowed one question but it's close to Christmas so we will let you off today. Your question about whether purdah applies or not, we will take up with the LEP as it was their decision. I think it is a fair comment from you so we will take that up. For the other, I will ask Cllr Harrington to respond.

Cllr Harrington

We will issue a decision on the scoping document just after the New Year.

Question 3

Councillor Bob Matthews, Credenhill Ward

To: leader of the council

The Cabinet Agenda is circulated on a Thursday, a full week before the meeting is due to be held, but the deadline for written questions is 5 PM the following day which gives Members very little time to prepare their questions and submit them to Councillor Services before the deadline expires.

I ask that the deadline be extended until 5PM the following Monday, still giving three clear days before the Cabinet meeting is due to be held. It is after all only democratic that councillors are given the opportunity to hold the administration to account.

Response

The council is committed to open and accountable local decision making and does encourage members of the council and public to engage in local decision making by utilising their right to ask questions at our public committees. In addition to written public and member questions, supplementary questions are also permitted at our public committees. The rules that govern our public and member questions processes are set out in the council's constitution and the timescales are outlined in the cabinet rules.

I will ask the audit and governance committee to consider this.