

Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at Online meeting on Thursday 25 June 2020 at 2.30 pm

Present: Councillor David Hitchiner, Leader of the Council (Chairperson)
Councillor Felicity Norman, Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairperson)

Councillors Ellie Chowns, Pauline Crockett, Gemma Davies, John Harrington, Liz Harvey and Ange Tyler

Cabinet support members in attendance	Councillors John Hardwick, Alan Seldon and Jenny Bartlett
Group leaders in attendance	Councillors Terry James, Trish Marsh and Bob Matthews
Scrutiny chairpersons in attendance	Councillors Elissa Swinglehurst, Carole Gandy and Jonathan Lester
Officers in attendance:	Director for economy and place, Director for children and families, Solicitor to the council, Chief finance officer, Director for adults and communities and Head of Corporate Performance, Assistant director, people and performance

152. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies from members of the cabinet.

153. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

154. MINUTES

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

155. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 5 - 8)

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 1 to the minutes.

In answer to a point of order, the monitoring officer confirmed that members of the public asking questions could be stated as doing so anonymously should they wish, provided that when submitting their question to the Council they provided details that they live or work in Herefordshire.

156. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS (Pages 9 - 14)

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 2 to the minutes.

157. END OF 2019/20 CORPORATE BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE REPORT

The cabinet member for corporate services and finance introduced the report and highlighted the following:

- It covered the first full year of the coalition budget
- There had been a number of challenges in changing the priorities and in addition there had been two major flooding events and the shared experience of a coronavirus.

- Staff were thanked for their work over the year which included the additional work which had been required in connection with the flooding and coronavirus.
- There was a slight underspend as at 31 March 2020 of £570k.
- Council borrowing had decreased by nearly £10m and investments had increased.
- All directorates had delivered their revenue savings target and were on target to deliver this year's savings.
- 71% of the performance measures over the previous year had shown improvement or remained steady compared to last year.
- 52% of the actions from our delivery plan had been identified as complete or having been progressed within their planned timescales.
- Bad debts written off amounted to 0.3% of the council's overall revenue budget.

As part of the discussion on the item, the following points were made about each cabinet member portfolio area:

Health and adult wellbeing

- The positive performance built on three years of focused practice development and culture change within the adults and community directorate.
- The strength-based model of practice had been of interest to both Welsh and English authorities. This model had supported increasing numbers of people and enabled residents to build on their own strengths.
- There was an enhanced level of support for staff.
- There had been a 30% reduction in complaints
- There was no waiting list for adult social care assessments.
- Herefordshire was ranked 8th nationally for resident's quality of life and was in the top quartile for residents in receipt of care who have as much social care as they would like.
- The TalkCommunity programme had been successful and this had been acknowledged during the two flooding events and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Environment, economy and skills

- There was new funding for external programmes, e.g. Marches renewable energy project which would assist with meeting environmental targets.
- Extra funding had been received for extending walking and cycling projects.
- Six new fully electric cars had been purchased.
- There had been energy efficiency projects across the council estate.
- The student accommodation on station approach would be completed soon.
- Work on the shell store and cyber centre was continuing.

Housing, regulatory services, and community safety

- Environmental health officers would be supporting track and trace.
- Strategic housing had delivered 213 affordable homes against a target of 210.
- A soft market test had been completed on the housing delivery project and a specification was in the process of being written to enable the commissioning of a consultant.
- The new allocation scheme for HomePoint had gone live on 22 June.
- Work was in progress on the housing strategy, tenancy strategy and temporary accommodation strategies .
- The supplementary planning document for affordable housing was currently out for consultation.
- Empty property work had been suspended due to the coronavirus.

Infrastructure and transport

- The economy and place directorate had delivered a balanced budget but there had been a challenge in the planning department.
- There was an ongoing problem with the flood damage incurred in the county. The council had been led to believe that Bellwin would cover these costs and there were ongoing discussions with government to ensure that the council received the funding.

Children and families

- The children and young people's partnership plan had been agreed which had been developed in consultation with children and young people.
- Work on mental health would be continuing and there would be a need to take into account the impact of the lockdown.
- There were now mental health support teams in secondary schools.
- The edge of care service was now in operation
- Specific accommodation for young people had been purchased.
- There had been some stabilisation in children's safeguarding and social work practice continued to improve.
- Recruitment and retention would be key to enable good practice to continue.
- The new children and young people's partnership arrangements were now operational and would build on the previous arrangements.
- Education performance in early years and primary schools were now in the top quartile but work would further work was required in the secondary schools.
- There had been an overspend in the children and families directorate but this was due to placement costs. There had been an improvement in placement costs in the last quarter of the financial year.

Commissioning, procurement and assets

- Cultural services had adapted to the new working arrangements due to the coronavirus.
- Property services had taken over the maintenance of the College Road campus.
- Work was underway on the Procurement- Local and social value project
- The waste team had managed to keep all services running despite the pressure of two floods and the coronavirus. The team had worked beyond their normal hours to ensure that no waste collections were missed.

Group Leaders

The group leaders made the following comments:

- The outturn was a credit to the council
- There would be decisions to be made if government did not provide the funding under Bellwin. However, it was confirmed that there was active engagement with the MPs.
- Not all the waste sites were open and this was causing residents anxiety. It was confirmed that there were plans to open all the waste sites.
- If there was a resurgence of the coronavirus and if government funding was questionable, then it would be very difficult to deal with the crisis and would put local government in a difficult position.
- It was acknowledged that it had been a challenging year and the overall underspend was welcomed. The financial position would be affected by coronavirus.

- There was concern that the looked after children (LAC) and the number of children on a child protection plan remained high which would continue the budget pressure in the children and families directorate. There was a request for a review of the threshold to ensure that it was correct. It was confirmed the threshold would be looked at and that whilst there had been less opportunity for contact with vulnerable children and young people, the schools and directorate had kept contact.
- The progress on the shell store, cyber centre and expansion of the Hereford Enterprise Zone were encouraging.
- The southern link road would be important to the projects in the Hereford Enterprise Zone but the funding had been lost. It was confirmed that the administration did not lose the money, it had been withdrawn because they were not in a position to progress the project as no business case had been prepared which could be submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT). A review of the project was currently underway.
- The strength based approach in adults and wellbeing directorate was welcomed.
- The council signing up to the citizen's advice bureau protocol in respect of council tax debt was good news.
- The active travel measures would open up towns for those people who were shielding or clinical vulnerable.

Scrutiny chairpersons

The scrutiny chairpersons made the following comments:

- It was frustrating that there had no little progress with regard to oral health as there had been a spotlight review in 2018 which had made recommendations. It was also 5 years since the oral health plan was put in place.
- The strength based approach was working well, delivering care at the right time, at the right level and properly monitored.
- Delayed transfer of care (DToC) had decreased.
- It was pleasing to note an increase in the use of the WISH website.

RESOLVED that:

- Cabinet reviewed performance and financial outturn for 2019/20, as set out in appendices A, B, D, E, F and G, and did not identify any additional actions to be considered to achieve future improvement; and**
- The treasury management outturn report at appendix C be recommended to Council for approval.**

The meeting ended at 16:19

Chairperson

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 25 June 2020**Question 1**

Mr R Palgrave, How Caple

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

The County All Party Parliamentary Group of MPs, supported by the County Councils Network (CCN), is investigating the decline of rural bus services and will make recommendations to government. They are inviting evidence from Councils. Their inquiry's terms of reference also seeks views on the immediate and long-term impact of Coronavirus on bus services. The deadline for responding is 31 July.

Re-vitalising bus services is a key part of the Local Transport Policy and will make a valuable contribution to addressing the climate emergency. Figures from CCN show that funding for rural bus services in the UK has almost halved since 2010.

It would be unfortunate if this opportunity to lobby central government for more financial support were missed. Is Herefordshire Council preparing a submission to this inquiry and if not will it now allocate resources to do so?

Response

Thank you for your question Mr Palgrave. Thank you for drawing attention to this important opportunity to provide evidence to the County Council's Network with a view to seeking a better deal for rural bus support from government. I can confirm that we will be making a submission and will provide our views on the issues raised which comprise:

- Funding for rural bus services
- Innovation
- The key issues we would like the National Bus Strategy to address, and
- Concerns regarding Covid 19 and longer term implications for rural bus services

We will be making a submission for the reasons outlined, collating the substantial evidence already held prior to the inclusion of Covid-19's after effects – and also on what so far limited and disjointed evidence we have on the further impacts since lockdown and re-emergence from lockdown. Public transport – particularly buses, particularly an ambition for electric buses – is a central theme to the transport policy of the new administration. Lobbying government to help them understand the huge advantages, social and economic, that public transport has in a semi-rural authority like ours is critical. We have already seen the effects of the partial disruption of our rather limited bus service on commuters and communities in the Golden Valley, it is essential we commit resource and focus on making sure good bus services are available within the County.

Supplemental Question

Will the evidence submitted by the Council be made public?

Response

Thank you sir. I see no reason why they shouldn't be as long as there is no matters that are outstanding in terms of necessary confidentiality but absolutely that is the ambition

Question 2

Anonymous, Hereford

To: cabinet member, finance and corporate services

I am an experienced event manager with a limited company who has been declined furlough due to being on annual payroll not monthly. I am unable to claim the Herefordshire Small Business Discretionary Grant Fund as I do not have a rateable value or licenced business premises as I work on site with clients, therefore I do not meet your criteria. All my future event work has been cancelled and I am currently living off savings. Is there any help available to support my business please?

Response

The small business and retail, hospitality and leisure grant schemes that council is operating on behalf of Government are aimed at businesses that operate out of properties that have a rateable value. The council has paid out over £55m in grants to more than 4,700 businesses. The council has also launched a discretionary grant scheme to support businesses such as yours that do not have their own business rates assessment. This is funded from Government, and Herefordshire has been allocated £3.2m in funding for this.

The scheme is aimed at small or micro businesses, charities and social enterprises with a turnover of not more than £10.2m and fewer than 50 staff that are in shared premises or other flexible working spaces.

As this is a discretionary scheme businesses need to apply via the council's website, the closing date for applications is midday on the 29th of June. I would encourage you to apply for the discretionary scheme.

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/discretionarygrant>

Supplemental Question

Thank you for your reply. However, as stated previously I am unable to claim from the Discretionary Business Grant because I do not pay business rates nor have business premises and the criteria clearly says:

Unfortunately, those in different circumstances to the above, such as businesses working from home or mobile-based businesses, are currently not eligible for this grant.

I am outside your criteria as I work from home then go on site with clients. Please can you advise what support is available to me, as I am not getting the furlough payments either?

Response

I would hesitate to answer that because I think the important thing is that we get the detail of this questioner's circumstances. If the governance support team could pass the contact details to the finance team, they will be able to see what we can try to do to better understand whether there is any grant funding that's available that they can qualify for.

Question 3

Ms M Setterfield, Hereford

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

From September many parents (and staff) could consider making their daily journeys to school by bicycle or on foot. More parents are likely to be working from home and others will be still furloughed, self-isolating or seeking employment and therefore more available to accompany children.

What progress has been made on the 20 action points of the 2017 Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy given that the council is accepting funding for Pop-up active travel in Herefordshire?

As bus use and car-sharing are currently considered less safe we risk huge extra congestion if we cannot make roads and cycleways safe for our children and families to use ready for this September.

Response

Thank you Ms Setterfield for your question. We support the ambitions of the 2017 Sustainable Modes of Travel and there is no better time than to respond to the realities of our current environment than now.

The first tranche of emergency active travel measure funding announced will enable local authorities to implement immediate temporary (pop-up) measures to respond to the relaxation of lockdown measures and the re-opening of shops by making provisions for social distancing on the highway and providing facilities to improve walking and cycling access to city & town centres, schools and businesses. Herefordshire Council have been allocated a sum of £40,000 for these initial measures and a set of proposals have been developed and are being consulted on in readiness for introduction from early July. These include measures in Hereford and the market towns and comprise 20mph zones, footway widening, cycle lanes, one way streets and some street closures. It is anticipated that the next funding will support the introduction of further measures, including more permanent provisions to improve walking and cycling. In readiness for this Herefordshire Council has commenced a process to bring together walking and cycling measures developed across various programmes, including SMOTS, and this will form the basis of further measures subject to funding.

The funding we have received from government is not significant, based as it is on a local authority's public transport usage but it does allow us to plan, prepare and promote an increase in safe routes to schools for cyclists and pedestrians. The transport team will be happy to discuss this with you and others who have an interest in this in more detail – and we are always receptive to new and better approaches to our school run congestion issues. Covid-19 aside, it should be the ambition of this Council to make sure cycling and walking is the primary mode of transport to school and colleges wherever possible. And we need to put more effort into making more possible.

Supplemental Question

Thank you for your heartening reply. May I just follow up by asking exactly what new measures will be in place by September and where will they be?

Response

I cannot give you the detail yet as we are working on this at full pace. We know the money is coming as two tranches. Herefordshire does not qualify for a lot of the emergency funding as it is based on previous public transport capacity and Herefordshire's has not been very good. We have got in total about £200k - £50k to start the immediate measures and £150k to try and do things soon after. We are preparing for schools going back in September so the minute we have the detail, it will be shared. If anyone wishes to feed into the process, please send any ideas, queries etc to the transport team.

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 25 June 2020**Question 1****Councillor Roger Phillips, Arrow Ward****To: cabinet member, commissioning, procurement and assets,**

With Hereford, Leominster and Ross Household waste sites open can the cabinet member give us an update on her proposed timetable for the opening of all the other Herefordshire sites ?

Response

Thank you for your question Cllr Phillips. As you will be aware, the household recycling centres had to be restricted to only three locations to ensure that the costs were kept within scope, due to increased staffing expenditure to manage the social distancing and control measures required of them.

The waste team and I have been having weekly meetings to discuss when the likely open of the remaining sites will be. We had to wait to see how Ross on Wye went first with a booking system. I am pleased to say it has been a huge success and I would like to personally thank the residents of Ross on Wye and surrounding areas for their ability to make this system work.

I am delighted to inform that, as a result of the waste team's incredible hard work finalising plans which have taken some weeks, that we have now been able to confirm that the remaining sites will be open. We are tentatively looking at this starting week commencing 6th July. I say tentatively because we need to ensure that measures are in place to ensure the safety of staff and users. I hope to have a confirmed date within the next few days and I will, of course, keep residents and staff up to date through our communications. The sites will be operated by a booking system to manage the amount of users coming to the site. This system will be used until the initial rush of visitors decreases to a manageable level.

I would genuinely like to thank all of the residents who use these satellite sites for their patience and understanding whilst these plans have been worked up.

Supplemental question

Thank you very much for that reply as you know I've been in contact with officers to try and get these sites open. I am hopefully that they will be opened. My supplementary question is can the cabinet member confirm that the administration is committed to retaining all these sites open in the future?

Response

Yes. There are no intentions to close any of the sites

Question 2

Councillor Barry Durkin, Old Ward

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

This question relates to the cabinet decision on the reintroduction of car parking charges. The timing for resumption of charges, following the easing of opening of non-essential shops under COVID 19 regulations, is disappointing and not helpful to shopkeepers. The charges, being so promptly reintroduced, do not help or support shopkeepers and has the potential to be further damaging to their livelihood, especially the independent traders, and also potentially detrimental to the economy of Herefordshire. It must be recognised that businesses will potentially be struggling to maintain their viability after not trading for so many months during the pandemic; in addition to the increase in the trend of on-line purchasing. This help and support for shopkeepers has been recognised by Bromyard Town Council with their decision to maintain no charges in their controlled car parks.

Why is it that the temporary suspension of parking charges could not have been extended to assist shopkeepers with further time to recover?"

Response

Thank you Cllr Durkin for your question. I am sorry but I do not recall being lobbied directly by you prior to your public question. However, after listening to the concerns expressed by parish and town councils, by ward members and particularly those from businesses and Hereford BID, earlier this week I decided to reintroduce free parking for four weeks, on street and in council car parks from Saturday 27 June until Friday 24 July 2020. This will help give retailers and the hospitality trade a much-needed boost at this critical time. I will be looking at what incentives could be introduced in future to attract more people to visit, and to stay longer, in our historic towns and city and I am due to consider this and take a further decision regarding this before the end of this period of free parking.

Like every other council across the country we have parking charges for several good reasons. Charges help us to encourage people to travel in a different way, by walking or cycling for example. For those that want to or must drive, varying those charges allows us to encourage shoppers and other visitors to park outside the urban centres by charging them less for staying longer, whilst those that want to park right in the centres are expected to pay more. Charges keep spaces turning over especially in the City and town centres.

Ideally, I would love people to really think about travelling a different way in town, especially when you consider for example that over 50% of the residents of Hereford travel less than two miles to shop or commute to work. We have all been encouraged by the boost in walking and cycling lockdown brought and we intend to support those ambitions in any way we can whilst recognising some folks must travel in by car.

We have made a commitment to support local business, encourage people to visit our historic city and market towns, and buy locally. We cannot afford to provide free parking forever as we use this income to pay for the costs of transport services including public transport and school buses – austerity and Central Government cuts have left us with 30% less money per year to carry out our responsibilities. So, in the longer term we will be looking at other ways to encourage people to safely visit our wonderful city and historic market towns. There is an opportunity to look to do things in a different way while supporting local business.

Supplemental question

My supplement question also relates to the further anxiety of shopkeepers. It concerns the current project of active travel measures following this statutory guidance on network management following Covid-19 and the proposed closure of county town centres. I understand the traders were notified on 20 June with a consultation ending on 23 June. There is lot of concern, anxiety and anger about the proposal from shopkeepers across the county and from residents. The rurality of Herefordshire when its villages and hamlets are not easily linked to town centres and as such there is difficulty to traveling to town centres and depend on cars unlike Hereford city thus Herefordshire residents will be forced to not use town centres due to restrictions and may go to out of town shops. The government committee for climate change has called for the need to revive the economy and that has been repeated locally as well. There was great concern for the markets towns out of Herefordshire especially with this very short consultation time to try to deduce some confidence of how it may be demonstrated by the administration that measures are in place to ensure the consultation with every resident and shopkeeper is robust with comments having been recorded, considered and addressed with commentary and reasons. The alternative appears to be just forcing the active traffic measures through with the closing of town centers countywide thus adversely affected shopkeepers and independent traders.

Response

I'm happy to address all of Councillor Durkin's concerns and anxieties and those he's raising on behalf of retailers. So the very first thing to understand is that legislation is not required under this emergency provision. We took the view that we should try and do as much consultation as possible in the shortest period of time as possible. Many authorities have not consulted and that is a matter for them. We are trying to do what we are required to do by government or they will come in and do it for us. So it comes down to that classic tension between trying to do something as quickly as possible in the best way possible against trying to please everyone. Now what I have made very clear to officers who are running this and trying to get it into place as soon as possible is that we will continue to talk to any traders and retailers that come forward and any parish councils that we consulted with and any ones that come forward at this stage. I have been speaking to many shopkeepers in Ledbury and Hereford throughout the last few days looking at what they are saying, specifically seeing what we can change to see if we can come to a compromise and some of those changes have and will be made so it is not a perfect situation. It is incumbent upon us to do this quickly and to make sure that we make the provision ultimately for the safety of people who will be using our streets but I absolutely assure you that we will continue to speak to traders and retailers and anyone else who has concerns.

Question 3

Councillor Nigel Shaw, Bromyard and Bringsty Ward

To: cabinet member, Infrastructure and transport

We've recently been consulted on ambitious plans to spend the Active Travel Emergency Fund (Covid-19) allocation. Given the initial allocation of £40,000, which I suggest will scarcely cover the consultancy and management charges of BBLP, will the Cabinet member now issue a statement to assure fellow councillors and residents that no funding from his other departmental budgets or council reserves will be diverted to satisfy this costly exercise and that no more planned schemes will be cut from the 2020-21 Annual Plan to cover up his departments inability to balance its budget in the current year? To lose one scheme may be regarded as misfortune, to lose two looks like carelessness, but now three! I refer to Haywood

Lane; Spine Road, Ross and Brierley Way – I suggest even Lady Bracknell had no comprehension of such a calamity.

Response

Thank you Cllr Shaw for your question and the much welcome levity. I seem to remember one of Lady Bracknell most famous lines was, “My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality” to which the reply came back, On the contrary, Aunt Augusta..I’ve now realised for the first time in my life the importance of being Ernest”. If Cllr Shaw and I were invited to audition to play these parts in a local am-dram production I am sure Cllr Shaw would be a natural shoe in for the role of Ernest – although a bearded Lady Bracknell would be distracting.

In relation to the crux of his question – we are required by legislation to carry out these changes and although, at present none has been identified, any need or desire to contribute to these measures from our transport budgets will be a matter for this administration and the public record.

The delaying of the three schemes you refer to is to ensure there is sufficient funding for the high priority scheme at Symonds Yat. The original budget allocated for the Symonds Yat project was based on a preliminary understanding and design of the scheme. Detailed investigations and design has enabled a more accurate works costs to be estimated and a shortfall has been identified. This work is considered high priority and the road here has been closed for a long period of time. The repair and reopening of the road must be progressed.

This variation of the annual plan is not linked to the delivery of emergency active travel measures that are proposed to facilitate social distancing in public spaces and provide viable alternatives to public transport and avoid excessive use of cars as lockdown restrictions are eased. The allocation of funding of £40,000 will enable a range of measures to be implemented following consultation with stakeholders in Hereford and the market towns and will not be spent solely on consultants’ fees as you suggest.

Supplemental question

I was delighted to read that the annual plan will not be adversely affected by any spending on the emergency travel measures. I earnestly hope too that the loss of four months parking income, that is ring-fenced for the public realm, will also have no injurious effect on the annual plan. To that end can the cabinet member explain whether his department was overfunded in its budget or what economies he is intending to make to cope with this loss of revenue?

Response

Thank you very much and it is a shame Councillor Shaw is not in the room, we could have carried on our Oscar Wilde Appreciation Society. First of all there will not be a loss of four months’ worth the parking income as after being lobbied by parish councils, Herefordshire councillors, including Councillor Durkin in a roundabout way, members of business groups and various other people, we have decided that a short-term boost was something that we were happy to try and provide for the traders and retailers in Herefordshire who are feeling very very anxious at the moment. As Councillor Durkin said and while numbers are still relatively low in terms of usage of the streets and the roads that we decided this would be a way of supporting them a little bit and we’re happy to do that. The second tranche of this measurement will be in relation to offering incentives to stay for longer, slightly on the outskirts of town as what we do not necessarily want (and the reason we have a parking regime) is people coming right into the centre of town, parking while they are shopping for half an hour or so and then leaving. What we would love them to do (but if they have to do that that’s fine) is let them into town and pay a premium. Those who are disabled can still have parking spaces

which, incidentally in relation to what Councillor Durkin said earlier, will still be provided in relation to the Covid-19 emergency travel measures designed for the town centres. So the second part will be a incentivised scheme so the losses will not be great, in fact the losses may actually be reduced or we might even make some money. This relates to the second part of this question because at the moment many of our slightly out of city centre car parks are underutilized, e.g. swimming baths at Ross and other places and therefore we think by offering an incentive to stay for longer on the perimeters of the towns and the city, people will come in and park, will get a good deal and will walk a short distance into town will spend much longer in town spending time in our shops, café, pubs, restaurants, hotels. Obviously obeying all the rules which are in place. Within the second stage of the parking review that was going on in terms of parking charges which will be happening in early next year, we will look to see if we do need to build in a recovery plan but it was a difficult decision as we have parking charges for a reason but I felt that in the circumstances and in replying to the concerns and the fears expressed to me that this was the right thing to do. If Cllr Shaw wants any more information, I'm quite happy for him to ring me directly to discuss it or email me directly, we do not always have to do this through public questions and that information can be in the public domain.

Question 4

Councillor Jeremy Milln, Central Ward

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

The past decade has seen a steep decline in the ecological health of our cherished rivers due largely, according to monitoring data, to diffuse phosphate nutrification from intensive stock rearing in the upper catchments. Soil degradation due to poor arable practices in areas prone to flooding is also contributory. 125 intensive poultry units have been approved by Powys since 2015 with another 27 awaiting determination and more in the planning pipeline. Four were approved by officer delegated powers only last week.

Now that we have all read the reports of the 'sickly River Wye' in the local and national press over the past couple of weeks, will Herefordshire Council leaders urge the UK government, through our MPs, to pull together and address this crisis as a matter of the utmost urgency? (It cannot be solved by Herefordshire Council alone!)

Response

Thank you for your question Cllr Milln and we share the same concerns. As you are aware we have been pressing the Environmental Agency, Natural Resources Wales, Natural England, Powys Council and other bodies to work with us to agree a satisfactory a new and more robust Nutrient Management Plan. The Leader of the Council and I have a meeting scheduled with Leader of Powys Council to discuss all the identified issues relating to the pollution of the Wye and Lugg. I will also arrange a meeting with our MPs to impress upon them our concerns. I have also asked officers to examine our own ability as an authority to influence good water quality, through our planning process and our capital programmes where we are able to influence land use practices. I am happy for members and representatives of the Wye and Usk Foundation and other interested parties to meet with me to discuss in more detail.

Supplemental Question

I am grateful to the Councillor Harrington for his response and I have no doubt the administration's concern accurately reflects that of the people of Herefordshire and those who have lobbied me in numbers, alarmed by the deteriorating condition of our rivers. Beefing up the Nutrient Management Plan is a welcome step and while it is easy to point the finger at

Powys and its performance with regard to the intensive poultry units it has allowed to proliferate, can I have his assurance that we will use all the tools at our disposal through government and the NGAs, to bring our own house in order by, where necessary, revision of our planning process and by acting against those whose practices damage aquatic environments such as through poor handling of farm waste or soil loss, now that we see, following the February floods, how vulnerable we are in a Climate and Ecological Emergency

Response

Yes and there is much we can still do within our own power and I welcome continued involvement at any stage