

Appendix 2 - Questions from members of the Council

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ 1	Councillor Durkin, Old Gore	As the council is a DBID partner, is the cabinet member responsible, assured that the DBID proposal for Herefordshire is 'on track' legally, operationally and commercially to enable becoming an effective countywide BID, with the aim of improving businesses in the defined commercial area? Or is the cabinet member aware of any such stated or other impediments to enabling commencement?	Leader
<p>Response: Herefordshire County Business Improvement District (BID) is independent of the council. The Council has appointed a Director to the Board. The BID is currently operational having formed a limited by guarantee company in early 2022, and has supported marketing activity over the last few months with a loan provided by the council to enable activities to commence prior to the collection of levies from relevant businesses. The council has been working with the BID to clarify those businesses that should be issued levy demand notices, seeking clarification as to who should be invoiced based on the definitions and exemptions included in the BID business plan (which was subject to the ballot in November 2021). We are now close to resolving these areas. We are not aware of any reason that would prevent the BID continuing. We have every confidence that the BID will be a significant contributor to the Herefordshire Economy and accordingly the Council looks forward to working closely with it.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question: How much have the tax payers of Herefordshire paid for this project? Would the Leader assure me that, as the authority is able to demand a BID levy, the BID arrangements are currently compliant with the requirement of the BOD Act and associated regulations? In addition also please inform why the answer to my question made no reference to advice from counsel?</p>			
<p>Response to supplementary question – Leader: The council took advice from counsel to ensure that arrangements were lawful, the advice remains confidential. The advice gave reassurance to the council and the bills would be sent out shortly.</p>			
MQ 2	Councillor Shaw, Bromyard Bringsty	What are the current total of vacant positions and positions held by temporary, Interim or staff acting up to a role (e.g. Acting Director) at the Council?	Cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning
<p>Response:</p>			

I'd like to thank Cllr Shaw for his question. Getting the balance right between permanent and temporary staff is important and – as he knows – there are many reasons why the council uses the flexibility afforded by temporary, agency and short-term appointments.

Sometimes we need specialist advice or expertise relating to a specific project or initiative – but only for a short period of time. In social care service areas there is a national shortage of qualified social workers prepared to work in the public sector – a problem exacerbated by Covid. Enabling officers to act up into more senior roles is an important way both to cover vacancies while formal recruitment processes are underway and to provide wider experience and on the job development opportunities.

The total number of vacancies is not held in one information system and a current figure cannot be provided in the time available to respond to written questions. However, in December 2022 an exercise was undertaken to reconcile all the data sources, which took more than 2 weeks to complete, and at that time there were 260 vacant posts of which 83 were covered by agency workers and 177 were vacancies actively being recruited into.

Supplementary question:

Will the cabinet member take steps to ensure that all current vacancies are advertised actively and will the chief executive consider actions he can take to have daily visibility of the trend in vacancies?

Response to supplementary question – cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning:

Yes

MQ 3	Councillor Hewitt, Golden Valley North	The Ofsted Rapid Review 2021 into sexual violence in schools and colleges found that, for child-on-child sexual assault 'when criminal investigations do not lead to prosecution', 'guidance does not equip' schools to make 'difficult decisions'. KCSIE (2022) cites relevant articles of the Human Rights Act (HRA) and Equality Act (EA) but falls short of an explanation as to how they may be used to protect victims. We understand that the DCS and his team are conducting a review of HC's guidance and advice, including safeguarding, this summer term. We seek assurance that this acknowledged gap in guidance will be addressed. That this Local Authority will produce written advice for our staff, to use when working with Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL's) which explains clearly how the Human Rights Act and the Equality Act work to protect child victims of sexual assault.	Cabinet member children and families
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Response:

Thank you for the question. Yes we keep our guidance under review. We are in regular dialogue with local DSLs about safeguarding and referral processes, and in the case of a particular incident we are one of several sources schools go to for advice. I am aware of the national level *metooschool* campaign for guidance from the DfE, Ofsted and councils to provide more detail on the legal frameworks that protect the rights of children who disclose sexual assault, and am always open to suggestions of useful wording.

Supplementary question:

Can the cabinet member assure me that to her knowledge no victim of peer on peer abuse in this county has had to pay twice by remaining in school with their perpetrator despite the best efforts of the school?

Response to supplementary question – cabinet member children and families:

This is a national issue and I have frequent conversations with schools and colleagues around the country. I cannot give that assurance in a public meeting which would be very irresponsible to do so.