

Minutes of the meeting of Council held at Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Friday 9 December 2022 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor Sebastian Bowen (chairperson)
Councillor Kema Guthrie (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Paul Andrews, Polly Andrews, Jenny Bartlett, Chris Bartrum, Dave Boulter, Tracy Bowes, Ellie Chowns, Pauline Crockett, Clare Davies, Gemma Davies, Barry Durkin, Toni Fagan, Elizabeth Foxton, Carole Gandy, John Hardwick, John Harrington, Liz Harvey, Jennie Hewitt, Kath Hey, David Hitchiner, Phillip Howells, Helen I'Anson, Terry James, Peter Jinman, Tony Johnson, Graham Jones, Mike Jones, Jim Kenyon, Trish Marsh, Bob Matthews, Jeremy Milln, Felicity Norman, Roger Phillips, Tim Price, Ann-Marie Probert, Nigel Shaw, Louis Stark, John Stone, David Summers, Elissa Swinglehurst, Kevin Tillet, Diana Toynbee, Ange Tyler and William Wilding

Officers: Chief Executive, Corporate Director - Economy and Environment, Corporate Director - Children & Young People*, Corporate Director Community Wellbeing*, Chief Finance Officer, Head of Legal Services and Democratic Services Manager

*denotes virtual attendance

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bolderson, Lester, Rone, Symonds and Watson.

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Gemma Davies declared a schedule 1, disclosable pecuniary interest, in agenda item no. 11, motions on notice, motion – multi-storey car park (bus station) as an employee of the Wye Valley Trust.

39. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the ordinary meeting of Council held on 21 October 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

40. CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Council noted the Chairman's and Chief Executive's announcements as printed in the agenda papers.

41. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 9 - 30)

A copy of the public questions and written answers, together with supplementary questions asked at the meeting and their answers, is attached to the minutes at appendix 1.

42. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL** (Pages 31 - 36)

A copy of the member questions and written answers, together with supplementary questions asked at the meeting and their answers, is attached to the minutes at appendix 2.

43. **REVIEW OF TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE POLICY**

Council considered a report by the Cabinet Member Housing, Regulatory Services and Community to approve the Taxi and Private Hire Policy 2022 – 2027. The Cabinet Member Housing, Regulatory Services and Community moved and introduced the report and the recommendations.

Councillor John Harrington seconded the report and recommendations. Councillor Harrington introduced the additional recommendations below:

(e) Cllr Tyler will continue to see what funding or match funding can be acquired to help operators bring in the new improved CCTV systems which they will be required to do over the next 12-14 months and which will cost approx. £500 and this is to include writing to the Police and Crime Commissioner to see if public safety funding might be available.

(f) Cabinet members will attend a follow-up meeting with officers and trade representatives, as those representatives requested, and officers to go through the penalty point scheme point by point, offence by offence to make sure we have clarity and accuracy on all points. And we will clarify the issue on moving seats in larger vehicles. And that this is done before the end of January - which will be before the new policy comes in.

Councillor Nigel Shaw proposed a motion without notice, under section 4.1.92 (d) of the constitution, to refer the Taxi and Private Hire Policy 2022 – 2027 to the Cabinet Member Housing, Regulatory Services and Community to reconsider the matter; the Policy was not in a form that could be considered by Council at this time.

Councillor Barry Durkin seconded the motion to refer the Policy to the Cabinet Member for reconsideration.

Council debated the motion to refer the Policy to the Cabinet Member for reconsideration.

The motion to refer the Policy to the Cabinet Member for reconsideration was put to the vote and was carried by a simple majority of members.

RESOLVED: that Council agrees the referral of the Taxi and Private Hire Policy 2022 – 2027 to the Cabinet Member Housing, Regulatory Services and Community for reconsideration under section 4.1.92 (d) of the constitution; the Policy is not in a form that could be considered by Council at this time.

44. **POLLING STATION REVIEW**

Council considered a report by the Returning Officer to approve the addition of three new polling stations.

Councillor Sebastian Bowen proposed the recommendations in the report. Councillor David Hitchiner seconded the recommendations in the report.

The recommendations in the report were put to the vote and were carried by a simple majority.

RESOLVED: That Council agrees that the following new polling stations be approved:

- **The Point 4, Royal National College for the Blind, Venns Lane, Hereford, HR1 1DT**
- **St Barnabus Church Centre, 45 Venns Lane, Hereford, HR1 1DT**
- **Kinnersley Castle, Kinnersley Hereford, HR3 6QF**

45. BYELAWS IN RELATION TO SKINS

Council considered a report by the Cabinet Member Housing, Regulatory Services and Community to approve and introduce new byelaws in relation to skins. The Cabinet Member Housing, Regulatory Services and Community moved and introduced the report and the recommendations.

Councillor Gemma Davies seconded the recommendations in the report.

Council debated the report and byelaws relating to skins procedures. During the course of the debate the following actions were raised:

- To feed back to Licensing, concern regarding the use of the wording *so far as appropriate* in the policy with regard to cleansing of instruments, materials and equipment. The wording was felt to be ambiguous and insufficiently explicit to enable the byelaws to achieve effective enforcement; and
- To ask the Corporate Director to consider what policy documents existed to guide Skins practitioners with regard to informing clients, in advance of treatments, of the likely health implications.

The recommendations in the report were put to the vote and were carried by a simple majority.

RESOLVED:

That:

- a) The new byelaws contained in appendix 1 to be adopted under Section 14(7) and 15(7) of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, subject to approval of the Secretary of State.**
- b) The existing byelaws made under the Hereford City Act 1985 are revoked.**

46. LEADER'S REPORT TO COUNCIL

Council received and noted the Leader's Report which provided an update on the work of the cabinet since the previous ordinary meeting of Council on 21 October.

Council questioned the Leader and the following actions were raised:

- To produce a written response to an outstanding action from the previous meeting of Council (21 October) to provide a statement on the outcome of the review of the number of cases of fabricated or induced illness (FII) in Herefordshire.
- To produce a written response in response to a question regarding: progress to return Children's Services staff to Plough Lane; processes to improve data collection and the reliability of data; an update on agency staff; and an update on the appointment of administrative staff.
- The Leader to discuss with the Chief Executive a potential meeting with the former Chairperson of the children's scrutiny committee regarding the outcomes of the external investigation into the failure to disclose reports to the scrutiny committee.
- To produce a written response to a request for an update on the establishment of forums to engage with children, families and partners of the Council.
- To produce a written response to a request for a briefing on recent announcements and impacts upon the current validity of the wetlands scheme and its integrity going forward.
- To produce a written response to a question regarding the implementation of Biodiversity net gain in Herefordshire.
- To produce a written response in reply to a query regarding the pooling of water on the St Owen's Street cycle lane.
- To produce a written response to a question to consider the inclusion of Home Share in the sustainable, cost-effective and versatile market envisaged under the recent Commissioned Home Care decision.

There was an adjournment at 1:30 p.m.; the meeting reconvened at 2:05 p.m.

47. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDERS

Motion 1 – Proportional representation

Councillor Felicity Norman proposed the motion.

Councillor Phillip Howells seconded the motion.

Council debated the motion.

In summary, there was division across the Council concerning support for the introduction of proportional representation to be used at general elections. Arguments for and against the introduction of proportional representation were raised by members of the Council.

Councillor Felicity Norman closed the debate.

The motion was put to the vote and was carried by a simple majority.

RESOLVED – that:

First Past the Post (FPTP) originated when land-owning aristocrats dominated parliament and voting was restricted to property-owning men.

In Europe, only the UK and authoritarian Belarus still use archaic single-round FPTP for general elections. Meanwhile, internationally, Proportional Representation (PR) is used to elect parliaments in more than 80 countries. Those countries tend to be more equal, freer and greener.

PR ensures all votes count, have equal value, and those seats won match votes cast. Under PR, MPs and Parliaments better reflect the age, gender and protected characteristics of local communities and the nation.

MPs better reflecting their communities leads to improved decision-making, wider participation and increased levels of ownership of decisions taken.

PR would also end minority rule. In 2019, 43.6% of the vote produced a government with 56.2% of the seats and 100% of the power. PR also prevents 'wrong winner' elections such as occurred in 1951 and February 1974.

PR is already used to elect the parliaments and assemblies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. So why not Westminster?

Council therefore resolves to write to H.M. Government calling for a change in our outdated electoral laws to enable Proportional Representation to be used for general elections.

Councillor Gemma Davies left the meeting at 2:35 p.m.

Motion 2 – Multi-storey car park (bus station)

Councillor Bob Matthews proposed the motion.

Councillor Terry James seconded the motion.

Council debated the motion.

In summary, there was widespread support for an investigation of a multi-storey car park on the site of the bus station to help alleviate congestion from traffic accessing Hereford from the North East and to provide additional car parking provision near to the hospital. There was opposition from some members who queried the safety of multi-storey car parks; the contribution of such a scheme to initiatives to reduce car use in Hereford; and the impact on existing heritage assets.

Councillor Bob Matthew closed the debate.

The motion was put to the vote and was carried by a simple majority.

RESOLVED – that:

Subject to a satisfactory scheme being approved for a new Transport Hub at the railway station, Council urgently considers the construction of a multi-storey car park on the present bus station site.

There is a general shortage of car parking spaces in that area and one of our main concerns is that medical staff coming off shifts, late at night, have to walk along poorly lit streets to the Garrick House car park. Sadly, we will all be aware of a number of very serious sexual assaults on females around the City in recent times. It would be right and proper for one of the floors to be allocated solely for the use of medical staff. Visitors from adjoining counties and locals are frequently complaining that at times it takes them an excess of an hour to find suitable parking.

It goes without saying this will eventually have a detrimental effect on our many small businesses. I am confident that the majority of members will support these

proposals because when this project has been previously discussed that has been the outcome.

The Council, therefore, calls on the Executive to explore the construction of a new multi-storey car park on the current bus station site to serve the needs of Hospital Staff, visitors and contractors as well as to provide additional car parking capacity to support the railway station and town centre.

Councillor Gemma Davies re-joined the meeting at 2:55 p.m.

Motion 3 – Local Government Finance and the present Cost of Living Emergency

Councillor Liz Harvey proposed the motion.

Councillor John Harrington seconded the motion.

Council debated the motion.

In summary, there was support for the declaration of a cost of living emergency in Herefordshire and proposed lobbying of central government for a fair funding settlement.

Councillor Liz Harvey closed the debate.

The motion was put to the recorded vote and was carried by a simple majority.

FOR (28): Councillors Graham Andrews, Paul Andrews, Bartlett, Boulter, Bowen, Chowns, Gemma Davies, Foxtton, Hardwick, Harrington, Harvey, Hewitt, Hey, Hitchiner, Howells, James, Jinman, Mike Jones, Marsh, Matthews, Milln, Norman, Price, Probert, Summers, Tillett, Toynbee and Tyler.

AGAINST (0):

ABSTENTIONS (5): Councillors Gandy, Guthrie, Kenyon, Shaw and Swinglehurst.

RESOLVED – that:

Since setting this year’s council budget in February 2022 the rate of inflation has quadrupled and fuel prices have rocketed. Here in Herefordshire, we have been assessed (by the Joint Strategic Needs Analysis, Public Health, ONS and Census data) as having significant issues with levels of child poverty, fuel poverty, food poverty, high house prices, low wages, low productivity, low growth, and low skills.

Nationally - and even more so locally - we are facing a cost-of-living emergency which, alongside the already declared climate emergency, is hitting hardest the least well off of our residents. These are also the people most likely to need and rely upon the very services this council is now struggling to sustain.

Our communities struggle to be resilient in the face of such extreme cost pressures.

Our two Herefordshire MPs have voted to support funding cuts for local government on every occasion that these have been put to Parliament. Over the last ten years the consequence of this has been a reduction of more than £100m in the annual core funding Herefordshire Council receives from government for local service delivery.

In the Chancellor's Autumn Statement just a fortnight ago, central government relaxed its cap on council tax increases for social care and core services. The result being that every local authority in the land will have to raise the local council tax to the maximum in order for the government's statements about the funding made available to local government to add up.

Here in Herefordshire the government's mismanagement of the national economy and its deliberate and ideologically driven underfunding of local government means that to balance the 2023 budget this council needs to find savings of in excess of £22m – nearly 10% of our service costs – just to survive. As a local authority we accept the responsibility to manage local service demands, but the economic consequences of national inflation is beyond our ability to mitigate.

Back in 2014 the UK was found to be failing in its commitments under the European Charter on Local Self Government – particularly in regard to the requirements of article of the charter relating to the provision of adequate finance resources to local authorities commensurate with the responsibilities placed on such authorities by their constitutions and by the law. (<https://rm.coe.int/local-and-regional-democracy-in-the-united-kingdom-recommendation-ange/168071a826>)

In March 2022, the UK was audited again found still to be failing in many of its commitments – especially as regards providing adequate finance to local government. (https://search.coe.int/congress/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=0900001680a5b483)

The failure over many years to adequately fund local government and thereby the services relied upon by those most in need and vulnerable in our communities leads to poverty, suffering, ill-health, inequality, loneliness, abuse, neglect and, in the worst cases, death. This situation must not be allowed to continue.

Therefore, this council resolves to:

- **Recognise and welcome the grants which have been provided to-date to individuals, households and businesses to offset some of the real and immediate damage being caused by inflation and fuel costs**
- **Declare a Cost-of-Living Emergency here in Herefordshire and, as a consequence, also to:**
 - **Recognise and respond to the disproportionate effect that this emergency has upon the least well off of our residents**
 - **Provide easy, swift and understandable access to advice and support for people in need**
- **Request that the Chief Executive write to the Prime Minister, and to both Herefordshire MPs, to call for their support for Government to:**
 - **Meet in full its commitments under the European Charter on Local Self Government**
 - **Commit immediately to uplift local government funding for 2023-24 by the current level of inflation – as assessed by the Office for Budgetary Responsibility (11%)**
 - **Provide sustained funding to address fuel and food poverty such that food banks become unnecessary**
 - **Undertake and implement the promised local government fair funding review**
 - **Commit to provide rolling 3-year index linked funding settlements for local government**

- **Agree rolling 3-year index linked grants to recognise additional service delivery costs for rural councils until the fair funding review is implemented**
- **Undertake the revaluation and re-banding of domestic properties for council tax and a review of the business rates charging system**

The meeting ended at 3.30 pm

Chairperson

Appendix 1 - Questions from members of the public

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Mr Leaton, Credenhill Parish Council	For what operational reason does the Council wait until December to publish the base rate? Why does Herefordshire Council not help Parish Council's by publishing the base rate earlier OR change the deadline for submission of the Gross Precept until after the Base Rate is published and Parish Council's have had time to meet and approve its budget and precept?	Cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning
<p>Response: Parishes determine their budgets requirements according to the ambition of their own work programmes, the needs of their communities and the operational cost of running the parish council itself. S50 of the Local Government Finance Act does not require Parish Councils to use the tax base to calculate their budget requirement.</p> <p>In order to calculate the council tax base, the County Council needs the most accurate information on new homes and any exemptions from council tax charges. All the information needed to make this calculation is not available to us until close to the end of the calendar year.</p> <p>The Council provides the tax base to all Parish Councils by 31 December in each financial year in sufficient time for parish council meetings in February/March which approve the precept calculations for the coming financial year.</p>			
PQ 2	Mr Kirwan, Bredenbury	<p>A council funded study foresees a footpath/cycle track/bridleway along the former Worcester Leominster railway. There is ambition to embed this proposal into the 2021-2041 Local Plan and Transport Plan.</p> <p>Bredenbury residents provided a corresponding report, highlighting shortfalls in the original report:</p> <p>Lack of consideration given to existing residences, businesses and heritage assets along the route; Lack of environmental assessment.</p> <p>Local examples:</p> <p>Our home, Rowden Mill Station, a privately maintained heritage asset, sits directly on the route and is key to our income.</p> <p>Noakes 'Riding School for the Disabled', one of few in the country, sits across the track. Neither are considered in the report.</p>	Cabinet member infrastructure and transport

9

		To protect property values and business investment confidence, can Cllr Harrington give assurance that this proposal will not be embedded in policy without the caveat that no PRow will be established without landowner agreement?	
<p>Response: The proposal for a greenway along the former Leominster-Worcester railway has been sponsored by the Worcester Bromyard Leominster (WBL) Greenway Community Interest Company (CIC). Herefordshire Council (HC), in response to the Hereford Transport Strategy Review in 2020, funded a number of community-led feasibility studies of active travel packages, including two other greenways projects that also seek to follow the alignment of former railways in the county.</p> <p>We have seen the reports prepared by the three sponsoring bodies' consultants and are aware that there are number of constraints and issues that would need to be explored further to understand the practicality and viability of such schemes.</p> <p>In 2023, HC will be developing a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for the county. A large number of walking and cycling infrastructure schemes, that will likely include the three greenways, will be considered and reviewed as part of the development of the plan. Schemes will undergo an appraisal process that will consider their value for money and deliverability among other criteria, before being prioritised and ranked into a pipeline of schemes for delivery over the next 3,5 and 10 years. Clearly, issues such as land ownership, local support, economic and environmental considerations will play a key factor in that appraisal process.</p> <p>Draft proposals for the LCWIP will be subject to public consultation before the plan is finalised. In addition, the LCWIP will need to support the ambitions of the Hereford Masterplan, the Local Plan and the Local Transport Plan which will also provide opportunities for public engagement and consultation before they can be agreed by the council.</p> <p>In relation to the specific question around the potential creation of any Greenway, I can give assurance that no routes, or parts of that route, will be supported by this administration without landowner consent. Landowner engagement is crucial for any of the proposed routes to become viable. I will ask that that caveat is included in any and all policy documents related to Greenways.</p>			
PQ 3	Ms Chavez-Brandon, Bredenbury	<p>The WBL Greenway 'Feasibility Study-Implementation Plan' https://wblgreenway.org.uk/ (funded through cabinet portfolio for Infrastructure and Transport) does not contain within its terms of reference any consideration of tourism businesses already contributing to the visitor economy, nor its impact on historical assets (heritage sites at Fencote and Rowden Mill stations, destinations in their own right), nor the impact on private dwellings sitting across the railway alignment or depending on it for access.</p> <p>It does not consider existing business infrastructure (impact on farm access / biosecurity), nor include a whole-route ecological assessment (corridor disused for 70 years).</p> <p>All issues concern the Environment and Economy. Can Cllr Chowns assess this report from her portfolio perspective?</p>	Cabinet member environment and economy

		As it stands, any consideration of the proposal being adopted into council policies would have detrimental effects on property values, on business investment confidence, on existing ecology.	
<p>Response: Through the council's Covid Recovery Plan the council supported two local groups in the county to commission feasibility studies exploring the future potential development of greenways. As such Worcester, Bromyard, Leominster Greenway CIC commissioned and own the feasibility study and have shared the findings with the council. The feasibility study is not an adopted council policy document. The report highlights the significant potential benefits of greenways, improving active travel infrastructure and enhancing the county's tourism offer. However, there is no intention at this stage to make any commitment to implementing the greenway. Any future further development of the idea would be in full consultation with local businesses and landowners.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question: As the original question is not specifically addressed in the answer provided:</p> <p>Within her response Cllr Chowns has referenced the WBL Greenway feasibility study: 'highlights the significant potential benefits of greenways' and states 'there is no intention at this stage to make any commitment to implementing the greenway'.</p> <p>However, this feasibility study may in the future become a component of a consultation process regarding this greenway proposal. It's terms of reference being limited to feasibility and benefits without consideration of negative impacts, should be fully understood in order to properly establish the value of this report in any future consultation.</p> <p>Does Cllr Chowns recognise that due to its limited terms of reference, this feasibility study does not provide a balanced view on potential benefits versus negative economic, heritage and ecological impacts that implementation of this greenway, as proposed, may impart?</p>			
<p>Response to supplementary question (cabinet member environment and economy) A written response would be provided after the meeting.</p> <p><u>Written response to supplementary question – sent on 23 December</u></p> <p><i>It is acknowledged that the report submitted to the Council regarding the WBL Greenway presents only one side of the case for the creation of a new route for a Greenway.</i> <i>Should the Council decide that the creation of a Greenway is desirable then any study undertaken will consider both the positive and negative impacts of any such scheme. Whilst the contents of the feasibility report will be considered as a part of that exercise, the team charged with progressing any further report will need to consider the full ramifications of any proposal and I can commit to ensuring that terms of reference for any future work will include a requirement to identify and address any potential negative effects in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.</i></p>			
PQ 4	Ms Currie, Hereford	Following the Panorama expose, OFSTED report, EGM (30.09.22) and the recent Scrutiny Management Board (28.11.22) I am disappointed at the apparent public denial still prevalent regarding the toxic culture within the council departments. The inability by scrutiny members to publically ask questions relating to the response rate of the employment survey (56%) or ask if open to non permanent members of staff (unconfirmed) leads me to conclude the committee has no grasp on what is important to residents or to deal with the pink elephant in the room	Cabinet member children and families

		when attempting to attract new permanent professionals. I suggest the employment of agency/fixed term staff is a DELIBERATE CHOICE to allow the council to avoid accountability when facing scrutiny and to ask it to confirm how many disciplinary/dismissal/termination actions have been taken in the directorate following the recent /ongoing Children's Services Scandal.	
--	--	---	--

Response:

We are working hard to build an appropriately skilled, experienced, and permanent workforce to support children and families and we are actively recruiting. Our stated ambition is to become an employer of choice and have recently launched our new recruitment microsite ([Home - Spirit of Herefordshire](#)) and introduced a welcome payment for experienced social workers, to boost our efforts in a very challenging national recruitment market.

The reality is that at present we do not have sufficient permanent staff to effectively run our children's services and as such we have to also employ agency staff in the short term. Many of our agency colleagues bring significant skills and experience having worked for other authorities. Where possible we mitigate the impact of agency staff by being able to offer longer term contracts and the flexibility provided by agency social workers has been helpful in managing peaks and troughs in demand within our services.

The recent staff survey referred to in the question was open to agency as well as employed staff. The employment of agency or fixed term staff is unrelated to issues of accountability.

Since Jan 2021, 11 disciplinary, dismissal or termination actions have taken place in the directorate.

Supplementary Question

The toxic/corrupt culture isn't even addressed in the answer given by the cabinet member nor on your new website– so still the pink elephant is being ignored. No change. The recent HR focused scrutiny meeting is available to watch online and seems to be an extension to the sales pitch video by Paul Walker rather than dealing with what might deter people from applying to work for an organisation that is and remains in disrepute.

The welcome payment and relocation package seems to be a repackaging of the disastrous project to recruit Romanian social workers that not long ago was offered by the council. Your memories may be short but ours (your residents) is not.

Only in September the cabinet member was saying about the lack or limited powers the council has to take against agency workers and is now effectively trying to say this doesn't relate to accountability issues.

In terms of the new staff and agency workers in the past two months would the cabinet member like to comment on the use of Google translate by them in meetings with families and professionals? Or how they can record accurately in such important documentation? Is this really how low your recruitment standards are! You cannot say as members you are not aware of this unacceptable calibre of staff joining your work force. This is the reality at the coal face and gives you a clear understanding. Yet you would feed us lies from the tabletop.

There is no confidence in you now even after all this intervention from your residents. The lack of confidence extends much further than the children's directorate. You should be hanging your heads in shame!

Please confirm how many agency workers in the children's social care directorate left or had contracts terminated since 2021 and how many issues have been referred to social work England (or equivalent) and the police since 2021?

Response to supplementary question (cabinet member children and families)

A written response will be provided.

I would like to say that I think if you look back over what we have said over the past year there is no complacency at all about the work that we have to do. I invite anyone to get in contact with me directly if they would like to have a chat with me.

PQ 5	Mr Jones, Hereford	<p>Why are the Taxi policy/conditions on the agenda when it is full of flaws and legal errors?</p> <p>Conditions must be Reasonable and Necessary many of the conditions do not meet those criteria nor are they in accordance to the Regulatory Code that all councils should be adhering to.</p> <p>The licensing department has already conceded that there will be a need to make amendments for minor changes which they will have the authority to do but the changes are not minor and there are too many for it to be safe to vote on the present set of conditions/policy as they have been presented to you.</p> <p>Can this matter be deferred to prevent strike action that has been called for by the trade because of the cavalier attitude of the licensing department?</p>	Cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community
------	-----------------------	--	---

Response:
 The policy and conditions have been extensively consulted upon over two separate consultation exercises in December 2021 and latterly August 2022. In addition, the trade were written to only in October asking for any further details, such as mistakes or errors within the policy and its conditions in case these had been missed, but no responses were forthcoming. Both the local and national associations were then chased again only last month for any additional comments and although responses were received this time, the comments were considered minor and where at all possible the policy and its conditions were amended to accommodate them.

As opportunities had been given for responses beyond the second consultation deadline of 28th August, it was determined that no meeting with the Taxi Association was necessary. Likewise it was not considered appropriate to open up a third consultation stage to just part of the trade when the points your Taxi Association had raised had already been considered.

As the original draft of both the policy and its conditions were written by one of the UK's leading taxi licensing specialist lawyers, we are comfortable with its legality. That said and with such a large document, it is possible that there could be some typos and future minor amendments required as legislation alters. Therefore it is normal practice to allow such amendments and corrections to take place by delegated authority, which today's report recommends.

As to the Regulator's Code, having attended the many meetings I am confident that the consultation process was meaningful and transparent and that the second revision will support the trade with an even playing field, whilst also protect the public through a set of fair and risk based documents which follow statutory codes and best practice.

Supplementary question:
 Why are you voting on something that has not been finalised? It is cheaper to apply for a judicial review of the policy than comply with the conditions in the policy.

There should have been a final meeting with the taxi association.

Response to supplementary question (cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community)

It is unfortunate that we did not have the final meeting. However there had been discussions with officers and legal services and it was felt at the time that a further meeting would cause problems, particularly in respect of judicial review, as everyone would not have been party to that negotiation. The Policy has been brought to this meeting of the full Council to discuss the issues you are raising. We have continually tried to talk with you and bring in the matters. I'm hoping we can amend or change things as we go through this process.

PQ 6	Ms Allen, Leominster	<p>At the moment there is an acute shortage of taxi drivers, and vehicle numbers are also declining. This is causing not only a problem because there are not enough vehicles to service the needs of School Contracts, but a public safety issue is also arising because of this.</p> <p>Are the council aware that if the Taxi policy that is presented to you today is voted through, there will be further loss in greater numbers? This policy will force more people to rethink their position, and viability of their business.</p>	Cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community
------	-------------------------	--	---

Response:
 Herefordshire Council is aware that that there has been reduction in the number of licensed drivers, although this mirrors the national trend for this area of employment. Nationally it has been widely accepted that this was inevitable after the many Covid lockdowns and business restrictions to the nighttime economy, as taxi drivers moved into alternative areas of employment, like parcel and supermarket deliveries and HGV driving, later choosing not to return to taxis. However, I am pleased to report that recently there are promising signs that this trend is changing as new applications are now above average for this time of year.

As a consequence of a second consultation of the conditions, the policy was significantly changed specifically to ensure that drivers are not discouraged from joining or remaining in the profession. Although the Council has had to retain a number of public safety and safeguarding obligations, most of these had previously existed in the present policy and the Council is reluctant to relax any conditions which would increase risk to passengers.

PQ 7	Mr Reynolds, Hereford	With the shortage of drivers causing safeguarding issues in Herefordshire, Do councillors believe this proposed policy reduces red tape effectively enough, to encourage new drivers and owners?	Cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community
------	--------------------------	--	---

Response:
 The Council must consider its public safety and safeguarding responsibilities above all other considerations. It is not the intention of any policy or condition to fetter this responsibility by reducing the mandatory checks required by legislation and its statutory guidance. That said, some elements of the policy and conditions were altered after the second consultation exercise to ensure that existing and new drivers would not be disadvantaged. For example, the requirement for existing drivers to sit a knowledge test has reverted to only new drivers and sat navs are now recognised as being appropriate tools to assist drivers in their duties.

PQ 8	Mr Rudge, Hereford	<p>Why in the proposed conditions is it worried about servicing regime of vehicles when we already have strict testing?</p> <p>It is stated that a vehicle should pass a test at any point. Any vehicle will suffer a break down at some point in its life including minor issues that would fail a test and yet a driver may be unaware of until checked.</p> <p>Similarly it is stated that Service history must be present.</p> <p>We already undergo tests up to three times a year to check actual vehicle roadworthiness and these are far more important as they check many parts of the vehicle not checked at a service interval. This could cause loss of vehicles that are perfectly safe and cause a further public safety issue.</p>	Cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community
<p>Response: Appropriate maintenance and recording of works is essential to ensure that vehicles remain safe for use as licensed vehicles. When a vehicle is being used as a licensed vehicle it must be safe, so that any licensed vehicle that breaks down or requires repair cannot be dangerously used. This is the reason for the testing regime and why tests have been increased for older vehicles, to ensure that any faults or safety issues can be discovered and rectified. A service history has to be required to provide evidence of this.</p>			
PQ 9	Mrs Reynolds, Hereford	<p>How can the council pass conditions that include CCTV conditions that licensing staff say will only need the existing systems to be slightly modified when in fact they will all have to be scrapped because according to the Operational Technical Specifications Ref Specification Details as published on the agenda “SD cards will not be acceptable” The specification also records that the systems must incorporate the following “Hard disk with both mechanical anti-vibration and anti-shock mechanism and self-recovery and selfcheck file writing system.”</p> <p>Our current systems operate by SD cards and do not have hard drives.</p> <p>Also I can't seem to find where the CCTV conditions have a lead up period before it comes into force.</p> <p>Warrington council found themselves in much the same situation as Hereford and they had to pay for the replacements.</p>	Cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community
<p>Response: It is correct that the conditions state that an SD card cannot be used. This is because new systems have to rely upon a flash based SSD (100% industrial grade) as well as a hard disk with both mechanical anti-vibration and anti-shock mechanism and self-recovery and self check file writing system, as the technology used these past 10 years has now moved on, hence the higher standard. Consultation with the National Private Hire and Taxi Association has also confirmed this to be the acceptable national standard.</p>			

As it is recognised that this will place a burden upon those already with CCTV, it has been recommended that there will be a lead in time of 12 months which the condition will reflect as and when the policy is presumably adopted later today.

The case concerning Warrington Council concerned the manner in which the CCTV was required to be used when the cabs were not in public use and was not about the technology. Our policy clarifies and therefore overcomes this.

PQ 10	Ms Portman-Lewis, Hereford	<p>The PR messaging from the Council sits in stark contrast to the lived experience of families affected by the historic and ongoing inadequacy of Children’s Services.</p> <p>Families contacting the careconcerns helpline have still not had responses and for most there is no sign of the apologies promised on TV.</p> <p>Families affected by historic and ongoing failings in Children’s Services still experience a toxic culture of parent blame and the characteristic delay and denial. Families still struggle to be heard and to have issues dealt with properly and swiftly enough to prevent harm.</p> <p>The needs of those affected by historic failure are being overlooked in the quest to set up a safe service for the future. Is it not time for an independent body to be set up to deal fairly, competently and urgently with the families affected by historic inadequacy?</p>	Cabinet member children and families
-------	-------------------------------	---	--------------------------------------

Response:
 Our response to the Panorama programme included an apology by The Chief Executive, the Corporate Director for Children and Young People, the Leader of Herefordshire Council and the Cabinet member for Children’s and Family Services. This apology was shared with the media and published on our [website](#).

We believe that all families who have contacted Care Concerns who provided their contact details have been responded. A number of families did not identify themselves and as such a response was not possible. Cases raised were reviewed by independent reviewers and these reviews informed the Local Authority’s response. At present we are not aware of any families for whom a response has not been forthcoming but anyone who believes that a response is still owed to them is welcome to contact myself or the Corporate Director for Children and Yong People, and we will look into this.

Gladys Rhodes White OBE has been appointed as Herefordshire’s Improvement Adviser and the Secretary of State has appointed Eleanor Brazil as the Commissioner for Children’s Services in Herefordshire. Both are independent to the Local Authority.

Supplementary question:
 I contacted the care concern helpline myself on 28/4/22 - no acknowledgment or response. I followed this up several weeks later, still no response. Your answer seeks to locate the blame onto the public in cases where there was no response, by suggesting the public did not leave their details. This is not a plausible suggestion: you cannot email the care concerns line without leaving a contact email address. If anyone wanted to respond to my care concerns email, they simply had to press “reply”.

When I had no response, I brought my case again to my MP, Sir Bill Wiggin. He wrote directly to the Chief Executive on 18 May 2022. Still no response. In October I emailed Darryl Freeman and Paul Walker directly – no substantive response. I have copied Cllr Toynbee in several times no response at all. I have added in desperation Eleanor Brazil after approaching her directly at the Public meeting held by “ A Common Bond “ Protest group where Ms Eleanor Brazil on hearing my raised concerns advised me to email so I dutifully did just this making contacted yet again with the LA & copied her in where she did in fact informed me she would not be responding directly to my email . It was further explained to myself that it is not her remit, nor that of Gladys Rhodes White, to deal with families directly.

I can evidence all of the above with an email trail.

After the Ofsted report was published it was stated on the BBC Midlands news that families impacted by the inadequate Children’s Services would receive a written apology. To date I know of no family who has received a written apology. Through A Common Bond, I know many other families who are still struggling to have their concerns dealt with.

So, since it is not the job of either Eleanor Brazil or Gladys Rhodes White to deal with the legacy of historic failure, my original question is unanswered. Let me repeat it.

Is it not time for an independent body to be set up to deal fairly, competently and urgently with the families affected by historic inadequacy?

Response to supplementary question (cabinet member children and families);

I can’t speculate on any recommendations that Eleanor Brazil might make and I can’t comment on particular cases. The Director of Children’s Services is following up on this case and it’s important that our complaints procedures are made clear to everyone. I am happy to meet with members of the public to chat.

PQ 11	Mr Lane, Weobley	The current licensing policy has decimated the licensed industry though-out the rural areas and market towns of Herefordshire. Could it please be explained how this new policy will benefit rural Herefordshire and help elderly or less mobile residents?	Cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community
-------	---------------------	---	---

Response:
 The current taxi licensing policy has been in place since 2019 and a notable reduction in drivers had not been observed until the recent pandemic lockdowns. So I differ on your view that our current policy decimated the licensed industry, as we believe it was the impact of Covid on both retail and the night time economy which then brought numbers down. This was a phenomenon mirrored nationally.

If the taxi policy put before members today is adopted then this shortage in drivers should not be worsened, as the latest revision has overcome the majority of issues which the trade perceived to be burdensome in the first draft. For example, the requirement for existing drivers to sit a knowledge test has reverted to only new drivers, sat navs are now recognised as being appropriate and most other requirements have returned to the level previously required rather than elevated.

Since 2002 no new Hackney Carriages have been issued to non-wheel chair access vehicles and as a consequence we have seen a steady increase in vehicles which the elderly and our less mobile residents can use. At about this time, the council also implemented government guidance to de-zone the county so that drivers can operate all over the county rather than in their former district council areas. As a consequence, some drivers inevitably

choose not to routinely operate in the more rural areas due to travelling times, selecting instead to start or finish their journeys in the city where there is more trade. Whilst we licence all taxi drivers and their vehicles, the Council cannot control how the businesses operate in terms of area – to do so would conflict with statutory guidance.

PQ 12	Ms Gallagher, Hereford	<p>The council has been criticised for the lack of support available to families on the edge of care work or in proceedings. The employment of locums/newly qualified social workers appear to be pertinent for the poor understanding of options available to sign post families to. During COVID many options offered by the council e.g. parenting courses did not run and it took 12 months to offer an online covid compatible option (too late if in proceedings). There are delays accessing as parents can only be referred for these by a professionals and not proactively.</p> <p>What budget is there for early intervention/early help, given there is limited statutory obligations to provide these solutions. And when will there be an option for families to refer themselves directly cutting out the middleman that cannot be called disguised compliance by children's services.</p>	Cabinet member children and families
-------	------------------------	---	--------------------------------------

Response:
 The evidence is clear that a strong early help offer can contribute significantly to health and wellbeing, aspirations and educational attainment, and enabling families to contribute to and feel supported by their local communities. Much of the early help provision in any local authority should be provided by universal services (such as schools, nurseries, children’s centres, community, voluntary and faith sector organisations etc) with more targeted support provided by the local authority and other agencies (such as health services, for example). At the moment a significant proportion of early help support offered is council led. We are working with our partners to strengthen early help provision where a partner agency is the lead.

Earlier this year we undertook significant work and “Talk Community” are bringing Herefordshire together, by connecting people to services, groups, community hubs, events, and information to help them stay well. The Talk Community [website](#) is available resource which includes relevant links and signposts for families to self-refer and seek help and support without necessarily the involvement of services if required.

The budget for Early Help for 2022/23 is £1,170,596; in addition to this the budget to commission services within the Early Help arena is £166,000. The budget for 2023/24 is currently being reviewed and will be submitted to the Council early in the New Year.

Supplementary question:
 During Covid families that had accessed support via universal services and were due to attend courses were advised the same courses had been cancelled. During a time of lockdowns and limited support network access universal services stopped. Your response accepts this service is council led and yet you left us abandoned as no alternative was offered. To this date the organisations that cancelled have not attempted to try contacting the families to offer the first spaces, this is significant failures to the families affected. The courses offered was the responsibility of the council, the council that took 12 months to offer an online alternative in March 2021. During this covid period the families were still expected by children’s services to achieve the same outcomes pre-covid, showing a lack of humanity.

Talk community has never been mentioned by a midwife, GP services during pregnancy or MH appointments or by any social worker before adoption was pursued for my son. Nor has it been offered during my son’s placement with a prospective adopter. The truth is there is still a lack of understanding by the council and failure to recognise its own missed opportunities even in recent months

Given the social stigma attached following losing a child via forced adoption or having a child removed has the council considered the likelihood of birth families retreating from going to any of the aforementioned group/hub places etc? Have you even asked if any would? Do you agree that you missed opportunities to have had a person from talk community at the EGM or the public meeting to help raise awareness and offer support to families? Can you tell the public how many times children's services has used parents attending course as disguised compliance since 2018?

Response to supplementary question (cabinet member children and families)

I empathise with the frustration behind the question and it was frustrating that services were disrupted during covid. It's important that we get back to maximum face to face work. As far as Talk Community is concerned I agree with the need to be clear about what support is available in communities whether it is NHS, Home-Start and other services. Talk Community is making progress on that and we need to continue particularly with Partners, Herefordshire Community Partnership is always keen to hear from people about what they need, please get in touch with them and me about the services you need. A written response would be provided.

PQ 13	Name and address supplied	<p>On the Council's website https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/social-care-support/protect-someone it says:</p> <p><i>If your family has been affected by peer-on-peer abuse, there is local support available. Children First Family Mediation is an independent family mediation service who offer confidential, sensitive support to Herefordshire families and individuals who have been affected by peer-on-peer abuse. To access the service please contact Sheena Adam by email admin@childrenfirstfamilymediation.org.uk ... and quote "Herefordshire".</i></p> <p>Children First Family Mediation (CFFM) does not offer support for families dealing with peer-on-peer sexual abuse. This was pointed out to Council in July. CFFM have since offered to mediate between the Council and families affected by peer-on-peer abuse failings, but officers have not been willing to come to the table.</p> <p>Why is this misleading message still on the Council's website? It puts the Council in a good light at the expense of the truth and families.</p>	Cabinet member children and families
-------	---------------------------	---	--------------------------------------

Response:
 Children First Family Mediation is a charity based in the North of England whose core offering is mediation where parents have separated. They were engaged some time ago by the then Director of Education, Skills and Learning.

Since this time, Children First Family Mediation have been approached once in respect of Herefordshire; this contact did not result in a service being offered. The information on the website was out of date and we apologise for this.

Our website has since been amended, removing the paragraph referencing Children First Family Mediation. The website will shortly be updated with other available support options.

Supplementary Question

I asked my question about the mediation service to find out whether there is any substance to the claims in the draft improvement plan for Children's Services about a new era of openness and accountability. What I have learnt from the partial truths in the written answer is that sadly, there is no new era of openness or accountability.

In July's Full Council I raised concerns that the careconcerns helpline was not working. I also pointed out that the mediation service for families - promised back in 2020 - did not exist. After that meeting, the Chief Executive wrote to you all to reassure you that the mediation service was in place.

It isn't. Why? Because Council officers will not come to the table. The mediation service manager asked Council officers to arrange a mediation session, but she, like the public, was left dangling. There is no mediation service because officers are not interested in mediation with the public. Since 2020 when the promise of mediation was first made, the public, and Councillors, have been led a merry dance, which once again has resulted in unfulfilled commitments. Once again, the blame is dumped on an officer who has left and no apology is forthcoming.

It is not the job of Gladys Rhodes White or Eleanor Brazil to deal with the legacy of harmful practice. You, our elected representatives, need to decide if you want this Council to meet the needs of the families already harmed.

Alongside the draft improvement plan, an action plan is needed to show how and when the needs of the families harmed by long years of inadequate practice will be met, and to bring to an end the ongoing hostility to families who raise concerns.

Will Councillors please insist that alongside the draft improvement plan, there is a coherent and funded plan for dealing with the enormous and tragic legacy of years of inadequate services, and that responsibility for this is removed from the current leadership who have lost the trust of the families harmed?

Response to supplementary question (cabinet member children and families)

A written response would be provided.

PQ 14	Mr Starling, Weobley	<p>Regarding the new taxi licensing conditions...</p> <p>It appears the new age restrictions on minibuses / Wheelchair accessible vehicles that can carry multiple wheelchairs could drastically impact the fulfilment of home to school transport for SEN service users. These are specialist vehicles and lessening the lifespan of this vehicle type will make it financially unviable to operate them. How does the council propose to ensure their service users will not be unfairly impacted and will still be able to access the appropriate transport they are entitled to?</p>	Cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community
-------	-------------------------	--	---

Response:
The age for wheelchair access vehicles is 15 and there is also condition 41 for Hackneys which allows for vehicles in good condition to be considered for an extension of this age. This is because both safeguarding and public safety are considered priorities to the Council and the age ranges of vehicles are therefore considered to be key to this aim as older vehicles can be more unreliable and need more checks.

PQ 15	Mr Rowe, Hereford	<p>It is obvious to the families who have come together raising concerns to the council and central government about the underhanded and dodgy practices going on in Herefords Children services, the same names keep coming up again and again.</p> <p>There was a lot of finger pointing at the EGM and councillors claiming they understood how we feel. You cannot understand how we feel you have never been through it. Anyone who has in</p>	Cabinet member children and families
-------	----------------------	---	--------------------------------------

the past, held the position currently held by Toynbee or feels an apology is sufficient clearly needs to resign.

Are the omissions of key information isolated to practices within the children's services directorate or have the legal team been complicit given Keehans judgement. Is anyone asking this about legal and is legal advice being supplied by external resources given the known potential for incorrect advice.

Response:

The level of openness and engagement on matters of practice, performance and our efforts to improve services are greater now than at any time in our past. Councillors resigning for acknowledging longstanding shortcomings is not necessarily helpful to children and families. What we need now is stability, solidity, commitment, and long-term thinking

Legal Services act on the direct instruction of Children's Services. The evidence in care proceedings is always presented to the court and families through their lawyers and all parties have the opportunity to challenge that evidence and present their own evidence. It is the court that makes decisions in respect of children, based on the evidence and information presented.

This year we've done a lot of work to improve these relationships, training and communication, and the creation of a further layer of management within the Children's Legal Team has brought greater levels of support and supervision to lawyers in the team.

Social workers at Herefordshire Council have access to expert legal advice at all times (including through the provision of an out-of-hours service). The capacity, structure, and management oversight of the legal team, and legal advice (which is mostly provided internally other than where particularly specialist advice is required) was reviewed following the 2021 High Court Judgement, and through the activity of the Corporate Leadership Team and the Improvement Board will be kept under review, alongside other services working together to safeguard children and young people.

Supplementary Question

As someone named as needing to go I hardly expected support for my question and statement.

We as families do not agree with your reasoning here, if applying the rationale used in children's court, the risk of future or emotional harm is probable, families would permanently lose their children even though they can offer stability, solidity, commitment, and long-term thinking. Why are you special enough to think the same shouldn't apply to you!

In care proceedings/ family court the restrictions on legal aid mean that the local authority has the upper hand. From a humane level the LA is not emotionally involved and suffering the afflictions families do. The final hearing is the only time families can truly be considered to have a voice. This is in turn dictated by the hearing length given by the judge and availability of the court and the questions asked and can take place in that time allotted. The majority of time in care proceedings is granted to the professionals brought in who are briefed by the children's services of their version of events meaning they get to paint a first impression.

Please be advised that social worker opinion even in the face of contradictory evidence is still held in high regard by the judiciary and parents can be told they are too intelligent to be truthful with professionals. Opinions offered by social workers that ignore evidence in the formation of that opinion are shared with psychologists, legal guardians, medical experts and more. It is clear the social workers at Hereford take a heavy handed approach and leave things out that don't suit their narrative. This must be a decision made outside of legal advice as any solicitors obligation is to the court first. This means that they have a duty to disclose information that may not fit the children's services narrative. Do not be fooled this is a deliberate choice by the directorate to not consult legal professionals.

In the spirit of openness please confirm how many members of your legal team have left or been dismissed since Keehans judgement in 2018 to date and if any members of staff have cited issues with children's services not consulting them as reasons for leaving.

Response to supplementary question (cabinet member children and families)

A written response would be provided.

PQ 16	Ms Anstey, Hereford	<p>Following the public meeting with families relating to the inadequately assessed Children's Services department (20.10.22), a common theme emerged that the complaint process is not fit for purpose. Complaints are often brushed off, concerns about staff ignored, complaints not being fully responded to or prolonged. There was also a pattern raised that the council fails to accept accountability especially if there is an issue of liability involved. This lead commissioner Eleanor Brazil committed to look into the complaint process within the council as part of her assessment.</p> <p>Given the experiences of members of the public have those effected come to the correct conclusion, this is a deliberate tactic to indirectly hope we go away quietly/arrogance the council cannot get anything wrong, and if not what assurances can be given that action is being taken to tackle the above issues/concerns?</p>	Cabinet member children and families
-------	------------------------	---	--------------------------------------

Response:

Families having to wait too long for responses is not acceptable, and improving our complaints procedures, and making them clear to everyone, is one of our top priorities.

Increased management oversight has now been added to our structures, and a new, permanent Complaints Manager is now in post. Managers are also receiving more complete training and guidance in order to be able to resolve issues sooner and more effectively.

We have expanded the Complaints Team, and will soon be signing off renewed and reviewed policies (for Corporate and Statutory Children's processes). We are confident that these changes will contribute to better quality responses, and that, as we continue to do better in our work alongside families, fewer causes for complaint will arise.

Supplementary Question

My question concerns the complaints procedure. Having worked for the local authority I would just like to ask if all staff are being fully trained and the tag line 'you hatch we snatch' is no longer used in the social care offices?

Response to supplementary question (cabinet member children and families)

It was important that the right training was provided. A written response would be provided.

PQ 17	Mr Castledine, Hereford	<p>Can I ask who wrote condition number 46?</p> <p>'There are 2 types of vehicles that can be licensed as Hackney carriages, those that are wheelchair friendly and those that are not.'</p> <p>This, to my mind is a ridiculous statement.</p>	Cabinet member housing, regulatory
-------	----------------------------	---	------------------------------------

			services and community
<p>Response: Your version of the condition is actually slightly different to that stated in your question, in that the proposed version of condition 46 presented to members today reads “<i>There are 2 different types of vehicle that can be licensed as hackney carriages: those which are Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs) and those which are not</i>”.</p> <p>This condition was drafted for us by one of the UK’s leading lawyers on taxi licensing to explain the reasoning behind why some saloon cars have remained in the hackney fleet whereas all new hackneys have to be wheelchair accessible. This condition has remained in the final version as it was considered to be informative.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question: In addition to my first question regarding section 46 of the proposed new terms and conditions for the taxi trade, if the councillors deem this as a badly written statement do they perhaps agree the whole document is flawed and needs more time to correct such points?</p>			
<p>Response to supplementary question (cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community) If the Policy is adopted today we would like to think that taxi trade and officers will continue to communicate if it becomes obvious that this is leading to a significant shortage of taxi drivers. Policy would not be undone however as the head of public protection and director of environment and economy may consider options to amend any conditions that might be thought to be unreasonable restricting potential license applications providing that this does not impact negatively on public safety. However I have every belief that the proposed Policy offers a clear, transparent and robust licensing regime to encourage new applications to the profession whilst keeping our public safe at all times.</p>			
PQ 18	Ms Reid, Hereford	<p>At 30 September 2022, there is forecast <u>overspend of £5.2 million</u> for Looked After Children (LAC). In 2020-21 the rate of LAC (per 10,000 children) was 87.0 (109 in October 2022), Statistical Neighbours rate was 60.2. The rate of babies taken into care in Herefordshire was 6.7 (2021-22) compared to Statistical Neighbour rate of 4.6 (2020-21), <u>nearly 50% more</u>. No data was provided for Herefordshire in 2020-21. Children unnecessarily in care is very expensive compared with much cheaper family support, is detrimental to children and results in bad publicity (eg <i>Panorama</i>). Sufficiency Strategy (sufficient foster and children’s home placements) is a Corporate Risk and reducing LAC would mitigate this risk plus that of “losing” Children’s Services.</p> <p>What was the average cost to Herefordshire Council of each Looked-After Child in 2021-22 and for Q1 and Q2 of 2022-23 (explain how calculated)?</p>	Cabinet member children and families
<p>Response: The average cost per child/young person in Q1/Q2 was £21,870 – this equates to an average cost per young person of £841 per week. Please see below how this cost has been arrived at:</p> <p><u>2022/23 Q1 & Q2</u></p>			

In-House Fostering & Staying**Put**

Amount	No of Children
1,360,261	177

External Fostering

Amount	No of Children
2,077,181	107

Residential

Amount	No of Children
4,223,305	50

Supported Accommodation

Amount	No of Children
1,133,140	56

External Staying Put

Amount	No of Children
19,520	5

In-House Supported Lodgings

Amount	No of Children
109,740	13

Total Average cost

8,923,147	408
-----------	-----

Average Cost for Q1 & 2**21,870****Average Weekly Cost****841**

Improved leadership and management oversight is already reducing drift or delay in respect of families subject to the Public Law Outline (pre-proceedings), and to ensure families are effectively engaged and supported where there are concerns that may lead to court proceedings. The rate at which children come into our care has been reducing over the past year and we are developing a reunification framework to assess and support children and young people who are able to return home to the care of their parents/families when it is safe and in their best interest to do so.

Supplementary Question

I'm afraid that yet again a public question has not been fully answered. I asked for data relating to 2021-22 to show the trend. Please disclose it. The average cost for each child was £21,870 for Q1 and Q2, therefore, for one year would be about £43,740 which could provide support for many families. I consider this understates as it's assumed that each child would be eg fostered continuously and "Staying Put" is included but is for adults not children.

The draft Improvement Plan states about reunification:

"Scoping of framework underway with draft due February 2023"

In view of the high costs and rate of LAC do you consider this is acting at pace?

Also I consider plans for Family Group Conferences and family support are not at pace and latter is not a Measure that Matters (targeted).

Response to supplementary question (cabinet member children and families)

We are moving forward as fast as we can to put family group conferences in place. I agree that they are very positive but it does require a lot of work and preparation. A written response would be provided.

Written response to supplementary question – sent on 20 December:

Please find below the placement costings which now include data for 2021/22 as requested

In respect the development of a reunification framework, we need to ensure that this work is robust and aligns well with our other processes and procedures such as our Permanence Policy and Procedures. Producing a draft of the framework by February 2023 is seen as a realistic timeframe to achieve this.

Regarding your question about Family Group Conferences. There are a number of different models and approaches to address this and these need to be explored to ensure that the most appropriate approach for Herefordshire is progressed. The Measures that Matter were designed as a broad set of indicators to provide a high level overview of the progression of the Improvement Plan. The exclusion of any area of the Improvement Plan from the Measures that Matter does not indicate that this area receives less attention or is not progressed with vigour.

2021/22

In-House Fostering & Staying Put

Amount	No of Children
2,375,418	199

External Fostering

Amount	No of Children
3,818,968	128

Residential

Amount	No of Children
7,265,637	61

Supported Accommodation

Amount	No of Children
1,831,615	52

External Staying Put

Amount	No of Children
117,337	7

In-House Supported Lodgings

Amount	No of Children
319,341	24

Total Average cost

15,728,316	471
------------	-----

Average Yearly Cost	33,393
----------------------------	---------------

Average Weekly Cost	642
----------------------------	------------

2022/23 Q1 & Q2**In-House Fostering & Staying Put**

Amount	No of Children
1,360,261	177

External Fostering

Amount	No of Children
--------	----------------

		2,077,181	107
Residential			
Amount	No of Children		
		4,223,305	50
Supported Accommodation			
Amount	No of Children		
		1,133,140	56
External Staying Put			
Amount	No of Children		
		19,520	5
In-House Supported Lodgings			
Amount	No of Children		
		109,740	13
Total Average cost			
		8,923,147	408
Average Cost for Q1 & 2			21,870
Average Weekly Cost			841
PQ 19	Mr Barnett-Jones, Hereford	With the new regulations that are coming in are there any exceptions for SEN school transport 8 seaters? With the new rules it would take almost of the school busses off the road and won't be financially viable to replace as that's all they get used for.	
Response:			
Cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community			

There are no exceptions. Unless the vehicles meet the licence conditions they cannot be licensed. This is because the vehicles used for school contract work must meet the same high safety standards as required for all other licensed vehicles.

PQ 20	Mr Juckes, Hereford	<p>Are Council aware that the national Taxi and private hire association have found dozens of errors/flaws with the Taxis policy being voted upon?</p> <p>I've been a taxi driver in Hereford for the past 24 years and yet over recent years it's been increasingly difficult to deal with the licensing department and their draconian attitude. I and many others are trying to do a job and provide a public service.</p> <p>Are Council aware that the policy, as it currently stands, will make not only myself but a great number of drivers and operators reconsider their position causing a far greater public safety issue than we are already faced with?</p> <p>Furthermore it needs mentioning that we drivers and operators rely on our jobs to survive! We've already lost a number of drivers because of the prospect of this policy coming into force.</p>	Cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community
-------	------------------------	--	---

Response:

I am aware that a number of corrections were made to the external solicitor's first draft following over 80 people commenting in the first consultation round. I am also aware that the officers proposed around 50 key changes in the second draft, which were all to the betterment of the trade. It is worth noting that following the second consultation round only two people responded and therefore only a few minor changes were needed – this is all documented in the appendices to the report and shows that we listened and took note. If there are any further minor amendments later found to be needed then the report recommends that the Head of Service has delegated authority to make these.

I really do appreciate how the trade needs our support which is why I have taken such a close and personal role in the two consultation processes as well as the various meetings with the Taxi Association. However, the licensing team's role is to regulate and administer the licensing functions and the legislation and its statutory guidance provides the remit within which they can operate. To help ease the burden on drivers further, the Council is now looking at how improvements can be made for applications to be made electronically which may assist in the future in speed by modernising how contact is made with the Council.

However, I cannot stress enough that public safety and safeguarding are the priority for the Council, although due to our recent changes I anticipate that the policy will not be over burdensome. I am also pleased to report that the number of new driver applications currently appears to be increasing.

I accept that there is a national shortage within many employment sectors, including the taxi and private hire trade. However, it is fair to say that many drivers left the profession to take up other employment as a consequence of the Covid emergency which effectively shut down the night time economy and therefore their business – but this was a national phenomenon, not a local one.

PQ 21	Mr N Maddy, Hereford	Apparently, I am only able to ask one question, so this is my one question. In light of the fact that the changes to Taxi licensing terms and conditions will reduce the amount of taxi's available in Hereford and will certainly reduce wheelchair accessible taxi's as they are far more expensive to replace and will cause school transport to pay parents to take their children to	Cabinet member housing, regulatory
-------	-------------------------	---	------------------------------------

		school increasing the need for the family car also it means that less taxi's mean vulnerable people are more at risk at night as they will be unable to get a taxi home. Are the councillor's fully aware of the negative impact to the public and the increase of the carbon footprint that these terms and conditions will lead to?	services and community
<p>Response: The change in policy is intended to protect the public and our most vulnerable members of society, balancing this with the need for the trade to operate as a business. It is not expected that this policy and its conditions will increase the carbon footprint or reduce the number of licensed vehicles. However, the situation will be monitored to ensure any changes are reported upon.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question: When/if it is proven that the number of taxes are reduced and the general public are more at risk and the carbon footprint does increase which it will. Will the council immediately undo the damage they have done in these terms and conditions?</p>			
<p>Response to supplementary question (cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community) I'm hoping this does not cause anymore damage to what we are doing and I do hope that we encourage more applications for the profession.</p>			
PQ 22	Mr Davies, Hereford	<p>Could the cabinet member please explain how less abled and SEN service users will continue to access mandatory council supplied transport?</p> <p>Unfortunately the current and proposed licensing conditions could result with no financially viable options for replacing specialist wheelchair accessible vehicles especially minibuses. We are a Local Business and this is greatly concerning. We have already had no option but to give notice on one SEN contract operated for Herefordshire council, due to this. I have numerous taxi plates and drivers licensed with the authority. However unless we can make it easier to license specialist wheelchair vehicles I will eventually have no choice to surrender all my plates and terminate further contracts.</p>	Cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community
<p>Response: The age for wheelchair access vehicles is 15 although there is also a condition which allows for vehicles in good condition to be considered for extending this age. However, safeguarding and public safety remains a priority for the Council and the age ranges of vehicles are considered to be a big part of this responsibility.</p>			
PQ 23	Mr T Maddy, Hereford	<p>Due to the inconvenience the licensing authority have given to all operators that own a taxi in Herefordshire.</p> <p>Should we not receive some type of compensation from the council that have caused us to spend thousands, on fitting CCTV systems into each vehicle? Which turned out to not even meet the legal requirements at the time.</p>	Cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community

		With this new proposed taxi policy this will cause even more of an upset to operators in Herefordshire. Even potentially closing down parts of the private sector due to these on going unnecessary expenses.	
--	--	---	--

Response:

Possible grant funding options were explored but were unsuccessful. The implementation of CCTV will allow a period of 12 months to enable the costs to be planned and accounted for as a business cost. The quotes received for adaption or for new units are well below the figure mentioned in your question.

Appendix 2 - Questions from members of the Council

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ 1	Cllr Roger Phillips, Arrow	Given the apparent changing circumstances with regard to the council’s wetland policy can the cabinet member inform the council what engagement is taking place with private solutions that could delivery phosphate reduction in the Lugg catchment area and provide credits which would allow the building of homes.	Cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning
<p>Response: The Council is very keen to see private developers design and bring forward their own mitigation schemes and wants to work with them in a structured and systematic way. We welcome recent announcements regarding the encouragement of Developer-led mitigation schemes by government and, in support of this objective, we are currently looking to mobilise a project to do three things: 1) To provide a series of guidance notes on key aspects of private schemes 2) To introduce an enhanced Pre Application process for developers to use at the concept stage that will bring together leads from our own Ecology team with Natural England and the Environment Agency to work together to provide early advice and guidance. 3) To develop a mechanism for Conservation Covenants - as set out in the Environment Act last year - which will provide a mechanism to ensure certainty of schemes once built out.</p> <p>The project is being developed following a recent meeting with local developers, and is presently at the outline business case stage with further work required to confirm resource requirements and an appropriate timeline. We will keep members and developers informed on progress and will advise when we are able to move forward with this initiative.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question: Some of the phosphate savings measures that the private sector have been submitting as planning application and pre-apps have Natural England agreement and legal agreements in place. There is no need to be held up by the council but this is what is happening. Now there are issues with the wetlands scheme we will need to find other options to facilitate building in North Herefordshire. This is having a huge impact on our local economy, on further jobs, revenue for the county, impact on rural schools with numbers of children declining. Can I urge the cabinet member to engage with private solutions which has not happened to date?</p>			
<p>Response to supplementary question (cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning) We are in discussions with the local building group and welcome the ideas and suggestions they are developing. I’m happy to provide assurance that engagement is happening and will continue. Recent statements by government have been positive and in support of developer-led solutions which is encouraging for the council.</p>			
MQ 2	Cllr l’Anson, Ledbury South	Herefordshire Children’s Services teeter on the edge of a precipice. Since the Ofsted report Children’s Scrutiny Meetings and Corporate Parenting Board meetings have been cancelled or postponed, time after time, Member’s Calendars altering daily.	Cabinet member

		<p>Eg. Co-opted member's emails of 16th, 17th Nov. ask for meetings lists - no response. Co-opted member is struggling to plan work calendar around constant cancelling and rescheduling</p> <p>Email from Children's Scrutiny Committee member reflects "The lack of available reports is a huge frustration as well as the constant moving diary of events"</p> <p>LGA Peer Review scheduled 17th November, now proposed 10th January '23. Last meeting workshop was 1st Nov.</p> <p>Does not this lack of meetings represent a continuing failure of urgency, poor management and scrutiny, and why is the Administration not able to address the needs of Herefordshire's children more effectively?</p>	children and families
<p>Response:</p> <p>We all want the same thing - for our services to improve as fast as possible, and we are now on a clear path. Urgency always has to be balanced with the need for systems and structures to be solid and embedded, so we are working from foundations that are strong and lasting.</p> <p>No Corporate Parenting Board meeting has been cancelled or postponed since the Ofsted inspection. All meetings for 2023 have been timetabled and circulated.</p> <p>Progress in Corporate Parenting is long overdue, as long-standing members understand. Good focussed work is now moving us forward, as we will discuss in week's meeting.</p> <p>Members who are on the Board are encouraged to fulfil their role not simply in relation to Board meetings, for example engaging with LGA training and support and liaising with their political group.</p> <p>As far as Children's Scrutiny committee is concerned, one meeting was postponed, and a delay in producing reports was one factor that contributed to this. The work plans are a matter for committee members, led by the Chair and Vice-chair, supported by officers.</p>			
MQ 3	Cllr Shaw, Bromyard Bringsty	<p>Following a successful ballot of businesses in December 2021, the Cabinet approved a loan of up to £210,000 to the Herefordshire County Business Improvement District in May 2022, whilst they raised the £580,000 recorded in the officer decision of October 2020. Repayments were to be made from the funds collected, which were presumed due to be billed for the new financial year in April 2022. An apocryphal nine months have now passed so can the cabinet member responsible confirm that these invoices were raised, what the residual sum now owed to the Council by the HCBID is and what outputs have been achieved?</p>	Cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning
<p>Response:</p> <p>The cabinet approved an advance to the Herefordshire County Business Improvement District (BID) in May 2022, to enable the BID limited by guarantee company to become operational Decision - Herefordshire County Business Improvement District Advance Request - Herefordshire Council.</p>			

The loan has been paid in instalments of £35,000 per month to the BID company, with the final instalment to be drawn down in December.

The levy invoices have been prepared but not yet issued. We are working with the BID company to finalise the approach and timing of invoicing.

The Herefordshire BID has a website which contains information about its business plan and its delivery monitoring on behalf of its members:
www.herefordshirecountybid.co.uk

Supplementary Question:

I'm sure fellow councillors will be dismayed at the lack of delivery of the Herefordshire County BID (HC BID), it reflects poorly on the administration and this council, in its delivery of its economic strategy. Crucially, the member does not provide any explanation as to why these invoices were not issued in April and have to date still not been issued. A matter for scrutiny perhaps. Can the cabinet member confirm the amount that the HC BID is now expected to raise this year, the business plan shows a reduced sum of £431k being raised from invoicing from this financial year 2022 – 2023 and future years together with £80k, which I presume comes from council revenue. Will the £676k due to be spent by the end of March 2023 actually be expended or will just overheads for the organisation be paid? The business community demands and deserves answers.

Response to supplementary question (cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning)

A written response would be provided.

Written response to supplementary question – sent on 21 December:

The Herefordshire County BID and the council are currently seeking to finalise the list of businesses that should be included in the levy invoices. Until this is resolved the timing and total value of invoices is not known at this time. We hope this will be concluded in January 2023. The council's role as the business rates billing authority is to collect the levy on behalf of the BID company. Herefordshire County BID is a separate limited by guarantee company, and as such questions relating to level of funds being raised in their business plan, and their areas of expenditure should please be directed to them. The council has made a loan of £210,000 to the BID company to allow it to become operational until the levy can be collected. Other than the loan, the council has made no other revenue contribution to the BID company.

MQ 4	Cllr Durkin, Old Gore	<p>There are areas and residences of this county that do not have a reliable and efficient mobile phone or broadband service. The telephone analogue service change over to digital will be occurring, we are notified, anytime between now and 2025. Following this change over analogue emergency personal alarm buttons, worn on the body or as motion detection, will not operate over a digital line.</p> <p>I am informed that the Council are relying on the Telecare system to provide an effective safety response, post change over, for their customers. However, what is being done to identify, find and alert Herefordshire residents, as soon as possible before the changeover, who are dependent on their analogue personal alarm devices and who are not Telecare customers' but are dependent upon other providers?</p>	Cabinet member health and adult wellbeing
------	--------------------------	--	---

Response:

The existing analogue telephone services in the country will be switching over to digital which is aimed to be completed by 2025. Nationally the telephone lines on which telecare services currently rely are being delivered by over 600 different telecommunications providers and over 300 different telecare alarm receiving centres. An estimated 1.8 million people in the UK currently use telecare services, of whom 1.3 million use alarms in their own homes, and 0.5 million in a range of care homes, supported housing and sheltered living arrangements. It is unknown how many people in Herefordshire have arrangements for the delivery of telecare services outside those sourced and supported by the council.

All of the council's telecare service users have been advised of the switch from analogue to digital telephony, and battery backups are being provided where power cuts would place people at risk through the non-operation of their telecare alarm. We are also assessing all the equipment used by the council's telecare users for digital compatibility and upgrading or replacing it as necessary.

The council has drafted a communication for people who use telecare outside the scheme offered by the council and will sharing it on the council's communications channels.

The Department of Health and Social Care's Policy Paper on the digital switchover was published on 5 December: [Telecare stakeholder action plan: preparations for the analogue to digital switchover - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/telecare-stakeholder-action-plan-preparations-for-the-analogue-to-digital-switchover). It advises that telecommunications providers are working on the best ways of informing telecare users about their migration and prompting them to contact their telecare service provider about any changes to their telecommunications arrangements. The Department has commissioned a range of information sheets to help prevent telecare alarm disconnections as part of this process. These information sheets will go to telecare service users and their carers, relatives or support network. The information drafted by the council for general information to residents will be informed by these information sheets and by the policy paper more broadly.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the independent regulator for communications, Ofcom, are working with telecommunications providers to ensure consumers are prepared for the digital switchover, and protected against allied risks. In the telecare sector, the government's stated priority is to see action taken to mitigate any risks to users of telecare services before their switchover day.

Supplementary question

The changeover date is between now and 2025. The announcement that analogue is being changed over has been notified since mid to early 2021 and indeed known about before. I've been approached by residents who are who have had no proactive response from their service provider over the last 18 months. Our respective officers have been aware and have been urging and constantly reminding to address how these non-telecare customers in the county who could be in jeopardy will be identified and been unable to establish how other service providers will be dealing with the changeover. I'm aware that the government has now addressed this issue however there has been no proactive council strategy in place to establish, identify, locate and inform Herefordshire residents who are in potential jeopardy, who are not a client of telecare. Would the portfolio holder agree with me that the council needs to establish a communication plan to identify, locate and inform all service providers and their clients in Herefordshire of the changeover and how it may be dealt with?

Response to supplementary question (cabinet member health and adult wellbeing)

We have been waiting for government guidance on this and we could not put out any communication until we got official detail. A government policy paper was published on Monday 5 December so we are now working towards communications so that nobody suffers from this digital switchover.

MQ 5	Cllr Hewitt, Golden Valley North	Last Friday we heard from Jesse Norman that he is pushing for a "one river" regulatory approach for the restoration of the River Wye - an approach which elicited clear agreement amongst members.	Cabinet member finance, corporate
------	--	--	--

		<p>What <u>written</u> evidence then can this LPA produce to validate recent assertion in planning committee that 'NE have told us that the Dore, Olchon and the Monnow' (the whole of the Lower Wye sub catchment) 'do not need assessment under Habitat Regulations?' These tributaries join the Wye at Monmouth and provide habitat for species designated under the SAC -eel, lamprey and salmon. Neglecting to assess whether a project in the lower wye sub catchment will affect these species also harms the main stem of the river for our neighbour Monmouthshire. As ward councillor for Golden Valley North may we see the advice on this matter from NE?</p>	services and planning
<p>Response: In August 2022 Natural England (NE) published updated guidance to local authorities on catchments in which a Nutrient Neutrality approach is in effect, and where NE advises that nutrients have the potential to result in likely significant effects or adverse effects on the integrity of Habitats Sites. At that time Natural England added a considerable number of new catchments nationally to the list. Natural England's advice to Herefordshire Council in that update is that Nutrient Neutrality applies only to the Lugg Catchment and to the part of the River Clun catchment which sits in the county.</p> <p>This advice, which has been provided to local authorities to assist them in their role as Competent Authorities for the purposes of Habitats Regulations Assessment, falls under Natural England's statutory duties and is part of a coordinated cross departmental response by government, supported by Defra and DLUCH. Natural England have provided technical background information on designated sites that have been identified as being within catchments where nutrient neutrality schemes are in effect and have, as part of their strategic approach, made an assessment of which catchments need to be covered by the approach.</p> <p>Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have not written to Herefordshire Council to give their view on any catchments on which might similarly need to be subject to a nutrient neutrality approach.</p> <p>On this basis Herefordshire Council are following advice which we possess from the statutory undertakers in applying a nutrient neutrality approach in catchments where NE/NRW have recommended that it IS necessary.</p> <p>We are aware from our links with the Welsh local authorities that Natural Resources Wales have applied similar criteria to tributaries within the Welsh part of the Wye catchment, to those established by Natural England on the Lugg catchment, where the tributaries in Wales are identified as exceeding conservation targets.</p> <p>To date we have not received any guidance from NRW on Habitats Regulations Assessment of development draining to the Dore/Olchen tributaries.</p> <p>We rely upon both Natural England and Natural Resources Wales as the advisory bodies who undertake both the monitoring and condition surveys to advise as to how this cross-border catchment issue should be addressed and we would welcome an updated joint position statement to provide full clarity.</p>			
<p>Supplementary question What I asked for was written evidence of advice from natural England that we do not need to conduct an HRA in the Dore, Olchen and Monnow catchments as was recently asserted in planning committee. Your answer is that no information or advice has been received on the catchments. The</p>			

response implies that we as a competent authority do not comply with regulations unless we're told to, hopefully by the English conservation body and that we do not have a duty under the SAC to enquire. I think we can all agree that a large housing proposal, here 89 houses where the sewage treatment works do not have capacity, which is close to, and uphill from a tributary river might have a significant effect on that watercourse and as a result the main river body. This is what the habitat regulations say about duties of a competent authority, that is the body that protects the Wye, which is this local Planning Authority: ' you must carry out an appropriate assessment if there is risk of a proposal having a significant effect on the conservation objectives of a European site or if your plan or project may cause harm to the sites ecological function or its ability to survive damage and reduce its ability to support a designated species.' Why is this authority cherry picking the rules when it comes to HRA. We have areas where clear advice from any to apply a nutrient neutrality approach but that does not mean that elsewhere we can ignore likely significant effects which will reduce the ability of our tributaries to support designated species. We are the competent authority that means we have to use our intelligence and follow the process, risk means yes, which means consult the relevant body NE or NRW and seek advice. Can we now as a competent, proactive, as an LPA take a competent, proactive approach to all our tributary rivers to protect the ecological integrity of the SAC and where there is clear risk of harm to designated species consult with NE/NRW to mitigate harm, as government guidance tells us to do. We need a one river approach and to do less would make a mockery of working with our neighbouring authorities to protect the Wye.

Response to supplementary question (cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning)

I share a lot of your concerns and I'm still unclear about how Natural England and Natural Resources Wales operate effectively in terms of their respective responsibilities across the Border to protect the entirety of the catchment of the river system. I am keen to better understand the thought processes within our own planning service and also how we work with adjacent authorities when our river systems cross the border and there is a clear need to co-ordinate and to understand the overall impact on the total river system. I support your call for a one river approach and I'm very keen that we take a one catchment approach to the way that we work with adjacent authorities who have a stake holding in the total catchment footprint. I will be seeking further information on this and I'm hoping that both within my portfolio responsibilities and phosphate commission we can make improvement ensuring that we are ourselves joined up but also the three agencies and other stakeholders and statutory consultees take a similarly joined up approach.