

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 28 MAY 2010**Question from Mr P McKay, Leominster**

- 1 *Having asked a number of questions I have learned that Herefordshire has 339 unsurfaced county roads totalling 164 km in length, yet does not know if they are passable by equestrians even though they are inspected annually, on foot if need be, since these inspections only record hazards. A 1999 inspection recorded passability, signage, obstruction, etc, information that is required due to British Horse Society undertaking an Emagin project to record all equestrian routes, and I ask if Council would review the inspection criteria for its unsurfaced county roads to include passability, signage, condition of gates, long term obstructions, ploughing etc. In a similar way to inspections of public rights of way, being I suggest reasonable public expectations of highway inspections, and thereby obtain better value for money for the cost of these inspections?*

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

Answer to Question 1

Current inspection criteria, which include obstructions and defects, as detailed in the Council's Highway Maintenance Plan (HMP) are published on the Council's website.

The plan was developed in accordance with the National Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management published by the UK Roads Board, and is subject to periodic review to take account of changes in the code of practice and most importantly changes in the demands placed on our county's extensive highway network, ensuring continued delivery of an efficient and effective highway maintenance service. The next review is scheduled for later this year, and Mr McKay's comments will be considered as part of that review.

No supplementary question was asked

Question from Mr N Jones

- 2 *A front page article in the Hereford Times earlier this month reported that the newly-elected MP for Hereford & South Herefordshire intends to seek a meeting with ESG's senior management team to discuss the possibility of 'an overhaul' of the scheme's retail element. As an ESG Board member, will the Council Leader give an undertaking that the founder of the It's Our City campaign (Cllr Hubbard) will be invited to attend these talks?*

Answer from Councillor RJ Phillips, Leader of the Council

Answer to Question 2

I understand this meeting has already taken place.

No supplementary question was asked

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Question from Mr P Cocks, Lower Bullingham, Hereford

- 3 *In the last fiscal year how many agency senior staff and how many agency junior staff were employed by the council and what was the cost to the taxpayer of these staff?*

Answer from Councillor JP French, Cabinet Member Corporate and Customer Services and Human Resources

Answer to Question 3

Total spend on agency staff during the financial year 2009/10: £5,817,347. We employ agency staff through a contract that went through a tendering process to provide value for money. Agency staff are used to fill posts that can be hard to recruit to on a permanent basis and also posts we keep open pending any future changes to the organisation, thereby ensuring the council minimises its liability in relation to potential termination costs. Actions are in place to ensure that agency spend is kept to a minimum, and used in a way which delivers value for money, and it should be borne in mind that on occasions what appears to be higher agency spend may be investing to save.

Number of Senior staff, which we have included as Directors, Assistant Directors and Heads of Service totals four.

We are unfortunately unable to provide an overall figure for junior posts for the entire year as we employ agency staff for such varied periods of time from one day to several months. Since August 2009 HR have kept substantial records an average would be approximately 127 per month taking the gross monthly figures across the eight month period. The figures prior to August are held by the contracted vendor.

Supplementary Question

The assertion in the response is that there is a need to invest to save. What are the additional costs to Herefordshire Council of short term termination proof contracts?

Answer from Councillor JP French, Cabinet member Corporate and Customer Services and Human Resources

Must agree to disagree. The Council was currently undergoing a huge transformational programme and shared services initiative across three organisations which would join together back office functions. As such programmes required long lead in times, it was prudent not to fill vacancies with permanent staff and therefore not incur redundancy costs.
