

## MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 19 NOVEMBER 2010

### Question from Councillor MD Lloyd-Hayes

- 1A *The revenue earned from Tourism is more than £416m a year. The proposed closure of TIC's across the County makes a saving of £200,000. Would the Cabinet member not agree that tourists, visitors and the general public deserve more than a robotic on line booking service?*
- B *Can the Cabinet Member confirm that plans for the new Hereford Library are still on track and when will it be built?*

### Answer from Councillor AJM Blackshaw, Cabinet Member Economic Development and Community Services

Answer to question 1

- 1A Yes – I refer to the answer given to Mrs O'Donnell (question number 1 from Members of the Public [text in full as follows: Answer to Question 1

*Unlike some other local authorities in the country, we are not closing the tourist information service in Hereford. We are remodelling the service throughout the county to ensure it is both affordable and fit for purpose in the future; the current arrangement does not represent good value for the public pound, there is no intention to end tourist information services for the city. I would caution against any assumption that decisions taken in respect of individual premises equate to removal of service.*

*I am pleased that, like ourselves, Mrs O'Donnell recognises the value of tourism to the local economy. However in the current challenging economic climate the council has a responsibility to ensure that public sector resources are used as efficiently and effectively as possible, whilst doing everything in our power to protect front line services. This does mean doing things differently, ensuring that we work with community volunteers and private sector partners to best effect, but it does not mean that Hereford, or any other market town in the county, will be left without a tourism information service]).*

- B This project is not part of the capital programme. However, in line with all our services, we continue to keep under review options and opportunities for future service delivery, ensuring we make best use of available resources.

### Supplementary Question to 1A

Would the Cabinet Member give consideration to a TIC located in the Buttermarket as this could be a focused central point for information? Such an approach would also resolve the worries of staff.

### Answer from Councillor AJM Blackshaw, Cabinet Member Economic Development and Community Services

A central tourism point is currently being considered as part of the refurbishment of the Buttermarket. This is currently work in progress.

### Supplementary Question to 1B

The question, as submitted, had not been answered.

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### **Answer from Councillor AJM Blackshaw, Cabinet Member Economic Development and Community Services**

A written answer would be provided.

### **Question from Councillor RI Matthews**

- 2 *Can the Cabinet Member confirm that all the professional advice that this and previous Councils over many years have received, up until a few months ago, clearly indicated that an eastern route was most appropriate for a Hereford Relief Road, and in particular for the long term economic viability of the county, and would be far more effective than alternative routes in reducing traffic congestion in and around the city generally?*
- A *Can the Cabinet Member also tell Members why there was a sudden change in officers' recommendations so late in the day?*
- B *Did the Executive have any input into this sudden change in thinking?*
- C *Does the Executive agree that it would have been more appropriate if independent consultants had been employed to carry out the study of options for the Hereford Relief Road, because there is a public perception that Amey, because of their close association with this authority, should not have been engaged to carry out this important task? They also changed their recommendations very late in the day.*

### **Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing**

Answer to question 2

- 2 No.
- A There has been no change in officers' recommendations.
- B See answer to question 2A above
- C There is no basis to question the professional judgement or impartiality of Amey or its sub-contractors. There was no change of recommendation by Amey.

### **Supplementary question**

It was suggested that all decisions on all matters be put off until after the May 2011 elections. Did the Cabinet Member not agree that the LDF process should be economically driven and not housing target led?

### **Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing**

The Cabinet Member could not support the suggestion of delaying decisions until after the May 2011 election and expressed the view that the second point had not be raised in a timely manner as part of the LDF process.

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### Question from Councillor PJ Watts

- 3 *Will Hereford Council please confirm that there are high schools within the county that are seeking, or will obtain, the status of academy in the year 2011, January 1?*
- A *Is the number of schools to date five? Please confirm the number and name the school.*
- B *When did Hereford Council first get notification and dates that these schools were about to become academies?*

### Answer from Councillor PD Price, Cabinet Member ICT, Education and Achievement

Composite answer to question 3.

The Council is aware that the following 3 high schools are seeking to achieve academy status in 2011:

John Kyrle High School – Academy Order received by the Council on 18 October 2010 from Department for Education(DfE) confirming the school can move to academy status as from 1 January 2011

Wigmore School (federation of high & primary schools) – School applied to DfE on 22 September 2010 to date no order has been received by the Council

Fairfield High School – School has commenced consultation with parents etc re a potential move to academy status; no application has yet been submitted.

Cllr Watts will of course be aware that there are already two academies in the county: Hereford Academy (formally Wyebridge School); and the Steiner Academy

### Supplementary question

As a key partner why has Halo not been involved in discussions of schools seeking to move to academy status?

### Answer from Councillor PD Price, Cabinet Member ICT, Education and Achievement

A written answer would be provided in due course as all appropriate partners should be included in such discussions.

### Question from Councillor GFM Dawe

- 4 *Is the rumour some of us have heard that Councillor Roger Phillips intends resigning as Leader of the Conservatives before or shortly after the next election (assuming he is re-elected) true?*

### Answer from Councillor RJ Phillips, Leader of the Council

Answer to question 4

Rumour and truth are rarely happy bedfellows!

### Supplementary question

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The question, as submitted, had not been answered.

### **Answer from Councillor RJ Phillips, Leader of the Council**

He has been elected as leader in the Annual Meeting for a year. It would be presumptuous to assume what will happen after May 2011 elections. He would continue in his current role with backing of the conservative group but would not presume what will follow the May 2011 election.

### **Question from Councillor GFM Dawe**

*5A The Rotherwas Access Road was opened over 3 years ago now. We were promised the £12.5m for the road and £5m for estate enhancement that would create 1000 jobs, at a cost of £17,500 per job. (There have been various other estimates, yet to come to fruition.) How many jobs has it created?*

*B Will you list the jobs created at Rotherwas since the Rotherwas Access Road was created and the range of salaries?*

### **Answer from Councillor AJM Blackshaw, Cabinet Member Economic Development and Community Services**

Composite answer to question 5

Major projects such as these are intended to support long term economic growth, and no timetable was set for job creation. Projected job creation is linked to development of the site. In the current economic climate it is as important to sustain and protect existing employment to ensure a sound basis for future growth, and the access road has supported this, protecting existing jobs in companies such as Arctic Circle and KGD Engineering that were being constrained by the poor access. Arctic Circle has invested over £1M and brought all its development work back to Rotherwas as a result of the access road. It has also opened up significant areas of land for future development & job creation; businesses that re-locate onto council land at Rotherwas will be required to provide job and investment information that can be monitored in the longer term.

### **Supplementary question**

What is the number of jobs that have been created at Rotherwas since the creation of the access road?

### **Answer from Councillor AJM Blackshaw, Cabinet Member Economic Development and Community Services**

The Cabinet Member was firmly of the opinion that 2,000 + jobs had been secured through the retention of KGD and Arctic Circle. The access road supported the south of Hereford and business migration in the region. The Council will contact businesses on the estate a fulsome response would be provided in writing. The creation of Rotherwas Access Road was an asset owned by the taxpayer and the estate is a site for future employment.

### **Question from Councillor GFM Dawe**

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6 *A large number of documents support the proposed Outer Distributor Road (ODR), these include:*

- *The Hereford Relief Road; Study of Options, Amey Report; September 9 2010*
- *The Sustainability Report (for the Relief Road), August 2010*
- *Environmental Assessment Report (for the Relief Road), August 2010*
- *Growth Point Connectivity Phase 1, April 2010 (the DaSTS report)*

*How much has been spent on the development of the ODR plans from 2006 to the present day?*

### **Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation**

Answer to question 6

The Council has spent a total of £479,034 since 2006.

### **Supplementary question**

How can it be justified to have spent the money and caused turmoil to residents and now propose a referendum (poll) on a relief road?

### **Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation**

The Rotherwas Access Road is of major significance to the county. There is a need to address this issue through the proposed poll as outlined in the notice of motion. Professional input from officers on the format of a question relating to the construction of a road would be required.

### **Question from Councillor GFM Dawe**

7 *Is the Council committed to maintaining the current level of bus services, despite the pressures from the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR)?*

### **Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation**

Answer to question 7

The cabinet is currently assessing the impacts of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) on all of its budgets, taking into account potential impacts on the residents and the wider community. The Council is well aware of the importance of bus services and the vital access they provide to employment, education, health and other services often for the most vulnerable members of our community. The full implications of the CSR on Council budgets will not be known until after the Council's Local Government funding settlement is known in December. Subject to this the Council will do all that it can to focus on the delivery of front line services such as these.

### **Supplementary question**

Are bus services to be maintained at current levels or not?

### **Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation**

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There is likely to be a 20% cut in transport grant. This is a significant loss of income and will affect bus services. The level of maintenance will be addressed once the authority receives the full outcome of the comprehensive spending review in December. I have previously had a meeting with bus companies and will again in January 2011 to discuss the effect of the bus subsidy reductions.

### Question from Councillor GFM Dawe

8 *What is the current cost of holding a local election?*

### Answer from Councillor H Bramer, Cabinet Member Resources

Answer to question 8

Costs will vary depending on what other elections/referenda are taking place at the time, as well as the number of contested seats. Costs for the unitary elections in May 2011 are estimated at £290,000. Further enquiries should be addressed, in writing, to the Returning Officer.

**No supplementary question.**

### Question from Councillor GFM Dawe

9 *Dinedor Parish Council are concerned that the planning designation of the Village as Open Countryside is severely limiting the possibility of the minor developments that are necessary to ensure the sustainability of the community and wish to request Herefordshire Council to reconsider the designation, or other means of providing some flexibility to allow infills, development of derelict property, and developments for existing residents needing to up or down size? Will Herefordshire Council be willing to take into account flexibility on this matter?*

### Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

Answer to question 9

The key to this lies in the policies being developed as part of the Local Development Framework, and all parish councils have been encouraged to engage in this process.

**No supplementary question**

### Question from Councillor MAF Hubbard

10 *Herefordshire Council's finance department recently reported the following levels of debt to a fellow Councillor:*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Council Tax Base</i>	<i>Council Debt</i>
<i>2005-6</i>	<i>67,152.50</i>	<i>£ 66,000,000</i>
<i>2009-10</i>	<i>70,016.60</i>	<i>£118,000,000</i>
<i>2010-11</i>	<i>70,750.60</i>	<i>£125,000,000</i>

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- A *How much does each household (Band D) have to pay in council tax to service this debt, and by how much has this amount increased since the financial year 2005-6?*
- B *How much has been spent on the LDF planning and consultation since 2006 to the present day?*
- C *Can the Leader of the Council confirm that the comment he made in a public meeting in Weobley on Friday 13 November 2009 that Section 106 money would be required from every new build house in the County proposed by the LDF to help fund the Hereford ODR is still true?*

### Answer from Councillor RJ Phillips, Leader of the Council

Answer to question 10

- A The figures quoted above include all borrowing regardless of source. Broadly speaking there are two types of borrowing – supported and prudential. The costs of current prudential borrowing, which accounts for some £41m of the funding of the £125m borrowing in 2010/11, are largely met through council tax precepts. Given that the balance is largely funded from other sources generated by the local government formula it is evident that supported borrowing received as part of the annual settlement provides a major contribution to funding the council's borrowing, and is not a cost to the local taxpayer.

A number of factors, including movement in working capital and investment balances, influence when and how much is borrowed so it is not possible to provide a static figure for the split between the types of borrowing, or indeed the allocation of that borrowing to individual schemes. However, on an estimate of the current year's prudential borrowing requirement, the cost to a Band D tax payer would be in the region of £64.00.

Without such borrowing it would not be possible to deliver projects which are essential to the local community including: Riverside School, Leominster swimming pool, the new crematorium, Rotherwas relief road, enhancements to Hereford city centre, Kington library, the mortgage rescue scheme, the museum resource & learning centre at Friars Street, improvements to public toilets and improvements to disability access.

- B From 1st January 2006 to 15th November 2010 expenditure on the statutory process required to develop the LDF was £822,716. It should be noted that much of this sum is supported through external resources such as Planning Resource Grant.
- C My reference to the need for developer contributions on all non-affordable homes was made, and is made, within the context of previous and current government policy regarding infrastructure funding.

### Supplementary question

Does this response mean that the Hereford Relief Road will be subsidised by the Council.

### Answer from Councillor RJ Phillips, Leader of the Council

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We need to wait for the government announcement on the infrastructure levy. In regard to housing development this is dealt with through the planning process.

### Question from Councillor AT Oliver

- 11A *What was the total number of housing units built in the period from 1996 to 2010 across Herefordshire, and what was the total number of affordable homes built in this period?*
- B *What is the number of homes required to meet the current need for affordable housing in Herefordshire and what percentage of the total need is required in Herford City?*
- C *Is housing need projected to rise over the next decade and, if so, what are the projected figures?*

### Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

Answer to question 11

- 11A 10,921 dwellings completed in the fourteen year period. Affordable homes built and acquired equates to 1882 (NB this includes all forms of delivery not just new build.)
- B Statistical projections are available on the council's website. A local housing market area assessment is currently being undertaken which will determine the need at local area levels, including Hereford City, by giving consideration to the various methodologies used to date, resulting in an overall level of affordable housing need. Delivery of this is expected in early 2011.
- C National Household projections can be disaggregated down to regional and sub-regional levels. This was done as part of the Examination in Public into the Regional Spatial Strategy last year and, on the basis of that evidence, a figure of 18,000 new homes is projected for the period 2006 to 2026.

### Supplementary question

There has been a varying number of homes built over the last 14 years with an average of 780 homes a year. Due to the recession it is likely to be an average of 600 a year over the next 15 years, which amounts to 9,000 in total of which 3,000 is likely to be social or affordable housing. Is this figure enough housing for the county?

### Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

Collectively many housing schemes will bring forward 900 homes per year as opposed to the 600 quoted; much of which will be affordable homes.

### Question from Councillor AT Oliver



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- 12 There are concerns as to whether all professionals involved in child safe-guarding are sharing the information they hold with other agencies on each case, due to considerations of confidentiality. As the sharing of information is vital to the process for protecting children can we be assured that these confidentiality issues have now been entirely resolved?

### **Answer from Councillor JA Hyde, Cabinet Member Children's Services**

Answer to question 12

Considerations of confidentiality should not be a barrier to information sharing in the interests of safeguarding. Every effort is being made to ensure that protocols remain fit for purpose and that all staff and relevant professionals are aware of the overriding imperative to protect the vulnerable within our community, and of their responsibilities in this regard.

### **Supplementary question**

It is understood that GPs instruct health visitors not to pass on information if they have concerns with the safeguarding agencies. Can the Cabinet Member confirm this?

### **Answer from Councillor JA Hyde, Cabinet Member Children's Services**

Safeguarding vulnerable children and adults is paramount. The comments made will be picked up with the local teams and a written answer provided. Herefordshire is however, in a better position than many authorities although we must never be complacent.

### **Question from Councillor AT Oliver**

13A *What is the current amount of prudential borrowing by the Council, and how much of this borrowing has been spent on each project financed this way?*

B *What is the annual cost to each Council Tax payer of financing this borrowing?*

### **Answer from Councillor H Bramer, Cabinet Member Resources**

Answer to question 13

I refer to the answer given by the Leader to question 10A.

### **Supplementary question**

Is the Cabinet Member aware that as prudential borrowing was at £28m in 2009 and is at £41m to date, can he advise what the balance of the £13m has been spent on and what individual projects has the Director of Resources allocated these funds to?

### **Answer from Councillor H Bramer, Cabinet Member Resources**

The Cabinet Member advised that he was happy to provide a written answer to the question with a breakdown of where the £13m has been allocated.