

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 4 FEBRUARY 2011

Question from D Phelps, Hereford

Question 1

The JOINT CORPORATE PLAN under 'Economic development and enterprise' seeks as a LONG TERM OUTCOME 1.1, 'Higher quality, better paid jobs and reduced unemployment' and one of the Council's justifications for growth is the need to improve wages and services in the county:

How many jobs have been created and how much have wages increased in Herefordshire as a result of new housing built over the last five years?

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

Answer to Question 1

The data is not available to assess the difference housing building specifically has made. However we have maintained our record for low unemployment in the county. Given our sustained investment in regeneration initiatives, such as Hereford City and the current work on superfast broadband as an example, housing provision must reflect anticipated future growth as well as meeting the needs of the existing resident population in the county.

Question from A Fisher, Hereford

Question 2

The draft JOINT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2011/14 dated 12 January 2011 indicates Local Transport Plan funding has been cut but that further funding may be available for 'both capital and revenue need' through the new Local Sustainable Transport Fund (para 2.9.1)

What steps is the Council taking to ensure that it retains and enhances its capacity to plan and deliver modal shift to walking cycling and public transport in the face of cuts in grant funding, the availability of the new Local Sustainable Transport Fund and its decision to shed 250 FTE posts?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

Answer to Question 2

The local sustainable transport fund provides a significant opportunity to secure funding for this important work and the Council plans to submit a bid. The changes to our delivery arrangements for highways and transport improvements with Amey Herefordshire have already reduced the cost of management of the service, and enables access to additional delivery capacity as and when funds become available.

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Question from Mrs J Straker, Fownhope, Hereford

Question 3

JOINT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2011/14 AND BUDGET UPDATE 2011/12, New Homes Bonus

How will the Council spend the estimated £660,000 p.a. it expects to receive from the New Homes Bonus?

Answer from Councillor H Bramer, Resources

Answer to Question 3

The Medium Term Financial Strategy sets out the Council's future spending plans; anticipated income from the New Homes Bonus is not ring-fenced for any specific purpose, and is being used as part of the overall funding target.

Question from D Straker, Fownhope, Hereford

Question 4

JOINT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2011/14 AND BUDGET UPDATE 2011/12, New Homes Bonus

Since the Council is expecting income from the New Homes Bonus, where will the new homes in Herefordshire be built between now and 2014 (please indicate numbers of homes in each location)?

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis, Environment and Strategic Housing

Answer to Question 4

It is not possible to identify exactly either the number or location of future housing development; this will be guided by the current Unitary Development Plan and its successor, the Local Development Framework (LDF) which is currently in development.

The draft LDF does not project any significant growth in the rate of new housing provision from that which has been taking place in the county in the last 15 years. New and affordable homes will be built to match local need, the birth rate and economic growth, and the LDF reflects the need to ensure that this vital housing provision is closely aligned to improvements to the county infrastructure.

Question from C Nicholls, Sutton St Nicholas, Hereford

Question 5

JOINT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2011/14 AND BUDGET UPDATE 2011/12, New Homes Bonus.

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Given the reduced resources in the period ahead and the Council's expectations of earnings from the New Homes Bonus, how many new homes earning the New Homes bonus will be built in Herefordshire between now and 2014 and of these how many will be affordable?

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis, Environment and Strategic Housing

Answer to Question 5

The rate of house building is outside the direct control of the Council. The typical annual house building rate for the County varies between 500 and 1000 depending on market conditions.

I would also refer the questioner to the answer provided to question 4 above.

Question from S Brown, Bucknell, Herefordshire

Question 6

THE HEREFORDSHIRE PUBLIC SERVICES VISION refers to Long Term Outcomes of 1.1 'The regeneration of Herefordshire', and 4.3 'Enhancing local democracy and community engagement' while the report to Cabinet on the Joint Corporate Plan states that 'all the key issues the people of Herefordshire regard as important, drawn from various consultations' are capable of being covered in the plan'...

What account has been taken of the 13000 signature petition given to Herefordshire Council asking for a halt to the ESG retail centre and a re-assessment?

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

Answer to Question 6

The petition was received in November 2009. The five recommendations contained in the petition have been taken into consideration, together with other consultations, and reflected in adjustments to the Master Plan.

It is not a simple case of 'either the redevelopment of the livestock market site or enhancement of the city centre'; these are not mutually exclusive. Both are vital elements to the future sustainability of the city and the county, and in addition to pursuing our longer-term ambitions for the old livestock market site and surrounding area we have continued to progress enhancements within the city itself including completing the redevelopment of Widemarsh Street, supporting retailers through activity such as the launch of the Truffle Card, and progressing plans for the enhancement of the Buttermarket site. At a time when, due to the economic climate, many other city regeneration plans are faltering, it is a mark of the value we all place on the future of our city and county that our plans continue to become a reality.

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Question from B Mee, Hereford

Question 7

JOINT CORPORATE PLAN, 'PRIORITY THEMES', STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1. 'Improve infrastructure and learning and employment opportunities, enabling business growth and sustainable prosperity for all'; LONG TERM OUTCOMES 1.5, 'Better roads, reduced traffic congestion, with more people walking, cycling or using public transport'.

'More people walking, cycling and using public transport' has been a stated policy aim of Herefordshire Council for some time. As a result of its level of investment in sustainable transport measures in the Council's first two Local Transport Plans, how many car trips have been transferred to walking, to cycling, and to public transport so far and how many more car trips does the Council intend to transfer to these modes as a result of future investment under 'the reduced resources in the period ahead'? (para 5 in the report to Cabinet on the Joint Corporate Plan 20 January 2011)

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

Answer to Question 7

Since 2003/04 surveys indicate that the number of vehicle movements on non-trunk roads within Hereford has decreased somewhat and on rural routes the number of vehicles has remained constant. Over the same period cycle and rail use has increased. Overall countywide bus use has declined slightly, but there is a marked difference where this decline has occurred. Within Hereford City bus use has declined significantly. This is in large part due to commercial decisions made by the bus operator regarding profitability of underused routes. Within rural areas where the Council has provided investment through the Low-Floor Bus Project bus usage has been increasing. Future targets for transfer have not yet been set.

Question from Mrs P Hughes, Hereford

Question 8

JOINT CORPORATE PLAN, 'PRIORITY THEMES', STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1. 'Improve infrastructure and learning and employment opportunities, enabling business growth and sustainable prosperity for all'; LONG TERM OUTCOMES 1.5, 'Better roads, reduced traffic congestion, with more people walking, cycling or using public transport'.

What levels of walking, cycling and public transport use (and by what year) will enable the Council to determine how well it is progressing on this 'long-term outcome'?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

Answer to Question 8

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Whilst the questioner refers to the outgoing plan, reduced congestion and a shift in transport habits remains important and the Council sees this as making an important contribution to securing the growth and sustainability of Herefordshire.

Question from Ms C Protherough, Clehonger, Hereford

Question 9

The draft JOINT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2011/14 dated 12 January 2011 states that 'the financial management strategy for increasing capital investment capacity centres on maximising developers' contributions ...' (para 7.9.6)

What impact will the Council's plans to maximise developer contributions have on the rate of house-building in the County and in particular on the rate of build of affordable homes?

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

Answer to Question 9

These plans will have no impact on the rate of house building.

Question from Ms P Mitchell, Hereford

Question 10

JOINT CORPORATE PLAN, 'VISION' Value for money

What are the Council's criteria for demonstrating 'value for money' and how will both these criteria and demonstrations of value for money be made available to the public?

Answer from Councillor H Bramer, Cabinet Member Resources

Answer to Question 10

As part of the external audit process the Audit Commission must assess the Council's performance in delivering Value for Money against nationally specified criteria contained in the Code of Audit Practice and can be found on Audit Commissions website at: <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgov/audit/auditmethodology/pages/valueformoneyconclusion.aspx>

As a result of the external auditor's independent assessment of the council's performance delivering Value for Money the Audit commission issued an unqualified conclusion on the Council's arrangements to secure the three key elements of Value for Money (economy, efficiency and effectiveness). This is part of the Annual Audit Letter which is a public document available on the Council's website at: <http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=568&MIId=3222&Ver=4>

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Question from Mrs M Brown, Hereford

Question 11

THE JOINT CORPORATE PLAN refers to 'Affordable housing appropriate to people's needs' (Long term outcome 5.3)

How have the Comprehensive Spending Review, public sector cutbacks, increased unemployment and the 'reduced resources for available in the period ahead' (Report to Cabinet on Joint Corporate Plan 2011-2014, para 5) affected the number of affordable homes needed in Herefordshire and the Council's ability to ensure that they are supplied over the life time of the JCP?

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

Answer to Question 11

We anticipate more people will need access to affordable housing although the impacts of the changes referred to cannot at this stage be quantified. The Council is awaiting the outcome of a local housing market assessment to obtain an up to date view of affordable housing need; the results are expected by April.

Question from Ms M Burns, Hereford

Question 12

THE JOINT CORPORATE PLAN refers in 'OUR VISION' to 'avoidable ... accidents' and 'doing all we can to combat climate change' and its 'PRIORITY THEMES', STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES and 'LONG TERM OUTCOMES' specifically set many goals that would be supported by fairer management of the road network to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists of all ages (for example LONG TERM OUTCOMES 1.5, 'Better roads, reduced traffic congestion, with more people walking, cycling or using public transport', 3.1 'Children and young people are healthy and have healthy lifestyles with less obesity...', 4.5 'Fewer accidents and injuries', 6.2 'Reduced CO2 emissions ..', 6.5 'Investment in high quality streets...' etc. etc.

When will the Council 'spend to save' and get value for money by introducing 20mph speed limits in all residential and shopping streets and continuous pavements and mandatory cycle lanes on higher speed roads in order to ensure that the road networks in Hereford and our market towns are attractive and safe for sustainable active travel on foot and by bicycle?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

Answer to Question 12

It is not the Council's policy to pursue such a blanket aim, even were it affordable. However, we are progressively implementing 20mph zones around schools and 30mph

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zones in villages and will continue to implement measures that improve safety and encourage walking/cycling, within the resources available.

Question from S Rowe, Hereford

Question 13

JOINT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY According to p65 of the draft Joint Medium Term Financial Strategy, annual capital expenditure will fall from nearly £75m in 2010/11 to under £15m in 2013/14.

What specific areas of the Council's operations are covered by this capital expenditure and how will the proportions of the available funds spent on each vary between 2010/11 and 2013/14?

Answer from Councillor H Bramer, Cabinet Member Resources

Answer to Question 13

Capital expenditure delivers 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 Reserve Scheme, the Museum Resource and Learning Centre at Friars Street and improvements to disability access.

Over the period 2010/11 to 2013/14 the Council will see a reduction in capital expenditure across all areas largely as a result of central government funding for major schemes such as the replacement schools programme coming to an end. In 2013/14 our two largest areas of capital expenditure will still be in Children's Services with £4.8m for Schools Maintenance and Sustainable Communities with £9.8m for Highways Maintenance.