

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 4 MARCH 2011

Question from Councillor PJ Edwards of Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

- 1 *Given Hereford City and its surrounding roads recent traffic gridlock due to emergency Transco Gas repairs at Newmarket Street, what powers will be used in future, in an attempt to reduce such major disruption?*

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

Answer to question 1

- 1 The Highways Agency is currently responsible for the management of trunk roads including the A49.

I agree with Councillor Edwards that the emergency repairs to the gas leak caused considerable traffic disruption and we took up the issue with the Highways Agency in our overall traffic management role. I acknowledge that the management and communication of highway works at this highly traffic sensitive location was not satisfactory and I have asked the officers to take this matter up with the Highways Agency to ensure that their management of similar issues is managed much more efficiently in the future. I have asked for a report back on the outcome of the talks to determine whether or not further action is necessary.

Question from Councillor PJ Edwards of Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

- 2 *Given that the County Local Development Framework (LDF) programme is now being delayed approx 12 months, when will the Hereford City (including immediate surroundings) Local Plan be made available for Public Scrutiny? Meanwhile, how will speculative Planning Applications be judged, specifically in relation to desperate improvements of infrastructure required?*

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

Answer to question 2

- 2 Cllr Edwards will be aware from the report elsewhere on Council's agenda that the legislative background is now changing significantly and we are proposing to amend the LDF timetable to enable the implications of those legislative changes to be fully considered. A report on timetable and options for progressing this will be considered by Cabinet in June, but it is reasonable to assume that consultation of the subsidiary area plans will not begin in advance of adoption of the core strategy. In the interim, the policies of the Unitary Development Plan continue to provide a suitable planning policy framework for the management of development.

Question from Councillor PJ Edwards of Councillors: JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing and H Bramer, Cabinet Member Resources

- 3 *The Hereford Times (February 10 edition) referred to The Belmont Oval Community Plan with “much of the 1950’s housing stock to be eventually demolished and rebuilt” what contribution to the scheme is being considered by Herefordshire Council and when is this housing renewal likely to be implemented?*

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

Answer to question 3

- 3 Herefordshire Council has developed a Local Investment Plan, agreed by the Homes & Communities Agency, which identifies the Oval Regeneration Project, relating to properties owned by Herefordshire Housing Ltd (HHL), as a strategic priority for the County. No financial commitment has been made by the Council we will support HHL in seeking other sources of funding. We are awaiting details on HHL’s timetable for the implementation of any finalised proposals following the community consultation and financial options appraisals. Hereford Futures are offering technical support to progress the options appraisals.

Question from Councillor DC Taylor of Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

- 4 *Is the Cabinet Member aware of the accident at the Sterecycle waste recycling plant at Rotherham in January, which was reported by BBC News (South Yorkshire)? A waste incinerator exploded which resulted in a tragic death when the building collapsed into the road. This was of a similar construction to that which was proposed for the Madley site.*

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that it was fortuitous that Herefordshire and Worcestershire Councils did not proceed with the proposed autoclave unit which could have resulted in a similar tragedy at Madley?

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

Answer to question 4

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- 4 I am unable to comment on the causes of the incident referred to which is currently subject to an independent investigation. However I am pleased that the Council's waste disposal contractor, Mercia Waste Management, has secured planning consent for Energy from Waste facility at Hartlebury in Worcestershire; this uses tried and tested technology with a strong safety record.
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Question from Councillor RI Matthews of Councillor AJM Blackshaw, Cabinet Member Economic Development and Community Services

- 5 *Can the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Community Services inform Council of how many new jobs have been created in the County during the past four years?*

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

Answer to question 5

- 5 This information is not captured by any statistics.

However, in terms of unemployment figures it is pleasing to note that Herefordshire has shown a degree of resilience during the recent economic downturn, especially when compared to the regional and national picture.

In March 2007 the unemployment rate in Herefordshire was 1.4%, this compared to 3.2% for the West Midlands and 2.4% for England. The most recent figures (Jan 2011) show that the unemployment rate for Herefordshire is now 2.4% but that those for the West Midlands have risen to 4.7% and those for England to 3.6%.

Although the county's unemployment rate has risen by 1% in the past four years, the peak of unemployment occurred in February 2010 when it was 2.8%. The unemployment increase in Herefordshire is also demonstrably less than the increase in the West Midlands (1.5% increase) and for England (1.2% increase).

Question from Councillor RI Matthews of Councillor H Bramer, Cabinet Member Resources

- 6 *Can the Cabinet Member for Resources tell Council how much has been raised from the sale of Council assets during his term of office?*

Answer from Councillor H Bramer, Cabinet Member Resources

Answer to question 6

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6 £7,016,079 (June 2007 – March 2011)

Question from Councillor AT Oliver of Councillor AJM Blackshaw, Cabinet Member Economic Development and Community Services

- 7A *Would the Cabinet Member confirm whether any cuts to the library service are planned?*
- 7B *Will opening hours for staff be reduced for instance. If so what are the total savings expected?*
- 7C *Are any improvements to the library service being planned to increase library use?*

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

Composite answer to question 7

- 7 As is the case nationally, the library service, along with other local authority services, will be required to meet budget savings. However, unlike many other authorities, the target savings for 2011/12 are only £200,000 from a £1.8 budget and we have no plans to close any of the core market town libraries. How the savings are made will be informed by the Future Libraries Programme, the developing Library Strategy and consultation with users and communities. The strategy will look at opportunities to improve access to library services whilst delivering those services more cost effectively, as well as how we can ensure that libraries play their full part as community hubs.

Question from Councillor AT Oliver of Councillor PD Price, Cabinet Member ICT, Education and Achievement

- 8A *Significant savings are stated to have been made within the Children and Young People's Directorate. How significant, i.e. what is the number of staff reductions, and what is the total saving in the Directorate's budget?*
- 8B *How will this effect service delivery in the directorate and what services are being reduced or lost?*

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

Answer to question 8

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- 8A The directorate expects to have achieved savings of £1.4 to £1.5 million by the end of the financial year.

The CYPD restructure identified a net reduction of 35.4 posts, the savings from which are included in the above figure.

- 8B The council will continue to place the needs and aspirations of the children and young people of Herefordshire at the heart of what it does. National policy changes (and their associated funding cuts) mean that we will no longer carry out some work, such as School Improvement Partners, and there are also nationally significant changes to the models for schools provision. The impacts of these changes are still being worked through in line with the budget principles reported to Council in February, but it is clear that, together with the reductions in public spending, services will increasingly become targeted on supporting those most vulnerable or in need.

Question from Councillor AT Oliver of Councillor AJM Blackshaw, Cabinet Member Economic Development and Community Services

- 9A *A review of all advice services provided by the Council and third parties was proposed in 2009 and a strategy drawn up under guidance from consultants. Would the Cabinet Member state why this review appears to have been abandoned and provide details of the total amount spent on this review to date and the cost of the consultants involved?*
- 9B *Does this Council consider that the provision of debt advice to local residents should be a priority in the current financial situation?*

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

Answer to question 9

- 9A The review has not been abandoned. The cost of consultants in drawing up a framework was £8,640. The development of this framework is now being undertaken by officers.
- 9B Yes.

Questions from Councillor GFM Dawe of Councillor RJ Phillips, Leader of the Council

- 10 Growth Point Status

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- 10A *What is the current status of the Growth Point status partnership agreement signed with central government in 2006?*
- 10B *How much money has Herefordshire Council received from central government as a result of the partnership agreement? What has it been spent on?*
- 10C *What conditions, if any, apply to funding received as a result of Hereford's Growth Point status?*

Answers from Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment & Strategic Housing

Answer to question 10

- 10A The status remains unchanged.
- 10B In total the Council has received almost £500,000 grant for revenue expenditure and £1,460,000 for capital projects. The revenue funding has been used to develop the evidence base for the LDF. The capital element will be used to help fund the Connect2 Cycle Project and to provide sustainable transport measures associated with the new Livestock Market.
- 10C The only specific grant condition applying to Growth Point grants is that capital funding is spent on capital projects.
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11 Population growth proposed for Herefordshire:

Analysis of housing needs show that some of the new housing will be occupied by people coming into the county.

- 11A *What analysis has been done of where people will come from?*
- 11B *What percentage of the new housing will be taken by in-migration?*
- 11C *What analysis is there of what jobs people will do and how they will get to those jobs?*

Answers from Councillor JG Jarvis Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

Answer to question 11

We have made a clear commitment to ensure that Herefordshire remains both sustainable and vibrant by providing the right level of growth, similar to the past. This requires a holistic view to be taken of the development of housing, employment, transport, utilities and community infrastructure.

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- 11A It is not possible to accurately state where they will come from, however historically around three quarters of people moving into Herefordshire come from London and SE England.
- 11B It is not possible to say. The affordable element of new housing schemes will be specifically aimed at meeting local housing needs.
- 11C No such analysis exists. Housing growth is dealt with in the context of the UDP/LDF which ensure that relevant infrastructure, including employment land, is provided to support employment and travel needs of the population.
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12 ESG in Hereford Preferred Option

Para 3.16 [in the Hereford Preferred Option] states ESG will mean Herefordians will shop in Hereford which is more sustainable than them travelling to Worcester, Cheltenham, Bristol and Cardiff.

12A *Where is the evidence to prove this?*

12B *ESG literature claims the new ESG retail centre will draw on a population of 400,000. This means many people will have to travel into Hereford to make it viable (as the total population of the county is only 176,000). Many Herefordians travelling to Worcester, Bristol and Cardiff may do so by train. Has this been taken into account when considering the sustainability of travel modes and ESG?*

Paragraph 3.36 states the retail study on-street surveys found that a fifth of people questioned wanted to see more non-food shopping. This actually seems very low. The evidence here is saying four fifths of people questioned weren't bothered about more non food shopping provision and presumably were happy with the current city centre.

12C *How has the 4/5th majority view been ignored?*

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

Answer to question 12

The future of the city can only be secured by delivery of an integrated package of improvements, of which an improved retail offer forms a part. The amended masterplan for the Edgar Street area has already been significant in ensuring the continued protection of the city centre as it is used in the consideration of planning applications for out-of town retail provision.

12A Para 3.16 of the Hereford Preferred Option paper, which has not yet been adopted, doesn't refer to the Edgar Street area, but rather the role of the city as a major market centre and referencing a PPS4 assessment that was

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informed by a retail study published in November 2010, available on the Council website.

12B Yes

12C This interpretation of the survey findings is misleading. The survey asked people to rank their top choices on "What they would like to see more of in the City Centre" – 21.2% put more non-food shopping at the top of their list – others chose alternative items such as more food shopping, more services such as banks and building societies, more leisure facilities such as cinemas and so on. It is inaccurate to infer that 4/5^{ths} of responders were actually against improvements in the City Centre.

Question 13 disallowed on the grounds that the question is the same or similar to a question raised in the last six months (19 November 2010) Herefordshire Council Constitution Part 4, 4.1.15.4 c.

14 Regional Growth Fund / LEP

14A *How was the decision arrived at for the £130,000,000 bid for the Edgar Street Grid Link Road and associated works, to be submitted to the Regional Growth Fund via the Local Enterprise Partnership?*

14B *What were the roles of the officers / elected members?*

14C *Can a breakdown be provided of this proposed expenditure?*

Answers from Councillor A Blackshaw, cabinet Member Economic & Community Services

Answer to question 14

14A At no point has the figure of £130,000,000 been given in relation to the link road. Hereford Futures, as the delivery company for this project, submitted a bid on the basis that the Link Road will facilitate the creation of a significant number of private sector jobs within the Retail Quarter and will open up land for housing development. The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) reviewed bid proposals from within their area, and endorsed the submission of this bid.

14B Council officers and members were involved in the formulation of the technical and financial evidence submitted within the RGF bid, and in supporting the LEP's assessment of the bid.

14C No; the financial information supplied as a part of the RGF application is commercially confidential.

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Question 15 disallowed on the grounds that it is the same or similar to a question raised in the last six months (4 March 2011 - the same question has been raised by a member of the public) Herefordshire Council Constitution Part 4, 4.1.15.4 c.

Question 16A disallowed on the grounds that it is the same or similar to a question raised in the last six months (4 March 2011 - the same question has been raised by a member of the public) Herefordshire Council Constitution Part 4, 4.1.15.4 c.

Question 16B disallowed on the grounds that it is the same or similar to a question raised in the last six months (4 March 2011 - the same question has been raised by a member of the public) Herefordshire Council Constitution Part 4, 4.1.15.4 c.

Questions from Councillor WLS Bowen of Councillor H Bramer, Cabinet Member Resources

- 17 *Is it possible to inform all parish councils of all reductions in funding that will be coming their way in the coming financial year? Will the Council ensure that any extra duties and responsibilities put upon parish councils are properly resourced?*

Answers from Councillor H Bramer, Cabinet Member Resources

Answer to question 17

- 17 Parish Councils are responsible for setting their own budgets and have independent precepting powers that inform the setting of the overall council tax as detailed elsewhere on Council's agenda today.

We are not placing 'extra duties and responsibilities' upon Parish Councils in the coming financial year. However this administration has made a commitment to work with parish councils during the coming summer as part of the preparation for the 2012/13 budget. In light of both the reductions in public funding and the national 'Big Society' agenda, we will be working with Parish Councils and other community groups to explore future service provision options. This dialogue will be guided by a refreshed Parish Charter, currently being developed in partnership with Parish Councils, and the emerging locality and community engagement strategies.