

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 3 FEBRUARY 2012

Question from Councillor EMK Chave of Councillor PD Price, Cabinet Member, Corporate Services and Education

- 1 *By what process is monitoring of actual savings and overspends against each year's budget carried out? We are often told that a strategy will achieve such and such a percentage saving. Who checks this is real, and to whom do they report?*

Answer from Councillor PD Price Cabinet Member, Corporate Services and Education

Answer to question 1

Savings and overspends form part of the Council's overall net budget monitoring, reported regularly to Cabinet (the reports being available on the council web site). In addition the directorates have more detailed challenge and review processes supported by their accountants. All savings proposals undergo a rigorous challenge process before they are adopted.

Question from Councillor EMK Chave of Councillor PD Price, Cabinet Member, Corporate Services and Education

- 2 *In the interests of openness, transparency and accountability to the general public whose money the Council spends, and whom they serve, why are the budgets and accounts presented in such a confusing way? Apparently even accountants, who like looking at figures, find them obscure and potentially misleading!*

Answer from Councillor PD Price Cabinet Member, Corporate Services and Education

Answer to question 2

All English and Welsh councils' published accounts must comply with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting, which consolidates the statutory and accounting standards the council is legally required to follow including, since 2010/11, compliance with International Financial Reporting Standards. The Audit Commission have commented favourably on our approach

The council presents its overall budget envelope as part of its financial plan and has used this approach for a number of years.

In addition, to accompany the council tax notifications sent to each household in the county every March, we provide a summary guide to explain how

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council tax payers' money is used; these guides are also available on the council website.

Supplementary Question

In referring to her earlier question Councillor Chave stated she expected to see laid before Council with this year's budget, the headings and figures for last year's budget, along with the actual income and expenditure in columns and an explanatory note if required. Without this information the Councillor believed Council could not make an informed decision on the budget. May Council expect for next year the budget is laid out with this information?

Answer from Councillor PD Price, Cabinet Member Corporate Services and Education

The Cabinet Member stated that the presentation of the report would be looked at in time for next year's budget to ensure absolute transparency. It was added that the Audit Commission had been pleased with the Council's budget report and statement of accounts.

Question from Councillor MAF Hubbard of Councillor PD Price, Cabinet Member Corporate Services and Education

Question 3 disallowed on the grounds that it is frivolous or otherwise out of order, see Herefordshire Council Constitution Part 4, 4.1.15.4 b.

Question from Councillor RI Matthews of Councillor PM Morgan, Cabinet Member, Health and Wellbeing

- 4 *A recent report for Herefordshire Council Health and Wellbeing Board stated that about 4,500 children in the county – the majority of them under 16 years – are said to be growing up in poverty. Can the Cabinet Member please inform Members of what action is being taken to address this frankly shocking issue? (Council Agenda page 72, bullet point 5 – Deprivation.)*

Answer from Councillor PM Morgan Cabinet Member, Health and Wellbeing

Answer to question 4

This question illustrates the great importance of one of the six priorities in the joint corporate plan which is to "Create a thriving economy" hence increasing employment opportunities and wage levels.

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There are many actions that have and will be taken to improve the economic prosperity of Herefordshire such as:

- Improving Broadband coverage
- Development of the Enterprise Zone at Rotherwas
- Relief road around Hereford
- Hereford Futures
- Adoption of the Local Development Framework

I look forward to all groups supporting us in these ventures.

A county-wide strategy (a draft of which is available at the following weblink: <http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/documents/s50003630/Child%20Poverty%20Strategy%20FINAL%20DRAFT%20December%202011%20-%20Appendix.pdf>) to address this important issue is scheduled for consideration by Cabinet on 16th February, having been endorsed by the Health & Wellbeing Board in January.

Supplementary Question

Can the Cabinet Member assure Council that this matter will be closely monitored and that the administration will do all that it can to improve the situation for young people?

Answer from Councillor PM Morgan Cabinet Member, Health and Wellbeing

The Cabinet Member welcomed the question from the Councillor and agreed this was a serious issue. The matter was being discussed by young people at the young people's forum this week. The matter would also be brought before the Health and Wellbeing Board and Cabinet.

Question from Councillor GA Powell of Councillor JG Jarvis, Leader of the Council

Question 5 disallowed on the grounds that it is out of order and the decision is at the discretion of the Chairman, see Herefordshire Council Constitution Part 4, 4.1.15.4 b and 4.1.7.1.
