

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 JULY 2014

Question from Councillor NP Nenadich

Home Visits

- 1 *Given that we as a Council have pledged to protect / assist the "most" vulnerable is it possible to consider home visits being increased from 15 minutes to 30 at this time? This interaction for so many may well constitute their only human contact and allow greater personal assistance.*

Answer from Councillor GJ Powell, Cabinet Member Health & Wellbeing

Answer to question 1

Currently the provision of 15 minute home care calls accounts for only 1% of total delivery within Herefordshire. We are working to remove these shorter duration calls completely. Where these calls are for medication prompts we will be working with individuals to use appropriate assistive technology. Actual care visits should be of an appropriate length to deliver a meaningful level of contact, care and support.

There are some vulnerable people in our community who have very little personal interaction and we are working with our voluntary and community sector to increase the number of groups and individuals in communities who look out for their neighbours. A 15 minute visit from a friend or neighbour can make the difference between social inclusion and rural isolation.

Supplementary Question

How are we developing initiatives to protect the most vulnerable?

Answer from Councillor GJ Powell, Cabinet Member Health & Wellbeing

We are having a housing seminar with private developers and Registered Social Landlords that will look at housing development in particular for elderly residents. The Cabinet Member- Infrastructure and I are working on a range of health and social care initiatives with Wye Valley Trust the 2gether Trust and the Herefordshire Clinical Commissioning Group to discuss initiatives. We will also continue to work with communities and volunteers.

Question from Councillor DB Wilcox

River Island Building – High Town

- 2.1 *The fire-damaged buildings adjoining Ann Summers in High Town continues to give cause for concern. Despite four years having elapsed since the fire, this eyesore continues to be a blot on the city centre*

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landscape. I am aware that discussions have taken place with insurers, owners and developers and various hopes and aspirations have been expressed. However despite all these, little has been achieved and I would ask if the Cabinet Member will actively consider taking appropriate action to bring this matter to a conclusion in the near future.

In particular, I would seek answers to the following points:

- (a) As the scaffolding and boarding continue to project into part of a designated highway, is there a proper permit currently in force allowing the continuing obstruction of the highway in this manner and if so when does this permit expire?*
 - (b) Can the Council either terminate such a permit and/or refuse to issue another one unless the Council can be satisfied that suitable works are to be carried out over a restricted period?*
- 2.2 Please advise as to what statutory notices can be served or other enforcement action taken under planning, highway or other legislation to require the restoration of the building and removal of the scaffolding and boarding.*
- 2.3 Depending on the answers given to the above can the cabinet member confirm what action he proposes to instigate to bring this matter to a suitable conclusion at the earliest opportunity?*

Answer from Councillor PD Price, Cabinet Member Infrastructure

Answer to question 2

This is a long-standing and protracted matter. The scaffolding around the front of the building (which has the appropriate license in place) is safeguarding the façade of the building from collapse. This is to be retained as part of the approved rebuilding scheme. Whilst the council does have powers to remove obstructions from the highway, we could not unreasonably withhold a licence for scaffolding required for this purpose.

Officers have recently inspected the building and are satisfied that the building is secure and that the historic elements to be retained are protected from wind and water.

The key to the rebuilding of the property rests with its letting on the commercial market. Officers and I are doing all that we can to encourage the owners to bring this matter to a speedy conclusion. In doing so we are working with businesses and other property owners in High Town. However should these discussions not prove fruitful options for more formal enforcement action will be considered in the autumn.

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Supplementary Question

What statutory powers are available to the council to take enforcement, or other action, as I asked at paragraph 2.2 above?

Answer from Councillor PD Price, Cabinet Member Infrastructure

There are statutory enforcement powers available to us but these could be very expensive to use. We have discussed the situation with the owners and their agent. They have confirmed that they want to return the property to its previous use. The Council would prefer to reach a mutual agreement rather than take enforcement action. I will inform Councillor Wilcox in the early Autumn of how negotiations have gone.

Question from Councillor P McCaull

Wind Turbine at The Earl Mortimer College, Leominster

- 3 *Recent press coverage has raised concerns regarding the return on investment made by the Welsh Assembly and Rushcliffe Borough Council when installing wind turbines, and noting that the supply company has gone into liquidation. I understand that the turbine fitted at The Earl Mortimer College in Leominster is the identical model as the Welsh Assembly one and therefore ask:*
- a) *Was it supplied by the same company as the Welsh Assembly and no longer in existence which means there is no-one to maintain it? (Company – Quiet Revolution)*
 - b) *What was the total cost of supply, fix and any maintenance so far?*
 - c) *How much electricity is it producing per month, in money as a return?*
 - d) *How many years is it going to take to get back that money even if no more money has to be spent from now on?*
 - e) *Or is this another case of misspending rates and tax payers money?*

Answer from Councillor H Bramer Cabinet Member Contracts & Assets

Answer to question 3

Given the level of detail requested I have asked officers to liaise with the school before providing a written response.

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Written Answer

- 3 a Yes it was supplied by 'Quiet Revolution'. In terms of maintenance there are a number of suppliers able to undertake such work
- 3.b The capital cost of the installation was £157,000. After a twelve month period the school chose to cease its operation on commercial grounds. Thereafter all revenue expenditure has been a matter for Earl Mortimer College to resource through its delegated funding from central government. The council has no service level agreement with the school who manage operational aspects of the site through a third party supplier.
- 3.c None – see 3 b above.
- 3 d Given the answer to 3 c above, there is no likelihood of any return on the scheme. However there was no payback expected to Herefordshire Council which did not fund the scheme.
- 3.e The scheme was funded via central government grant. There was no borrowing associated with the scheme.

Question from Councillor J Knipe

Hereford United Football Ground

4. *We are reading a great deal in the press about the re-negotiation of leases on the Edgar Street football ground. I would like to know whether a due diligence report was prepared on behalf of Herefordshire Council to establish the financial credibility of Hereford United prior to the leases being amended in the last year. If a report has been prepared could it be released to avoid unnecessary speculation?*

Answer from Councillor H Bramer Cabinet Member Contracts & Assets

Answer to question 4

I understand that the future of football in Hereford is generating a high level of speculation in some quarters. The council has been aware of the situation the football club has been facing for some time and has been doing what it can to support the retention of league football in the county whilst protecting public assets.

The council carried out the appropriate level of due diligence when restructuring the Hereford United Football Club leases, as it would do with any existing long term tenant who is not a new entity; no separate report was prepared at that time. The conditions have not been met to enable the leases to be extended beyond 2044.

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Supplementary Question

What does the Cabinet Member consider to be “an appropriate level of due diligence”, to which he refers in his answer?

Answer from Councillor H Bramer Cabinet Member Contracts & Assets

In renegotiating the leases we were in discussion with a Club with which, although in some financial difficulty, we had been dealing for a considerable time. The Council and those representing the Club wanted to allow football to continue to be played at Edgar Street. The level of due diligence undertaken with someone known to us as opposed to someone unknown to us would be completely different. We are trying to provide for football to continue to be played at Edgar Street and hope that that may still be the case.

Question from Councillor RI Matthews

Ragwort in verges

5. *Can the Cabinet Member please inform Members as to what action is being taken to deal with the serious problem of Ragwort which has been observed growing in abundance on roadside verges throughout the County, including in the immediate vicinity of the new Cattle Market? I understand from Government literature that this weed contains toxins which can have “debilitating or fatal consequences if eaten by horses and other grazing animals”.*

I feel that this matter has not been treated with the urgency it merits, and as a result Members are receiving complaints from concerned parties.

Answer to question 5

Balfour Beatty deals with this issue on behalf of the council. Treatment includes a seasonal spraying programme to aid control of ragwort in the county. Further details on how to recognise and report Ragwort are available on the council's website; members are also able to highlight particular problem areas to their locality steward. The specific concern regarding the area in the vicinity of the new livestock market has been passed to Balfour Beatty.

Supplementary Question

Will the Cabinet Member also act to control Japanese Knotweed?

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Answer from Councillor P Rone Cabinet Member Transport & Roads

I will check what action needs to be taken.

Question from Councillor RI Matthews

Franklin House

6 *I understand that the people working to provide a University of Hereford have been given an option to purchase Franklin House from the Council for a fee of £880,000.*

Can you confirm that this is so, and at the same time inform Members as to where the Customer Services will be situated if this sale should go ahead?

Answer from Councillor H Bramer Cabinet Member Contracts & Assets

Answer to question 6

This is not so. Following the motion passed by Council asking the executive to identify the most appropriate way in which the council can assist in securing the future of higher education in the county I have authorised officers to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the New University of Herefordshire and commence negotiations for options on a number of sites, one of which is Franklin House. A link to the report informing that decision is below.

<http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=2714>

Following Cabinet's consideration last September of options for the future model of customer services, which included options for the future base for customer services in the city, a further report on the council's accommodation strategy is scheduled for consideration in the autumn.

Supplementary Question

Can you assure Members that the best possible price will be sought when disposing of Council assets?

Answer from Councillor H Bramer Cabinet Member Contracts & Assets

We have a duty to obtain the best possible price at the time a disposal takes place.

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Question from Councillor MD Lloyd-Hayes

Children's Safeguarding

7 *In light of the importance of the Government and this Council's attempts to protect children from physical, sexual, mental and emotional abuse, would it not be prudent to insist that Members of this Council, who are all Corporate Parents attend Children's Wellbeing seminars/training in order to engage and carry out their statutory duty effectively?*

Answer from Councillor J Millar Cabinet Member Young People and Children's Wellbeing

Answer to question 7

I agree that every member of this council should attend training and briefing sessions on this important issue, which was highlighted by the Health & Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee's task & finish review. I share Cllr Lloyd-Hayes' concern and will take the matter up with Group Leaders with a view to introducing some mandatory corporate parenting and safeguarding training from 2015, and ensuring that such opportunities are accessible to all members.

Supplementary Question

Could consideration be given to reducing the allowances of Members who do not carry out their corporate parenting role effectively?

Answer from Councillor J Millar Cabinet Member Young People and Children's Wellbeing

That is not within my remit. I will suggest that it is raised with Group Leaders.