

Agenda item no. 5 - Questions from members of the public

(Appendix 1)

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Mr P McKay, Leominster	The Ordnance Survey Getoutside Greenspaces Map encouraging us to be 'A More Active, Greener, Healthier Nation' does not presently show some of our Greenspaces such as Credenhill Park Wood, Bromyard Downs, Bircher Common, etc., and I ask if Herefordshire Council, as part of its role monitoring the implementation of the Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy, will provide Ordnance Survey with authoritative feedback requesting that all our green open spaces be shown?	Cabinet member infrastructure
<p>Response: Thank you for raising this issue. The dataset used to produce the Ordnance Survey (OS) 'Greenspace' digital mapping was created without this council's involvement. I have asked officers to write to OS raising your concerns.</p>			
PQ 2	Mr M Finning, Ross-on-Wye	There is an adolescent mental health epidemic, reported on almost daily. Sadly, in Herefordshire, hospital admissions for youngsters due to mental health issues is more than double the national average. This was in a report provided to the Council and reported in the Hereford Times. In light of this, do the members of the Council support the highly significant numbers of young people in the county who suffer from anxiety, panic attacks and poor mental health?	Cabinet member children and families
<p>Response: Yes we do, along with our partners including such groups as the No Wrong Door Herefordshire Voluntary Organisations Support Service, other community and voluntary organisations, schools, colleges as well as health services such as health visitors, school nurses and more specialised services that are funded by Herefordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and provided by 2Gether NHS Trust. It's a really important area and something I am focused on with our partners.</p> <p>The mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people continues to be a priority for this council, Herefordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, Wye Valley NHS Trust and 2Gether NHS Trust. Through Herefordshire's Children and Young People's Partnership and our children and young people's plan that is currently being refreshed, we and our partners are committed to supporting the mental health, emotional wellbeing and other needs of children and young people through a range of universal, early help and specialist support so that they can stay safe and have a great start in life.</p> <p>I would like to provide some clarification of the local context behind nationally published figures.</p>			

Local protocols at the county hospital in Hereford result in a number of children and young people being counted as a hospital admission where in other areas they are not. This is because, when children and young people who may need support from a mental health professional arrive at the Herefordshire Accident and Emergency department, they are moved to the children's and young people's ward so that they can be provided with support in a non-stressful and highly professional environment and therefore are counted as 'admitted' even if they stay for less than a day.

When individuals admitted for less than a day are excluded from the data, the local admission rate is not significantly different from the national rate. Consequently, published figures reflect differences between routes to support rather than represent true differences in the underlying prevalence of need. The local strategic analysis reports have been updated to consider the context of local practice on nationally reported figures.

Supplementary question

Will the council show support for those in the community wishing to meet with their school to help to improve mental health issues?

Response to supplementary question

Schools had an important role to play. It would be expected that there would be discussions between the school and parents and carers with pupils at the school. The council did not have authority over schools. If there was a specific issue it was important that this was raised with the relevant school.

PQ 3	Mr S Betts, Ledbury	Is Herefordshire Council aware of the 'Plantlife' initiative to improve the wildlife carrying capacity of the Nation's road verges and of one specific neighbouring local authority example of up-take of this initiative; namely, Gloucestershire County Council's recent unanimous decision to adopt a pro-wildflower/wildlife policy of road verge management?	Cabinet member transport and regulatory services
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Response:

Yes, we are aware of the Plantlife initiative. Our [Highway Maintenance Plan](#) sets out our approach to verge maintenance. Rural carriageways are cut with a single 1m swathe width, increasing in width to incorporate appropriately sized visibility splays at junctions, bends and in front of signs. Verges wider than 1m and the vegetation beyond this point remain largely untouched, so allowing nature to run its course. Our current policy is that highway verges are cut twice a year. The first cut is expected to be completed before the late May bank holiday; the second cut before the August bank holiday. The number and timing of cuts for verges is subject to ongoing monitoring and will be considered in our current review of the Highway Maintenance Plan. We are open to a reduction in the number of cuts, and/or adjustments in the timing of our cuts, in locations were this approach is supported by the community and we are satisfied that this will not present undue risk to road users.

A number of parish councils in the county operate Lengthsman schemes which may include verge maintenance and we will ensure they are aware of the Plantlife initiative.

Supplementary question

Would he accept ongoing input from the public and other bodies to improve the management of roadside verges for wildlife purposes?

Response to supplementary question

There had been ongoing discussions with Balfour Beatty Living Places about managing the verges and maintaining diversity of plantlife. The council was looking at a way of involving parish councils to bring local knowledge to bear on what actions may be appropriate. It was hoped there would be improvement.

PQ 4	Ms M Steel, Hereford	Currently only 1 out of 8 members of the council cabinet is female, and overall less than a third of councillors (16 out of 53) are female. What steps is the Council taking to address the stark gender imbalance? The Women's Equality Group in Herefordshire is holding a meeting during Local Democracy Week on Wednesday 17th October (7.30pm at the Kindle Centre) to look at the issue of under representation of women in local democracy and the group looks forward to sharing the council's response at that meeting.	Cabinet member, finance and corporate services
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Response:

Ultimately council representation is made up by those councillors who are elected by the public. The prerequisite before we see a change in the gender balance is to see more women standing in elections to give the electorate a real choice in who they want to represent them.

Herefordshire Council is taking active steps to encourage a more diverse group of candidates to stand for election. Building on the Local Government Association's '[Be a Councillor](#)' campaign, we will be running a local campaign designed to encourage a wider range of people to consider standing for election either as a Herefordshire councillor or as a parish councillor in the county. This will include elements targeted at encouraging more women, younger people and ethnic minority groups to consider standing for election. As well as existing councillors describing their motivations and work as locally elected representatives, we will be publishing on the council's web-site details of the support that councillors elected to Herefordshire Council can expect to receive in terms of training, allowances, computer equipment and supporting policies, such as child or dependent carer support, maternity leave, and reasonable adjustment for disabled people.

I am pleased to note that some of my colleague female councillors from Herefordshire Council are attending the Women's Equality Group meeting to mark [European Democracy Week](#) on 17 October, and welcome the support of the Women's Equality Group in raising the profile of this important issue.

Supplementary question

What is the justification for the gender balance on the cabinet? If suitable candidates could not be found from the Conservative Group why could female councillors from other groups not be appointed?

Response to supplementary question

It would be unusual for an administration to involve members of other parties in their decision making body.