

## Agenda item no. 6 - Questions from members of the council

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ 1	Councillor PJ Edwards, Newton Farm	In the absence of an accurate response to my question put to Council meeting 12 <sup>th</sup> October 2018 regards the BBLP contract and selling of Grounds Equipment, please may all Members be informed of vehicles and machines which Herefordshire Council own in relation to the BBLP contract?	Cabinet member transport and regulatory services
<p><b>Response:</b> The query that you raised in relation to the Leader's report to Council in October did not receive an inaccurate response. Your query, as recorded in the minutes, was whether Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP) would be able to deliver their responsibilities to maintain the council's open spaces and verges given that it was understood that they had sold the equipment they owned required for these tasks and would therefore be reliant on third party contractors. The response confirmed that BBLP remained contracted to deliver this work, which is the case. A further query requested confirmation of the amount of money raised from the sale of equipment; this information was provided on 29 October 2018 (for ease of reference the amount was £21,548.40).</p> <p>As you will appreciate there is a significant amount of machinery and vehicles the council owns in relation to the BBLP contract; rather than produce a lengthy list here I would ask any member wishing to inspect the relevant asset register to email <a href="mailto:Laura.Lloyd@herefordshire.gov.uk">Laura.Lloyd@herefordshire.gov.uk</a> who will be able to assist.</p>			
<p><b>Supplementary Question:</b> How can the contract with BBLP be so poorly managed that council-purchased assets such as new mowers and a new tractor are not entered in the asset register and why hasn't the purchase of additional equipment not resulted in the reduction of contract costs?</p>			
<p><b>Cabinet member response to supplementary question:</b> I take exception to claim that the contract is poorly managed. A response from the contract officer would be provided.</p> <p>Response provided on 12 April 2019:</p> <p>The current list of the plant and vehicles owned by Herefordshire Council for the public realm service has been provided to Cllr Edwards, that asset register does contain 324 items of plant, including small plant such as drills, angle grinders and chainsaws through to large plant such as the New Holland T6.145 TIER 4B Tractor to which Cllr Edwards refers. In addition to these items</p>			

the list also identifies 116 items of small plant that are not currently in use for the delivery of service and may be disposed off. A further 17 items of plant are listed specifically for the delivery of service at Hereford Crematorium.

This plant together with the 12 council owned gritters and 4 council owned snow blowers are being utilised by Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP) alongside their own plant and resources and those of their sub-contractors to deliver the Public Realm Services Contract across Herefordshire. Since its inception in 2013 the contract has delivered significant cashable efficiencies.

The purchase of new equipment has contributed to this and revenue contract costs have been reduced by 1/3<sup>rd</sup> over the period. The Council has over the period invested additional capital funding in the public realm, and its highway network in particular. As a result more than 60% of the classified road network is now in good condition, compared with c50% in 2013. The proportion of the unclassified road network that is deemed in need of maintenance has also reduced by almost 10%. Clearly, an ongoing investment is required to continue this improvement in the overall condition of our public realm, and the investment of capital has been sustained over the period of this contract. In the first full year of the contract operating, which was 2014/15 the net expenditure (capital and revenue) through the contract on Public realm services was £43.2 Million, in 2015/16 £32.5 Million, 2016/17 £26 Million and in 2017/18 £32.5 Million. This level of investment in the county road assets demonstrates the Council's commitment with the support of central government to improve the maintenance of highways.

Cllr Edwards Question stems from his earlier question to Council in October 2018 in regard to the disposal of council owned plant and in particular the disposal of surplus grounds maintenance equipment at public auction in 2018. The listing below includes for all council owned plant and vehicles that have been disposed of at public auction as managed for the Council through the fleet management services provided by BBLP.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Vehicle/Equipment Description</b>	<b>Sale price</b>	<b>Department/Service Area</b>
15/10/2013	Land Rover Freelander Diesel Com	£2,100.00	Highways
15/10/2013	Land Rover Freelander Diesel Com	£1,900.00	Highways
15/10/2013	Land Rover Freelander Diesel Com	£1,900.00	Highways
15/10/2013	Land Rover Freelander Diesel Com	£1,800.00	Highways
17/10/2013	Peugeot 206 Sw Diesel Estate 1.4	£1,700.00	Highways
17/10/2013	Renault Clio Diesel Hatchback 1.4	£2,500.00	Highways
17/10/2013	Peugeot 206 Diesel Estate 1.4	£2,300.00	Highways
17/10/2013	Renault kangoo Diesel SL17dCi 85	£1,350.00	Highways

22/10/2013	Land Rover Freelander Diesel Com	£1,700.00	Highways
24/10/2013	Renault kangoo Diesel SL17dCi 85	£1,450.00	Highways
17/01/2014	Ford Transit Mini Bus	£400.00	Marshfield Leominster
17/01/2014	Leyland Daf 75 CF 26T 6x4 Gritter	£7,300.00	Highways
17/01/2014	Leyland Daf 75 CF 26T 6x4 Gritter	£6,400.00	Highways
17/01/2014	Leyland Daf 75 CF 26T 6x4 Gritter	£6,900.00	Highways
14/05/2014	Peugeot Partner Petrol 600 LX va	£250.00	Car parks team
14/05/2014	Peugeot Partner Petrol 600 LX va	£250.00	Community Protection Team
12/02/2016	Mercedes Atego 1823 Gritter	£3,800.00	Highways
15/01/2016	DAF 75CF 6x4 ECON GRITTER	£5,000.00	Highways
13/05/2016	Mercedes Atego 1823 Gritter	£3,600.00	Highways
28/07/2016	Citroen Berlingo Diesel 1.9D 600	£100.00	Home Improvement Agency
28/07/2016	Citroen Berlingo Diesel 1.6HDi 8	£200.00	Home Improvement Agency
28/07/2016	Citroen Berlingo Diesel 1.9D 600	£300.00	Home Improvement Agency
28/07/2016	Peugeot Partner Diesel 600 LX 1.	£200.00	Pest Control
28/07/2016	Peugeot Partner Diesel 600 LX 1.	£250.00	Travellers Site Admin
28/07/2016	Peugeot Expert Diesel 2.0 Hdi Va	£850.00	Trading Standards
29/09/2016	Peugeot Partner Petrol 600 LX va	£50.00	Environment Protection
30/03/2017	Peugeot 206 Hatchback 1.1 style	£316.67	Waste Disposal - General
15/06/2017	Exhibition Trailer	£1,800.00	Fairs/Markets
15/06/2017	Citroen Relay 35 Diesel 2.2 HDI	£4,800.00	Home to School College Transport
10/11/2017	Mercedes Atego 1823 Gritter	£5,200.00	Highways
10/11/2017	Mercedes Atego 1823 Gritter	£5,600.00	Highways
14/12/2017	Citroen Relay 1800 Lwb Diesel 2.8 Hdi Enterprise Minibus	£2,000.00	Transport Section

11/05/2018	Ransomes HR300 Outfront Mower	£9,300.00	Highways
11/05/2018	Ransomes HR300 Outfront Mower	£8,800.00	Highways
11/05/2018	Ifor Williams KM126G Flatbed Trailer	£900.00	Highways

All the above was disposed of as equipment that that was in use for the delivery of service, or had reached the end of its operational lifecycle and required renewal.

MQ 2	Councillor A Seldon, Bromyard West	How would the cabinet member for finance and corporate services defend the accusation that his administration proposed an unbalanced budget in 2018-19 by proposing a manifestly undeliverable budget for the Children and Families Directorate in February 2018?	Cabinet member finance and corporate services
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**Response:**

The question indicates that Councillor Seldon is suggesting there has been unlawful activity by this administration and this Council given that it is a requirement of law to set a balanced budget. Making such an outrageous accusation, suggests to me either a complete lack of understanding of local government finances and budget setting, or an attempt to grab a headline in view of forthcoming elections; neither explanation reflects well on the questioner.

Herefordshire Council's budget setting process is well established and robust. This administration's proposals in 2018, as they are every year, were reviewed by scrutiny. The particular financial challenges facing children's services were fully set out and tested by scrutiny, and the director for children's wellbeing confirmed that whilst no cast iron assurances could be given on the saving on this area he had confidence in the work that had been done in relation to the estimates. The budget proposals were reviewed and assessed as lawful by the council's section 151 officer, and debated by full Council before being voted on – a vote in which I note Councillor Seldon supported the very budget proposal that he now says was 'manifestly undeliverable'.

As a councillor active within the Local Government Association (LGA) he will recall that as recently as January this year the LGA was reporting that nearly 90% of local authorities had overspent their children's budget in 2017/18 and there is no reason to believe that the picture will be different at the end of the 2018/19 financial year. I am sure Councillor Seldon would not be intending to suggest all those authorities are similarly to be 'accused'. A further report from the LGA, "Making Sense", in the Autumn of 2018 has highlighted how little control local authorities have over children's care costs. I would be delighted to lend Cllr Seldon my copy if he wishes to cultivate an interest in this area. The reality is that nationally the pressures on children's social care are increasing whilst local government resources have been reducing. At the time the budget was set, and reflected in the medium term financial strategy, the pressures facing children's services were recognised and, as any prudent council would, we maintain close oversight of that budget and ensure that, should it prove necessary,

additional resources are made available to support that vital service. Those additional resources are only available to us because of this administration's continued prudent approach to budgeting.

**Supplementary Question:**

Is the answer to the initial question 'yes'?

**Cabinet member response to supplementary question:**

The answer is no. A similar process would be followed to produce the budget for the following financial year. It was hoped that if there were concerns these would be raised through the scrutiny committees or with the section 151 officer. There was national concern over the funding of children's services at councils and greater certainty was required from central government.

MQ 3	Councillor ACR Chappell, Hinton and Hunderton	There are a number of milestones and other historic items like finger posts and boundary stones across the county that need to be preserved.  Will the cabinet Member for Highways, undertake a county wide audit to ensure these items are recorded and not destroyed by highways works and other events?	Cabinet member transport and regulatory services
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**Response:**

The council considers the protection of historic structures such as milestones and boundary stones to be a valuable part of the historic environment of the county, many of which are listed by Historic England. The council is aware of the potential threat to these features and is working to reduce it. When highway maintenance is undertaken close to these features, care is taken not to remove or damage these markers. If they are found to be in an unstable condition, they are reset and repaired where possible, and we continue to explore external sources of funding to support more proactive management.

The council already holds a significant amount of information about these features, and is working to improve this data. Until recently listed milestones were the only ones recorded on the Herefordshire Historic Environment Record (HHER), which affords them greater protection under the Planning (Listed Building & Conservation Area) Act 1990. In the last few months, we have been working with the Milestone Society to add data held by them and also adding data from a survey we carried out in 2012/13 to the HHER. Although adding these unlisted structures recorded in the HHER will not afford any additional protection, it will give them greater visibility and attention when it comes to management and protection of them, as is the case for all heritage assets. As a result of this survey and audit work there are now around 300 mile markers recorded on the HHER and this work is still ongoing.

There is always merit in seeking the views and assistance from parish councils as they can contribute valuable local knowledge to this work, and I will ask officers to liaise with Locality Stewards to take those discussions forward at a local level.

**Supplementary question:**

Is there awareness of the missing milestone marker in Byford? Were there discussions with BBLP, highways officers and planners to ensure that historic markers were protected? Were the police investigating stolen markers?

**Cabinet member response to supplementary question:**

The council worked closely with the milestone society, the police and local parish council to protect historic markers.