

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 24 JUNE 2021

Question 1

Councillor Yolande Watson, Kerne Bridge Ward

To: cabinet member, finance, corporate services and planning

How much money has been spent to date in renting out venues and equipment (including technology and plastic barriers) to ensure Councillors are safe to vote following the High Court Ruling. Please include the unseen expenses, e.g. the opportunity cost on staff time spent putting these measures in place.

Response

From 7 May 2021, the Covid 19 regulations that allowed public committees to take place virtually came to an end. Physical meetings resumed with appropriate social distancing and other measures to protect those attending.

In the early phases of planning for a return to physical meetings we were juggling several issues including:

- not having access to Shire Hall for the foreseeable future due to damage to the building and therefore needing to book up a suitable venue for the next known number of meetings of Council, Planning and Cabinet - our three big committees;
- knowing that Zoom won't work in a physical setting without some form of technological intervention (i.e. at least one fixed camera/PA/microphone system) we would not be able to live stream or record meetings.

Estimates for PA services were as high as £2,300 per meeting with costs of £270 half day and £360 full day hire of suitable meeting venues. We had 7 known council meetings running forward to May 2022 – so it was possible to quickly arrive at potential costs in excess of £40k, based on these numbers.

These projected costs justified an in-house investment in IT and audio equipment to avoid greater bought-in service costs after the first few meetings. A larger scale, long-term IT solution will be needed for our largest meetings and research is underway to ensure that any additional equipment purchased will also meet the council's needs when we return to hold meetings in the Shire Hall again.

To date, the council has spent the following amounts on venue hire, the hire of audio visual equipment/services and on the purchase of additional cameras and microphones.

Cost incurred:	Cost (Exclusive of VAT)
Hire of Venue	£1202.50
Hire of Audio and Visual Equipment and support services	£3935
Purchase Of PA Equipment	£946.16
	Total Cost: £6083.66

No additional expense was incurred as a result of providing Covid 19 screens, personal protective equipment (PPE) as this has been provided from the council's existing supplies.

Some additional staff time is required for set-up and clearing away of meetings, principally, in the form of running the camera/microphone and live streaming systems and ensuring PPE equipment is available and securely stored. To quantify the additional time spent, principally by democratic services, is as follows:

Smaller meetings – e.g. Audit and Governance, Scrutiny.

1. Set-up: name plates and Covid 19 security/safety – 2 X's DSO @ 1hrs = 2hrs
 2. During the meeting – clerking and live streaming – 2 X's DSO @ 3 hrs = 6 hrs
 3. After the meeting – packing away PPE- 2 X's DSO @ 1hrs = 2hrs
- Total: 10hrs per meeting**

Larger meetings – e.g. Full Council, Planning and Regulatory

4. Set-up: name plates and Covid 19 security/safety – 2 X's DSO @ 2hrs = 4hrs
 5. During the meeting – clerking and live streaming – 2 X's DSO @ 3 hrs = 6 hrs
 6. After the meeting – packing away PPE/Covid screens - 2 X's DSO @ 2hrs = 4hrs
- Total: 14hrs per meeting**

Normal practice would be to deploy just one DSO for meeting prep, attendance. This, effectively, represents a doubling of staff time per public meeting held.

As meetings are currently being held in non-council premises, there may be additional custodian staff time required for meeting set up and transportation of equipment. No costs have been incurred as of yet, but a £20 hourly rate will be applied if such services are required for future meetings.

Question 2

Councillor William Wilding, Penyard Ward

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and highways

In reference to package A - the active travel measures could you tell us when specific parts of this programme will be operational. In particular, with school travel plans. When will we actually see measures introduced to encourage an increase in students using public or school transport and with the 'Behaviour Change Programme', can you indicate what a comprehensive campaign would include and begin.

Response

The expansion of school travel plan support to cover market towns will be funded by the government's Capability Fund which should be confirmed by the end of June. On this basis we would expect to commission consultant support and be able to support schools to review and update their travel plans from September onwards through the year. This funding is also due to support a walk to school programme promoting walking for Hereford and market town schools.

A number of active travel measures are already progressing and these will inform the range of activities which schools can benefit from including:

- Pedestrian training for primary school children
- Bikeability cycle training – includes in school training, holiday activities and adult cycle training
- School travel grant scheme (schools can access funding cycle and scooter parking)
- School e-cargo bikes – As part of the Towns Fund we purchased 27 e-cargo bikes which are designed for commuting to school. Here we will be offering these on trial, free of charge to schools or directly to parents, to encourage behaviour change. If parents are keen to permanently purchase a bike themselves we aim to help facilitate that by, for

example, amongst other avenues, working with them and low or no interest loan providers.

Encouraging students and other riders back onto public transport will form part of the campaign to encourage behaviour change and support the recovery from covid. We will need to develop the messaging around this with regard to the government guidance on social distancing and will look to coordinate with government's planned national campaign to encourage people to get back on buses which was announced in the National Bus Strategy. Our intention will be to commission the support to develop and deliver this campaign as soon as possible following cabinet's determination.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for your answers.

I welcome the news on school transport and behaviour change.

Like us the vast majority of councils have declared climate emergencies and developed plans to get to zero carbon, but only 3 or 4 have clear and obvious links to these plans on their websites.

Sadly Herefordshire is not one of those. So, can we have assurance that the need to communicate to residents our commitment to zero carbon is of the utmost importance, because it leads to behaviour change.

Can I request that we insist on clearer and more obvious links and regular top banner headlines on the council website. Can I also ask that we plan a big push later this year when COP26 happens.

Response

Thank you Councillor Wilding for your question and I can confirm that a paper will be coming to Cabinet I hope at the end of July which will make proposals for the use of the climate reserve including setting aside funding for a major communications campaign so watch this space on that and I agree with you that very strong county-wide messaging on the need for urgent climate action will be important in line with the upcoming conference in Glasgow at the end of the year