

## **PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 29 SEPTEMBER 2022**

### **Question 1**

**From: Mr P McKay, Leominster**

**To: Cabinet Member, Infrastructure & Transport**

Could you kindly provide an update of when we may hope to view the integrated map of 'Highways, public rights of way, and open spaces' online, reference reply to question 26 May, and do you have any news yet as to when the aim to make the anomalies list available online may be achieved, reference reply to question 29 June?

### **Response**

The datasets have been shared with the IT project team and they have commenced work on the project to publish the data to the website. As the project is now in progress I am informed that we will be in a position to create the mapping layer by the end of November 2022.

### **Question 2**

**From: Jim Hicks and Merry Albright, Herefordshire Construction Industry Lobby Group**

**To: Cabinet Member, Infrastructure & Transport**

As you might be aware, Dover Council have recently managed to remove the moratorium on new housing development in the Stodmarsh catchment area, on the basis that, like in Herefordshire, new housing development can be shown to have a negligible impact on nutrient levels in the watercourses, owing to its limited proportion of overall land use. Dover Council also successfully put forward a case to show their moratorium disproportionately impacted upon housing development.

This has all been agreed and supported by Natural England and Dover and housing restrictions have been lifted with immediate effect.

Would Herefordshire Council consider making a representation to Natural England on the same basis given that there is strong and scientific evidence to show that new housing in the Lugg catchment is of negligible impact?

### **Response**

I thank Merry Albright for her question which she had previously raised last week. My officers have been in touch with Dover District Council who were able to confirm the process they followed to gain the exemption. Dover District Council also advised us that their exemption is based on the fact that impact is down stream of the SAC and did not challenge its integrity. Through Cabinet Commission we will consider whether there is anything further that can be done. However, I would also add that clarity is needed at a national level on how they intend to develop or replace the rules pertaining to Nutrient Neutrality. The Council has recognised the difficulties faced by developers which is why it has voluntarily chosen to commence a programme of delivery of Integrated Wetlands the first of which is now nearing completion.

### **Supplementary question**

Thank you for your answer.

We appreciate the specifics for Dover are unique, but also feel that there is merit in asking for the Herefordshire neutrality criteria to be reassessed by NE, in light of the now agreed negligible impact from new housing and the disproportionate weight of demonstrating neutrality for housing as identified in the Dover case.

HCILG acknowledge the progress relating to wetlands with thanks. However the wetland initiative is unlikely to make much difference to the majority of developments held or paused, many of which have been waiting for more than 3 years and face desperate future circumstances through no fault of our own. The demand for credits outstrips all projected supply and the costs and timescales are of grave concern.

We would also like to ask that HC are clear in their wider communication that the wetlands - although facilitated by HC - are being paid for entirely by local house builders, who have been willing partners/customers from the beginning and stepped up and agreed to pay for solutions, not only to enable them to trade and provide much needed homes and jobs, but also to continue to contribute to Herefordshire, and help restore our ravaged ecology.

### **Response from cabinet member infrastructure and transport**

The cabinet member confirmed that in relation to communications the council will make it, and the cabinet member had himself personally made it, very clear how the mitigation has been paid for and where the burden is falling currently.

In relation to the question about the Dover case the council had agreed to go back to Dover and speak to Natural England around the points raised to see if there were things which could also be applied in Herefordshire's case. The cabinet member cautioned that the case in Dover was quite different and that Dover was below the area that was protected and therefore perhaps was inaccurately put into the moratorium area. The cabinet member gave assurance that the council would investigate and report back.

### **Question 3**

**From: Ms Reid, Hereford**

**To: Cabinet Member, children and families**

Leeds City Council transformed its Children's Services using Family Group Conferences (FGCs) etc., reduced costs and number of Looked After Children (Final Report, Independent Review, p100). Herefordshire has high rates of LAC and care proceedings compared with its "statistical neighbours" (per LAIT). The council's Family Meeting Practice Guidance, states the circumstances in which FGCs should be convened inter alia when a child is subject to public law (care) proceedings.

The below questions ask about FGCs etc. under the auspices of Herefordshire Council for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.

- How many care proceedings were commenced ie "letter of issue" issued?
- How many of the families affected by these care proceedings were offered a FGC?
- How many of the families affected by these care proceedings participated in a FGC?
- How many FGCs took place for whatever reason?

### **Response**

The service does indeed have a higher rate of children in our care than the England average and statistical neighbours, although the rate at which children come into our care has been reducing

steadily since the start of this year as a consequence of improved practice and increased management oversight.

Care proceedings were commenced for 99 children (63 families) in the year 2021/22

The service does not have a dedicated Family Group Conference service or offer, as Leeds City Council had, and the development of an offer is being explored along with other initiatives to build on family strengths and to prevent some children coming into our care so that all families in pre-proceedings might in the future be offered a Family Group Conference.

The ECHo (Edge of Care and Home) team was introduced in April 2020 and does have a small dedicated resource of 1.2 FGC coordinators. All families supported by ECHo are offered a FGC which equates to 19 families in 2021-22 but few families in pre-proceedings or proceedings are able to be offered support by the ECHo team and so for statistical purposes the answer to the questions regarding numbers of families in proceedings and FGC is zero.

### **Supplementary question**

Firstly, Leeds City Council's Children's Services assessed as "Outstanding" in March 2022 does still offer Family Group Conferences (FGCs) including when requested by families.

Reiterate: "How many FGCs took place for whatever reason?"

The 2022 rates of care applications per 10,000 children were:

- Herefordshire: 18.5
- "Statistical Neighbours": 10.74
- England: 9.6

The low number of FGCs is disappointing as they are recommended by statutory guidance and the government-commission Independent Review recommended mandating them. Per the council's guidance they should be convened when children are on the threshold or subject to care proceedings etc.

The Family Rights Group etc could be commissioned for the rapid routine use of FGCs which would soon recoup its costs and save money by less care proceeding and children in care. In principle, would the Cabinet support this including allocating budget and setting target date(s)?

### **Response from cabinet member, children and families**

The cabinet member confirmed that she understood that family group conferences were recommended and why. They are an important tool for supporting children and families and the cabinet member will be following up on this. The cabinet member explained it is a very specific model and before the council bring it in, it would need to be sure that everything was in place to do it properly. The council should make sure that it is exploring every possible option for the child and the fact that the council is not doing the particular model called family group conferences does not mean that it is not doing that.

The cabinet member confirmed that as this an important matter she would continue to push on this and provide an update.