

Minutes of the meeting of Council held at Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Friday 8 December 2023 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor Roger Phillips (chairperson)
Councillor Stef Simmons (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Polly Andrews, Bruce Baker, Jenny Bartlett, Chris Bartrum, Graham Biggs, Dave Boulter, Harry Bramer, Jacqui Carwardine, Ellie Chowns, Simeon Cole, Frank Cornthwaite, Pauline Crockett, Clare Davies, Dave Davies, Barry Durkin, Mark Dykes, Matthew Engel, Toni Fagan, Elizabeth Foxton, Carol Gandy, Catherine Gennard, Peter Hamblin, Liz Harvey, Helen Heathfield, Robert Highfield, David Hitchiner, Dan Hurcomb, Terry James, Jonathan Lester, Nick Mason, Bob Matthews, Ed O'Driscoll, Aubrey Oliver, Rob Owens, Justine Peberdy, Dan Powell, Ivan Powell, Philip Price, Adam Spencer, Louis Stark, Pete Stoddart, John Stone, Elissa Swinglehurst, Richard Thomas, Kevin Tillett, Diana Toynbee, Allan Williams, Rob Williams and Mark Woodall

Officers: Chief Executive, Director of Governance and Law, Chief Finance Officer and Democratic Services Manager

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jim Kenyon and Ben Proctor.

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor David Hitchiner declared an interest in agenda item no. 7, capital programme review and update, as a local resident to the proposed Southern Link Road.

30. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

31. CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Council noted the Chairman's and Chief Executive's announcements as printed in the agenda papers.

32. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 5 - 28)

A copy of the public questions and written answers, together with supplementary questions asked at the meeting and their answers, is attached to the Minutes at Appendix 1.

33. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (Pages 29 - 32)

A copy of the Member questions and written answers, together with supplementary questions asked at the meeting and their answers, is attached to the Minutes at Appendix 2.

34. CAPITAL PROGRAMME REVIEW AND UPDATE

Council considered a report by the Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Services to approve the revised capital investment budget for 2023/24 onwards.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Services proposed the recommendations in the report and introduced the report.

The Leader seconded the recommendations in the report.

Council debated the report. There was division among the membership. It was the contention of some members that the capital funding proposed towards the southern link road was a valuable contribution towards improving infrastructure in the county. The use of capital funding to support the southern link road was opposed by other sections of the membership who queried the viability of the scheme.

Proposed amendment:

- 1) **Instead of removing the £2m retrofit hub budget, fund this through capital receipts, and reduce the capital receipt allocation to the SLR by £2m.**
- 2) **Remove the SLR elements for 2024 onwards, reducing the allocation to the £800k identified as required for 2023/24, on the basis that further proposals for SLR funding in future years can and should come to council as part of the normal annual budgeting process.**

Councillor Chowns proposed the amendment above to the original motion.

Councillor Heathfield seconded the amendment.

Council debated the proposed amendment. There was division among the membership. It was the contention of some members that the retention of the retrofit hub was essential to meeting climate and cost of living challenges. The removal of proposed capital funding to support the southern link road was opposed by other sections of the membership; the reduction in investment would not allow access to additional sources of funding towards the infrastructure project.

The proposed amendment was put to the vote and was lost by a simple majority.

The original motion was put to the vote and was carried by a simple majority.

RESOLVED – That Council:

- a) **Approve the revised capital programme for 2023/24 attached at appendix C;**
- b) **The chief finance officer be authorised, following consultation with the Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Services to make in year amendments to the final value included for the investment projects for (i) from Wye Valley Trust (WVT) and (ii) . Also the investment project from Herefordshire and Worcestershire Group Training Association (HWGTA), in both instances, based on the final approved business cases;**
- c) **Approve the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts of up to £1.6m in 2023/24, to support transformation to generate ongoing revenue savings and reduce service delivery costs in future years; and**
- d) **The chief finance officer be authorised, following consultation with the Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Services to make in year amendments to the final value included for the relocation of the library to the Shirehall based on the final approved business case and utilise the grant award from Stronger Towns Board.**

35. LEADER'S REPORT

Council received and noted the Leader's Report which provided an update on the activities of Cabinet since the meeting of Council on 13 October 2023.

Council questioned the Leader and the following actions were raised:

- To provide a written response to a question requesting updates on the phosphate credit scheme, including the number of applications that were still delayed and the amount of housing to be released under new schemes.
- To provide a written response to a question regarding the continuation of the Market Towns funding programme.
- In response to a question, to consider the extension of the deadline for the consultation on the new County Plan.
- In response to a question, to investigate the increase of the council subsidy for the 232 bus services.

36. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDERS

Council debated the motion contained in the report by the Director of Law and Governance.

Motion – Affordable Housing

Councillor Owens proposed the motion.

Councillor James seconded the motion.

Council debated the motion. There was consensus among the membership that there was a requirement for more affordable housing to be constructed in the county. Caution was expressed by some members regarding the potential complications to councils involved in the construction and management of social housing stock. There was significant support for the motion.

The motion was put to the vote and was carried by a simple majority.

RESOLVED: Council:

- **Request the cabinet develop a programme to deliver an ambitious number of units of social housing, market-rent lifetime tenancies, affordable home ownership and market sale properties, funded through the prudent use of borrowing, capital receipts and the management of council assets in time for this to be agreed by Council as part of next year's capital programme.**
- **Request that the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee undertake a review of good practice in housing delivery provided directly by local authorities and make recommendations to Cabinet by June 2024.**
- **Request that the Leader of the Council to provide an update on housing delivery at each meeting of the Council.**

The meeting ended at 1.10 pm

Chairperson

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

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Ms Russell, Hereford	<p>CO2 constitutes 0.04% of the atmosphere of which only 3% of this is manmade. China produces as much CO2 in one day as the UK produces in a year. If we had net Zero then you wouldn't eat, because when you eat you convert carbon, and breathe out 4% CO2. The 4% is then absorbed by plants. At 0.02% plants die. So if we had Net Zero you'd have to be dead and there would be no plants. Herefordshire is a rural county with a low population. The countryside absorbs our CO2 and feeds us fresh air. So the question therefore arises: why is Herefordshire Council striving for Net Zero, potentially restricting our lives and our choices due to larger emitters, when our major, minor contribution would mean so little?</p>	Cabinet member environment

Response:

I think the first point to get clear is what is meant by Net Zero – it does not mean that there is no carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Therefore the idea that plants will die as a result of net zero is factually incorrect. It also does not mean that you can't eat.

The United Nations describe Net Zero as 'cutting greenhouse gas emissions* to as close to zero as possible, with any remaining emissions re-absorbed from the atmosphere, by oceans and forests for instance.'

*Emissions may be generally referred to as 'carbon' but include other greenhouse gases (GHG) such as methane.

The United Nations explanation of why we need Net Zero is:

The science shows clearly that in order to avert the worst impacts of climate change and preserve a livable planet, global temperature increase needs to be limited to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Currently, the Earth is already about 1.1°C warmer than it was in the late 1800s, and emissions continue to rise. To keep global warming to no more than 1.5°C – as called for in the [Paris Agreement](#) – emissions need to be reduced by 45% by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050.

- United Nations [Net Zero Coalition | United Nations](#)

On the current trajectory the planet will continue to heat up to over 3 degrees and this will lead to massive changes to ecology (including plant life) which cannot adapt as quickly as the planet is changing. It will impact equatorial regions and cause mass migration as well as severe food shortages. I would say that the outcomes you fear from Net Zero – not being able to eat and plants dying – are the consequences of the world not reducing its GHG emissions rather than the opposite.

China may produce more CO2 than Herefordshire but that does not mean that we can abdicate our responsibility to reduce emissions. It is interesting to note however that the Qinghai province in China is powered by 100% renewable electricity – which is not the case in Herefordshire yet. We are fortunate to have a relatively low CO2 but even so there is room for improvement.

- The Council is committed to providing residents with a transport network that supports all transport modes, enabling safe and sustainable travel choices for residents.
- The Council is also committed to leading a local response to the Climate & Ecological Emergency, which was recently reaffirmed by unanimous vote at Full Council on the 28th July.
- Here we have set targets, and are making good progress to achieve:
 - carbon neutrality across the Council's own emissions by 2030
 - and we are working with partners, businesses, communities and residents to achieve this countywide.

This does not mean making huge sacrifices or restricting lives and choices but it does mean considering different choices, being aware of the impact of the choices we make, taking some personal responsibility for that impact.

Herefordshire Council takes the Climate and Ecological Emergency seriously, it is at the heart of our policy forming and thinking. The UK Government has made great progress in not only reducing the GHG emissions of the UK but in supporting a just transition around the world. It has enshrined in the Environment Act the principle of 'integration' to consider the environment in all that you do and Herefordshire Council has additionally taken that upon itself. HC is proud to be working towards Net Zero as an organisation and is proud of the efforts that are being made throughout the county to reduce emissions. We have businesses and individuals who are all doing something to help – for instance the companies and individuals recognised in the recent greener footprints awards.

So, why are we striving for Net Zero? Because it is the right thing to do.

Supplementary question:

I appreciate the global perspective provided on net zero emissions, the response does not seem to address Herefordshire's specific localized context and rationale. As a rural county with relatively low carbon emissions that are heavily offset by natural absorption, I believe a robust cost/benefit analysis would be prudent before committing significant resources given counter evidence on limited impact. Can the Council provide a fact-based assessment on Herefordshire's specific carbon footprint, breakdown of emissions sources, ecological absorption capacity, and economic impacts of pursuing aggressive net zero policies? What localized data is motivating setting a 2030 target? Why is boosting natural sequestration through environmental conservation not being considered as a primary path forward given our land use profile? A localized, evidence-based approach accounting for counter perspectives warrants fully exploring before declaring any singular path the definitive "right thing to do" for Herefordshire.

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member for Environment:

A written response would be provided.

Written response to supplementary question (provided on 4 January 2024):

We utilise Local Authority territorial greenhouse gas emissions which are published by central government each year two years in arrears. This is the most accurate and up to date information available to us. Sources of emissions include; domestic, industrial & commercial, public sector, transport, land use, land use change and forestry, agriculture and waste management.

Agricultural emissions sources are electricity, gas, 'other' (this includes diesel), agricultural livestock and agricultural soils. 65% of the emissions are generated by livestock and 18% from agricultural soils. Land use, land use change and forestry, woodlands and grassland are significant carbon sinks sequestering around 159,500 tonnes of CO2 in 2021, with cropland and settlements generating emissions. Despite this offset agriculture does generate net emissions, a total of 5,942,000 tonnes of CO2 equivalent in 2021, these emissions have reduced by 24% since 1990.

PQ 2	Mr Banks, Hereford	<p>In light of well-documented fire hazards associated with electric vehicles (EVs), recent Freedom of Information data reveals that in London over the past 5 years over 500 fires were caused by batteries in electric vehicles of all kinds. The fire service requires burnt out vehicles to stay at the site for 24 hours as they can reignite and explode, 48 hours if indoors.</p> <p>Given the potential personal liability for councillors and officers, it's crucial to ensure that duty of care is upheld, especially in authorizing EV use and addressing fire risks at charging stations or multi-story car parks.</p> <p>With the Fire Service's forthcoming EV fire regulations, I am concerned about the Council's preparedness. Has the Council integrated a Fire Service-approved safety plan into its EV planning and do the current safety measures align with impending regulations?</p>	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
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Response:

I can confirm that Herefordshire Council has reviewed the fire safety issues related to the councils EV charging equipment with our EV provider and that these comply with current fire safety legislation. This includes the charge points installed in Garrick multi storey car park.

Supplementary Question:

Based on the response provided, I do not believe the Council has fully answered the question that was raised.

1. The response only addresses fire safety related to the council's own EV charging equipment. It does not address fire safety issues and regulations more broadly when it comes to EVs and charging infrastructure within the council's jurisdiction.
2. There is no indication that the council has an integrated fire safety plan related to increased EV adoption and charging infrastructure. The question asked specifically about having such a plan and aligning with impending fire service regulations.
3. It does not provide assurances that duty of care is being upheld to address fire risks from EVs and charging stations in parking garages, public lots, etc. - whether council-owned or private.
4. There are no details provided about alignment with the Fire Service's forthcoming EV fire regulations, as asked about in the question.

In summary, the response focuses very narrowly on the council's own EV charging equipment, but does not address the wider issues related to fire hazards and regulations pertaining to EVs in Herefordshire.

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member Transport and Infrastructure:

A written response would be provided.

Written response to supplementary question (provided on 4 January 2024):

The council has a responsibility to ensure that it has considered the fire safety aspects associated with any electric vehicle charge points it has installed at its properties. This includes fire safety assessments at covered car parks and EICR inspections of wiring within council buildings which would cover the electrical safety of the supplies serving charge points that are connected to council buildings. The charge point installers and equipment installed have to comply with the relevant guidance/ legislation, and charge points are subject to regular checks to ensure they are in good condition and continue to comply with the regulations. This is the responsibility of the charge point installer and operator and is required as part of their contract with the council.

All future planned charge point installations on council property will have their own direct separate electrical supply, which will be installed by the district network operator (National Grid), and each installation will have to comply with the relevant electrical and fire safety regulations/ guidance. In addition we will be using the Risk Insight, Strategy and Control Authority guidance document RC59 (Fire Protection Association, 2023) to inform checks carried out on all installations.

Most available evidence to date suggests that fires in electric vehicles are less likely by 11 times to occur than in hybrid vehicles and petrol or diesel vehicles [1] [2] [3] Norway represents one of the largest markets for EVs in the EU. Statistics for the number of total EVs in Norway was 270,309 as of 2020, which was 9.7% of all cars in Norway. The rescue operation Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection outlines 110 fires in passenger car EVs for the years 2016-2021, compared to 4,026 internal combustion engine vehicle fires [4].

[1] *Thatcham Insurance Research Department, "Fire Risk of Electric Vehicles," Thatcham Insurance, 2022.*
 2 *London Fire Brigade, "RE: Electric vehicle research - assistance request - Arup," London Fire Brigade, London, 2022.*
 3 *The Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection (BRIS), "Fire statistics: Fire in passenger car per year and fuel type," BRIS, 2022.*
 4 *The Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection (BRIS), "Fire statistics: Fire in passenger car per year and fuel type," BRIS, 2022.*

PQ 3	Mr Pugh, Leominster	Is the Herefordshire unitary authority policy of a limit to full council questions by the public of one hundred and forty words [to be delivered within a one minute (ideal) timeframe] acceptable and synonymous with transparency of full council actions, freedom of speech, and full council accountability to proffered questions especially those affecting the operation of full councils in both action or agenda where a full public interface to full council meetings would be denied or limited by only allowing a restricted one hundred and forty words and tiny timeframe to be allotted and permitted for what are often very complicated questions?	Chairman
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Response:
 Every local authority has to have, publicise and keep an up to date written constitution that sets out its governance arrangements. Herefordshire Council approved the current constitutional arrangements in May 2022. This set out the current public question policy and process.

It is important to note that council committees are formal meetings in public, they are not public meetings. In this regard, members of the public have the right to ask a question and receive a response to that question (subject to that question being agreed). Unlike a public meeting, council committees make no provision for public debate.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you for permitting my previous question relating to existing question policy allowed at full council meetings restricting such questions to 140 words or less to be delivered (ideally) within a one minute timeframe or less.

Supplementary question starts below.

I thank the council for their considered response that comprehensively failed to answer my question "is it synonymous with public scrutiny and freedom of speech, or full council accountability to limit questions to 140 words or less considering the complexity of council agendas?" Given that councils across the land and including Herefordshire unitary authority are facing complex issues that must be responded including, but certainly not limited to, allegations of malfeasance in public office, and how are such questions to be lawfully and properly framed inside the limitations of existing question policy, a decision made by council in May 2022. This appears to engender obfuscation, and surely council should have allowed the paltry three minutes given in Colchester as an absolute minimum.

Response to supplementary question from the Chairman of the Council:

Thank you for your questions and interesting suggestions which could be looked into with reference to best practice at other authorities.

PQ 4	Mr Symonds, Ross-on-Wye	Copse Cross Street in Ross regularly suffers vehicles leaving the town centre being driven on the footway. This is because the carriageway between Old Gloucester Road and the former Rosswyn Hotel is too narrow for 2 vehicles. Pedestrian safety and traffic flow relies on vehicles taking turns to prevent congestion. When this does not happen, vehicles queue back into Gloucester Road and drivers become impatient meaning some drive over the footway to get through. Officers were investigating installation of a yellow box in the narrow section of carriageway to prevent drivers entering it until their exit is clear, along with an enforcement camera to ensure compliance. Can the Council explain what is happening to address this problem please?	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
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Response:
Thank you for your question.

The introduction of a yellow box at this location is only permissible where a priority movement arrangement can be introduced and due to insufficient forward visibility in this location, this could not be operated safely.

We note the comments regarding vehicles driving along the footway. Unfortunately the current footway widths along this length of highway prevent the installation of measures, such as bollards, to prevent this from occurring.

The most appropriate option to resolve this matter would be to restrict traffic flow to a single direction. Whilst there are no plans to do this at present, such a proposal would be subject to further consideration and consultation should funding become available.

PQ 5	Ms Banks, Hereford	In 2019 Herefordshire Council declared a Climate Emergency but the British Government has yet to do this. The House of Commons declared an emergency but it was never acted upon. Why, therefore, are you following guidance from the World Economic Forum, an unelected body, rather than following our own elected Government?	Cabinet member environment
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Response:
The Council is committed to leading a local response to the Climate & Ecological Emergency and both the Council's initial declaration, and subsequent reaffirmation were voted on with a majority decision by the locally elected members of Full Council.

The importance of this commitment is reiterated within the most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), who are the internationally accepted authority on climate change. Some headlines statements from this report include:

- o Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1°C above 1850–1900 in 2011–2020.
- o Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred.
- o Human-caused climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe.
- o This has led to widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people.
- o Continued greenhouse gas emissions will lead to increasing global warming, with the best estimate of reaching 1.5°C in the near term in considered scenarios and modelled pathways.
- o Risks and projected adverse impacts and related losses and damages from climate change escalate with every increment of global warming.

Supplementary question:

Is Herefordshire Council in receipt of any monies, either directly or indirectly, from the World Economic Forum?

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member for Environment:

Unaware of any funds received.

PQ 6	Mrs McGeown, Weobley	<p>Ref: Public question(Q3) and supplementary, raised at 13th October full meeting, regarding the information letter provided by each school to parents to enable them to give fully informed consent for their children to receive a medical procedure within Herefordshire secondary schools (in this case the Flu vaccination).</p> <p>The concern of the questioner was that this letter should observe the ethical duties as per the “Montgomery Ruling” to inform parents of all “material risks”.</p> <p>Response from Cabinet Member Adults, Health and Wellbeing: "As a result of your queries and concerns I have asked our Director of Public Health to raise this matter Directly with NHS England and to ensure all the necessary ethical requirements are considered."</p> <p>So what happened? How did NHS England satisfy all ethical requirements and where are the details recorded? Is our Director of Public Health happy?</p>	Cabinet member adults, health and wellbeing
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Response:

Thank you for your question. The Director of Public Health contacted the regional lead for NHS England to consider the ethical requirements around vaccination consent in schools in the context of the original enquiry. Both parties are satisfied that the current approach is appropriate and ethical. NHS England's written response to the original enquiry, which referenced patient information leaflets and the medicines and healthcare products regulatory agency, is included below,

"NHS England have reviewed the vaccine offer letter used by Vaccination UK for the 2023/24 Flu vaccination programme in schools in Herefordshire. We are satisfied the letter is in line with the national guidance on immunisation consent found in Chapter 2 of the Green Book ([Consent: the green book, chapter 2 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)) There is no requirement for the offer letter to include the vaccine Patient Information Leaflet or details of relevant Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) reports. NHSE have searched the MHRA website and were unable to find MHRA reports specifically around the children's nasal flu vaccine."

Supplementary question:

You state "NHS England have reviewed the vaccine offer letter...is in line with national guidance...no requirement to include Patient Information Leaflet..."

Never mind national guidance, surely it's what's correct for Herefordshire Folk that matters? Isn't this why we have Public Health Herefordshire to determine this? There may be no national requirement but surely there's an ethical duty to fully inform Herefordshire parents about the Patient Information Leaflet.

Surely Herefordshire Councillors embrace "The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates?"

This declares that when the superior or higher civil authority makes an unjust/immoral law or decree, the lesser or lower ranking civil authority has both the right and duty to refuse obedience to that superior authority. If necessary, the lower authority may even actively resist the superior authority.

So Councillors, please do your ethical duty, refuse obedience to national guidance.

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member Adults, Health and Wellbeing

A written response would be provided.

Written response to supplementary question (provided on 4 January 2024):

Thank you for your supplementary question. As stated in my original response, both NHS England and our Director of Public Health are satisfied with current arrangements regarding ethical considerations and consent.

PQ 7	Mr McGeown, Weobley	<p>In answer to PQ5, 13 October 2023, full meeting, Clr Jonathan Lester stated support for:</p> <p>“cross-party membership organisation that supports the most ambitious councils to go further and faster on their Net Zero and Clean Air targets”.</p> <p>There is widespread concern raised by “Council Watch” groups nationally about Carbon Literacy Training, Re-education and Certificates for Elected Representatives and Council Officers.</p> <p>Particular focus of concern is “The Carbon Literacy Trust” a £637,658 annual income organisation:</p> <p>https://carbonliteracy.com/organisation/</p> <p>And their Elected Members Course:</p> <p>https://carbonliteracy.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/LA-Elected-Members-Course-Overview.pdf</p> <p>So are Herefordshire Council using/intending to use this organisation or similar for Carbon Literacy Training for Councillors and Officers?</p>	Leader
<p>Response:</p> <p>We will soon begin work to develop our 4th carbon management plan for the period 2025/26 to 2030/31. Where any specialist support is needed, this would be procured as part of our normal procurement process rather than through a specific provider.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question:</p> <p>You state “Where any specialist support is needed, this would be procured...”</p> <p>I will take this as from toolkits similar to those available from Carbon Literacy Trust/ https://www.slcc.co.uk/climate-action/</p>			

Carbon Literacy Training, whilst possibly having merit in Metropolitan City Environments, is a narrative conflicting with our way of life in Golden Cross with Weobley Ward.

It encourages Councillors into persuading and taking detrimental actions against:

our traditional off grid heating, firewood suppliers, oil syndicate, pedigree livestock farming and “have one less child for families”. I Kid You Not, It’s In There, You Couldn’t Make It Up!

Dilwynners perceive newborn children as blessings, ensuring the future of village, playgroup and school.

To allow scrutiny and enable raising issues of concern with Elected Representatives.

Could Councillors undertaking Carbon Literacy Training courses be held in public, (Herefordshire Council live YouTube Channel)?

Response to supplementary question from the Leader:

The matter raised could be referred to the relevant scrutiny committee.

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PQ 8	Mr Morfett, Hereford	The Conservative party like to claim that they can be trusted with delivering value for money for taxpayers. In respect of securing funding for new transport projects the Council will have to show that it has followed the Treasury Green Book and compared alternatives to road building, such as rail, walking and cycling infrastructure, and that a stand alone road offers the best return on investment compared to the alternatives. What was the comparative returns on the alternatives to building the Southern Link Road, such as Pontrilas Station, investment in safe, active travel modes, etc to reduce pollution, tackle congestion and where is the report on these investment proposals?	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
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Response:

The Southern Link Road was originally developed to Full Business Case stage in line with the Department for Transport’s Green Book procedure. As part of that process, alternatives to road-building such as active travel and public transport improvements were considered in the early option appraisal stages before a preferred option was identified. Further progress of the scheme will include a review of the business case to take into account any changes such as scheme cost or travel patterns since the original case was produced.

Projects to improve active travel and public transport in the city are being pursued as part of the current Levelling Up Fund programme and are expected to have beneficial local impact. We remain committed to work with our partners to further investigate the options available at Pontrilas.

PQ 9

Mr
Harrington,
Hereford

Can Cllr. Stoddart explain clearly, with reference to constitutional and financial rules, why the progression of the business case for Eastern River Crossing requires revenue but the Southern Link Road is being allocated capital without this project being adopted Council policy? I also understand some of the capital will be borrowing. Off the top of what precious and scare (thanks to our Conservative MPs voting for cuts) revenue stream does he intend to skim money to service the borrowing for a project the DfT wouldn't sign off the last time around because it didn't add up?

Cabinet
member
finance and
corporate
services

Response:

As defined in the councils capitalisation policy (extract below) and agreed with external auditors, the funding of the SLR can be treated as capital investment as it has an agreed and approved route. The Eastern River Crossing's route has yet to be determined and as such the scheme is still considered to be at the feasibility stage, hence it is funded from a revenue budget.

'The key parameter in distinguishing between revenue expenditure and capital expenditure is that the options have been narrowed to a definable parameter. It is not necessary that an absolute final option have been selected as this could be influenced through the planning application or detailed consultation processes. Therefore, to contextualise with a specific example, a major highways investment project could be capitalised from the point at which cabinet (or appropriate decision maker) approves a defined route.'

The funding is using £5m of the existing balance in the capital receipts reserve and £5.3m is funded from corporate funded borrowing, this is already allowed for in the Treasury Management Strategy and revenue budgets and therefore there has been no change to the revenue budget to fund this project.

Supplementary question:

Thank you for the clarity on the classification of capital v revenue but what I seem to be misunderstanding is what business case and what route are you talking about? There are neither. The SLR was cancelled by a Full Council vote. Instead, you are proceeding against policy by allocating money to a non-existent, non-policy scheme and failing to allocate capital for use on agreed policy schemes. Before I refer this decision to the Local Government Ombudsman can I ask if it is the accepted practice of this Council to allocate millions of capital to projects that are not Council policy? Or is this minority administration expecting to work hand in glove with the Liberal-Democrats to agree policy by default by agreeing a capital budget? Can the Section 151 and Monitoring Officer supply input into your reply please?

Response to supplementary question from the Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Services:

Outline business cases have been produced with further detail forthcoming in January 2024.

PQ 10	Dr Geeson, Hereford	In his Report to this Council meeting the Chief Executive talks about “the excellent progress we are making on our environmental performance” and “our continued commitment to net zero by 2030”. That is to cut carbon emissions to zero by 2030, which is totally at odds with building long stretches of road, that would increase emissions hugely. The outline strategic business case for a stand-alone Southern Link Road, makes no mention of net zero. There is no mention of all the possible sustainable transport measures, that have already been identified, to reduce emissions and ease traffic congestion across Hereford. The anticipated benefits of a southern link road as listed are questionable, without any evidence to support them. So why does this Herefordshire Council propose to ignore the net zero commitment, and even to borrow to pursue this road?	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
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Response:

The Southern Link Road is considered to be part of a wider package of measures that includes active travel and public transport improvements like those currently being delivered with Levelling Up Funds. The Link Road’s contribution to easing congestion on parts of the network should be viewed as being essential for helping to create the conditions where these measures can be successful. The Hereford Strategic Transport Review of 2020 identified the problems of severance caused by the A49 and the need to reassign road space in order to deliver high quality walking and cycling infrastructure.

Supplementary question:

2030, when Herefordshire Council have pledged to reach net zero with their carbon emissions balance is only six years away. However, it is surely not possible to get new roads built and offset before then. Note that the emissions for building and maintaining a single carriageway road, as planned for the Southern Link Road, could be around 800 tons CO2 or equivalent per kilometre. Embodied carbon from road construction includes the emissions from manufacturing the raw materials, transporting them to the site, and the lengthy construction process itself. To offset that it is generally considered that a tree can store about 167 kg of CO2 per year, or 1 ton of CO2 per year for 6 mature trees. When Herefordshire Council is considering offsetting the carbon emissions to be spent, can you confirm that the calculations of the added costs of thousands of mature trees, the costs of buying land to plant them on, and the costs of planting and ongoing maintenance will be included in the outline business case for a Southern Link Road?

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member Transport and Infrastructure:

A written response would be provided.

Written response to supplementary question (provided on 4 January 2024):

We will be reviewing and updating the scheme package which will include an updated traffic model based on the latest traffic data. Part of this work will be to understand carbon emissions associated with the scheme and the options we might have to reduce them, including the contribution that active travel measures can have. The council’s new Local Transport Plan, due to be published in 2024, will also consider the overall carbon emissions for a range of transport proposals and interventions as part of meeting the council’s and the government’s ambition for net zero emissions.

Measures to deliver biodiversity net gain as a result of any road scheme will help to offset any carbon impact. In addition, the council is developing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy to deliver landscape scale nature recovery through biodiversity net gain and wider grant funded initiatives which will support not only the provision of habitat and increased biodiversity but has the potential to provide carbon sequestration through tree and woodland planting, wetlands and other habitat in line with local landscape character.

PQ 11	Mr Summers, Hereford	Many years ago, Lower Bullingham residents were, as part of the for the relief road project, promised traffic calming measures on Holme Lacy Road. Since then, there have been a number of different plans drawn up and paid for by the taxpayer. Yet the residents are still not seeing the improvements they were promised. Can the Cabinet Member please inform the residents of Dinedor Hill Ward. ONE. How much has been spent over the years on design proposals for Holme Lacy Road? TWO. Perhaps a much a bigger concern was LEP money vired to the Enterprise Zone and if this is the case, (and I have no reason to believe differently,) when will it be vired back to the Quiet Routes Programme? THREE. When do you estimate that the promised Holme Lacy Road traffic calming be completed?	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
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Response:

1. £92,729 was spent historically producing feasibility designs, before the project grew from being minor cycling/walking improvements to fully comprehensive LTN1/20 cycleway improvements. £86,206 has since been spent on the contract with Price and Myers for design work associated with traffic calming measures alongside the development of new cycleways/walkways.
2. Funding for measures along Holme Lacy Road was tagged onto the Hereford Enterprise Zone funding bid for LEP funds back in 2020. Unfortunately, a scheme was unable to be delivered in line with LEP timescales and was therefore removed from the package. This is largely because the project grew from being minor cycling/walking improvements to fully comprehensive LTN1/20 cycleway improvements. Rather than return the funds to the LEP and they be lost from Herefordshire, they were used for additional plot development work at Hereford Enterprise Zone. Hereford Enterprise Zone phase 5 match funding could subsequently contribute towards improvements along Holme Lacy Road, which were earmarked for this purpose. It should be noted that the Hereford Enterprise Zone has fully funded the design work for both Holme Lacy Road and Quiet Routes. This design work is now nearing completion and Levelling Up Fund monies have also been secured to fully fund these projects. Design work for both schemes is expected to be completed this financial year, with construction scheduled to commence summer 2024.
3. Works on Holme Lacy Road Active Travel Measures's and Hereford Enterprise Zone Quiet Routes are scheduled to be completed by end of March 2025.

Supplementary question:

If after all these years of feasibility studies the design work is only nearing completion can the public expect further cost? Also I ask for a clearer picture regarding funding for Holme Lacy road moved from 2023 to 2024 and how this relates to funding for a development on the Enterprise Zone?

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member Transport and Infrastructure:

The cost of the scheme may increase in cost. An officer would make contact with Mr Summers.

PQ 12	Mrs Wegg-Prosser, Hereford	Appendix A and C of the Capital Programme allocates £12,300,000 to the Southern Link Road, a scheme which failed its then business case during the previous Conservative administration. Cabinet Minutes 5.10.23 (#36) describe the Southern Link Road as conforming with requests from 'members of the public' to invest more in road infrastructure and that it will 'address congestion of A49'. Where is the evidence that points to members of the public requesting more investment in road infrastructure with no mention of sustainable transport measures, nor the attainment of carbon emission reduction, nor actual reduction in congestion on the A49? Please cite full evidence, not opinion.	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
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Response:

I consider the Southern Link Road to be a vital first step in developing a western bypass of the city that will create the conditions for sustainable transport measures in Hereford and an improvement in local air quality. A review of the business case will consider these wider benefits alongside an assessment of the carbon impact of its construction, maintenance and operation. Any new road scheme will be an integral part of the new Local Transport Plan that will set out the Council's plans for reducing overall transport carbon emissions.

Supplementary question:

Thank you for your answer to my question about the evidence for building a Southern Link Road in advance of undertaking sustainable transport measures. I had requested, and had hoped to be provided with solid evidence of public support for a stand alone road merely joining the A465 to the A49 south west of the City. Furthermore I had expected to learn that the sustainable transport measures, with associated carbon emission reduction, were to be included simultaneously, as was the case with the previous South Wye Transport Package. And what about 'reduction in congestion on the A49'? Where is the evidence for that? Background papers mention the Southern Link Road relieving severance on the Belmont Road which, of course, is the A465, not the A49. I would be grateful if I could be supplied with fact-based evidence, rather than spurious opinion, about the merits of building this stand alone Southern Link Road.

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member Transport and Infrastructure:

A written response would be provided.

Written response to supplementary question (provided on 4 January 2024):

I consider the Southern Link Road to be the first stage of a more comprehensive solution to tackling the problems of congestion and resilience for Hereford and the surrounding area. Resilience can only be improved by the addition of a second road crossing of the River Wye, which is an integral part of both the western bypass and the Eastern River Crossing and Link Road. The greatest reduction in congestion on the A49 is achieved when the SLR is combined with either the western bypass or the ERiC. A report on the New Road Strategy for Hereford is being prepared for consideration by Cabinet at its meeting on 25th January 2024, and greater detail on the levels of traffic relief will be available for that meeting.

The most recent public consultation regarding travel in Hereford was conducted in early 2020 as part of the evidence base for the Hereford transport Strategy Review. The most popular responses for the most important outcomes were: “reduce congestion/improve traffic flow”, “quicker/more reliable journey times”, “reduce carbon emissions/improve air quality” and “offer a realistic alternative to the car”. The most popular interventions to achieve these outcomes were: “invest in the bus network – electric buses, reduce fares”, “increase capacity – new roads, new river crossing” and “support sustainable school travel/safer routes to school”. Cabinet is still considering which elements of the sustainable transport measures in the draft Hereford Masterplan to prioritise, but these will undoubtedly benefit from the reduction in congestion as a result of a second river crossing.

PQ 13

Mrs
Morawiecka,
Hereford

The ambitions of a Council can be seen in its budget priorities. Councillor Price said in October that Pontrilas station is a priority for the Council and the Leader’s report states that “Specifically I will be advocating the need for a new station at Pontrilas……. These infrastructure projects are the key to ensuring we attract the right skills and jobs to the county and with it a strong and prosperous economy.” When a new railway station south of the City will do more to tackle road congestion, meet the Council’s ambitions on environment, reducing air pollution and meeting net zero by 2030, why is the Cabinet only seeking to allocate millions to a stand-alone road project that fails to comply with these adopted policies and allocate nothing for developing a business case for Pontrilas station?

Cabinet
member
transport and
infrastructure

Response:

As previously stated, the Council is committed to working with partners to investigate the case for a new Pontrilas station, as well as delivering the Hereford Bypass. Both of which are key to helping the economic growth for the County. We have not committed any capital funds to the Pontrilas station project at this stage. However, by working with partners, it is hoped that a review of the case for the station will recognise its wider economic, environmental and social benefits, and its role in a multi-modal transport system that offers people a choice in how and where to travel.

Supplementary question:

The ambitions of a Council can be seen in its budget priorities. Councillor Price said in October that Pontrilas station is a priority for the Council and the Leader's report states that "Specifically I will be advocating the need for a new station at Pontrilas..... These infrastructure projects are the key to ensuring we attract the right skills and jobs to the county and with it a strong and prosperous economy." When a new railway station south of the City will do more to tackle road congestion, meet the Council's ambitions on environment, reducing air pollution and meeting net zero by 2030, why is the Cabinet only seeking to allocate millions to a stand-alone road project that fails to comply with these adopted policies and allocate nothing for developing a business case for Pontrilas station?

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member Transport and Infrastructure:

Meetings regarding the proposed station were taking place with Network Rail and the government was being approached for extra funding, in order to move forward to an outline business case. Funding for the project would appear in a future capital account.

PQ 14	Ms Hornsey, Hereford	What is Herefordshire Council doing to provide for rough sleepers this winter and over the next subsequent years?	Cabinet member adults, health and wellbeing
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Response:

I am pleased to confirm that following extensive work with the Homelessness Forum, provision will be in place for rough sleepers through the winter which will be fully operational from Monday 11 December 2023 and operate through until 31 March 2024. Dormitory style accommodation of 18 bed spaces for males will be provided in refurbished temporary accommodation owned by the council in the city centre, with space within the curtilage of the property to site four single occupancy 'pods' to accommodate females. The provision will be accessed from 8pm to 8am with volunteer wardens on site to support residents. Laundry and washing facilities, together with food and drinks, will be provided by a local voluntary organisation. The individual occupancy, secure pods provide a bed and toilet facilities. In addition, a further four single occupancy pods have been purchased which can be sited elsewhere to meet demand.

This winter provision forms part of the council's wider pathway of support for rough sleepers and strategy for ending rough sleeping.

Supplementary question:

What provision was there in November for rough sleepers?

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member adults, health and wellbeing:

Temporary accommodation was available from 1 December; permanent accommodation from 11 December. During cold weather facilities were available.

PQ 15	Mrs Steel, Hereford	<p>The Leader's report to Council mentions training in "Restorative Practice" for staff in Children's Services.</p> <p>The move away from a culture of parent blame is hugely welcomed. As Leeds Council recognises: "Restorative approaches are already widely established nationally and internationally as a highly effective way of achieving better outcomes for children, young people and their families.</p> <p>The Leader's report states that, "150 staff members [are] still to book onto a course."</p> <p>Restorative practice is not yet embedded within Children's Services and in some cases poor practice and parent-blaming attitudes are still harming families. When parents raise concerns, they are still not being listened to and their questions are not answered even when the questions are about safeguarding concerns. To whom should parents turn when they are not being listened to over safeguarding concerns?</p>	Cabinet member children and young people
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Response:

The Improvement Partnership between Leeds and Herefordshire continues to progress in accordance with agreed delivery plans. The latest monitoring reports that Restorative Practice Training Sessions to date have been convened with 295 staff members, with a further 147 staff booked onto future dates and 150 additional staff still to book onto the additional sessions that have now been scheduled for January 2024. The Restorative Practice 'Train the Trainer' programme has also been completed with staff who will lead future delivery of the Restorative Practice Training Sessions with all new starters. There are several other elements of the delivery programme which are also progressing and remain on track. Initial feedback from the Leeds team and our own workforce report that the training has been very well received although on-going training will be necessary to support further learning and development so that Restorative Practice becomes embedded and impactful.

Reports of poor practice and parent-blaming attitudes are concerning and should be raised directly with relevant staff and/or reported to their supervisor / line manager at the earliest opportunity so that intervention can lead to prompt action and early resolution. Where this is not possible, for whatever reason, the Council's Complaints Service can be contacted to try and achieve a resolution at stage 1 of the complaints procedure. If this is not possible, parents have an opportunity for the complaint to be investigated by an Independent Investigating Officer and Independent Person at stage 2 of the complaints procedures.

The Complaints Service and Children's Services have been working together with a number of families who have made complaints at stages 1 and 2. Recent complaints monitoring and reporting indicates that progress is being made with families, although some parents remain dissatisfied about some historic and current, matters and may elect to progress their complaint to an appeal at stage 3 of the complaints procedure. Ultimately, where parents remain dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint about Children's Services they can contact the Ombudsman who can look into the result of a complaint and/or the way a complaint has been handled. The Ombudsman can't however look into complaints about anything that has been considered by a court and can't stop a council from taking court action or be used to appeal against a court decision as this will require parents to take legal advice.

There are no known current safeguarding concerns reported by parents or carers that have not been listened to and actioned appropriately or remain live and under review.

Supplementary question:

Given that the Home Office statistics on rape allegations state that only 3 in 100 rape allegations are false how comfortable are you as corporate parents that the council's most senior officers are willing to leave Herefordshire children in placements with carers who have been charged with multiple accounts of child sexual abuse including child rape?

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member children and young people:

A written response would be provided.

Written response to supplementary question (provided on 9 January 2024):

The West Midlands regional child protection procedures which cover the broader West Midlands region (as distinct from the seven local authority West Midlands conurbation) set out for the multi-agency safeguarding professionals organisations the procedures to be followed where there is any concern regarding a 'person posing a risk to children'. These largely cover circumstances where the risk is more readily apparent as a consequence of the conviction of an individual.

When placing children, local children's services are required to work with other safeguarding partners to consider whether any further assessment of risk is required and alongside that whether an assessment of a person's capacity to protect children in their care should also be conducted.

The details of may or may not be shared with other people which may well include a child's birth parents based on the unique details of each individual case.

It is recognised that where information cannot be fully or even partially shared with birth parents this can be a cause of concern, but in reaching a decision on whether to share or not this will be based on the best interests of the child/children involved.

Therefore I am assured that the council's officers do follow the appropriate procedures when assessing the suitability of placements.

PQ 16	Mr Morgan, Leominster	<p>This Council meeting is the first since the publication of the latest Ofsted Monitoring Report (31/10/23) which is a damning indictment of this Council's care of looked-after children, in particular unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. There is NO mention of the concerns raised by Ofsted in either the report from the Chief Executive or the Leader. There is no acknowledgement of how we are failing these vulnerable children, no apology for what is clearly identified as discriminatory practice, and no hint of how we are going to do better. There is not even any reassurance that the safeguarding concerns raised by Ofsted have all been dealt with.</p> <p>How and when is the Council proposing to rectify its response to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children?</p>	Cabinet member children and young people
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Response:

The Ofsted feedback letter comments on a service offer that is inequitable and not yet inclusive but does not describe it as discriminatory. It is recognised that Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) are a vulnerable cohort of our children looked after and that we need to do more to ensure the needs of this group are fully met. We have seen a significant increase in the numbers of children seeking asylum who are unaccompanied and the multi-agency provision of local services to meet their needs is under-developed. This is regrettable and we have developed an action plan to address this. The action plan ensures that Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and young people will be supported to live with suitable connected carers whenever this is in their best interests. We are also making sustained efforts to ensure that this cohort of young people has access to culturally appropriate placements, worship, activities, food and language.

As Corporate Parents we are looking at this holistically across all areas including Housing, Communities, Commissioning and Adults as well as Childrens Services. Corporate Parenting' means the collective responsibility of the Council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies to give care experienced children, young people and Care Leavers the opportunities and support we would want for our own children. This includes supporting them through to maturity and into adulthood. Since the Ofsted Monitoring Visit in September 2023 we have accommodated four new Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children within the boundaries of Herefordshire. There is also a UASC group where young people can feedback on their experience and for them to support to shape the service.

As with the previous Monitoring Visits, Ofsted did not formally raise any safeguarding concerns during the most recent Monitoring Visit. The letter from the 3rd Monitoring Visit did include that due to visits being undertaken at the minimum statutory frequency, there were some safeguarding concerns. These concerns had been addressed and there is ongoing review and scrutiny for these vulnerable young people. We have since amended our Practice Standards to reflect an increased visiting frequency to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and young people so that a relationship with their allocated worker can be formed allowing them to feel safe and to share information about themselves and their journey to the UK. This work provided part of the focus of the most recent Improvement Board and is also overseen by the Corporate Parenting Board.

Supplementary question:

What safeguarding and monitoring processes are in place to ensure the welfare of unaccompanied refugee children in their care placements both in and out of County?

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member children and young people:

At the point of referral a Social Worker will visit child on the same day and a placement is found, we endeavour to place within the County. This placement will be a foster placement or a supported accommodation provider dependent on their age and needs. The child has their emotional and physical health needs assessed. They are able to gain an interpreter to support communication and to enable us to hear their story and understand their needs. Clothes and other essential items are purchased for them. They are visited weekly for the first month to ensure a relationship is built with them. Each child will have differing needs and the response to them is tailored to those needs. Any possible family members who may be in the Country are contacted and assessed. These actions are the same whether the child is placed within or outside the County. They continue to be monitored and safeguarded within the statutory frameworks for all looked after children.

PQ 17

Ms
Protherough,
Hereford

Cllr Price has recently informed the Council that the cost of the Eastern River Crossing cost has trebled over the last couple of years, so the Southern Link Road could now cost more than 3 times the original cost of £27million, or over £80million in today's prices. How can the Council justify reallocating £10.3 Million to negotiate the compulsory purchase of land, while a robust, financial business case is not in place and there is no funding for the actual road?

Cabinet
member
transport and
infrastructure

Response:

The increase in costs for the Eastern River Crossing were identified as part of developing the Strategic Outline Case for the scheme. As a result of that more detailed work, the new bridge over the River Wye floodplain was identified to be significantly longer than originally envisaged and this is a significant element of the increased costs.

The costs of the Southern Link Road are not subject to the same level of change as the details of the scheme are well-developed. A review of costs as part of a wider review of the business case for the scheme puts the current estimate at around £35m. The updated business case will help us to identify other sources of funding. Once we have a robust funding package we will be able to start the necessary land purchase and other processes needed to progress the scheme.

Supplementary question:

Councillor Price is using basic CPI to inflate his base Southern Link Road costs from the 2015 prices to October 2023 to calculate a road construction cost of £35million. The CPI rate is much lower than the construction industry inflation rate of 168% over the same period, which gives a current

construction cost exceeding £72million. The Southern Link Road now excludes any of the sustainable transport measures included in the original South Wye Transport Package, so would Councillor Price please provide a more realistic cost estimate of this road and explain how the prudential borrowing being requested today will be repaid, with interest, from this road investment, without reducing yet further vital local services now and in the future

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member Transport and Infrastructure:

A written response would be provided.

Written response to supplementary question (provided on 4 January 2024):

The cost of £35 million has been calculated using indices from the Building Cost Information Service BCIS, taking the original cost estimate from Q2 2018 and projecting it to Q1 2027. The Inflation rate used is construction-specific and is made up from data across the whole of the industry. The revised cost estimate only covers the road scheme.

PQ 18	Mr Emmett, Hereford	The Bypass issue for Hereford has become a fifty year litany of ‘promises’ and mistakes. The last being the procurement of land that wasted millions of pounds. Though the greatest worry is, in these times of Councils stripped to the delivery of ‘statutory services’ due it must be said by central government cutbacks, that Herefordshire Council deems it necessary to pursue this project again. Moreover, according to the Highways England’s 2016 letter that highlighted the purpose of the Bypass is to release ‘pressure’ on the Birmingham Box, can you reassure us that a decade long scheme, now costing millions more, is for the people of Herefordshire’s benefit and not for ‘wider’ promises, involving as it will further unplanned urban spread?	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
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Response:
 I would like to reassure Mr Emmett that the Council’s view of the bypass is that it is for the benefit of Herefordshire residents and businesses. A bypass will take through traffic out of the city, improving road safety and creating better conditions for walking, cycling and bus users. It will also allow the city to grow, as it surely has to, to support its economic growth and prosperity for the future.

Supplementary question:
 Is there not substantially better ways of securing what money we may receive to get Hereford moving now, with improved transport flow and alternative options rather than adding another probable failed chapter to this half a century long saga?

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member Transport and Infrastructure:

A written response would be provided.

Written response to supplementary question (provided on 4 January 2024):

The last full review of all possible transport options for Hereford was the Hereford Transport Strategy Review in late 2020. The conclusion of this review was that, while measures such as walking, cycling improvements would help to deliver reductions in congestion in the city, the problems would remain with network resilience due to there being only one major road crossing of the River Wye. Far greater reductions in city centre congestion would result from a second river crossing, which would improve the conditions for more walking and cycling infrastructure, and this solution has long been pursued by previous administrations.

The Council at the time opted to pursue a package of active travel measures plus a new Eastern Link Road. A recent Strategic Outline Case report has found the cost of this option to be far higher than expected and the Council will be considering alternatives in order to achieve the best-balanced package of measures.

Funding for major road schemes and minor improvements are likely to come from a variety of different sources and further work will be done on identifying and pursuing an overall funding package.

PQ 19	Ms Reid, Hereford	<p>I understand that some people engaged to do work for Herefordshire Council – I shall describe as “workers” - have accommodation (eg hotel, lodgings) paid for by the council. This is most likely to be for non-permanent workers who live some distance away from Herefordshire.</p> <p>For the period 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023, how many “workers” had accommodation paid for by Herefordshire Council and how much did this cost the council?</p>	Cabinet member finance and corporate services
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Response:

Between April and September 2023 the allowance has been paid to 32 Agency workers at a cost of £126,684

Supplementary question:

The response to my public question was:

‘Between April and September 2023 the allowance has been paid to 32 Agency workers at a cost of £126,684’

I would have preferred the response to name the allowance and to state that no other “workers” had accommodation paid by Herefordshire Council. It is possible that non-agency “workers” had accommodation paid for.

I calculate the average cost of accommodation per worker for one year would be nearly £8,000 which presumably would be paid in addition to the normally more expensive cost of employing agency “workers” compared with permanent “workers”.

For the period, please break down by directorate, how many “workers” had accommodation paid for by Herefordshire Council and how much did this cost the council?

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Resources:

A written response would be provided.

Written response to supplementary question (provided on 18 January 2024):

Between April and September 2023, the allowance was paid to 32 Agency workers with a total cost of £126,864, as part of the terms and conditions of their contract. This represents accommodation costs for agency social workers in the Children & Young People Directorate as part of measures to respond to recruitment challenges. Payments in respect of accommodation costs are not made to permanent workers as part of their everyday role.

Agenda item no. 6 - Questions from members of the Council

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ1	Cllr Aubrey Oliver, Saxon Gate	In the years ended 31 March 2021, 2022 and 2023 how many of the children in the care of the council in the age group 16 to 18 were classified as being in neither education or employment and what percentage of the total number of children in our care in each year was this? Is this an issue which is particularly pronounced in boys or girls? Please provide a gender break down of how many children in our care were classified as NEET.	Cabinet member children and young people

Response:

The figures below are taken from the published DfE “At Risk” table which are published on a quarterly basis and form part of CCIS reporting by each local authority in England.

	Cohort	CLA NEET (no.)	CLA NEET (%)	Male (No.s)	Female (No.s)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Mar-23	33	5	15.2%	3	2	60%	40%
Mar-22	36	2	5.6%	2	0	100%	0%
Mar-21	35	3	8.6%	3	0	100%	0%

It is important to note that the cohort of children in care for comparator purposes is the 16 and 17 yr olds only (or 16-18yrs as it is often expressed).

Supplementary question:

The information already provided on this issue is somewhat reassuring. There has been a National Statistic issue that with 16-18 year olds, 1/6 of them are neither in employment or education. Our March '23 cohort roughly coincides with these figures. Are we continuing to support these young people, to ensure that they do not become homeless?

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member for Children and Young People:

A written response would be provided.

Written response provided on 11 January 2014:

For those up to the age of 18 all young people in care have a Virtual School Education Officer (VSEO) who will be working with the social worker and carer to assist them in finding suitable courses and apprenticeships. They continue to have termly Personal Education Plans (PEPs), even if they are NEET. I would say that the 16-18 cohort of CLA is well supported.

MQ 2	Cllr David Hitchiner, Stoney Street	Community transport provides a valuable service to many communities in Herefordshire enabling able and less able people to get to and from Hereford in particular. The service is hampered by the limited places in the centre of Hereford that service users can be dropped off without breaking the Law, in particular at the back entrance to Maylords Orchard. Could the Cabinet Member explain what steps are being taken to resolve this issue?	Cabinet members Transport and Infrastructure and Roads and Regulatory Services
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Response:

I am very aware of the importance of community transport schemes' ability to drop off passengers as close to their desired destinations, which is why the council provide a parking permit scheme to Dore Community Transport to allow the use of the council's car parks. I am pleased that the issue about dropping off opposite the Green Dragon, in Broad Street Hereford, has recently been resolved by explaining the rules about street parking, whereby a user may use a loading bay in the street to allow passengers to board or alight the vehicle given that the driver will be present.

I understand that the circumstances at the Maylords' access road is a little different in that this is a Bus Stop which does not permit stopping in the location, except for buses – this is so that buses have full access as they arrive to the kerbside to allow users to safely get on and off. There is, however, a public car park directly next to this location with a lift into the shopping centre and therefore Community Transport users can arrange pick-ups and collections from this point. If the driver is with the vehicle, then there would be no requirement to pay in the car park, as per our enforcement protocols, should the parking permit not be available.

Supplementary question:

Would the cabinet member agree that a solution needs to be found regarding the parking tickets allocated to community transport vehicles parked in order to collect elderly and disabled passengers?

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member transport and infrastructure:

A written response would be provided.

Written response provided on 11 January 2024:

A meeting was held between the Parking Services Manager and the Organiser of the Community Transport operator, the following was agreed:

- i) Their current permit scheme is to be amended such that the vehicles will be allowed to park in any council operated car park and in on street pay and display bays*
- ii) The Parking Service is to provide the operator with a map of the city that highlights all available locations*
- iii) That a dispensation be given for liveried vehicles to use the taxi rank located adjacent to the Maylords centre*

The Organiser is happy with the agreement.

MQ 3	Cllr Elizabeth Foxton, Eign Hill	<p>Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 What impact has this Act, and ministerial announcements and comment associated with it and the matter of Nutrient Neutrality, had on the council's plans to generate phosphate credits, through the creation of wetlands, to enable development to continue in areas where river pollution is high?</p>	Cabinet member environment
<p>Response:</p> <p>Cllr Foxton, thank you for your question, there has been no immediate impact on our credit scheme because of the proposed amendments in the levelling up bill. The Council followed DLUHC advice and continues to trade credits. Prudently, longer term investment decisions on further mitigation were paused for a few weeks whilst the likely impact of the government's proposals was assessed. I am pleased to say that I intend to bring a report to January Cabinet, setting out how we intend to provide mitigation that will not only clear the current backlog from the 2019 housing moratorium but also bring forward further mitigation to meet the requirement for 4400 homes identified in the local plan.</p>			
MQ 4	Cllr Liz Harvey, Ledbury North	<p>The 800m City Link Road element of the Hereford City Centre Transport Package has, so far, cost over £6m more than was originally budgeted by previous Conservative administrations.</p> <p>The Southern Link Road was estimated to cost £27m (2015) and previous Conservative administrations failed to unlock Department of Transport funding because the business case could not be made to demonstrate its Value for Money.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member is on record stating that road infrastructure delivery costs have doubled in the last 18 months.</p>	Cabinet member finance and corporate services

		What is the figure the Cabinet Member has in mind now for the projected delivery cost of the resurrected Southern Link Road project, and what is the current assessed probability that a Value for Money business case can be successfully made for this increased cost if one was unable to be made previously for the lower figure?	
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Response:

The pressures on the City Link Road costings have previously been reported to Cabinet

Funding for the Southern Link Road was allocated via the Department of Transport, following the submission and approval of a business case by the Department of Transport. The subsequent decision to no longer proceed with the scheme led to the DfT reallocating the funding

Certain elements of road construction costs have seen significant rises in the past couple of years. We are in the process of reviewing the details of the Southern Link Road scheme in light of the time elapsed since work on it was stopped in 2019. Part of this review includes a revised business case that will take into account changes in local traffic levels and will include a draft cost estimate of £35m to complete the scheme. This cost estimate includes allowances for inflation and contingencies for unforeseen events.

The business case will then allow us to identify and secure the necessary funding. I remain as convinced as ever of the importance of the Southern Link Road to helping to tackle the problems of highway network resilience and traffic congestion in and around Hereford, and to promote sustainable travel in the city.

As previously stated, the Business Case for the Southern Link Road will demonstrate Value for Money.

Supplementary question:

If the risk has not been assessed, despite the proposed decision for £10.3m spend on the project, please confirm. Please confirm how much it is reasonable for the council to spend before a risk assessment is made. Please provide detail to group leaders that the link road will only cost £35m.

Response to supplementary question from Cabinet Member transport and infrastructure:

£35m is the current figure for building of the SLR, utilising the same criteria for western bypass and eastern link road.