

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

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Ms Banks, Hereford	<p>A comment from central government, published by the Guardian Newspaper on January 30 stated that:</p> <p>“Ministers plan to push cash-strapped English councils to sell assets.”</p> <p>What is the position of Herefordshire Council regarding this proposal?</p>	Cabinet member finance and corporate services
<p>Response: A balanced revenue budget is proposed for 2024/25. The proposal does not include plans to sell council assets to support the revenue budget in 2024/25.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question: By what lawful right can the council sell-off what it does not own but is public property merely entrusted to the council to manage?</p>			
<p>Response to supplementary question from cabinet member finance and corporate services: There are no plans or intentions to dispose of council assets in the near or medium term up to 2029.</p>			
PQ 2	Mr Banks, Hereford	<p>While there are significant reductions proposed for vacant posts across directorates, the plans are silent on executive pay. With the Chief Finance Officer highlighting 'unprecedented economic conditions' putting pressure on finances, what is being done to control senior management costs at the top? Is this being considered alongside frontline cuts?</p>	Cabinet member finance and corporate services
<p>Response: The 2024/25 budget recognises that the council will need to transform as an organisation to ensure the future sustainability of the council and the services it delivers and this will require a review of the size and shape of the workforce to create a lean and resilient council for the future. The proposed savings, at Appendix B, reflect these transformation plans. In addition to removal of vacant posts across Directorates, the council-wide savings include additional measures: S1 Mutual Early Resignation Scheme 2024 and S3: Transformation (Target Operating Model). These proposals include a review of the council’s management structure, corporate services and business support functions across the council.</p>			

Supplementary Question: I understand the proposed Council-wide savings aim to deliver a "lean and resilient" workforce. However, the response is still unclear on whether senior and executive pay is in scope for those transformation initiatives. If frontline staff face uncertainty while leadership layer costs are protected and opaque, how does that align with shared sacrifices in challenging financial times? Specifically, will executive salaries and discretionary spending like travel come under review alongside direct public services facing cuts?

Response to supplementary question from cabinet member finance and corporate services:

Thank you Mr Banks for your supplementary question.

I can confirm all discretionary spend is in scope for the transformation initiatives we outlined in our previous response and some of our plans to reduce the size and shape of our workforce are specifically targeted towards management costs.

It's important to note that our executive salaries are neither protected nor opaque and annual pay increases are determined nationally and are outside of the control of the council. Salaries for our senior team are transparent both in the pay policies we adopt and in the amounts that are paid. Our pay policies are reported annually in our 'Pay Policy Statement' and the amounts received by individuals are reported in our 'Statement of Accounts'. Both documents are publically available.

The council is clear that the solutions to our financial challenges require a 'whole council' response at all levels throughout the organisation.

PQ 3	Ms Russell, Hereford	Residents raised the importance of protecting community facilities and spaces, especially for vulnerable groups like the elderly. If any sale or change of use of current Council properties, such as community centres, is under consideration to raise capital, how would you ensure equivalent spaces and accessibility remains for those residents reliant on these services?	Cabinet member adults, health and wellbeing
------	-------------------------	---	---

Response:

Thank you for your question. I can confirm that the council does not directly own or operate any community centres.

Developing and protecting community facilities and spaces is very important. The council's Talk Community service works closely with local communities to ensure that local needs are met through a wide variety of assets and settings, including using existing facilities to provide warm spaces. The community capital grants scheme which will be launched in 2024-2025 will be a further means through which the council will support investment in community facilities, as well as the direct investment it is making in the new library and learning centre in Hereford.

Herefordshire Council continues to keep under review the properties it owns or uses to ensure that they remain aligned with the needs of the council and its communities.

PQ 4	Mr McGeown, Weobley	<p>The Hereford Times has recently reported that the “Revised Draft City Master Plan” is to be submitted for public consultation early this year.</p> <p>I can not find a dedicated entry for it in the public reports pack.</p> <p>So where is it and more importantly what amount has been budgeted to resource this most important consultation?</p> <p>Will the consultation methods be of sufficient breadth and adequately financed so they will satisfy the council constitution?</p> <p>Article 3 – Citizens and the council</p> <p>2.3.2 Citizens have the right:</p> <p>(d) to be consulted or in some other way participate in council decision making in accordance with the arrangements the council has for such consultation and participation;</p> <p>5.8.67 Consultations</p> <p>5.8.68 The council encourages as many people as possible to give their views on decisions which affect them.</p>	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
<p>Response:</p> <p>The development of the Hereford City Masterplan has been paused, to allow for the Local Plan, the New Hereford Road Strategy and the Local Transport Plan to be progressed. Once this work is complete, the council will be in a position to review the City Masterplan, ensuring Hereford is well placed to play its critical role in realising the ambitions of the county wider strategies. Further information will be available in due course on the process and timescales for stakeholder consultation and public engagement for the Hereford City Centre Masterplan.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question:</p> <p>I am most pleased that the “Draft City Master Plan” is soon to be submitted for public consultation.</p>			

From the council constitution, Citizens Rights, 5.8.67 Consultations

5.8.68 states: The council encourages as many people as possible to give their views on decisions which affect them.

But I note from Summary results of the 2024/25 budget consultation events, carried out for the council by Impact “Consultancy and Research” pages 305-338

That the pop-up consultation stands etc only managed to engage 652 people.

But Herefordshire contains around 200K good folk. So this sort of consultation is not going to be any use in fulfilling “as many people as possible to give their views”.

Now when I was helping with Dilwyn’s Parrish Plan consultation, it was impressed upon me, that the gold standard, was to deliver a printed copy with reply questionnaire, to every household.

Will sufficient funds be included in the budget to allow this gold standard of democratic consultation to be applied to the draft city master plan? Will a copy be delivered to all Herefordshire households?

Response to supplementary question from cabinet member transport and infrastructure:

No – the council did not have sufficient resources to provide a copy of the consultation document to all households in Herefordshire.

PQ 5	Mr Pugh, Leominster	Is it not a breach of council duty and ethics (Section 149 Equalities ACT 2010 general duties Section A) to discriminate against second property or private property owners by implementation of any fiscal penalty that actively discriminates against them as a group, solely because they are deemed by council, or any others, to be “vacant” property owners.	Cabinet member finance and corporate services
------	------------------------	--	---

Response:

The Equality Act 2010 provides protection against discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics. Property owners (as a group) are not protected by the Equality Act 2010.

The discretion given to councils to charge a premium is intended to be used as part of a wider strategy to encourage homeowners to bring their properties back into use for the benefit of the local community and economy.

Supplementary Question:

What public funds will be needed defending the legal and lawful challenges inevitably to be adopted by outraged second home owners over being labelled as cash cows by the council?

Response to supplementary question from cabinet member finance and corporate services:

The council is not practising discrimination against a protected characteristic, it's a separate group that is not protected by the equality act. The intention is to bring properties back into use to benefit the economy and community across the county.

PQ 6

Mrs Pugh,
Leominster

It is noted in the council budget breakdown the expenditure allotted to repair and refurbish both roads and pavements in Herefordshire. Bearing in mind the number of Herefordshire inhabitants that have been injured on uneven dangerous pavements or suffered physical injury or damage on private or commercial transports of all types because of the appalling surfaces of our largely neglected pavements and highways is the budget sufficient to achieve better results and avoid accelerating the present neglect?

Cabinet member roads and regulatory services

Response:

Herefordshire's highway network is over 2,100 miles in length, which is long enough to stretch from Land's End to John O'Groats some two and a half times. We also have over 410 miles of footways, mainly centred in the city and market towns but also providing essential links in our villages. Our Officers and contractors work proactively to maintain and improve our highway network. Our Cabinet recognises that more is required for the council to match the aspirations of its residents and so to help address this we are committing £10 million pounds of additional investment into highway resurfacing between 2024-2026; thus investing for the future. In addition, Government has also recently announced that this council will receive an additional £106,918,000 for investment in the network, over the next 10 years as a part of its Network North initiative. This funding will help to address the maintenance and also improve Herefordshire's roads and pavement network to a good and safe condition.

Supplementary Question:

If the council knows what funds are available, the works required and the costs of the works, can the council confirm that there are sufficient funds in the budget to restore Herefordshire roads and footpaths to a good and safe condition? If not, what % of the outstanding works can we expect to see expedited?

Response to supplementary question from cabinet member roads and regulatory services:

A written response would be provided.

Written response to supplementary question provided on 23 February 2024:

Herefordshire's highways are subject to regular highway safety inspections to ensure that they are in a safe condition day to day. Where defects are identified through our inspection process or are reported to us by members of the public they are prioritised using a risk based approach and necessary works completed within the relevant timescales to correct the defect. This work is funded each year to ensure our roads are in a safe condition.

In terms of our longer term plans, we have calculated that our carriageways have an asset value of £1,624m and currently require £113m of investment. Our footways have an asset value of £88.4m and currently require £1.5m of investment.

To address this need we are committing £10 million pounds of additional investment in to highway resurfacing between 2024-2026 and we will be investing every penny of the additional funding the government has allocated to Herefordshire, following the changes to HS2, into our highway network. This will mean a further £106 million pounds being invested over the next 10 years into local roads alongside the £14 million pounds we receive from Government each year to maintain our road network.

PQ 7	Mr Evered	To reduce the CO2 level of Herefordshire's atmosphere by 0.16 PPM (parts per million) or 0.000016%, how much is the council tax payer contributing to the council in order to achieve its Net Zero goal? If not known, what is the council's projected figures for this?	Cabinet member environment
------	-----------	---	----------------------------

Response:
In the financial year 2022/23 the Council invested £4,773,000 in capital projects to support our net zero carbon and nature rich goals. Of this amount £4,431,000 was external grant funding secured by the Council, the remaining £342,000 capital coming from the Council's own budgets. Much of Council's spend is in 'invest to save' projects such as installing solar photovoltaic panels on schools.

Supplementary question:
Current Atmospheric CO₂ is 425.89 ppm. The council's NetZero policy, if fully achieved, will cause a reduction to 425.73ppm. The council received £4,431,000 in external grant funding to help achieve this spectacular reduction! From whom was the grant received and are there any conditions the council has to fulfil to receive it?

Response to supplementary question from cabinet member environment:
Herefordshire Council does not measure performance towards net zero targets in terms of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) but in terms of carbon emissions measured in tonnes of CO₂ per annum. More information can be found [on our web pages](#).

The grant monies were received from numerous funding sources including the following:

- **Getting Building Fund** (administered by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP))
- **The Levelling Up Fund** (LUF) (administered by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Department for Transport (DfT))
- **Local Transport Plan** (LTP) (administered by the Department for Transport (DfT))
- **Natural Flood Management** (NFM) programme (administered by Environment Agency (EA) and Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA))
- **Sustainable Development Fund** (SDF) (administered by Welsh Government)
- **National Peatland Action Programme** (administered by Natural Resources Wales (NRW))

- **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** (administered by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the European Commission(EC))
- **Warm Homes Fund (WHF)** (administered by National Grid and Affordable Warmth Solution (AWS))
- **Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery (GHG LAD)** (administered by Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy)
- **Home Upgrade Grant (HUG)** (administered by Department for Energy Security and Net Zero)
- **Stronger Towns Fund (STF)** (administered by Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG))
- **Basic need allocations** (administered by the Department for Education (DfE))

These grant allocations are each subject to their own funding agreements which were satisfied to enable the Council to defray the grant.