

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

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ 1	Cllr Liz Harvey, Ledbury North	<p>In February 2024, in order to achieve a balanced budget and to mitigate the worst effects of applying the maximum increase allowed in Council Tax, your minority administration gave assurances to this Council that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £2.3m of reserves would be repaid by savings delivered by the Children’s Directorate; and • All income received above that budgeted from council investments would be used to provide additional targeted support to hard hit families. <p>Please would the Leader confirm that you going to honour these firm undertakings?</p>	Leader
<p>Response:</p> <p>We recognise the challenging financial climate and its impact on individuals and we continue to provide support to households in hardship. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme, approved by full Council in February 2024, continues to provide support at the maximum level to those most in need with more than 11,000 households expected to receive 100% discount on their council tax through this scheme – paying no council tax at all. The scheme provides support to eligible households regardless of their council tax banding. In addition, the Council continues to offer support to residents through award of Discretionary Housing Payments, administration and allocation of the Household Support Fund, support services provided by Talk Community and by providing temporary housing solutions for individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It is expected that this support will continue in 2025/26.</p> <p>As at Period 6 of 2024/25 (September 2024), the Children & Young People Directorate is forecasting a balanced position against the approved revenue budget. This forecast assumes delivery of Savings Targets S2 and S3 in full and that activity in progress over the remainder of the year will achieve Savings Target S3 by 31 March 2025; Savings Target S4 is currently assessed as ‘at risk’. This means that the Directorate will have achieved £2.3m of savings in 2024/25 without using the additional budget allocated from reserves by the Budget Amendment approved by Full Council in February 2024.</p> <p>As at P6, the revised forecast, including management recovery actions, highlights that the additional budget allocation of £2.3m is not forecast to be used in 2024/25. This is currently presented as an underspend and included in the overall forecast position for the year to report performance against the approved Revenue Budget of £212.8m. Due to the volatility of the Directorate’s demand-led activity and risk of impact on the outturn position, until the full year results and achievement of savings are known, the final requirement from the additional budget cannot be confirmed. We are continuing to monitor financial performance and identify recovery action in 2024/25, however, any overspend on the council’s Revenue Budget in 2024/25 must be funded from the council’s available reserves.</p>			

MQ 2	Cllr Dave Boulter, Whitecross	<p>The Leader's Report states that "1,100 high value jobs have been created" on the Enterprise Zone.</p> <p>What is the evidence businesses on the site are required to provide to evidence the achievement of these jobs, and what is the definition of 'high value' that you are using to test and to agree their figures?</p>	Cabinet member economy and growth
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Response:
The Hereford Enterprise Zone Ltd Board has a Placement Strategy setting out a range of criteria that a business must meet to qualify to locate on Skylon Park. The Placement Strategy ensures only businesses that in key target sectors that will create higher value employment (more better paid jobs) located on the Enterprise Zone. The business commits at the point of contractual sale of the land as to how many jobs they will create as a result of their business growth on the Enterprise Zone.

Following a review of the Hereford Enterprise Zone at the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee in November, we are also committed to commissioning an external economic impact assessment to gather and review the evidence required to further quantify the significant impact it has and continues to make to the Herefordshire economy.

MQ3	Cllr Pauline Crockett,	<p>Many of us have witnessed and experienced the devastation caused by recent and repeated flooding in our County. Every time this happens homes are ruined and lives are thrown into turmoil!</p> <p>Our County's drainage system is unable to cope with the scale and frequency of these severe weather events. Residents need action now.</p> <p>This Council must robustly enforce landowner riparian responsibilities, and take action to better manage water on and off the public highway.</p> <p>The Council must also maintain the operational effectiveness of existing flood defence schemes and ensure that the Environment Agency does likewise.</p> <p>In my Ward all of my Parishes have had to report serious flooding events, I am sure I am not alone!</p> <p>What are this administration's immediate plans to improve the protection of our residents and where will you be investing early?</p>	Cabinet support member
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Response:
This administration is utterly committed to addressing the serious flooding risks that have caused such hardship to residents, and disruption to our schools and economy. It is clear to everyone that the events are becoming more frequent and more intense. In response to the October and November floods, and building on the motion passed by this council at our last meeting, we have set in progress a county wide project to understand each and

every flood or near-flood event, and then, where possible, take remedial action – whether that be addressing failures or capacity issues in our drainage system, resolving problems with how quickly the rivers can get water away, looking at – as I mentioned in the previous meeting of Council – our plans for new homes in light of their contribution to flood risks, and yes, as you suggest, working with landowners and where necessary taking enforcement action where riparian responsibilities have been neglected. We will also be looking at improving our flood mitigation and emergency response services.

Solving a problem in one area carries the risk of moving it elsewhere. This work will require coordination of all of those risk areas, and as the Lead Local Flood Authority we will be taking leadership of all the various bodies involved in this – the Environment Agency, Welsh Water, Severn Trent Water, The Lugg and Lower Wye Internal Drainage Boards, and so on, as well as the parish councils who we have already partnered with to map any missing assets and develop a deeper understanding of the local drainage network.

To this end we have already seconded staff into a growing flood team so that we have the ability to move forward on this across the county, and they are already hard at work. We are drawing funds from our [emergency response budget] and will be asking this council to support investment in flood response in our capital budget next month. There is much in climate change that is beyond our control. But rest assured we will leave no stone unturned in facing this.