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Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Thursday 17 July 2025 at 2.30 pm

Cabinet Members Physically Present and voting:

**Councillor Jonathan Lester, Leader of the Council (Chairperson)
Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst, Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairperson)**

Councillors Graham Biggs, Harry Bramer, Dan Hurcomb Barry Durkin, Carole Gandy, Ivan Powell, Philip Price and Pete Stoddart

Cabinet Members in remote attendance

None

Cabinet members attending the meeting remotely, e.g. through video conferencing facilities, may not vote on any decisions taken.

Group leaders / representatives in attendance

Councillors Liz Harvey, Terry James and Clare Davies (online)

Scrutiny chairpersons in attendance

Councillors Toni Fagan (also attending as substitute group leader for Cllr Toynbee), Ben Proctor and Pauline Crockett.

Other Councillors in attendance:

Councillor Hitchiner

Officers in attendance:

S Gregory (Secretary), H Hall, C Porter, T Russell, D Thornton (democratic services support), S Tompkins and P Walker

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies from members of the cabinet.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hitchiner declared an interest regarding item 9 on the basis he lived in the vicinity of the proposed route. It was noted that it was not a registerable interest and Councillor Hitchiner had a dispensation to take part in the meeting.

Councillor Powell declared an interest regarding item 9 in his capacity as chairman of Hereford Rugby Club

13. MINUTES

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

14. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 9 - 16)

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 1 to the minutes.

15. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS (Pages 17 - 20)

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 2 to the minutes.

16. REPORTS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

There were no reports from scrutiny committees for consideration at this meeting.

17. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS' IMPROVEMENT PLAN - PHASE 3

It was confirmed that Tina Russell was appointed as the permanent corporate director for children's services this week and congratulations were extended. It was also confirmed that this appointment updates the position in paragraphs 7 and 8.

The member for children and young people introduced the report. Thanks were extended to the corporate director for their development of this approach regarding the children's improvement plan and for their leadership in delivering the improvements required. The leadership team, managers and staff were also thanked for continuing to deliver improvement in the council's practice and approach to support and working with families.

It was confirmed in producing the report, the council was conscious of key legislation, statutory guidance, the independent review of children's social care and the published government's response called 'keeping children safe, helping families thrive'. As a result, the council are in a good position to develop and implement the government's families first programme.

The plan reinforces the council's restorative strength-based approach and it sets out the council's tripartite approach in monitoring progress through key performance indicators, case auditing and gathering views and experiences of children and families.

Thanks were extended to those who had shared their experiences with the council and by the end of March 2025 over 100 families had done so. The views reported were consistently positive.

It was highlighted that Ofsted's 7th monitoring visit report was published on 17th July. Ofsted had noted that the quality of practice for children in care had improved at pace since the last monitoring visit, the director of children's services and managers had worked with conviction to allow social work to flourish and consistently stronger practice was improving the experience and outcomes for children in care.

It was noted that the approach taken during Phase 2 of the plan was making a clear tangible difference both in terms of quality of social work and the pace of improvements.

Comments from cabinet members. Thanks were extended to the director of children's services and the cabinet member for their level of service, hard work and efficiency in turning around children's and young people. It was noted that the directorate was not only operating within budget but under budget as per the Quarter 4 report and were delivering an exceptional service.

It was noted that whilst Ofsted acted as the independent arbiter, the Government appointed children's commissioner also provided scrutiny on children's services. It was highlighted that previous concerns by Ofsted regarding the pace of improvement acknowledged that the pace had progressed to create an environment for social work to flourish.

It was confirmed that the service was in a good place to deliver against the family first programme. The four outcomes are for children and young people to stay together to get the help they need, that children and young people are supported by their family network, children and young people are safe both in and outside the home and that children and care leavers have stable and loving homes.

It was raised regarding how well the council reflected on itself to ensure it went from strength to strength. It was noted that in Phase 3 the council commits to knowing itself and had identified where further work was needed. It was confirmed that the council has a tripartite approach to measuring progress against those outcomes, it has a good

understanding of its key performance indicators, and its case audit practices were improving. It was confirmed that the service knows itself well and it was the feedback from children and families that was most important.

It was highlighted that where a case audit was recorded as inadequate, it did not mean the child was at risk, it was regarding the way in which practitioners engaged such as the plan not being written in a child friendly way or the family didn't understand the detail. The service continues to understand these points, so it can improve.

Group leaders gave the views of their groups. The encouraging progress on delivering the improvement plan was acknowledged. It was positively noted that the pace had also improved. Appreciation and thanks were extended for the hard work and dedication of staff. Concerns were raised regarding repeat referrals and repeat child protection cases, allocation of stability for children in care and child protection, and two out of five social workers were still not permanent. It was noted that the health outcomes would be monitored to ensure that the ICB provided the necessary support for emotional mental health, dental support and therapeutic interventions.

It was queried how the key performance indicators in the plan compared with England and the council's statistical neighbours. It was raised how child friendly Herefordshire was embedded in policy.

In response to group leaders, it was confirmed that the level of re-referrals had decreased and were in line with the council's statistical neighbours. It was clarified there were two measures for repeat child protection (1) is a repeat within two years and this had reduced from 54 to 43 last year and (2) was a repeat at any point, this had reduced from 103 to 63. It was noted that child friendly Herefordshire will be reflected on and considered in all decisions going forward. It was noted that England averages and statistical neighbour data can be helpful comparators, but they should not be viewed as targets as each case was unique. It was acknowledged the point about the ICB was important and children's services were aware. It was confirmed that a lot of the work was delivered through the Herefordshire Children's Safeguarding partnership.

Councillor Powell proposed the recommendations, and it was unanimously resolved that:

That Cabinet:

- a) Cabinet endorse the Phase 3 Improvement Plan outlined in Appendix A**
- b) Cabinet authorises the Corporate Director for Children and Young People in consultation with the council's Corporate Leadership Team to lead this improvement plan on behalf of the Council and to send it to Ofsted as part of the ongoing children's services monitoring.**

18. DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY FOR HEREFORDSHIRE 2025 TO 2028

The member for adults, health and wellbeing introduced the report. It was highlighted that the strategy had been developed through consultation and engagement with the community, local providers, services and people who had lived experience of domestic abuse.

It was noted that engagement with people with lived experience of domestic abuse and victims continues through the year by LEAN (Lived Experience Advisory Network).

The strategy sets out a vision for Herefordshire which is to be a county where domestic abuse is not tolerated and where everyone can live free from abuse and harm.

It was noted that the strategy has four overarching priorities (1) improving the awareness and prevention (2) improving and understanding of domestic abuse and support services (3) improve joint working and coordination across services and (4) to hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour. An action plan had been developed incorporating a number of outcomes below each priority area and the Local Partnership Board will be responsible for monitoring and measuring progress against these outcomes.

It was confirmed that data referenced on page 8 referred to local statistics. On page 13 data regarding intimate partner violence, suicidal, and self-harm research were National Statistics. Within the needs assessments the data sources listed all related to Herefordshire unless otherwise stated.

Comments from cabinet members. It was positively noted for the lived experience to have been captured within this strategy. The sanctuary scheme was a good scheme to give options for victims to remain in the home. It was important to raise the understanding of what is domestic abuse including coercive control. The 'cut it out' scheme was positively highlighted and queried if it would be taken forward and grown to increase awareness of it.

It was confirmed that the council would like to roll out the 'cut it out' scheme to wider businesses. Whilst increasing awareness may see an increase in numbers that would be positive, as it would mean more awareness was being raised.

It was confirmed that children's services have conducted two workshops to complete a specific children's plan that would report into the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board.

Group leaders gave the views of their groups. The strategy was welcomed; it was noted to be a good and solid strategy. It was positively acknowledged that important schemes such as 'ask Angela' and 'cut it out' were highlighted. It was raised that abuse takes place in more than the domestic environment, including towards council staff and queried if staff were receiving the right amount of training

Several queries were raised; whether the council's health partners could be encouraged to establish a sexual assault referral center in Herefordshire, if the council has enough housing for those in domestic abuse situations and if there were any face-to-face training available in Herefordshire for members to participate in. Clarification was sought regarding the membership of the Local Partnership Board.

A request was made to ensure that schools were providing information regarding domestic abuse and positive relationships as this would be a good investment in the younger generation.

More up to date data was requested regarding domestic abuse recordings in children social care referrals, as the current data was from 2022/23 and it would be helpful to see if there was a trend.

It was positively acknowledged that the report took on board the contributions to involve the NFU and 'we are farming minds' to incorporate rural issues.

Clarification was sought regarding the figures on pages 106-107.

In response to queries: It was confirmed that abuse towards council staff was logged and routinely monitored through the internal health and safety committee. It was confirmed that victims of domestic abuse received priority for housing.

Regarding the Sexual Assault Referral Center in Worcestershire, its focus was regarding the immediate response and standards for evidential integrity. Ongoing support for

victims is commissioned to be delivered more locally to where the victim lives or chooses to go. It was confirmed that these are governed and reviewed at the West Mercia Strategic Sexual Assault Board which is hosted by the Police and Crime Commissioner and delivers against what is the NHS England strategy for the provision of support to survivors of sexual abuse and assault.

It was confirmed that the statistics on pages 106 -107 of the agenda pack would be checked.

It was understood that the Government would be introducing domestic abuse and awareness in schools through the curriculum to start from primary school onwards.

It was also noted that the comments and feedback received would be taken before the Partnership Board for their action plan.

Councillor Gandy proposed the recommendations, and it was unanimously resolved that:

That Cabinet:

- a) The Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2025 to 2028 be approved for implementation;**
- b) Approval of progress updates and any refresh of the associated needs assessment required, be delegated to the Corporate Director for Community Wellbeing in consultation with cabinet members during the lifetime of the strategy.**

19. PROCUREMENT STRATEGY FOR THE HEREFORD WESTERN BYPASS -PHASE 1

The member for transport and infrastructure introduced the report. It was highlighted that the decision was regarding approval of the procurement strategy and to inform members of the land acquisition strategy.

It was confirmed that a design review had been completed for Phase 1 of the bypass which revealed that the original design of the Southern Link Road was still good for the most part. Therefore, it was now the right time to bring on a construction partner to help finalise the designs and to assist with working with National Highways and Network Rail in completing the approvals for the design. It was confirmed that early contractor engagement would assist in finalising the construction cost estimates.

It was confirmed that current financing will use the £10.3m agreed by cabinet and council. The report in March 2024 authorised the spending of £10.3m and the report was comprehensive, open, transparent and clearly set out the rationale for the decision to progress to the development of Phase 1.

It was highlighted that a full business case will be considered by cabinet before the funding for the construction of Phase 1 was drawn down and there was no requirement for a further business case regarding this current decision to procure a contractor.

It was noted a useful PGC was also held on 7 July.

It was raised that the appendices to the report were exempt and if discussion by cabinet members or group leaders referred to them, the meeting would need to move into closed session.

Comments from cabinet members. There was support for the project moving forward.

Group leaders gave the views of their groups. No concerns regarding the approach to procurement were raised. There was support from some group leaders for the bypass proceeding. Concerns were raised as well regarding whether the scheme would deliver an improvement to traffic and would represent value for money. It was raised that evidence to justify the decision and spend had not been delivered. It was queried whether the money could be phased so the procurement approach was brought forward alongside a business case with the funding being released when the business case and value for money analysis evidence supported it.

It was queried if all decisions taken by the Economy and Environment Director would be taken in full consultation with the cabinet and the section 151 officer, would be fully documented and accessible to members.

It was queried would the procurement and construction consider the council's commitment to net zero, would there be active travel infrastructure and consideration made for children and young people.

It was raised if lessons learnt from previous projects were being applied to Phase 1. Whether there was confidence in the pricing to provide a reliable indicative pricing for Phase 2 and what the margin of error was.

It was queried what the likelihood of central government funding would be required to deliver the full Western Bypass and what safeguards were in place to avoid further cost burdens being passed onto council taxpayers.

It was raised what were the causes for delay with Network Rail and National Highways and what escalation mechanisms would be in place to resolve inter-agency issues.

Lastly, it was queried if there was a robust set of KPI's for the procurement strategy and Phase 1 of the bypass and could these be shared with members. Or could KPI's be developed with members.

In response to queries it was noted that the council had LEP funds of more than £25m odd to pay for this project, planning permission was granted and there was an issue with appointing a contractor but the council was online to deliver the bypass with government money. In terms of justification for the bypass, it was noted that the last administration paid around £450k for a report reviewing the bypass project which concluded that a transport package with the Western bypass included provided the greatest transport resilience for Herefordshire. Furthermore, the justification for the first phase of the Western bypass was established with the application for the LEP grant

It was emphasised that the project has had to start again. It was noted that the active travel measures for Phase 2 were in conjunction with building that road as well. In Phase 1 the active travel measures would be delivered adjacent to South Herefordshire, the Holme Lacy Road scheme, cycle and travel way. It was noted that Phase 1 would use Holme Lacy Road as active travel measures and reduce car usage on it.

It was confirmed that the intention of procuring a contractor that would work with the council would be to discover ahead of construction the buildability of the scheme and the environmental impacts it would have. This would ensure the council has best practice for a major infrastructure scheme that mitigates all the issues that are encompassed.

Regarding National Highways and Network Rail, it was confirmed that the council has quarterly meetings with them, it was progressing well and approvals in principle had been reached.

It was confirmed that when the major decision for the money is concerned, all the reports and reasons why it will be going ahead will be available.

Councillor Price proposed the recommendations, and it was unanimously resolved that:

That:

- a) Cabinet agrees the procurement strategy as detailed in Appendix 1**
- b) Cabinet agrees the proposed strategy for the acquisition of land associated with the proposal as detailed in Appendix 2**
- c) Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director Economy and Environment to undertake a two-stage procurement process and award of a Pre-Construction Services Agreement to a contractor through a compliant framework for the design and early contractor involvement on the project within the current approved budget.**
- d) Cabinet delegates authority to Commercial and Investment Manager Property Services to agree the Heads of Terms and subsequent acquisition of land, within the approved budget.**
- e) Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director Economy and Environment to procure and enter into contracts with any additional specialist external consultants and advisors required to support the project with the approved budget.**

The meeting ended at 16:15

Chairperson

Agenda item no. 4 - Questions from members of the public

Question No.	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1.	Peter McKay, Leominster	On 1st May were advised that you would consider an addendum to the 2018-2028 Rights of Way Improvement Plan comprising an amplification of the Public Right of Way Glossary that says CRF's and CRB's were intended to be shown as Roads Used as Public Paths, but in fact were shown as Footpaths and Bridleways, identifying them as being prospective upgrades when redrafting the plan in 2028. Having acknowledged that this situation exists in Herefordshire, would you accept that could be commenced now, in consultation with the Local Access Forum, so that this could be worked through, developed and incorporated in the redrafted Rights of Way Improvement Plan, as an agreed plan for these rural greenways, by 2028?	Cllr Hurcomb
Response: Thank you for your question. Yes, this is something we will consider, in consultation with Members, Officers and the Local Access Forum members.			
Supplementary question: No supplementary question			
Supplementary response:			
PQ 2.	Tracey Bowes, Hereford	The original South Wye Transport Project (SWTP) business case included £5million of funding from developers, as it would unlock land for housing. The current 2 page business case and budgets indicate that Herefordshire Council and local taxpayers will fully fund the Southern Link Road, with £5million of capital receipts being used instead of developers contributions. Why are taxpayers across Herefordshire subsidising a road for housing developers in Hereford?	Cllr Price

Response:			
The two-page business case state's that the cost of the first phase of the Hereford Western Bypass is currently estimated at £35m for which a council contribution of £30m was sought with the expectation that the remainder be funded through third parties such as the Department for Transport and developers. Furthermore, the South Wye Transport Project, was a multi scheme package, for which the southern link road was only one part of a wider selection of schemes aimed at improving transport. Whilst the council is now aiming to deliver the first phase of the Hereford Western Bypass many of the active travel schemes from the package are also being delivered including the cycle links on Holme Lacy Road and the Quiet Routes where construction is scheduled to start in August/September. When the Southern Link Road was cancelled by the previous administration the council had to hand back £millions of funding to the Local Enterprise Partnership and were not able to draw down any of the S106 developer funding that was collected to support the scheme. As a result, these funds are no longer available to the council and the council has had to use its own funding to bring the scheme forward.			
Supplementary question:			
The original South Wye Transport Package cost was £35million with the road costing £27million. Herefordshire is now paying £35million for a standalone Southern Link Road which, in order to detrunk the current A49, will have to be built to National Highways standards for a 60mph road, ending at a 4-armed roundabout. With the increase in road building costs and a much higher road design spec, what is the impact on the Council's Value for money, Return on Investment and Benefit Cost Ratio calculations compared to the original BCR of the South Wye Transport Project, where many of the benefits were attributed to the non-road components of the scheme and how likely is it that a 60mph road can be built for just £35million?			
Supplementary response:			
Standards for construction have not changed since the original SLR design were undertaken which would have also had to comply with the design manual for roads and bridges and had approvals from National Highways. It is correct to say that the construction Phase 1 will cost more than it would have in 2019, had the bypass not been cancelled by the previous administration it would have been built by now, at a lower cost the funding for it would have come from Government funding. The decision to cancel the bypass resulted in the Government funding being returned to the Local Enterprise Partnership who redistributed the funding to other projects across the Marches LEP and not to projects in Herefordshire. Early contractor involvement will assist in narrowing down the construction cost estimates. Before any money is drawn down to fund the construction of the scheme, a revised detailed business case will be prepared outlining the cost benefit ratio of the proposals to enable an informed			

decision to take place. The work to develop this business case is currently being undertaken and will be informed by the further design work proposed in this procurement. It is taking time to complete the new transport model and to test the scheme and the future housing growth model. Therefore the current benefit cost ration is not available.

PQ 3.	James McGeown, Hereford	Herefordshire Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan Phase 3, appendix A, page 12, Ofsted Recommendation, The quality of practice including assessments, plans, planning and purposeful visits that are responsive to risk and need: • Timeliness of RCPC (Review Child Protection Conference) sustained average through year at 94% So we can find a fundamental element of proper process for a RCPC with a timeliness requirement from: https://westmids-herefordshire.trixonline.co.uk/chapter/child-protection-conferences#information-for-the-conference "Children's social care should provide all conferences with a written report that summarises and analyses the information... The report should be provided to parents and older children ... a minimum of 5 working days before review conferences to enable any factual errors to be corrected and the family to comment on the content." Was this requirement included in evaluating 94% Timeliness of RCPC?	Cllr Powell
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Response: The timeliness of child protection review conferences is a statutory key performance indicator it does not include the distribution of the decisions and record of those meetings. Data reporting show the % of Review Child Protection Conference completed in timescale each quarter gives an average of 94% for 24/25, this is the KPI reference in the Phase 3 plan. The Corporate Director has advised that service is working on its own practice standards and the system monitoring of activities with them, including when parents and young people receive copies of their assessments. At this time this is not available as an automated report and managers review this as part of their staff supervision and case auditing. We do however know from our case audits this is an area of improvement required.	
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Supplementary question:

In response you state:

Data reporting show the % of Review Child Protection Conference completed in timescale each quarter ...

Herefordshire Social Services have a Statutory Duty as set out on page 98, Working together to safeguard children 2023:

“share the conference information with the child and family beforehand, where appropriate, and ensure that they understand the information provided “

So if I understand correctly, if the information required by Statutory Duty was not provided.

Then Review Child Protection Conference would not have been completed.

From Information gathered by a Herefordshire campaign group:

“We have yet to find a family who have received “Reports from Other Agencies ... in advance of RCPC”. We believe completion of this Statutory Duty has rarely/never been achieved.”

So are Elected Cabinet Members confident signing off 94% when “Conference Completed” may be nearer 0%?

Supplementary response:

The statutory measure is about the timeliness of delivery of children protection conferences and our data is currently at 94% for that statutory measure. So yes, I personally and therefore cabinet, should be confident in signing off that 94% timeliness of review children protection conferences is accurate.

PQ4	Mrs E Morawiecka, Hereford	“Under the previous Conservative administration the public auditor was unable to sign off the Herefordshire Council accounts for many years, until after the Conservatives had left office. To avoid this situation reoccurring in the future and to confirm that use of capital reserves and borrowing is providing Value for Money for taxpayers across Herefordshire, would the Cabinet member for Finance please explain the current Benefit Cost Ratio of the Southern Link Road capital project and how this has been calculated?”	Cllr Stoddart
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Response:

The accounts were not signed off due to a technical issue that was resolved, and the final certification was completed in 2019/20. However, in the audit committee papers for the 2015/16 Audit Finding Report (AFR) the below statement was included:

"We cannot formally conclude the audit and issue an audit certificate for the Authority for the year ended 31 March 2016 in accordance with the requirements of the Act and the Code until we have: completed the work necessary to issue our Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) Component Assurance statement for the Authority for the year ended 31 March 2016, and completed our consideration of other matters brought to our attention by the Authority. We are satisfied that these matters do not have a material effect on the financial statements or on our conclusion on the Authority's arrangements for securing value for money through economic, efficient and effective use of its resources."

More recently the 2024/25 accounts were completed one month earlier than the statutory requirement putting the council in the top 3% of councils in the country and the finance team won the 'Excellence in Governance, Reporting & Assurance' award at the Public Finance Awards run by CIPFA.

The council has made provision for £30m to be made available for the delivery of the scheme within its 5-year budget. Before this money is drawn down to fund the scheme however, a revised detailed business case will be prepared outlining the cost benefit ratio of the proposals to enable an informed decision to take place. The work to develop this business case is currently being undertaken and will be informed by the further design work proposed in the procurement. It is taking time to complete the new transport model and to test the scheme and the future housing growth through the model, therefore the benefit/cost ratio is not currently available.

Supplementary question:

Congratulations to the Council finance team on the improvements made in respect of managing Herefordshire's finances. However, despite this improvement in reporting income and expenditure, the cabinet member has admitted that today's key decision will be uninformed. He is unable to show that the road provides Value for Money.

Cabinet has no justification for investment in a standalone Southern Link Road project as much of the information needed to inform a business case is not available. The cabinet member is unable to even confirm that the presumed benefits of the Southern Link Road exceed the costs. So how can Cabinet today approve expenditure of up to £10.3million capital on this project?

Supplementary response:

The decision to fund £10.3m to fund the preparation of the scheme and development of the business case to inform the construction of the scheme was taken by cabinet in March 2024. This report does not commit any further council funding but merely states how the council is delivering the proposals already approved. That decision was well informed and went through due process.

A review of the scheme has identified there are opportunities to take advantage of more modern construction methods ensuring value for money. Therefore, today's report seeks approval to bring on board a contractor who is able to refine the design and provide a more informed estimate of cost. Any robust business case needs to understand the costs of a proposal in order to inform its ratio to benefits and therefore it would be entirely normal for a project of this type to progress designs to a stage that enabled the confidence in costs to inform the full business case.

PQ5	Jeremey Milln	Ahead of item 9 of today's Cabinet agenda, a press release from Herefordshire Council last week was extensively quoted in the Hereford Times. Yet it is clear from the on-line comments few were fooled by claims that a car-centric housing access road designed for 30/40mph, would function as a bypass, be adopted as a 60mph A49 trunk, improve overall air quality or relieve congestion. How then can the Cabinet member continue to believe that his SLR scheme which, unlike the previous SWTP, effectively ignores sustainable transport options and would have to be funded by local council tax payers, might be affordable and effective?	Cllr Price
Response: The previous proposal of the first phase of the Hereford Western Bypass formed part of the wider South Wye Transport Package for which many of the sustainable transport elements, such as Holme Lacy Rd cycling facilities and quiet routes, are being delivered in advance of phase 1 and therefore these have not been ignored in the development of the proposals. When the Southern Link Road was cancelled by the previous administration the council had to hand back £millions of funding to the Local Enterprise Partnership and were not able to draw down any of the S106 developer funding that was collected to support the scheme. As a result, these funds are no longer available to the council and the council has had to use its Levelling Up Funding to deliver the schemes. Had this not been the case the Levelling Up Funding could have been used to support even great active travel measures in Hereford.			
Supplementary question: The Cabinet members' response makes no effort to answer my question as to how his proposed 'bypass phase 1' (aka SLR) might be affordable and effective, since it would have to be funded by local Council tax payers and lacks the sustainable transport elements of the South West Transport Package since the Active Travel Measures he refers to, funded by Levelling Up Fund grant won by the previous administration, are entirely separate schemes. Instead he strews blame. First for returning Marches Local Enterprise Partnership money found to be a loan that previously he had asserted was a grant; and second, on the draw-down of Section 106, which presumably refers to Bloor's Holmer West contribution, was for phase 2 anyway. I ask again how can he continue to believe his standalone Southern Link Road, supported only by a two-page Strategic Outline Business Case for a £10.3m spend towards a road set to vastly exceed its £35m price tag, might be affordable, realistic and effective?			
Supplementary response: Thank you for your question, I am sorry I just don't understand your way of thinking on this. I have clearly been involved with the various iterations of getting the bypass to where it is over many years. We've gone through lots of iterations of funding of BCR's of affordability, it is the			

right thing and each time that we look at it and go forward there comes even more problems that means we must deliver the infrastructure to make Herefordshire a place where traffic and people can live their lives, jobs will go, the economy, everything along those lines.

I really find that your questions on the Southern Relief Road, the Phase 1 Bypass, are now getting to a point that you're making the same point over and over again. This county has to move on and we are trying to do the best to move this county on in all aspects of what goes on in this county. If we had built the body past five years ago it would have cost considerably less money than it is going to today, I've made the points that you raised because they are relevant, I'm not choosing the bits that you wish to choose I'm choosing the whole thing in the round, so I believe that this is the right thing to do for the benefit of the county and we are at a stage of development that we are discussing later on today to go to procurement. I know it won't satisfy you as an answer but that is my answer to you. Thank you.

PQ6	Ms Reid, Hereford	On the agenda is the Herefordshire Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan, Phase 3. I have read the 'Children's Improvement Plan Phase 3' report and its appendices and none of them mention the high rate of children in care in Herefordshire compared with its Statistical Neighbours (similar areas). Per the Local Authority Interactive Tool, LAIT, (at 31 March 2024, latest data), the rate (per 10,000 children) of children in care in Herefordshire was 114 but the Statistical Neighbours' average rate was 67 ie 70% higher. I suggest for Ofsted Recommendation 5 another Key Performance Indicator is added: "The rate of children in care is the same or lower than its Statistical Neighbours" (or similar wording)? Would you recommend my suggestion?	Cllr Powell
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Response:

We recognise that England and Statistical neighbour averages are useful comparators but they should not be considered to be targets.

The Corporate Director in her presentations has always been clear that we need to be focused on ensuring that we bring children into care when it is necessary and appropriate to do so and that when they are received into care those children move to a "permanency" arrangement giving them long term security and stability of care in a timely way.

Therefore I support Ms Russell's approach that it is not a target to be the same or lower than statistical neighbours but to be assured we are bring the right children into care. Therefore with respect we would not support your recommendation.

We do however, as previously stated view England and statistical neighbour averages as a helpful comparator.

Supplementary Question:

No supplementary question

Supplementary response:

PQ 7	Eddy Parkinson, Leintwardine	Regarding Hereford child social services, We see continual issues with the quality of decision making and therefore harsh and perverse outcomes for families. The councils data system we know from upheld complaints decisions and High Court judgements can be inaccurate. Some of these outcomes are in the media. I ask, Are the councillors and senior staff of the council satisfied they are not in a 'disinformation bubble' created by rogue staff covering for many years of awful practice?	Cllr Powell
Response: There is a formal reporting structure together with systems and processes where cases are independently reviewed. The systems and processes in place act independently and come together to provide information, including data, that is effectively monitoring the progress of Children's Services and the improvement. The council is also monitored in terms of its improvement by Ofsted through monitoring visits by the Department of Education, Children's Commissioner, Scrutiny, Safeguarding Partnership, Corporate Leadership Team, Cabinet and the Lead Member all of whom have access to a range of information and data. Therefore in answer to the question "Are the councillors and senior staff of the council satisfied they are not in a 'disinformation bubble' the answer is yes we are. As I have explained to Mr Parkinson during our previous meetings if Mr Parkinson has any concern regarding conduct or staff he should use the complaints procedure and we would investigate appropriately. As a council we take any allegations very seriously.			
Supplementary question:			
Supplementary response:			

Agenda item no. 5 - Questions from councillors

Question No.	Questioner	Question	Question to
Q 1.	Cllr Ben Proctor	Can the executive please explain how the mural on the side of the Commercial came to be destroyed?	Cllr Price
Response: The mural on the side of the Commercial was part of a public art programme delivered in partnership with the property owner. Unfortunately, the external render to which the mural was applied has since failed. The Council is currently in discussion with the building owner to understand the cause of the damage and what remedial steps may be possible. At this stage, no conclusion has been reached.			
Supplementary question: Thank you for the initial answer, which I have found a little disappointing. The public art commissions have been a rare success and incredibly popular in the city, and presumable in the wider county. The council selected locations, it commissioned the artworks, and it should have taken steps to ensure that the substrate was satisfactory. It's very disappointing that the cabinet member is attempting to shift responsibility onto the building owner. Where we're left is that a piece of artwork has been destroyed and will never be able to be replaced. Has he apologised to the artist, and would he like to take the opportunity now to do so, and to the people of the city and the county? Can he assure us that it will be replaced with work of equal quality as soon as possible and what assurance can he give to the other artists involved in the commissioning and the people of the city and the county that the other artworks that were commissioned as part of the scheme are all safe?			
Supplementary response: Thank you for your supplementary question. I agree with you the murals were very successful and benefitted Hereford substantially in people coming to visit just to see them. I am unable to comment further at this stage as the council is working with the building owner to consider possible options for a way forward.			

Q 2.	Cllr David Hitchiner	The officer responsible has confirmed to Councillors that the roundabout at the A465 end of this road will have four arms and not the five required for the full by pass. Five arms are required if this roundabout is to give access to Phase 2. Not only will the reputation of the Council suffer because the Council seem to be having a lack of foresight and ignoring a logical way to proceed, but the Council must show Value for Money. It would surely be cheaper and less inconvenient for residents for the 5 arm roundabout to be built as part of Phase1. How does building a roundabout you know is going to need to be redesigned fit with Value for Money principles?	Cllr Price
Response: The previously proposed design for phase 2 is currently being reviewed to ensure that it is fit for the future needs of the county. With the increased mandatory housing targets imposed on the county and the resultant increase in traffic levels, it is likely that the design of the road and the roundabout between the A465 and phase 2 of the bypass will change from what was previously proposed. Therefore, the roundabout will be constructed to meet current requirements, rather than on assumptions of what the future design might be Had the previous administration not cancelled the Southern Link Road, resulting in £millions of funding being returned to the Local Enterprise Partnership, this roundabout would have already been delivered by now and the council would be further ahead with its designs, planning and funding for the rest of the Hereford Western Bypass.			
Supplementary question: You have failed to provide a properly reasoned response. There is no doubt whatsoever that the roundabout on the Clehonger Road will require five arms otherwise there will be no link to Phase two. So, a much larger roundabout is going to be required. Isn't the real reason for not having five arms is that, if you need to alter the roundabout at this stage, you will also need to reapply for planning permission which would hold up your plans to get diggers on the ground before the next election. You're clearly determined to get the project over the line, whatever. The failure to provide a business case which satisfies the green book is clear evidence of this. Instead, all we have at the moment is a two-page business case which is based on unsupportable claims. We are now promised something less than green book, but we're not quite sure what.			

Much is made of de-trunking the A49 through the city. In fact, this is a key reason for favouring a western route over an eastern one. Given the undue haste in getting diggers on the ground, can the cabinet member assure the public that the road is being built to a standard that Highways England will accept? And is this assurance from Highways England in written form.

Supplementary response:

We have planning permission to build Phase one, when we have the design for Phase two which is being worked on and we'll have the outline case for this middle of next summer, we will know how we will join these two together. At this moment in time, it has always been proposed that we start with the roundabout that is on the design for the previous SLR. As such, the roundabout can be elongated as and when Phase 2 comes on board, which does not have planning permission yet but when it does, we will then know exactly what to build, what land will be needed to come forward.

It is this council's ambition to build the western bypass in total and as we progress, as I've said before earlier today, pressures are now coming in new directions as each year goes by for the economy, housing, road infrastructure and many other infrastructure projects and we just have to keep pace with it.

It is no good going back over the same ground time and time again. The plan is to build a four-arm roundabout that has the capability of expansion. That's where we're at, that's what we intend to deliver and that's what is Phase one, which we are looking at later this afternoon. I can't say anymore, you know the answers, I've answered it before and to be honest I think it's the time we look to move on rather than just go back over old ground.

Highways England will adopt this road, and they are National Highways. Our officers meet regularly, quarterly with their task force, and this is constantly updated as we move forward with the design over the next 12 months. You will find that National Highways will be supportive of the way that Phase one is built and it will be to the adoptable standard for National Highways to take on as the A49 in the future.

