

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

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ 1	Cllr Stark, Ross West	In April 2025, Ross Town Council agreed the specification for a new more fitting barrier to replace the temporary concrete safety barrier below Wilton Road cliff face in Ross. Since then, the work has been cancelled twice, first for completion in February and then August 2026. Your administration have trumpeted that this is the year of delivery for major projects. Can you explain why this is not the case here?	Leader
Response: The planned work to Wilton rockface is a priority for the Council and forms part of a £38.6m investment in Highways and Public Realm during 2026/27. Following receipt of original tender returns from contractors, a review of the project was undertaken in February 2026 with Balfour Beatty Living Places as it was identified that it would take the supply chain three months to produce the required materials, which would result in the project not being delivered before the end of May 2026 and the end of the contract with Balfour Beatty. Leadership of the project has since passed to the Council and the same scheme has been put to our own Highways and Public Realm Schemes Framework for delivery. In order to reduce lead times associated with the project, the team have agreed to explore an option to purchase the required materials directly from the relevant supplier, which I hope will be possible. Whilst the Highways and Public Realm team are working to deliver the project as quickly as possible, I am aware that they have recently advised Ross Town Council that works cannot commence in August due to nesting birds occupying the rockface and surrounding vegetation. Due to the nesting birds, and subject to the result of bat surveys that will conclude at the end of July, the earliest that works can begin is <u>from</u> October 2026, which also avoids the peak tourist season in Ross. The Highways and Public Realm team have been clear with me that Wilton rockface remains a high-priority scheme, with funding secured for delivery in financial year 2026/27. I have asked that the project team ensure that Ross Town Council and all Ward Members for Ross is updated on a regular basis as I am aware that there have been concerns about communication previously.			
Supplementary question: I only found out about this further delay to this key project for Ross only through the associated road closures having disappeared from the weekly street works report. So, how can both myself and Ross Town Council have any assurance that this project will ever be delivered?			

Response to supplementary question:

The highways and public realm team have been clear with me that the rock face remains a real priority for the council. I reiterate that the scheme is going through the relevant procurement process and we will appoint a contractor to undertake the works. It has been explained that there's been a delay due to the timing and the fact that works couldn't be undertaken in August. There's been the problem of the transition from one contractor to another but on the most substantive point it is not acceptable that ward councillors are not kept informed so I apologise and take responsibility for that. I will make sure that ward councillors are updated on any matter.

MQ 2	Cllr Pauline Crockett, Queenswood Ward	Leader, one of the four corporate priorities of this Council is People, your quarterly report makes no reference to the Care Quality Commission's 'Requires Improvement' assessment of Herefordshire Council's Adult Social Care services for people, so, given the significance of that judgement, why was it omitted from your report, and how can members and residents be assured that the council is treating the findings with the transparency and urgency they deserve?	Cabinet member Adults, Health and Wellbeing
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Response: Thank you for pointing this out. It should have been mentioned. However, I wish to stress that this does not mean that important issues raised are not at the forefront of my mind regarding improving certain elements of the service. At the next Cabinet meeting (30 July) we will be approving a full array of measures that will address all improvements that are needed. The improvement plan will go in to further detail as to how this will be achieved. I thank Cllr Crockett and the Health, Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny committee members for their ongoing interest and work in helping to shape and influence this important area of work.

Many of the improvements identified by CQC were already underway during the assessment process, and we are continuing to deliver them at pace. Progress will be reported through established governance and scrutiny arrangements, ensuring ongoing transparency and accountability. Most importantly, we will measure not only whether actions have been completed, but whether they are making a real difference to the experiences and outcomes of people who use our services.

Supplementary question:

Will you commit to including progress against the CQC improvement plan as a standing item in future quarterly reports until the areas identified by this CQC report have been addressed?

Response to supplementary question:

I'm really pleased to note that there's already really positive things to say. We're making huge progress in lots of areas in adult social care and I'm really looking forward to cabinet meeting next week where we will be highlighting the progress that we've made with adult services, the plans that we've have already put in place to address some of the shortfalls that the CQC report highlighted and I am confident that because we're such a robust council who can really make improvements, like we have done with children's services, we will be able to improve and address all of the issues and maintain a good

service. But in answer to your specific question, I think that's a really good idea and I will commit to updating members on the progress in my leader's report.

MQ 3	Cllr Ben Proctor, College Ward	Can the council provide an update on the work being undertaken to reduce the Section 106 backlog and confirm the current level of unspent Section 106 money?	Cabinet member Culture and Environment
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Response:

The Section 106 team is now fully staffed. A new S106 Highways Engineer joined the team in June and has had an immediate impact with a number of schemes being pushed forward for delivery this year. The team have also temporarily engaged one of the engineers that helped establish the team previously for a 4 to 6 month period to ensure a smooth handover with the new Highways Engineer. The current figure for unspent Section 106 is £5.3m for highways and transport projects, £3.7m leisure and sports projects and £5.9m on education projects. In 2025 the team delivered £2.98m of works helping to reduce the backlog and delivery is forecast at over £2m in 2026/27. The spend of section 106 monies has increased year on year with 1.39 million in 2022/23, 1.74 million in 2023/24, 2.79 million in 2024/25 and 2.98 million in 2025/26. The forecast for spend in 2026/27 is over £2m. The levels of unspent S106 money will continue to reduce as our work intensifies.

Supplementary question:

When this administration took charge, the section 106 backlog stood at 13 million pounds. Today, it stands at 14.9 million. The section 106 backlog grows at an average. The income comes in at an average of 2.7 million pounds a year. Based on the answer, the council spends at an average of 2.2 million pounds a year. I think everybody must be able to see that if the money comes in at a faster rate than it is spent, then the backlog will continue to grow. The answer signs off by saying the levels of unspent section 106 money will continue to reduce as our work intensifies. If he were to double the rate at which he is delivering section 106, it would still take 9 years to clear the backlog. But this isn't about the money. It's about the communities waiting for the things they were promised. What can he say to the communities of Herefordshire and the members of this council that would persuade any of us he has a grip on this issue?

Response to supplementary question:

We came into a backlog and officers are working really hard to clear that backlog. Sometimes it's very complicated to get projects delivered and out of the door. So certainly not for want of trying. Capacity has been an issue. We're working on that. But I take your point and we will

continue to try to deliver those projects as quickly as possible so that we actually drive down the total sum and not simply work on the trailing edge whilst more 106 comes in ahead of that. But you're right it's very important to see these infrastructure and mitigation projects delivered in a timely fashion. Thank you.