

Council

**Thursday, 13 November 2014, 10.00 am, County Hall,
Worcester**

Minutes

Present:

Mrs P E Davey (Chairman), Mr A A J Adams,
Mr R C Adams, Ms P Agar, Mr A T Amos, Mrs S Askin,
Mr J Baker, Mr R W Banks, Mr M L Bayliss, Mr A N Blagg,
Mrs S L Blagg, Mr C J Bloore, Mr PJ Bridle,
Mr M H Broomfield, Mr J P Champion, Mr S J M Clee,
Mr P Denham, Mr N Desmond, Ms L R Duffy,
Mrs E A Eyre, Mr A Fry, Mr S E Geraghty,
Mr W P Gretton, Mrs J L M A Griffiths, Mr P Grove,
Mr A I Hardman, Mr M J Hart, Ms P A Hill,
Mrs A T Hingley, Mrs L C Hodgson, Mr C G Holt,
Mr I Hopwood, Mr M E Jenkins, Ms R E Jenkins,
Mr R C Lunn, Mr L C R Mallett, Mr P M McDonald,
Mr A P Miller, Mrs F M Oborski, Mr S R Peters,
Dr K A Pollock, Mr D W Prodger, Prof J W Raine,
Ms M A Rayner, Mr A C Roberts, Mr J H Smith,
Mr R J Sutton, Mr C B Taylor, Mr J W R Thomas,
Mrs E B Tucker, Mr P A Tuthill, Mr R M Udall,
Mr G J Vickery, Mr T A L Wells and Mr G C Yarranton

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. Eight questions submitted to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (previously circulated); and
- C. The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 18 September 2014 (previously circulated).

**1609 Apologies and
Declaration of
Interests
(Agenda item 1)**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr S C Cross and Mr J W Parish.

Four declarations of other interests disclosable were made:

Mrs L R Duffy - Agenda item 6 - Chairman of the Fire Authority Audit and Standards Committee.

Mr P Grove - Agenda item 5 - in receipt of police pension.

Mr A C Roberts - Agenda item 9 - Notice of Motion 2 -

		Trustee of St. Richard's Charity.
		Mr C B Taylor - Agenda item 9 - Notice of Motion 2 - Owner of a small business.
1610	Public Participation (Agenda item 2)	There was no public participation at this meeting.
1611	Minutes (Agenda item 3)	RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
1612	Chairman's Announcements (Agenda item 4)	The Chairman welcomed Mr Baker back to the Council after a recent illness. The Chairman referred members to the printed announcements.
1613	Fire and Rescue Authority (Agenda item 6)	The Chairman welcomed Mr Mark Yates, the Chief Fire Officer, to the meeting. The Chairman of the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority, Mr D W Prodger, presented his report to the Council and he and Mr Yates answered questions asked by members of the Council.
1614	Reports of Cabinet - Matters which require a decision by the Council - Capital Programme (Agenda item 7(a))	<p>The Council had before it a report on two amendments to the Capital Programme. The first was a scheme to improve the public realm in Kidderminster town centre and the other referred to a financial exercise completed which updated the expenditure profile of the Capital Programme over the current and future financial years. A revised Capital programme was attached to the report as an Appendix. In the debate, the local member expressed his full support for the proposal in Kidderminster.</p> <p>RESOLVED that:</p> <p>(a) the Capital Programme Cash Limits be updated to include the £1.5 million investment to improve the Public Realm in Kidderminster town centre; and</p> <p>(b) the Capital Programme and cash limits as set out in the Appendix attached to the report be approved.</p>
1615	Reports of Cabinet - Summary of	<p>The Leader of the Council reported the following topics and answered questions in relation to a number of them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worcestershire Next Generation

**Decisions made
(Agenda item
7(b))**

- Delivering the Corporate Plan - FutureFit Update
- Worcestershire Parkway Regional Interchange
- Commissioning of IBS Schools Service
- Fair Funding Consultation Outcomes 2015-16
National and Local Changes to the Funding
Arrangements for Schools - Revisions to the new
Local Funding Formula for Worcestershire
Mainstream Schools
- Worcestershire Safeguarding Children's Board
Annual Report 2013/14
- A440 Southern Link Road Dualling Phase 3
- Transfer of Kingsford Forest Park to the National
Trust
- Scrutiny Report - Reducing Crime Against People
at Risk
- Commissioning of ICT Infrastructure (Managed
Services)
- Resources Report
 - Revenue Budget Monitoring 2014/15 Outturn
Forecast as at 31 August 2014
 - FutureFit Programme Update
 - Capital Programme Budget 2014/15 Actual
Expenditure as at 31 August 2014
 - Digital Strategy
 - Welfare Reform Act - Replacement of Social
Fund

**1616 Visit by the
West Mercia
Police and
Crime
Commissioner
(Agenda item 5)**

The Chairman introduced and welcomed to the meeting Mr Bill Longmore and his Deputy Mr Barrie Sheldon. Mr Longmore gave a brief presentation on his work as Police and Crime Commissioner since his election in November 2012 and then answered a wide range of questions posed by members.

The Chairman thanked Mr Longmore and Mr Sheldon for their attendance.

**1617 Annual Report
of the Chief
Executive
(Agenda item 8)**

The Chief Executive presented her report to Council which covered various topics including:

- Worcestershire Resident Priorities
- New Ways of Working
- Delivering the Corporate Plan; FutureFit
 - Open for Business
 - Health and Wellbeing
 - Children and Families
 - Environment
 - Delivering Within our Means
 - Looking Ahead

1618 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 1 - Constitutional Change (Agenda item 9)

The Chief Executive then answered a broad range of questions from members.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for her report.

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion standing in the names of: Mrs E A Eyre, Mr A I Hardman, Mr J P Campion and Mr S E Geraghty as set out in the agenda papers.

The Motion was moved by Mr A I Hardman and seconded by Mrs E A Eyre who both spoke in favour of it.

The Council agreed to consider and deal with the Motion on the day.

It was then moved by Mrs P Agar and seconded by Mr P Denham as an amendment that the final paragraph be replaced with:

"The Council urges the government to take the opportunity now for a radical English Devolution settlement devolving power to councils in England and to create new Passenger Transport Authorities with responsibility for regulating all public transport including fare structures, under democratic local control in each council area."

The amendment was debated during which the following principal points were made:

- the amendment was complementary to the original motion and would ensure growth in the local economy. Other members stated that the amendment was unnecessary as the original motion had the necessary flexibility and breadth
- the amendment would be a boost for local people, it would safeguard the environment, cut pollution and set the scene for growth
- that central planning of public transport would allow the Council to have greater influence on routes and services and enable an integrated transport system to be created. Other members suggested that the county lacked the scale of transport infrastructure which allowed the city region examples quoted to operate successfully
- the amendment would safeguard public transport for the future and assist the people of the county.

On being put to the meeting this amendment was lost.

- the motion would guarantee influence for county councils and mirror the demands made by cities and regions
- it would place power closer to the communities and redress the trend of power being centralised close to the seat of national government
- it would be a practical example of localism and would ensure powers were reclaimed
- the motion captured a new mood for devolution and should be welcomed.

The Council then debated the original Motion.

On being put to the meeting the Motion "This Council notes the statement made by the Prime Minister following the 'No' vote in the Scottish Referendum and in particular welcomes the formation of a Cabinet Sub-Committee to examine English constitutional change and the continuing commitment that "power can and must be devolved more locally".

This Council commends the 'One Place, One Budget' initiative taken by the County Council's Network and chaired by the Leader of Surrey County Council, which creates an ambitious vision for public services to be more closely controlled by local people. This envisages a new devolution settlement between Whitehall and the counties to move decisions about how all local services are delivered closer to the people affected by those decisions. This would deliver better public services, reverse decades of centralisation and revitalise UK democracy.

This Council urges the Government to take the opportunity now for a radical English Devolution settlement devolving power to both the counties and the cities of England" was agreed.

1619 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 2 - Local Economy

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion standing in the names of Mr P M McDonald, Mr A Fry, Ms P Agar, Mr L C R Mallett, Ms P A Hill, Mr G J Vickery and Mr P Denham:

(Agenda item 9)

"We believe that retail is a key industry which employs many local residents. Council calls upon the OSPB to establish a Task and Finish Group working with District Councils and other agencies to encourage inward retail investment into the county, and it will investigate ways to provide help and support to Worcestershire retailers and small business owners located in our high streets and shopping centres."

The Motion was moved by Mr P M McDonald and seconded by Mr L C R Mallett who both spoke in favour of it.

The Council agreed to consider and deal with the Motion on the day.

A debate ensued during which the principal points were made by Members speaking in favour of the motion:

- it would help address some of the pressures faced by small businesses and would help revitalise high streets
- it should be a main strand of local economic development
- not only about shops on local streets it was also about creating the right environment for small business possibly including assistance with website development
- it would indicate a joined-up approach and send a clear signal that Worcestershire was "Open for Business".

Members also spoke against the motion and made the following principal points:

- it was the wrong mechanism to use
- this could have been added to the OSPB Work Programme in a less formal way
- that this was more a matter for district councils to consider.

On a named vote the Motion was lost.

Those voting in favour were:

1620 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 3 - Salary Structures within the Council (Agenda item 9)

Ms P Agar, Mrs S Askin, Mr J Baker, Mr C J Bloore, Mr P Denham, Mr A Fry, Ms P A Hill, Mr R C Lunn, Mr L C R Mallett, Mr P M McDonald, Mrs F M Oborski, Mrs E B Tucker, Mr R M Udall and Mr G J Vickery (14).

Those voting against were:

Mrs P E Davey, Mr R C Adams, Mr R W Banks, Mr M Bayliss, Mr A N Blagg, Mrs S L Blagg, Mr M H Broomfield, Mr J P Campion, Mr S J M Clee, Mr N Desmond, Mrs L R Duffy, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr W P Gretton, Mrs J M L A Griffiths, Mr A I Hardman, Mrs A T Hingley, Mrs L C Hodgson, Mr C G Holt, Mr I Hopwood, Mr A P Miller, Dr K A Pollock, Mr D W Prodger, Mr A C Roberts, Mr J H Smith, Mr R J Sutton, Mr C B Taylor, Mr P A Tuthill, and Mr G C Yarranton (29).

Mr P J Bridle and Mr J W R Thomas abstained (2).

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion standing in the names of Mr P M McDonald, Mr A Fry, Ms P Agar, Mr R M Udall, Ms P A Hill, Mr G J Vickery, Mr P Denham and Mr L C R Mallett:

"With the ever growing gap between employees within this Council we call upon the Cabinet Member responsible to consider inviting an independent body agreed by leaders of all political parties to undertake a review of salary structures within the County Council to ensure a fairer balance of remuneration among our employees."

The Motion was moved by Mr P M McDonald and seconded by Mr G J Vickery who both spoke in favour of it.

The Council agreed to consider and deal with the Motion on the day.

A debate ensued during which the following principal points were made:

- there was a growing disparity in the wage scales and the motion was intended to address this
- the County Council should aspire to pay the living wage and act as a beacon within the local economy

- low paid workers needed to be protected following an extended wage freeze.

Other members suggested

- the motion would not address the problem of low pay and departing from nationally agreed wage scales would not protect the Council's workforce
- this was an ill thought out attack on Chief Officers' and Head of Service pay and was neither relevant or appropriate
- the Council was a fair employer and would not condone this attempt to undermine the foundations of the current wage structure.

On a named vote the Motion was lost.

Those voting in favour: Ms P Agar, Mr J Baker, Mr C J Bloore, Mr P Denham, Mr A Fry, Ms P A Hill, Mr R C Lunn, Mr L C R Mallett, Mr P M McDonald, Mr R M Udall and Mr G J Vickery (11).

Those voting against: Mrs P E Davey, Mr R C Adams, Mrs S Askin, Mr R W Banks, Mr M L Bayliss, Mr A N Blagg, Mrs S L Blagg, Mr P J Bridle, Mr J P Champion, Mr S J M Clee, Mr N Desmond, Mrs L R Duffy, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr W P Gretton, Mrs J M L A Griffiths, Mr A I Hardman, Mrs A T Hingley, Mrs L C Hodgson, Mr C G Holt, Mr I Hopwood, Mr A P Miller, Dr K A Pollock, Mr D W Prodger, Mr J H smith, Mr C B Taylor, Mr J W R Thomas, Mrs E B Tucker, Mr P A Tuthill and Mr G C Yarranton (30).

1621 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 4 - Footway Maintenance (Agenda item 9)

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion standing in the names of Mrs E B Tucker, Prof J Raine, Mr M E Jenkins, Mrs S Askin, Mrs F M Oborski and Mr T A L Wells as set out in the agenda papers.

The Motion was moved by Mrs E B Tucker and seconded by Mrs S Askin who both spoke in favour of it. The motion was altered with the consent of the signatories present so that the word "workers" at the end of the first paragraph was replaced with "walkers".

The Council agreed to consider and deal with the Motion on the day.

With the agreement of the signatories of the Notice of Motion present at the meeting it was agreed to alter the

Motion so that the word "increase" in the second paragraph was replaced with the word "review".

A debate ensued during which the following principal points were made:

- footway maintenance had been allowed to fall victim to budget reductions and a serious backlog of work had developed
- many faults fell below intervention level and this increased the backlog further
- that if capital funding could be found to address this need that would be acceptable
- increases to this budget head could only be found by reductions elsewhere and the Council would face some stark choices

An amendment to paragraph 2 so as to increase the total highways maintenance budget allocated to footways maintenance was moved and seconded. On being put to the meeting this amendment was lost.

On a named vote the Motion as altered "This Council recognises the importance of the simple activity of walking and getting out of the house as part of a healthy lifestyle. Safe footways are especially important for the elderly if they are to feel confident enough to walk to their local shops and services and continue to take part in their community. We are concerned that the county's footways budget of only £800,000 in 2014/15 is totally inadequate to maintain our footways and that the inspection criteria are insufficiently rigorous to identify where the surface is unsafe for less able walkers.

We call on the Cabinet to increase the proportion of the total highways maintenance budget that is allocated to footway maintenance in 2015/16 and to consider a new capital project for footway improvements in the coming year to be spread across all councillors' divisions" was agreed.

Those voting in favour: Mrs P E Davey, Mr R C Adams, Mrs S Askin, Mr R W Banks, Mr M L Bayliss, Mr A N Blagg, Mrs S L Blagg, Mr P J Bridle, Mr J P Campion, Mr N Desmond, Mrs L R Duffy, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr W P Gretton, Mrs J M L A Griffiths, Mr A I Hardman, Mrs A T Hingley, Mr S L C Hodgson, Mr I

Hopwood, Mr A P Miller, Dr K a Pollock, Mr D W Prodger, Mr J H Smith, Mr C B Taylor, Mr J W R Thomas, Mrs E B Tucker and Mr G C Yarranton (27)

There were no votes against.

Ms P Agar, Mr J Baker, Mr C J Bloore, Mr P Denham, Mr A Fry, Ms P A Hill, Mr R C Lunn, Mr P M McDonald, Mr R M Udall and Mr G J Vickery abstained. (10)

**1622 Question Time
(Agenda item
11)**

Eight questions had been received by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and had been circulated before the meeting. All the questions were asked (or taken as read). All answers are enclosed with these Minutes.

**1623 Key Issues
Debate
"Worcestershire
Next
Generation"
(Agenda item
10)**

In view of the time it was agreed to defer this debate to the next scheduled meeting of the Council.

**1624 Reports of
Committees -
Summary of
Decisions
Taken by the
Planning and
Regulatory
Committee
(Agenda item
12)**

The Council received the report of the Planning and Regulatory Committee containing a summary of decisions taken.

The Council adjourned from 1.30 p.m. to 2.15 p.m. for luncheon.
The meeting ended at 4.40 p.m.

Chairman

COUNCIL 13 NOVEMBER 2014 - AGENDA ITEM 11 – QUESTION TIME

Answers given at the meeting may have been a précis of the full answer which is set out below. In some cases additional information is also included. Where, due to time or other constraints, it was not possible for the question to be asked formally the written response is also included below.

QUESTION 1 - Mr R M Udall asked Mr J H Smith:

"The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways will be aware of the problem being faced by a number of St John's residents who have been advised by either their insurance company or by the police to remove their cars from the highway. They wish to have an official footway crossing but are unable to afford, in one single payment, the full cost of the work which could be over £1,000. Some residents have been tempted to use loan sharks or pay day lenders to borrow the money which has placed them into considerable debt. Will he therefore consider a pilot scheme within my St John's Division to allow residents to pay for footway crossings in instalments which would make the costs more affordable and would remove the need to borrow money at high rates of interest placing them into serious debt? Would he also be willing to meet with me to discuss how such a scheme could be implemented and introduced?"

Answer given

Thank you for your question. I am happy to meet to discuss this issue, and in principle I am supportive of establishing a pilot scheme to enable people to pay for footway crossings in instalments. I would point out that any pilot system must not incur any additional costs to the County Council and there will need to be an additional cost to applicants to cover the additional admin costs of stage payments. Also any residents that default in payment stages will not receive any reimbursement and no work would be undertaken until full payment is received.

QUESTION 2 – A printed question from Mr A T Amos was directed at Mr A I Hardman:

"Would the Leader of the Council :

(a) confirm that, in its recruitment and selection procedures, the County Council does not in any way, directly or indirectly, discriminate against any group of people,

(b) confirm that the appointment of staff is done purely and solely on the basis of merit, experience, and ability, and not on the basis of any irrelevant factor such as gender, skin colour, or ethnicity, and

(c) agree with me that where discrimination does occur, the organisation itself and the country are the losers and end up with third-rate people rather than the best?"

Written Answer

I thank Mr Amos for his question and I will answer the three elements as they were put.

(a) confirm that, in its recruitment and selection procedures, the County Council does not in any way, directly or indirectly, discriminate against any group of people,

The County Council is committed to ensuring that recruitment and selection is carried out objectively and that candidates are not unlawfully discriminated against. To this end, recruiting managers receive appropriate training which clearly sets out the Council's expectations with regards to equality and diversity. The equality and diversity monitoring information collected from candidates during the recruitment process is separated from the main application form and therefore cannot influence recruiting managers when shortlisting candidates. The Council will shortly be analysing equal opportunities information provided by job applicants for possible difference between application and interview rates for protected groups.

The percentage of employees who are disabled or from black and minority ethnic groups is monitored. Figures show that currently, 3.73% of the Council's employees are disabled. This is the highest this figure has been in a number of years. The percentage of employees from black and minority ethnic groups fell from 7.12% to 6.17% during 2013/2014. However, I'm pleased to report that during the first half of 2014/2015, this figure has risen to 6.32%. To give some context, historically the percentage of black and minority ethnic staff employed by the Council has remained fairly constant, between 6.0% and 6.5%. Over the past few years, the Council has not recruited as many new staff because of the challenging economic climate and there have also been significant staffing reductions across the Council. Set against this backdrop, the fact that diversity rates haven't gone down dramatically is a notable achievement.

(b) confirm that the appointment of staff is done purely and solely on the basis of merit, experience, and ability, and not on the basis of any irrelevant factor such as gender, skin colour, or ethnicity, and

There are a number of reasons why staff are appointed on merit. Firstly, the Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against candidates because of one of the protected characteristics which include sex, race, age and disability. Secondly, the principle of selection on merit means the Council will appoint the most suitable candidates and this makes good business sense.

(c) agree with me that where discrimination does occur, the organisation itself and the country are the losers and end up with third-rate people rather than the best?"

The County Council owes it to the citizens of Worcestershire to appoint the most suitable candidates. This helps ensure that not only does the Council recruit people who will contribute positively to the performance of the authority but also that the reputation of the Council as a good employer is maintained. Doing otherwise would not only be potentially costly to the Council, it could also contribute to other undesirable outcomes such as higher staff turnover. The Council's recruitment processes are robust. Any allegation of possible discrimination is taken very seriously and investigated appropriately. On the rare occasions when such an allegation is substantiated, the Council's recruitment practices would be reviewed to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

QUESTION 3 – Mr P M McDonald asked Mrs E A Eyre:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families please inform me over the last two years how many hours teaching assistants have spent teaching? Also, how many unqualified teachers are employed to teach by this Council?"

Answer given

As at 30 September 2014, the Council employs 1,594 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Teaching Assistants across 188 LA schools within the county. This equates to an average of 8.5 FTE Teaching Assistants per school and equates to over 2.7m hours worked during an academic year based on their contractual hours. We do not keep a central record of how many hours these Teaching Assistants have spent teaching as their work is organised on a daily basis by the school they are employed at.

As at 30 September 2014, the Council employs 17.05 full time equivalent (FTE) unqualified teachers across all LA schools in the County. This equates to **21,568** hours worked over a school year based on their contracted hours.

Supplementary Question

In response to Mr McDonald reiterating his question Mrs Eyre said that it was unlikely that she could give a more specific answer given how widely distributed the information sources were.

QUESTION 4 – Mr P M McDonald asked Mr John Campion:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning please inform me of the number of hours now spent by senior officers (Head of Service and above) working from home?"

Answer given

The County Council does not hold central records of the number of hours spent by officers working flexibly. The majority of county hall based staff are required to work in a mobile and flexible style, chief officers included, which releases direct savings in the region of £500,000.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about monitoring Mr Campion stated that whilst central recording of hours worked from home were not collated, individual managers had responsibility for monitoring this and the important thing was that the performance of Chief Officers and Heads of Service was measured by focussing on the quality of the outcomes they achieved rather than where they carried out their work.

QUESTION 5 - Mr Paul Denham asked Mr Campion:

"I was pleased to read in Worcester News on Wednesday 5 November that the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning has arranged to consult users of the new WCC website via a 'public feedback group'. Can he please advise Council what consultation took place with partners of the county council prior to the release of the county's new website?"

Answer given

Prior to the release of the county's new website the project team consulted with a residents' focus group, all our district council partners and a range of WCC stakeholders to cover all business areas of the council.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about specific problems experienced by Worcester City Council Mr Campion confirmed that the City Council had been a consultee and a significant amount of time in the project was allocated to reviewing the 8,000 pages and engaging partners in the design and focussing content down to what customers needed. As with any major change of this kind teething problems were almost inevitable.

QUESTION 6 - Mr R C Lunn asked Mr J H Smith:

"Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways explain whether he thinks that it makes sense and provides long term savings, to change some of the light sensors in the light columns in roads such as Hewell Road Redditch, thus removing the current unfairness of newer roads providing brighter lights than older ones during the switch off period?"

Answer given

Thank you for your question. There are around 55,000 street lights in Worcestershire made up of different types of lanterns installed at different times. Orange coloured lamps are older and white light lamps are modern. Some of these were installed relatively recently and are more energy efficient than the older (orange) types, which are inefficient.

The current part-night programme is relatively low cost to implement whilst delivering good energy and cost savings and reduce CO₂. It concentrates on those old lamps that are inefficient in order to contribute towards the savings that the County Council has to find. Hewell Road, Redditch, has both types of lamps, which is why there is a difference. In the longer term, it would require significant capital investment to change the older inefficient lanterns to modern ones such as LED. New highway adoptions by developers include low-energy lanterns, which is why there is a difference compared to older streets.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about extending the range of sources of funding Mr Smith said that all potential ways of funding ongoing improvements would be investigated.

QUESTION 7 - Mr W P Gretton asked Mr S E Geraghty:

"Reports of traffic congestion on Worcestershire's motorways are broadcast on national and local radio all too frequently, usually due to vehicle breakdowns or accidents. Can the Cabinet Member ascertain from the Highways Agency why this is the case and what can be done to reduce the inconvenience to Worcestershire residents and others using the motorways? Will he urge the Highways Agency to take action accordingly?"

Answer given

Firstly, can I thank Philip for his question highlighting this issue.

The motorway network through Worcestershire is a vital part of our transport system and whilst not under our control it's right that we seek to influence the Highways Agency (HA) responsible for this network. We all know that when accidents do occur on the motorway it can have quite an impact on Worcestershire roads and on local traffic congestion. Thankfully having checked the records I can report that accidents on the Worcestershire section of the motorway network are actually lower per mile than the England average. It is unlikely that breakdowns would vary significantly from the norm.

I would draw members' attention to:

Supporting facts for 2013 accident records as reported on the government link

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-annual-report-2013> indicate:

	No. Accidents	approx. miles	Accident No./ mile
Worcestershire	71	50	1.4
England	4892	18,000	2.72

However, we will all be aware that the Highways Agency has been undertaking works to replace the central barrier to prevent more cross-over accidents and other improvements. Temporary speed reductions are put in place and any accidents or breakdowns in the section of the works can increase the impact of any incident. Reporting of congestion may have increased due to these significant road works along the M5 corridor however the works have recently reduced in length and they will have a long term benefit.

I am assured by the HA that accidents or breakdowns on the motorway are pursued as quickly as possible through incident response teams to clear debris and direct traffic. Additionally, the Highways Agency pursues network improvements to reduce congestion caused by incidents and traffic volumes.

I hope this further information is helpful but I'm happy to ask our staff that do meet with the agency to highlight just how important the network is to Worcestershire and the impact that incidents do have on our local roads.

QUESTION 8 - Mr G J Vickery asked Mr John Smith:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways care to comment on the 'Better Roads for England' report from the Local Government Association?"

Answer given

Thank you for your question. The document to which you refer is a report from the LGA based upon independent research and calls for better and more value-for-money ways of delivering better roads and transport services from the next incoming Government, whoever that may be. I would welcome any additional funding, freedoms or powers given to local authorities by the new Government. This administration has, of course, already improved the condition of our highways by the additional capital sums invested in road maintenance, footways and drainage over recent years and is investing in improving congestion by major projects such as the

Worcester Southern Link Road improvements and the Hoobrook Link Road in Kidderminster".

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about the effects of increased traffic flows on local routes Mr Smith confirmed that issues raised by the LGA report would be studied closely and that the Council had a good record in securing new funding streams.