

## COUNCIL 18 JANUARY 2018 - AGENDA ITEM 9 – QUESTION TIME

Questions and written responses provided below.

**QUESTION 1** – Mr P M McDonald will ask Karen May:

*"How much has the Council spent over the last two years on employees who have been suspended?"*

### **Answer**

Thank you Cllr McDonald for your question. The cost to the County Council on employees who have been suspended over the last two full years is £116,445 for 2015/16 and £83,409 for 2016/2017.

### **Supplementary Question**

In response to a concern expressed about the cost to the Council, the Cabinet Member explained that the cost equated to circa. 0.001% of the total salary bill. In 2015/16, 16 employees were suspended of which 2 were dismissed, 1 resigned and 13 returned to work. In 2016/17, 15 employees were suspended of which 2 were dismissed, 1 resigned and 12 returned to work.

**QUESTION 2** – Mr P Denham will ask Lucy Hodgson:

*"Two school crossing patrols allocated to St Barnabas and Stanley Road primary schools serving children living in Rainbow Hill division retired during recent months and have yet to be replaced. A child was injured as a consequence of a collision with a moving vehicle outside St Barnabas C of E Primary School last year.*

*The Road Safety (Education and Schools) Team Leader has stated in writing on 4th December 2017 that "the (St Barnabas School) site has failed a risk assessment for future provision of a patrol at this location. This is mainly due to the volume of vehicles not stopping and the duty of care for any individual we were to place in the live carriageway."*

*Is the Cabinet Member with Responsibility prepared to risk potential injuries to young children attempting to cross a busy road where it is deemed to be too great a risk to employ an adult crossing patrol? If not, what does the Cabinet Member with Responsibility intend to do to reduce this risk as a matter of urgency?"*

### **Answer**

Over 50 School Crossing Patrols are deployed across the County at specific sites to support children aged between 5-11 years old (14 in middle school areas) to safely cross the road. Patrols are deployed to sites that fall within the criteria outlined in the SCP Policy for Worcestershire. This Policy follows national guidance and was updated and adopted by the Council as part of the Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) in November 2017. The School Crossing Patrol (SCP) Service is a non-statutory (discretionary) service and even where an SCP is provided, it remains the responsibility of the parent and/or guardian to ensure that their child travels safely to and from school.

The introduction of road safety and traffic management schemes, along with infrastructure improvements and school travel plans have had a positive impact on the safety of children walking and cycling to school, reducing the reliance on School Crossing Patrols. During the last three years there has been only one collision involving a child pedestrian has taken place within 50 metres of a school in Worcestershire (at school opening/closing times). The injury to a child that Cllr Denham references in his question, whilst incredibly unfortunate, happened to a child of pre-school age and outside of school crossing patrols hours so cannot be linked to the absence of a school crossing patrol.

It's also important to mention that the County Council, offers road safety education (RSE) and practical pedestrian training to every first, primary or middle aged child in the county. It also offers RSE to high school pupils although we do not current have any take up of this. The Council has a statutory obligation to do this and the training is designed to develop the behaviours and attitudes of all participating school children for safe road use as pedestrians, passengers, cyclists and novice drivers. These are behaviours that are potentially life-long.

So in respect of the two sites that Cllr Denham specifically mentions. The longer term plan (i.e. within the next year) for St Barnabas is to have a Pedestrian Crossing installed, this will mean that the site no longer meets the criteria for a school crossing patrol. Meanwhile the advert to replace the post, until the Pedestrian Crossing is installed, has been re-published and the school has been approached again for them to sign up for Road Safety Education (the School currently does not utilise this offer). The needs across the Stanley Road site are being re-evaluated this week and I'm waiting for the output of this review. I will pass this information on to Cllr Denham as soon as I can.

#### Supplementary Question

In response to a concern about the length of time taken to provide a school crossing patrol at St Barnabas Primary School, the Cabinet Member commented that an advertisement had been placed to fill the vacancy and applications were awaited.

#### **QUESTION 3** – Mr R C Lunn will ask Karen May:

*"In view of the announcement of Carillion going into administration, can the Leader inform Council of the degree of our current and ongoing contract involvement with this company."*

#### **Answer**

The Council doesn't have any contracts with Carillion or with any of its subsidiaries. We are speaking to our contractors to see if there are any links to Carillion further down the supply chain.

Carillion telent (Ct) is a contractor to Openreach who build and manage the network for BT Group with whom we have our contract.

We are working closely with BT and have robust processes in place to ensure the impact is minimised and the delivery of Superfast Broadband across Worcestershire continues as planned.

#### Supplementary Question

The Cabinet Member explained that in future following the issues with Carrillion, the Market Engagement Team would be actively monitoring the market performance of current providers of services to the Council.

#### **QUESTION 4** – Dr C Hotham will ask Ken Pollock:

*"As Network Rail have failed to abide by planning conditions at Alvechurch station and legal obligations at Barnt Green station, both to the detriment of the less able. How can this council be confident that Network Rail have any intention of providing adequate facilities for disabled people at the new Worcester Parkway station?"*

### **Answer**

Thank you for the question. With regard to Alvechurch and Barnt Green stations, your comments are noted and Worcestershire County Council will continue to work with all key stakeholders, including Network Rail, to improve facilities at both stations.

With regard to Worcestershire Parkway, the station is being delivered by Worcestershire County Council with support from their rail advisors and not by Network Rail. Network Rail will take the asset into use but the scope of the development is set by the County Council and their advisors in line with requirements from Network Rail and Great Western Railway. The design is fully compliant with all current legislation regarding disabled access. In addition, the scope of the scheme has been developed alongside consultation with Worcestershire's Disabled Users Groups and the delivery team are now finalising the facilities that will be provided. This includes but is not limited to the following:

- Accessible ticket vending machines
- Ramped kerbing, tactile paving
- Priority parking for disabled users
- Accessible toilets
- Signage design to be suitably designed for disabled users
- Lift with spoken instructions and large buttons as well as suitable out of hours support line.

### Supplementary Question

The Cabinet Member agreed to meet Dr Hotham on site at Alvechurch and Barnt Green Railway Stations to observe the facilities for disabled people at these stations.

### **QUESTION 5** – Mrs F M Oborski will ask Alan Amos:

*"Sadly Diamond Buses seem to be continuing to breakdown regularly within Wyre Forest. Can the Cabinet Member inform me of what steps he is prepared to take to improve the situation?"*

### **Answer**

I thank Councillor Oborski for her question relating to Diamond Buses as this gives me an opportunity to update her and other colleagues.

As Cllr Oborski is aware, I take this matter very seriously and we have had frequent communication about the quality of Diamond's services. I have been recording and logging complaints and working with officers and Diamond to get those investigated to bring about improvement in reliability. This matter is very important as the service delivery directly affects residents of Worcestershire. The challenge to our intervention is that the majority of Diamond's operations within Wyre Forest are commercial so are not subject to control by the County Council. The duty to tackle poor performance of commercial services rests solely with the Traffic Commissioner's Office for the West Midlands.

Having said that, officers are currently reviewing and tendering the local subsidized bus network within Wyre Forest. Once this is complete, we expect to tender the reviewed services for an Easter operational start date. In addition, we have bolstered our Terms and Conditions as part of the new tendering system called Intend. Operators who satisfy the County Council's price and quality criteria at contract award, will be subject to our Terms

and Conditions. This will enable us to monitor the performance of operators and deal with poor performance, and conversely reward good performance.

I have already met with Senior Managers from Diamond Buses and have another meeting planned imminently. You will appreciate that there are a few commercially sensitive issues that I need to be mindful of so am constrained from giving more detail in public. However, colleagues can be assured that it is my firm intention to improve the quality of bus services throughout Wyre Forest as soon as possible.

#### Supplementary Question

The Cabinet Member agreed to look into the possibility of setting up a bus users group for the Diamond Bus Services in Wyre Forest.

#### **QUESTION 6** – Mrs F M Oborski will ask Marcus Hart:

*"Parents often base a choice of school on the most recent OFSTED Report. When the most recent OFSTED Rates a school as " Good" and yet Progress 8 scores show the school's performance as "well below average" and the Key Stage 2 SATs Results are well below the Worcestershire Average, what steps is he intending to take to alert OFSTED to the anomalous situation which has arisen and the desirability of their revisiting these schools?"*

#### **Answer**

The Cabinet Member and officers of the local authority, through the commissioned services of Babcock Prime, ensures that the end of key stage 2 and 4 results for maintained schools are analysed as part of a wider risk assessment process for determining how school improvement resources are utilised. Schools receive attention in terms of challenge and support in inverse proportion to success; therefore those schools where results, across year groups as well as at points of statutory assessment, are problematic, receive additional attention to address any shortcomings identified. The local authority does not wait for Ofsted to re-inspect providers before corrective action is taken. The Cabinet Member holds officers and the commissioned services of Babcock Prime to account for this activity and with, Headteachers and governors for the performance of maintained schools.

Ofsted has a rolling programme of 'Section 5 school inspections. For most types of setting, Ofsted is required to inspect 'within five years from the end of the school year in which the last inspection took place'. The exceptions to this requirement are maintained primary and secondary schools and academies that are routinely exempt from section 5 inspection because they were judged outstanding at their last inspection. (Certain types of schools are never deemed exempt, such as maintained special schools, special free schools, alternative provision academies, pupil referral units and maintained nursery schools).

Additionally, schools judged to be good at their previous Section 5 inspection, will normally receive a one-day short inspection, carried out under Section 8 of the Education Act, approximately every three years, as long as the quality of education remains good at each short inspection. This affects around one fifth of good schools. The potential outcomes of short inspections have recently changed; a school may, after one day, be judged to remain good, may require a second day's inspection because it may be inadequate, may be told it would no longer receive a good grade if re-inspected under Section 5 (and requires a follow-up Section 5 within 1-2 years) or that it is at least good, may be outstanding and that it will receive a full Section 5 within 1-2 years to check this out.

However, rather than simply re-inspecting schools according to chronology and eligibility alone, Ofsted uses risk assessment to ensure that its approach to inspection is proportionate and so that it can focus its efforts where it can have the greatest impact. Risk assessment has two stages: stage one involves an assessment of each school, based on an analysis of publicly available data, and stage two involves a more in-depth desk based

review of a wider range of available information. Therefore, whilst some providers are re-inspected because they are not routinely exempt from inspection and are due a revisit, many are selected on the basis of recent performance including in terms of pupil outcomes. Therefore, Ofsted itself is annually making its own assessments of when a school's last inspection judgement may be seemingly 'out of kilter' with more recent pupil outcomes in deciding when to re-inspect. However, even when it does choose to inspect on the basis of elevated risk, it must still ensure outcomes are evaluated fully and not inspect on the basis of published data alone.

This risk assessment, like the local authority's, includes analyses of pupils' academic achievement over time, taking account of both attainment and progress. Indeed, 'exempt' schools can be inspected (under a Section 8 no formal designation inspection, a monitoring visit which can be turned into a Section 5 school inspection).

**QUESTION 7** – Mr R M Udall will ask John Smith:

*"Can the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing confirm how he determines his priorities for preventative work in order to prevent avoidable ill health and what campaigns he plans to promote in the year ahead?"*

**Answer**

Thank-you for this question which I am happy to answer.

Our preventive work is firstly shaped by our statutory duties regarding public health, and secondly by over-arching priorities agreed through the Health and Well-being Board, which are set out in our Health and Well-being Strategy. These over-arching priorities draw on the health data presented in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. The statutory guidance on JSNAs and Health and Well-being Strategies states "This is not about taking action on everything at once, but about setting a small number of key strategic priorities for action, that will make a real impact on people's lives".

The criteria for determining the over-arching priorities were that they should:

- Relate to major causes of avoidable ill health and premature death;
- Affect people across all age groups;
- Be linked to good evidence of potential to improve outcome;
- Be linked to JSNA data which suggests a worsening situation, and/or a situation that is worse than would be expected for Worcestershire;
- Show clear geographical and/or population inequalities in health and well-being outcomes
- Need strong partnership working to improve outcomes.

Following wide-ranging consultation the three overarching priorities for our prevention work over the next five years were identified as:

- improving mental health and well-being;
- increasing physical activity;
- reducing the harm caused by alcohol.

We plan to have a major campaign around each of the three priorities over the next year, and will be working with system partners to deliver these campaigns.

**Supplementary Question**

What was the Council doing to raise awareness of the issues associated with Glaucoma and what action was being taken to encourage people to undertake eye tests? The Cabinet Member commented that for people ineligible to receive free eye tests, every effort was made to encourage them to take eye tests should they be experiencing difficulties.

**QUESTION 8** – Mr C J Bloore will ask Alan Amos:

*"Would the Cabinet Member for Highways join me in thanking the parents and guardians of children attending Charford First School in my division who gritted and cleared paths before Christmas to ensure children could safely attend school? However, would he agree with me that lost school days because of treacherous paths are not fair on the children, teachers and parents and agree to meet with them and me to put a plan in place to ensure that both roads and paths outside schools are gritted during snowy conditions?"*

**Answer**

I would like to thank Cllr Bloore for his question partly because it gives me the opportunity to put on record my thanks, and those of the people of Worcestershire and beyond, to the tremendous efforts by our Highways Department, and Ringway, in getting the roads cleared during the pre-Christmas snow fall on Sunday 10th December. I was informed that our primary and secondary routes were open by 8.30 on Monday morning. All primary routes were continually ploughed and treated over a 30+ hour period. Overall, our treatment programme equated to covering 18,093 miles of road. Worcestershire roads were open more quickly and more efficiently than any neighbouring authority so well done Worcestershire and our staff. We're very proud of you.

Turning to the specific question, yes, of course, I would like to thank schools, parents, guardians, pupils, and all those members of the community who worked to clear pathways. Worcestershire County Council Winter Service is always supplemented by local self-help and I fully support and encourage this where it is appropriate and safe to do so.

All of our 244 schools, including Charford First School, were contacted in October 2017 in advance of the core winter service period, plus 2 follow-up reminders in November, inviting them to purchase salt from us by the end of November. Regrettably, the take-up was very limited with less than 20 schools placing an order. Charford First School was one that did not respond. The decision to close schools is a direct responsibility of Head Teachers.

The County Council simply is not – and I suspect never can be - in a position to treat all roads and pavement. We have over 2,000 miles of pavements alone. However, support was provided for a number of critical locations, including access to emergency services, crematoria, water treatment plants, health centres, doctors surgeries, town centres, village centres, and, of course, hospitals and elderly people's homes. In addition, we took account of the need to assist Districts with their refuse collection, and maintained very good communications with all our District Councils. So I think we chose our priorities well

Third party snow contractors were also utilized within their prescribed zones, with their focus being on the primary and secondary routes. As they cleared these routes, they would have moved on to clearing the minor roads. Indeed, given the efficiency of the Council's overall operation, many minor roads were cleared which would ordinarily not have been.

Furthermore, I would add that we have some 1,350 yellow grit bins across the County and 200 green grit bins. We are happy to receive requests for new grit bins – the yellow ones - on publicly adopted highways and these would be assessed against criteria detailed in the agreed Winter Service Policy 2016. In fact, Cllr Bloore will be very pleased to know that, as recently as Monday, I was in his Division checking on the refilling of a yellow grit bin in Tollhouse Road.

Inevitably, there will be some disruption to normal life during adverse weather conditions. However, the actual closure of a school is the direct responsibility of the Headteacher, not the County Council. I think I have outlined how the County can assist organizations and

individuals who live and work in Worcestershire in these circumstances, and how our teams have kept us all moving.

#### Supplementary Question

In response to a concern expressed about the legality/insurance implications of clearing snow from outside school premises, the Cabinet Member responded that it was not possible for the Council to clear snow from outside all school premises therefore the Council relied on self-help and he saw no difficulty with this. He agreed to meet Mr Bloore to discuss any possible solutions in the future.

#### **QUESTION 9** – Mr C J Bloore will ask Ken Pollock:

*"Would the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economy and Infrastructure agree with me that safety for commuters and pedestrians at Bromsgrove Railway Station is paramount? If he does would he agree to meet with me and officers to discuss the ongoing problems of single side pedestrian access along the Stoke Road entrance and exit that has been and continues to be the subject of much public concern?"*

#### **Answer**

The new Bromsgrove Station was developed by a partnership between the West Midlands Combined Authority and Worcestershire County Council. The partners considered that a footway on one side of the access road would be sufficient and would enable the station approach to retain a semi-rural aspect which was an important planning consideration. It should be noted that the access road is not a public highway but is part of the station curtilage. The planning application, which was widely consulted upon and has since received planning consent, clearly indicated that a footway would only be provided along one side of the carriageway. Given the relatively quiet nature of the road it is easy for pedestrians approaching the station from the west along Stoke Road to cross over the access road using the pedestrian refuge and then to walk down the footway on the east side of the access road. The partners do not propose to install an additional footway at this location for the reasons indicated above but it should also be noted that to do so would entail the construction of a retaining wall or similar and the loss of vegetation.

#### Supplementary Question

In response to a concern about the continual issues with the pedestrians using the left hand side to exit Bromsgrove station onto Stoke Road and motorists ignoring the turn right sign, the Cabinet Member agreed to meet Mr Bloore to see if anything can be done to resolve the difficulties.