

**COUNCIL 14 FEBRUARY 2019 - AGENDA ITEM 8  
– QUESTION TIME**

**Questions and written responses provided below.**

**QUESTION 1** – Mr R J Morris will ask Alan Amos:

*"I would like to ask the Cabinet Member for Highways if there is any additional support to help with the pathways on the Westlands Estate, Droitwich? He will be aware that little has been done to improve pathways on the estate since the 1970s when the estate was built. We have managed to complete resurfacing along the Farmers neighbourhood however there are several neighbourhoods on the estate where the pavements are in severe disrepair."*

**Draft Answer**

I thank Cllr Morris for his question and commend him for his attention to the needs of his constituents.

Over the last four years, we have completed work on 10 footways on the Westlands Estate in Droitwich including those in the Farmers neighbourhood. Alongside this, we have also completed work on 6 smaller stretches of footway. The total expenditure on these footways amounts to over £160,000 which equates to nearly 2,300 linear metres of footway being repaired, this meterage being based on a cost of £70 per metre of footway completed. As Members will be aware, we manage our footways using our core footways budget based around the asset condition, which we have to prioritise across the whole County and within the available budget which, for our core asset based work, is £2.53m, spent to reflect the asset based nature of the work. However, I can confirm that we are currently reviewing the Westlands Estate which incorporates a large number of footways including some divorced footways which we are surveying over the next few months. We will be focussing on those areas where we know we have reports of pothole defects historically. Nonetheless, I do anticipate that some sections of footway are likely to be included in 2019/20 and beyond. Once we have completed this review I will be able to give Cllr Morris the hopefully good news.

**Supplementary question**

In response to request, Alan Amos undertook to provide feedback to Richard Morris following the completion of the review of footways in relation to the Westlands Estate, Droitwich.

**QUESTION 2** – Mrs F M Oborski will ask Alan Amos:

*"Town and Parish Councils have previously been able to purchase Green Grit Bins to be placed to serve Highways areas which did not qualify for the Yellow WCC Grit Bins. I have now been made aware that this facility has apparently been withdrawn and such Grit Bins can only be placed at sites which meet WCC Highways Criteria. Can the Cabinet Member inform me:*

- a) if this is true, When this change in Policy took place?;*
- b) What Member involvement took place in making this decision?; and*
- c) When were Elected Members and Town and Parish Councils informed?"*

## Draft Answer

I thank Cllr Oborski for her question.

I am pleased to confirm that there has been no change in the policy regarding Grit Bins and the Council has not removed the "facility" of Green Grit Bins. There has been a review and some operational changes have taken place in relation to the criteria associated with the Green Grit Bins. There have been some small changes to the assessment criteria for Green Grit bins, including a question about whether the bin can be located on private land. Where the bin is to be located on the public highway an agreement is required to clarify ownership and ongoing maintenance and refilling responsibilities. This recognises that in the past there have been instances of Green Grit Bins on the public highway with no mechanism to refill and where they may stand empty.

This was detailed in the Winter Service update issued to all members in December. Parish Councils have also been informed along with a reminder about the need to place any orders for 1 tonne grit bags. I will ask officers to re-circulate the guidance information. I asked for the Review because I know how important both the Yellow and Green Grit bins are to residents and I wanted to make the system as flexible as possible within the necessary legal obligations to which the Council must adhere. Consequently, I am always open to suggestions from anybody as to how we can make the system as customer - friendly as possible. I strongly support the Green Grit Bin scheme as a good example of residents helping themselves and I believe it is the duty of the County Council to assist those people who want to do so.

### Supplementary question

On receipt of the details from Fran Oborski, Alan Amos undertook to investigate whether the correct decision was made over the refusal to provide a Green Grit Bin in Eastwood Drive, Kidderminster to Kidderminster Town Council.

### **QUESTION 3** – Mr R C Lunn will ask Lucy Hodgson:

*"Can the Cabinet Member inform Council as to how many people were prosecuted across the county in 2018 as a result of enforcement carried out by Worcestershire Regulatory Services?"*

## Draft Answer

I thank Mr Lunn for his question. He needs to be aware that Worcestershire Regulatory Services is the shared service delivering Environmental Health and Licensing services for the six district councils. The County Council stopped being a member of this partnership on 1st June 2016, although our Trading Standards team remains based at Wyre Forest House with their WRS colleagues and we continue to buy a range of services from the partnership to support our team in their work, as much of what they do has links to the wider regulatory agenda. Hence, the Cabinet Member has no formal role in WRS and therefore should really not comment on the work undertaken by this service for the districts. Mr Lunn should either contact WRS directly or go through his local district council and I am sure that WRS colleagues will be more than happy to help him with his question

The Cabinet member can tell Mr Lunn that the County Council's Trading Standards Service completed the prosecution of 5 defendants during the calendar year 2018. Three of these related to bogus builder type activity and two related to mis-described motor vehicles. Of the 5 cases, 4 resulted in individuals being sentenced to either actual custodial or suspended custodial sentences, the longest of which was 2 years. The 5th case was of a limited company, which received a fine. All of these cases were the subject of local press coverage. The level of sentencing shows the serious nature of the offending that our team are tackling, which is again backed up by the recent press coverage of the animal health

and welfare case against a Throckmorton-based farming enterprise where the owner was subject to a suspended prison sentence. The focus of the team is not on minor technical breaches of regulatory controls, it is very much on serious breaches of the law.

#### Supplementary question

In response to a query, Lucy Hodgson confirmed that the Trading Standards service did earn income from some of its roles as well as undertaking its regulatory role.

#### **QUESTION 4** – Mr R M Udall will ask Adrian Hardman:

*"Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care explain to Council what he has done to reduce the risks of social isolation for elderly Worcestershire residents?"*

#### **Draft Answer**

Social isolation is recognised as having a significant impact on someone's mental and physical health – at its most severe, it is estimated to be the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Consequently, the Council commissions, in partnership with the Big Lottery and CCGs, the Reconnections service. This is the first social impact bond of its kind, where payment is made where there is a measurable reduction in social isolation. Reconnections has worked with over 215 agencies who have made referrals, triaged 3000 referrals since 2015 and reduced the social isolation of 1300 older people. Referrals to Reconnections can be made by anyone or any professional including where someone is eligible under the Care Act. Discussions are taking place between the Council and CCGs to extend the contract until July 2020. All Council funding comes from the Public Health Ring Fenced Grant.

#### Supplementary question

In response to a request to lobby the Government about the impact on the elderly, particularly for those with a visual impairment, of its plans to stop the funding of tv licences for the over 75s, the Adrian Hardman emphasised that this was a matter for the BBC not the Government.

#### **QUESTION 5** – Mr R J Morris will ask Alan Amos:

*"Can I please ask the Cabinet Member for Highways what protection is planned for Businesses on the far end of Berry Hill industrial Estate, Droitwich, to protect and safeguard them from the frequent traveller encampments they experience? We need to support the ongoing businesses which are regularly adversely affected."*

#### **Draft Answer**

I thank Cllr Morris for his question.

I am aware that there have been a number of traveller encampments on the Berry Hill Estate in the past and we are committed to try and stop this from occurring again. The intention is to create a new ditch and bund system along the area affected by the historic traveller encampments to prevent their renewed access, subject to utility services checks. The extent of the ditch and bund is still to be decided with our partners referred to below and the nature and number of the services which may impact on the construction of the ditch. We hope to have these works completed during the spring/summer of this year. An alternative element such as a low tongue-and-groove fence may also be considered and/or added dependent upon design and the outcome of the utility searches. Most of the cost of this will likely be met by taxpayers. I understand that County Highways are currently working closely with Cllr Morris, Wychavon District Council, the police and affected

businesses to put a solution in place. There is a clear need to resolve this on-going matter once and for all so local businesses are not again adversely affected by this disruption. There is of course another aspect to resolving this matter which, unfortunately, is beyond my power, but I am delighted to update Council that a joint statement was issued last week by the Home Sec. and the Sec of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. I do hope that reassures Cllr Morris and everybody else that further help is on the way.

#### Supplementary question

Alan Amos undertook to examine what more can be done within the existing funding envelope to protect and safeguard businesses on the far end of Berry Hill industrial Estate, Droitwich from the frequent traveller encampments.

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

*"Staff working at the Primary PRU and the MET Education Centres based at Lea Street School Kidderminster tell me that they believe that their use of these premises may be due to cease at the end of the Summer Term 2019. Could the Cabinet Member tell me:*

- a) If this Timetable is true?; and*
- b) Where it is intended to provide replacement facilities?"*

#### **Draft Answer**

Commissioners have been working with the Head Teacher since the Autumn because they do feel that the property in Lea Street is in scope for disposal due to significant costs of refurbishment and dilapidation. But in terms of both the PRU and MET provision, no formal timeline has been given so no-one has said the centres will be out by the summer of 2019. The review the feasibility study was still being undertaken and therefore in respect of the replacement facilities, until I and the CMR for Transformation and Commissioning see the report that is due to be completed at the end of March/beginning of April then we don't know as yet exactly where the replacement provision will be. However we are working hard and closely with the school.

#### Supplementary question

In response to a query, Marcus Hart indicated that there was no information that the PRU would be moving to the Grange, Kidderminster.