

Council**Thursday, 14 July 2016, County Hall, Worcester - 10.00 am****Minutes****Present:**

Mr A P Miller (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 P J Bridle, Mr J P Champion, Mr S J M Clee, Mrs P E Davey, Mr P Denham, Mr N Desmond, Mrs E A Eyre, Ms L R Duffy, Mr A Fry, Mr S E Geraghty, 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, Mr R C Lunn, Mr L C R Mallett, Mr P M McDonald, Mr T A Muir, Mrs F M Oborski, Mr S R Peters, Dr K A Pollock, Mr D W Prodger, Prof J W Raine, Mrs 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 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. 14 questions submitted to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (previously circulated).
- c. The Minutes of the Council held on 12 May 2016 (previously circulated).

1796 Apologies and declaration of interests (Agenda item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Mr S C Cross, Mr W P Gretton, Ms R E Jenkins and Mr P A Tuthill.

Interests were declared by:

Mr M L Bayliss as his daughter was employed by the County Council.

Mr J P Champion declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 6(4) and left the meeting during consideration of that item.

Mrs L R Duffy – Item 7 Paragraph 38 – runs an organisation which is part of the projects set out in that agenda item.

1797 Public Participation (Agenda item 2)

Mr P Denham presented a petition on behalf of residents in his division. The petition related to a request for a one-way traffic system in Vauxhall Street and Church Road.

Mr J Baker read a letter from a family in Redditch which had been affected directly by a suicide from the Musketts Way footbridge over the A448.

The Chairman thanked both for their contribution and the above family for attending and said the relevant Cabinet Member with Responsibility would respond in writing in due course.

1798 Minutes (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the annual meeting held on 12 May 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1799 Chairman's Announcements (Agenda item 4)

The Council stood for a minute's silence in memory of Mr M H Broomfield and Jo Cox MP.

The Chairman congratulated Mrs E A Eyre who had received a BEM in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. Mr T A L Wells was welcomed back after his recent accident.

1800 Reports of Cabinet - Matters which require a decision by Council - Worcester Parkway Regional Interchange (Agenda item 5a(i))

The Council had before it a detailed report on the funding for the Worcestershire Parkway Regional Interchange. The report reminded members that the Council had in January 2015 committed to the delivery of a Parkway Railway Station in the triangle of land formed by the intersection of the Worcester-Paddington (Cotswolds) and Birmingham-Bristol railway lines and the B4084 near Norton.

The scheme had been approved in principle by Cabinet and was progressing through Network Rail's Governance for Railways Investment Process.

A full detailed Planning Application had been agreed in August 2015 subject to the satisfactory completion of relevant Conditions, the majority of which would be met by the Principal Contractor as part of the Detailed Design process.

The members of the Council had been sent an Exempt Finance Report detailing that the final cost of the scheme would be higher than the estimate reported to Cabinet in December 2014. This was mainly due to higher land and utility costs and increasing the construction cost estimate to reflect current construction market prices and a proportionately higher contingency sum. The details of

1801 Reports of Cabinet - Matters which require a decision by Council - Capital Programme (Agenda item 5a(ii))

this Appendix were not referred to openly because the financial details remained commercially confidential as the Council was currently in commercial negotiations with potential contractors and were accordingly exempt at this stage from public disclosure.

The report set out details of proposed virement and that a key finance principle was that the cost of building and operating Worcestershire Parkway did not require additional revenue funding from the Council during the 25 year borrowing period or beyond. The Cabinet had approved the finance required to deliver the scheme and was now recommending that the Council should agree that the Capital Programme be adjusted accordingly.

A discussion ensued during which there was widespread support for the Parkway project and for the method of funding the Council's elements of the costs. Members did ask that once the financial package was agreed and the exempt information could be made public it be circulated accordingly, together with confirmation to members of the source of the virement authorised by Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the addition to the Capital Programme set out in the Exempt Finance Report (the Appendix to the report circulated to members of the Council only) be approved and the capital cash limits be updated accordingly.

The Council had before it a report on the need to make additions to the Capital Programme. The additions were required as a result of grants received by the Council and funding received as a result of Section 106 funding from planning notifications in relation to housing developments across parts of the county.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) (i) an increase of £0.9 million for the Pothole Action Fund and £0.8 million for Highways Maintenance schemes following receipt of increased capital grant income; and
- (ii) an increase of £0.7 million school improvements funded by Section 106 funding receipts;

be approved as detailed in paragraphs 12 to 14 of the report, and that the Capital Programme cash limits are updated accordingly;

1802 Reports of Cabinet - Summary of decision taken (Agenda item 5b)

- (b) subject to the satisfactory receipt of future expected Section 106 funding, an increase of £0.7 million for school improvements as detailed in paragraph 15 of the report be approved, and that the Capital Programme cash limits be updated accordingly.

The Leader of the Council reported the following topics and answered questions in relation to them:

- Scrutiny Report: Increasing Physical Activity
- The provision of effective presentation services for Children and Young People including optimising the use of Children's Centre buildings
- Resources Report
 - Provisional Financial Results for the year ending 31 March 2016
 - Future Fit Programme Update
 - Capital Investment
 - Pension Fund Update
 - Proposed Earmarked Reserves, New Investments and General Balances
 - Public Health Ring-Fenced Grant (PHRFG)
 - Borrowing and Lending Transactions 2015/16.

1803 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 1 - Diversity (Agenda item 6)

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion standing in the names of Mrs F M Oborski, Mrs E B Tucker, Mr M E Jenkins and Mrs S Askin.

The Notice of Motion was moved by Mrs F M Oborski and seconded by Prof J W Raine.

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

General support was expressed for the Motion.

On being put to the meeting RESOLVED that:

"We are proud to live in a diverse and tolerant society. Racism, xenophobia and hate crimes have no place in our country. We at Worcestershire County Council condemn racism, xenophobia and hate crimes unequivocally. We will not allow hate to become acceptable.

Worcestershire County Council will work to ensure local bodies and programmes have support and resources needed to fight racism and xenophobia.

1804 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 2 - Equality in Schools (Agenda item 6)

We reassure all people living in Worcestershire that they are valued members of our community."

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion standing in the names of Mr J Baker, Mr P M McDonald, Mr R M Udall and Mr R C Lunn.

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

The Council was advised by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services that the Motion related to an Executive function and although the matter could be debated by Council it would stand referred to Cabinet for a decision.

Upon being duly moved and seconded the Motion stood referred to Cabinet for a decision.

1805 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 3 - Safe Place Schemes (Agenda item 6)

With the consent of the signatories present at the meeting the Notice of Motion as printed in the agenda papers was withdrawn.

1806 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 4 - Police and Crime Commissioner (Agenda item 6)

Mr J Campion had declared a DPI as Police and Crime Commissioner and withdrew from the meeting during the consideration of this item.

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion standing in the names of Mrs E B Tucker, Mrs F M Oborski, Mr M E Jenkins and Mrs S Askin.

The Motion was moved by Mrs E B Tucker and seconded by Professor J W Raine who both spoke in favour of it.

The Council agreed to deal with this matter on the day.

An amendment was moved by Mr P M McDonald and seconded by Mr L C R Mallett that the final sentence of the Motion be replaced with "*we call upon the Police and Crime Commissioner to resign his position as a County Councillor in order to prevent any possible risk of a conflict of interest*".

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that the amendment was procedurally valid. Council then debated the amendment and the with the agreement of

the signatories present this amendment was incorporated into the Motion as an addition, the altered Motion becoming the substantive Motion and reading:

"This Council notes with concern that the newly-elected Police and Crime Commissioner continues to occupy seats both on this Council and Wyre Forest District Council, thus making it difficult to fulfil the ability of the County and District Councillors on the Police and Crime Panel to hold the Police and Crime Commissioner to account.

We call upon the Police and Crime Commissioner to explain to this Council how we can hold him to account whilst he is still a member.

We call upon the Police and Crime Commissioner to resign his position as a County Councillor in order to prevent any possible risk of conflict of interest."

A debate ensued during which the following principal points were made. Those speaking in favour of the Motion:

- suggested there was a very clear conflict of interest and the PCC should have resigned his County Councillor seat at the same time he resigned from the Cabinet
- believed it was not possible to carry out this high profile role and still serve the people in his electoral division
- made clear that the costs of any by-election were offset by the need to maintain the integrity of politicians and the democratic process
- Mr Champion's absence from the Chamber was a clear indication of the conflict of interest which existed and which he clearly acknowledged
- it was surprising that the law did not disqualify a PCC from being a councillor.

Those speaking against the Motion:

- suggested that this was political posturing and the reality was the electors had voted for Mr Champion as their PCC and also as their local councillor
- many councillors were dual-hatted and it was

hypocritical to suggest this situation was somehow different or special

- potentially a stand-alone by-election would cost £20,000 and seemed unnecessary as the PCC said he was not standing at the next County Council elections in May 2017
- the PCC did not act in a political manner and his positions held elsewhere were not relevant.

On a named note the Motion as altered was lost.

Those voting in favour were: Ms P Agar, Mrs S Askin, Mr J Baker, Mr C J Bloore, Mr P Denham, Mr A Fry, Ms P A Hill, Mr M E Jenkins, Mr R C Lunn, Mr L C R Mallett, Mr P M McDonald, Mrs F M Oborski, Prof J W Raine, Mr R J Sutton, Mr J W R Thomas, Mrs E B Tucker, Mr R M Udall, Mr G J Vickery and Mr T A L Wells (19).

Those voting against were: Mr A P Miller, Mr A A J Adams, Mr R C Adams, Mr A T Amos, Mr R W Banks, Mr M L Bayliss, Mr A N Blagg, Mrs S L Blagg, Mr P J Bridle, Mr S J M Clee, Mrs P E Davey, Mr N Desmond, Mrs L R Duffy, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr S E Geraghty, Mrs J M L A Griffiths, Mr P Grove, Mr A I Hardman, Mr M J Hart, Mrs L C Hodgson, Mr C G Holt, Mr I Hopwood, Mr A A Muir, Dr K A Pollock, Mr D W Prodger, Mr A C Roberts, Mr J H Smith and Mr C B Taylor (28).

Mrs A T Hingley, Mr S R Peters, Mrs M A Rayner and Mr G C Yarranton abstained (4).

1807 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 5 - Academy Schools (Agenda item 6)

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion standing in the names of Mr P M McDonald, Mr G J Vickery, Mr P Denham and Mr R M Udall.

The Notice of Motion was moved by Mr P M McDonald and seconded by Mr P Denham who both spoke in favour of it.

The Council agreed to deal with the matter on the day.

During the course of the debate the following principal points were made:

- that this issue was important as events in other areas could impinge on the provision of education within the county. Indeed schools within the county might struggle and cause a 'ripple effect' within specific towns or areas

- planning of school provision was essential but was becoming more problematic as Academy schools created a more dynamic market place environment for school places and provision
- that expertise existed within the Council to deal with a range of planning issues and should an Academy close there would be contingency planning in place to address that
- the Cabinet Member with Responsibility agreed to circulate a briefing note to all members on the Council's capacity to meet the needs of pupils should an Academy close.

On being put to the meeting RESOLVED that:

"In light of the worrying news that a number of Academy schools are set to close on the Birmingham/Worcestershire border and their potential effect on Worcestershire based schools, could the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families tell this Council what plans he has put in place should any Academy Schools fail in Worcestershire?"

1808 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 6 - Bridge Safety (Agenda item 6)

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion standing in the names of Mr J Baker, Mr R C Lunn, Mr P M McDonald and Mr R M Udall.

The Notice of Motion was moved by Mr J Baker and seconded by Mr R C Lunn who both spoke in favour of it.

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

With the agreement of the signatories present the Notice of Motion was withdrawn on reassurance from the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways that a small, multi-agency working group including the Cabinet Members with Responsibility would be set up to look at all options to reduce the risk to the public using the Musketts Way footbridge over the A448.

1809 Reports of Cabinet Members with Responsibility -

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care presented her report which concerned a number of overarching issues:

- Adult Social Care - Population and Demographic

Adult Social Care (Agenda item 7)

context

- Assessment
- Technology
- Care Act
- Domiciliary Care and Home Care Market
- Supported Living and extra care
- Supported Groups and Carers
- Day services and employment
- working with partners and external providers - health
- staffing

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility answered questions about her report which included:

- the possibility of renegotiation of contracts to ensure most beneficial outcome for service users and the Council. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility gave details of a 'Dynamic Purchasing System' which funded services on outcomes for clients
- the Council had spent capital in some cases and had to receive benefits for service users in any subsequent contract arrangements
- Council ownership of care homes. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility gave details of some of the homes where the Council still owned the freehold and plans for their future
- the viability and future for smaller homes. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility acknowledged that small homes could be more customer friendly, but finely balanced finances in a competitive market meant futures were less assured and residents faced more uncertainty. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility confirmed that eight homes had ceased trading in the past year
- market polarisation and the increasing focus on 'self-funders'. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility gave a brief description of the options open to older people purchasing their own care and suggested better information sharing was essential for service users to find the best 'match' for their individual needs
- the UK's decision to leave the EU and the effects

**1810 Reports of
Cabinet
Members with
Responsibility -
Economy, Skills
and
Infrastructure
(Agenda item 7)**

of the minimum wage on recruitment of care staff in the future. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility said there would be changes but it was too early to quantify these

- the changing nature of care markets and how the Council was reacting. A particular question was asked about the potential for a care village in Worcestershire and the timescale for any project. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility spoke generally about purchasing of care and more specifically about the Council's aspirations to facilitate the provision of the widest possible choice including the care village model of provision.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for her report.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Skills and Infrastructure presented his report which covered a number of overarching issues:

- Economic growth and investment
- Key programmes including:
 - Worcestershire Innovation (WINN)
 - Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
 - Worcestershire Growth Fund
- Business Support Programmes
- LEADER programme
- National Cyber Skills Centre (NCSC)
- EU Funding Programme 2014-2020
- Worcestershire Business Central
- Worcestershire Local Transport Body
- Worcestershire Local Transport Plan
- Connecting Schools and Business
- Careers and Enterprise Company
- University Technical College
- Worcestershire Apprentices Clearing House
- Young people not in education, employment or training (NEETS)
- Rail strategy
- Midlands Connect
- Kidderminster Rail Station
- Worcestershire Parkway
- Worcester Southern Link Road
- Other major projects in the course of delivery
- Emerging infrastructure projects
- Strategic planning, development central and

waste and minerals plans

The Council Member with Responsibility answered questions about his report which included:

- loss of EU funding following the referendum result to leave the EU and the UK's final withdrawal. Also whether the decision to leave the EU would mean local businesses seeking to relocate. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility gave a brief outline of how cost pressures might affect local business but said it was too early to give a comprehensive assessment either about that or other financial support
- the local economy and the extent of devolution to the county. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility re-stated the County Council's current views about devolution and confirmed that Bromsgrove District Council had taken the decision not to join the West Midlands Combined Authority. The Council Member with Responsibility referred to other "groupings" which sought to further economic advancement
- whether the various growth funds and other initiatives yielded value for money in the terms of the number of jobs they created
- NEETS and whether providers of home tuition were properly regulated and checked
- the Cabinet Member with Responsibility accepted an invitation to visit the various locations where intended infrastructure improvements in Pershore were to take place
- in response to a specific question about promoting the co-operative and third sector the Cabinet Member with Responsibility confirmed that all business sectors would be included when offering support and advice
- the future of both Foregate Street station and Shrub Hill station once the Parkway Regional Interchange became operational. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility set out his understanding of the situation and the current views of various train operating companies
- road infrastructure improvements in Bromsgrove

and when these might be expected given the planned housing developments in the town

- the planning and timing of the development of the eastern gateway in Redditch
- rural broadband availability, take-up and speeds.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility promised written answers as follows:

- a question asked on paragraph 46 on proportion of spend funded by the EU and the value to this Council of such financial assistance
- a question asked on paragraph 53 about the £5m given out in grants to support business growth and business start-ups, how this was monitored and the results including failing businesses.
- paragraph 61 – about whether the Cabinet Member with Responsibility attends monthly meetings and gives feedback to members
- business support programmes - does the creation of jobs mean zero-hours contracts, full-time or part-time opportunities?
- costs to the County Council of marketing Superfast Broadband.
- what was the threshold figure for take-up of superfast broadband to trigger a further rebate to the County Council.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for his report.

**1811 Question Time
(Agenda item 8)**

Fourteen questions had been received by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and had been circulated before the meeting. Eight were asked at the meeting during the thirty minutes allocated and one was withdrawn. (All answers are enclosed within these Minutes.)

**1812 Reports of
Committees -
Summary of
decisions taken**

The Council received the report of the Pensions Committee containing a summary of decisions taken.

**by the Pensions
Committee
(Agenda item
9(a))**

**1813 Reports of
Committee -
Summary of
decisions taken
by the Planning
and Regulatory
Committee
(Agenda item
9(b))**

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

The meeting adjourned between 11.20 a.m. and 11.25 a.m. for a health break and between 1.00 p.m. and 1.45 p.m. for luncheon.

The meeting ended at 3.05 p.m.

Chairman

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COUNCIL 14 JULY 2016 - AGENDA ITEM 8 – 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 at the meeting the written response is also included below.

QUESTION 1 – Mr G J Vickery's printed question asked Mr J H Smith:

"According to the draft Health & Well-being Strategy 2016-2020, one of the key principles underpinning the strategy is "taking actions that we know will work." In the list of priorities is action to deal with alcohol abuse but there is no reference to drug abuse. Does this mean that we don't know what to do about drug abuse?"

Written Answer

- No.
- The list of priorities in the Health and Well-being Strategy is drawn up from selection criteria which include scale of the problem in Worcestershire. Far greater numbers of people abuse alcohol than misuse illicit drugs. For this reason, tackling alcohol misuse was given a higher priority in our Health and Well-being Strategy than was tackling drug misuse.
- We do, separately from the Health and Well-being Strategy itself, have a strategy to tackle the misuse of drugs together with partners and this includes commissioning a service from one key provider with an emphasis on prevention as well as on treatment of drug abuse. We work closely with the police and probation services to play our part in the implementation of a West Mercia drug strategy. I am pleased to note that numbers of clients referred into our commissioned specialist service have increased in recent months and that the percentage of adults who are referred on from criminal justice who are engaged in the service is now above the national target.

QUESTION 2 – Mr P M McDonald's printed question asked Mr A C Roberts:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning please inform me of how many apprentices this Council expects to employ over the next year?"

Written Answer

We currently have the following apprenticeships already in place:

- In a partnership arrangement between the County Council, Wyre Forest & Wychavon District Councils, West Mercia Police and the NHS we co-fund 3 apprentices in finance who rotate their placements between the organisations
- Highways have 2 civil engineering apprentices, based at their depots in Malvern and Lydiate Ash
- Libraries have 2 customer service apprentices in Kidderminster and Redditch Libraries

In addition to this as part of its Talent Programme, the Council are currently in the process of recruiting 10 new apprentices for the September 2016 intake.

QUESTION 3 – Mr P M McDonald asked Mr J H Smith:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being for please inform me of how many school children are suffering from asthma throughout the county?"

Answer given

We do not have the figures for asthma prevalence broken down by age and therefore cannot give an accurate answer to the question. We have contacted the NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups and they are unable to give a breakdown by age. Asthma UK give the following statistics about asthma in children nationally:

- One in 11 children has asthma and it is the most common long-term medical condition.
- On average there are three children with asthma in every classroom in the UK.
- The UK has among the highest prevalence rates of asthma symptoms in children worldwide.

For Worcestershire there are an estimated 89,900 children aged 4-17, which if 1 in 11 have asthma symptoms would mean 8,200 children with asthma symptoms. There were 74,300 children on the latest local authority school census, which with the same prevalence would give 6,800 with asthma symptoms.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about monitoring methods for air pollution, a casual factor in some forms of asthma, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility stated that any means of reducing asthma levels would be assessed.

QUESTION 4 – Mr P Grove asked Mr M J Hart:

"The collapse of Eastham Bridge on Tuesday, 24 May was of a surprise to all. Eastham Bridge is vital to the rural community especially schools and also the economic viability of rural businesses. Communication with the local residents is vital for all concerned. Therefore would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways please give an update on progress to date, and the programme going forward?"

Answer given

The most important thing is that no one was hurt in this incident. The County Council acted quickly to make the site safe and to put the necessary diversions in place. Improved signage is also now in place.

Following the collapse, engineers were onsite to carry out the investigation to establish the cause of the collapse. As part of the overall investigation the remains of the bridge have been analysed and removed from the river, this required much of the remaining structure to be removed for safety purposes.

The Council is in regular contact with the community. This has included making arrangements for access to the site via the local member, official releases and indeed myself, attendance at public meetings and providing updates on matters via agreed communication channels.

In June, the Council confirmed that we will be building a temporary bridge on the site. Completion of the survey works, design of a temporary solution, securing the statutory approvals and completing the build is going to take approximately six months.

A number of partners have been consulted including the Environment Agency, the army and Historic England and also providers of temporary structures. Due to the complexity of this site, in that it is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), it is likely to be the end of the summer before we have confirmed plans in place.

Survey work is well underway at both the existing alignment and the proposed location for a temporary structure. The information from this will be used to support securing of the necessary approvals and also to inform the design for both temporary and permanent solutions.

We continue to progress with our contractors and partners, including the approvals required for both temporary and permanent structures.

We do understand the frustrations that local people now face because of the diversions to their regular journeys and we will continue to work with the community about what could be done to minimise the disruption if we can.

QUESTION 5 – Mr J Baker's printed question asked Mr J H Smith:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being, both present and past, recognise NOW the need to cage the bridge that goes over the A448 after yet another death from this bridge? Will they admit that they should no longer continue to ignore the need for action to be taken now to prevent more loss of life?"

was withdrawn at the meeting.

QUESTION 6 – Mr R M Udall asked Mr M J Hart:

"Will the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways confirm if he is satisfied with the service provided by the Council's highways maintenance provider Ringway?"

Answer given

Yes, absolutely.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question the Cabinet Member with Responsibility confirmed he was content that the Council's maintenance contractor was operating properly, efficiently and effectively but would look into any particular concerns members brought to his attention.

QUESTION 7 – Mr R C Lunn asked Mr S E Geraghty:

"What effect does the Leader of the Council think that the EU Referendum result will have on the County Council and its provision of services over the next 5 years?"

Answer given

Firstly, I would like to thank Mr Lunn for his question.

As members will know the outcome of the EU referendum has triggered a period of significant market instability and political change. Given the events of the last three weeks it is just too early in the process of leaving the EU to really assess the likely long-term impact on the UK, let alone this county.

To a certain extent the long-term impact will depend on how the UK and our global partners approach these changes and the success or otherwise in being able to trade and do business internationally outside the current EU arrangements.

In Worcestershire, it is my firm belief that we must continue to drive forward our ambitious plans to grow the Worcestershire economy by around a third in the period up to 2025, creating an extra 25,000 jobs and thousands of new homes as set out in the Strategic Economic Plan. Worcestershire is in the top four fastest growing local economies in the country for two successive years and the strong partnership we have forged through the Worcestershire LEP is making a very positive impact.

I'm therefore, very keen to see the County Council continue to press ahead with the major economy and infrastructure investments which will help continue to create economic growth, good quality jobs and tax revenues that will help to sustain the services we all wish to see continue.

In relation to EU funding, in the current 2014 - 2020 programme Worcestershire has received an indicative allocation of £57,052,034. The overall programme looks to support over 3,000 local businesses creating more than 500 jobs, training more than 13,000 participants and providing support to assist more than 8,000 unemployed people move towards employment. Worcestershire County Council has over the past 12 months submitted 13 bids for funding. The applications total a funding request of almost £15m.

Nationally DCLG have said that discussions are taking place between the ESIF Managing Authorities and relevant Government departments to agree and confirm the way that the Structural Fund Programmes will be operated in coming months and years. A formal communication will be issued by them as soon as they are in a position to provide correct and comprehensive information.

For the time being as far as ERDF is concerned, DCLG are working as far as possible on a 'business as usual' basis. Projects that have been approved are operating and assurances have been given that claims will be paid. Planning for future calls is continuing and call documentation is being prepared. There is a pause in issuing new funding agreements until the cross-government discussions have reached conclusions, although the Investment Decision group continues to meet, appraisals are being taken to sub-committees and funding agreements are being drafted.

The LGA, on behalf of Local Government, are also working to seek further assurances from Government over the future EU programme and how they will decide on replacements to EU laws affecting services.

Once we receive any further information on these matters, I will of course ensure members are appropriately updated.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about options to meet the challenges of the UK's changed status the Leader of the Council said it is too early to start second guessing what the Council might have to do but he was prepared to consider all options to safeguard the county's interests.

QUESTION 8 – Mr R C Lunn's printed question asked Mr A C Roberts:

"Does the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning agree that it makes sense for a person looking to contact the County Council online, to be able to use one general enquiry email address?"

Written Answer

I'm sure we're not talking about limiting the Worcestershire.gov addresses (like our personal contacts) so the short answer is; I agree that it makes sense for the public to have only one email contact.

However, our overriding aim is to see that we give a prompt and accurate response in a timely way.

Until December last year there was a general enquiry email that went to The Hub. The problem was that the first email was in a free text form, which sometimes had insufficient detail. This meant there had to be an exchange of emails before the query could be sent to the department best placed to make a response.

Now the public can use the 'Contact Us' access, which comes up when you search on Worcestershire County Council or can be found on the County Council Home page.

If you click on 'Contact Us' you are offered an enquiry form and a couple of choices from a drop-down menu. I've tried it and found very simple to use.

The advantage of the revised system is that the enquiry can be filtered automatically and directed straight to the right department. This means that there is less need for supplementary information and the person who knows the answer can oversee the response.

The old system wasn't withdrawn immediately, as that may have added to frustration, but the take-up of the new contact point has been very good (I have the data if you would like to see it). So I don't think it will be too long until the old contact can be withdrawn and have a single 'Contact Us' point.

QUESTION 9 – Mr J Baker asked Mr J H Smith:

"Could the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being ensure that the pre-existing safe scheme initiative be promoted throughout the whole of Worcestershire as it is proving successful in the current areas where it is being run. This in turn will provide help and reassurance to those who may be feeling threatened by hate and racism."

Answer given

Thank you Councillor Baker for your question. The Safe Place Scheme will be established in all of the major towns of Worcestershire by the end of this year. The scheme exists in Kidderminster, Bewdley, Stourport, Bromsgrove, Redditch, Worcester City and Malvern with Evesham and Droitwch being launched between September and November of this year 2016.

The scheme was set up and is operated by Our Way Self Advocacy, a Kidderminster voluntary organisation that supports and advocates for people with learning disabilities. The scheme was originally established to provide places of safety for people with learning or physical disabilities so that they could identify safe shops and premises in town centres where they could seek help if needed or felt threatened in any way.

However, since the original concept the targeted audience has been widened to include anyone who feels they need assistance or feel threatened or overwhelmed in any way in the busy shopping areas and beyond.

Each district area has a group of volunteers that take responsibility for maintaining and monitoring the safe places premises and district directories of the various businesses that are signed up to the scheme can be found at www.ourway.org.uk/safe-place-scheme.

The scheme is heavily promoted and supported through various Worcestershire partnerships and organisations and the County Council has invited the Safe Place scheme to provide information stalls at events previously held at County Hall. We will continue to support the scheme at every opportunity and promote its excellent services, which are clearly of great benefit to individuals who feel at risk or anxious when in public places. This is a scheme that helps people within our communities feel safe and is an excellent example of partnership with local businesses."

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about the potential to expand the 'safety pins' scheme currently operating in the city of Worcester the Cabinet Member with Responsibility said he would look to facilitate this if the demand existed.

QUESTION 10 – Mr G J Vickery asked Mr M J Hart:

"The Government has announced a £60million fund for sustainable travel. Councils are invited to bid for a share of this money. Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways please tell us the content of this Council's bid?"

Answer given

Thank you for your question.

The bidding process was only announced formally last week and we have until 9 September to submit a bid. It is too early at this stage to say what our bid will entail but the current round of Local Transport Plan pre consultation events taking place with County and District Councils should help to inform this process, and I together with relevant colleagues and officers, will be working up a bid submission before the deadline.

QUESTION 11 – Mrs F M Oborski asked Mr S E Geraghty:

"Preparations for the Elected Mayor for the West Midlands Combined Authority are proceeding apace.

Can the Leader of the Council tell me:

(a) what relationship he expects Worcestershire County Council to have with the Combined Authority, and

(b) what prospects, if any, he sees for any devolved powers to Worcestershire?"

Answer given

I would like to thank Mrs Oborski for her question.

A very useful briefing on Devolution and the current position for Worcestershire was sent out to members in June and so there is little more at the current time that I can usefully add to that note. However, I'm happy to summarise in relation to these two specific questions.

At the current time Worcestershire has no plans to join the WMCA but will continue to work with partners through various partnerships, including the Midland Engine and Midlands Connect, on issues which need wider collaboration to achieve and which can secure outcomes that are in Worcestershire's best interest.

Worcestershire has been working on a set of devolution proposals which were the subject of discussions with Government in April. Partners are now reflecting on the feedback received and awaiting any changes that may emerge from a new Prime Minister and Cabinet over the summer months before considering this issue further in the autumn. We will continue to work with partners to advance proposals, with or without a formal Devolution Deal, where they make sense for Worcestershire residents and businesses.

It is difficult to be precise about what powers or responsibilities could be devolved under any arrangement at the current time.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about the appointment of a new Minister for Local Government and Communities the Cabinet Member with Responsibility stated that the MP for Bromsgrove would be very good for Worcestershire's aspirations and the work of the County Council in general.

QUESTION 12 – Mrs F M Oborski's printed question asked Mr M L Bayliss:

"Is the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families confident that the new arrangements within Children's Services Social Work Teams which will see, within the Early Help Service, only one Community Social Worker in a District, will be adequate to deal with necessary referrals from partner agencies in a timely manner so as to protect vulnerable children?"

Written Answer

In response to your question I can confirm that we are actually investing in 9 fte community social workers and 1 fte team manager. This obviously equates to more than one in each district. The allocation of this resource has been worked out based on some early testing of the community social worker role in Redditch. This testing included developing an understanding of referrals and the impact upon the community social workers' time.

The community social worker role is pivotal to building relationships with a wide range of services in local areas to improve their capability and confidence in identifying and managing risk in order to keep children safe. It is through these relationships and with all agencies playing their full part that we can collectively protect vulnerable children and improve their outcomes.

As with any new service, we will need to review its effectiveness, learn from practice and take stock on whether it is meeting need. This review will take place in October following the first three months of the role being operational.

QUESTION 13 – Mr A I Hardman asked Mr M J Hart:

"In view that the Eckington Bridge is at least twice as old as the Eastham Bridge and a vital link for Bredon Division road users, can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways reassure users it is safe, and state when it was last inspected by his bridge department?"

Answer given

The last inspection of the structure (a general inspection) was carried out on the 1 June 2016. A diving inspection is also planned for this year. At the point of the last inspection no issues were identified that would raise concern with regard to safety and overall structural stability of the bridge.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about the possibility of a weight limit for this particular bridge the Cabinet Member with Responsibility said that an assessment could be carried out.

QUESTION 14 – Mr A I Hardman's printed question asked Mr M J Hart:

"Kemerton Parish Council submitted its own traffic calming scheme last year to the County Council. Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways please ensure that a formal reply is sent to the Parish Council, which includes reasons for its non-compliance to County regulations and costs for the work?"

Written Answer

Thank you for your question. The County Council did indeed receive a copy of the Kemerton Parish Council report into traffic calming options last year. Comments were made at the time, including an offer to investigate the issues. I will ensure that the relevant officer makes contact with the Parish Council directly in order to review and discuss the issues raised.