

Council**Thursday, 17 January 2019, County Hall, Worcester - 10.00 am****Minutes****Present:**

Mr B Clayton (Chairman), Mr A A J Adams, Mr R C Adams, Ms P Agar, Mr A T Amos, Mr T Baker-Price, Mr R W Banks, Mr R M Bennett, Mr C J Bloore, Mr G R Brookes, Mrs J A Brunner, Ms R L Dent, Mr N Desmond, Mr A Fry, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr P Grove, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr P B Harrison, Mr M J Hart, Ms P A Hill, Mrs A T Hingley, Mrs L C Hodgson, Dr A J Hopkins, Dr C Hotham, Mr M E Jenkins, Mr A D Kent, Mr R C Lunn, Mr P M McDonald, Mr S J Mackay, Mr L C R Mallett, Ms K J May, Mr P Middlebrough, Mr A P Miller, Mr J A D O'Donnell, Mrs F M Oborski, Ms T L Onslow, Dr K A Pollock, Mrs J A Potter, Prof J W Raine, Mrs M A Rayner, Mr A C Roberts, Mr C Rogers, Mr J H Smith, Mr A Stafford, Ms C M Stalker, Mr C B Taylor, Mr R P Tomlinson, Mrs E B Tucker, Mr P A Tuthill, Mr R M Udall, Ms R Vale, Ms S A Webb and Mr T A L Wells

Available papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. 9 questions submitted to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (previously circulated); and
- C. The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2018 (previously circulated).

2056 Apologies and Declaration of Interests (Agenda item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Mr P Denham, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr A I Hardman and Mr R J Morris.

2057 Public Participation (Agenda item 2)

Revd David Haslam asked a question relating to Syrian Asylum seekers.

2058 Minutes (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2059 Chairman's Announcements (Agenda item 4)

Noted.

2060 Reports of Cabinet - Matters which require a decision by Council - A4440 Worcester Southern Link Road Structures (Agenda item 5 (a))

The Council considered the addition of A4440 Worcester Southern Link Road Structures to the Capital Programme.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- The Leader of the Council introduced the report. He indicated that the necessary funding would be provided to complete a footbridge over Broomhall Way in advance of the receipt of the funding by the developer to allow access by cyclist and pedestrians over the Southern Link Road (SLR). In addition, funding was required for a farm accommodation bridge and a footbridge linked to planning obligations as part of the dualling of the SLR
- It was queried why funding from developers had not been sought to complete the development of the ring road to the west of Worcester city and the construction of a bridge to the north. The Leader responded that proposals for development to the west of the city would be assessed by planning officers as part of separate planning applications at the appropriate time
- These proposals were welcomed by local residents given the dangerous nature of the pedestrian crossing at Norton, where a near fatal accident had taken place a few years ago. The Leader responded that this tragic case emphasised the importance of providing good walking/cycling crossing points on a main dual carriageway
- The apparent lack of understanding of how much the project would cost was queried. The Leader responded that costs had been assessed and would now be included in the capital programme. These proposals formed part of the wider scheme which amounted to a considerable sum of money.

RESOLVED: that

- a) **£3.5 million of funding necessary to complete the Broomhall Way Footbridge is allocated to the Southern Link Road Phase 3 Dualling Project with funding ultimately being received**

2061 Reports of Cabinet - Matters which require a decision by Council - New One-Off Grant - Adult Social Care Winter Pressures (Agenda item 5 (a))

from developers' S106 contributions and that the Capital Programme is updated accordingly; and

- b) the £3.5 million necessary to complete the Crookbarrow Way Footbridge and Upper Battenhall Farm Accommodation Bridge is provisionally allocated to the Southern Link Road Project and that the Capital Programme be updated accordingly and to vire £0.5 million from existing allocations within the Capital Programme.

The Council considered the addition of a new one-off grant – Adult Social Care Winter Pressures to the Capital Programme.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- The Leader introduced the report. He welcomed the receipt of the £2.4 grant from the Government and was keen to spend the resource as soon as possible in liaison with the NHS to alleviate winter pressures. He emphasised that the funding was only available for new expenditure, not to ameliorate existing pressures
- This Council was committed to supporting the most vulnerable members in society and therefore this extra funding was welcomed
- A request was made that members be kept informed on how the funds were being spent.

RESOLVED that the use of £2.4 million Adult Social Care Winter Pressures grant be approved and the revenue budget cash limits be updated accordingly.

2062 Reports of Committee - Summary of decisions taken (Agenda item 5 (b))

The Leader of the Council reported the following topics and questions were answered on them:

- 2019/20 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan update 2019-22
- Development of Worcestershire Children First
- 'Good Education Places for all Worcestershire Children' – School Organisation Plan 2019-24
- Review of Education Planning Obligations required under S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy
- Commissioning a Prevention and Early Intervention Service for Children and Young

2063 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 1 - Worcestershire Children First (Agenda item 6)

People

- Forward Look at Adult Services
- Council-Provided Day Services for Adults with a Learning Disability and Connect Short-Term Service
- Waste Contract
- Scrutiny Report: Bus and Community Transport Provision
- Balanced Scorecard Performance and Corporate Risk Update
- Resources Report.

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

The motion was moved by Mrs F M Oborski and seconded by Mrs E B Tucker who both spoke in favour of it, and Council agreed to deal with it on the day.

Those in favour of the motion made the following comments:

- The establishment of Worcestershire Children First would create a democratic deficit in terms of members' ability to oversee the performance of educational services. There were concerns about the implications for future budgets, the future dual role of the Director of Children, Families and Communities as Chief Executive of the Company, the funding of SEND, the ability to transfer funds between different parts of the service, the relationship with the Schools Forum and Head Teachers Association, the way contentious decisions would be made and the future of the company at the conclusion of the intervention period. Schools had concerns about the value for money of the Babcock Prime contract and the lack of control over future contract arrangements. There would be minimal councillor representation on the Board. A scrutiny exercise was necessary with full partner consultation
- The creation of the company represented a huge change for the Council and members were unaware of all the implications. There were queries about how the democratic oversight would work, how members could continue to fulfil their role as corporate parents, the mechanisms for the control of spending, and the governance and scrutiny arrangements

- It was contended that contrary to other views expressed, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel had not undertaken a detailed scrutiny of the transfer of educational services into the company in November 2018
- Educational Services were not under the direction of the Secretary of State and it was therefore a decision taken by this Council to include it. It was that aspect of the proposals that required full consultation and scrutiny.

Those against the motion made the following comments:

- The Cabinet Member for Children and Families emphasised that the Council had no option under the direction of the Secretary of State but to move children's social care into an alternative structure. He stressed that the company created for this would be wholly-owned by the Council not independent of it. It was considered better to integrate educational services into the company to avoid fragmentation of education provision. Determination of the democratic involvement in the company had not been finalised but a Board would be established with Council representation (albeit not the lead member). Members would still have the opportunity to scrutinise the service and continue to undertake their role as corporate parents. The Council retained its legal responsibility for safeguarding. The budget would be set by Council and there would be no additional precept. Design principles were being worked on and these would be underpinned by key performance indicators established by the Council. There had been a full engagement process. The company would go live in October
- The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel had already considered the widening of the scope of the Worcestershire Children First to include educational services at its November 2018 meeting.

On a named vote, the motion was lost.

Those voting in favour were:

Ms P Agar, Mr C J Bloore, Mr A Fry, Ms P A Hill, Dr C Hotham, Mr M E Jenkins, Mr R C Lunn, Mr P M McDonald, Mr L C R Mallett, Mrs F M Oborski, Prof J W Raine, Mrs M A Rayner, Ms C M Stalker, Mrs E B Tucker, Mr R M Udall, Mr T A L Wells. (16)

2064 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 2 - Archives and Archaeology Service (Agenda item 6)

Those voting against were:

Mr B Clayton, Mr A A J Adams, Mr R C Adams, Mr A T Amos, Mr T Baker-Price, Mr R W Banks, Mr R M Bennett, Mr G R Brookes, Mrs J A Brunner, Ms R L Dent, Mr N Desmond, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr P Grove, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr P B Harrison, Mr M J Hart, Mrs A T Hingley, Mrs L C Hodgson, Dr A J Hopkins, Mr A D Kent, Mr S M Mackay, Ms K J May, Mr P Middlebrough, Mr A P Miller, Mr J A D O'Donnell, Ms T L Onslow, Dr K A Pollock, Mrs J A Potter, Mr A C Roberts, Mr C Rogers, Mr J H Smith, Mr A Stafford, Mr C B Taylor, Mr R P Tomlinson, Mr P A Tuthill, Ms R Vale, Ms S A Webb. (37)

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion set out in the agenda papers standing in the names of Mr R C Lunn, Mr C J Bloore, Mr P Denham, Mr R M Udall, Ms P Agar, and Ms C M Stalker.

The motion was moved by Mr R C Lunn and seconded by Mr C J Bloore who both spoke in favour of it, and Council agreed to deal with it on the day.

The following amendment was moved by Mrs L C Hodgson and seconded by Mrs K J May:

"This Council calls on the Cabinet Member with Responsibility to endeavour to protect the County award-winning Archive and Archaeology Service from cuts in funding which would adversely change its nature and reduce its effectiveness.

Council calls upon the Cabinet Member with Responsibility to confirm how she will provide an effective service which recognises the historic significance of the county."

Those in favour of the amendment made the following comments:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities commented that the reference in the original motion to no compulsory redundancies being made could not be supported because no such guarantee could be given. To achieve the proposed savings set out in the budget for the next financial year, there would need to be a review of all aspects of the service to establish efficiencies by looking at other ways of working, a review of charging policies, and a review of

staffing. The views of scrutiny had been taken into consideration. She felt that this motion was too early given that the budget would be determined at the February Council meeting. There were parts of the service that continued to increase its commercial activities and brought in grants for individual pieces of work. She would establish a Member Advisory Group, chaired by herself, to look at how these savings could be implemented and ways to improve income generation

- The proposal to create a MAG could help protect the service. Compulsory redundancies might not be necessary but to rule them out would place an unnecessary restriction on the work undertaken to review the service
- It was noted that there was no mention of the Archive and Archaeology Service in the Annual Report of the OSPB
- The Leader of the Council commented that the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities had listened to requests to protect this award-winning service. It was impossible to rule out staffing changes at this stage with the budget out for consultation and the plans to redesign the service. He emphasised that the plans to redesign were concerned with exploring commercial possibilities not just cost-cutting.

Those against the amendment made the following comments:

- The fact that this motion had not been rejected out of hand by the administration and the proposal to create a MAG were welcomed. However the amendment could not be supported because of the removal from the original motion of the reference to compulsory redundancies not being made. The aim of the original motion was to consider ways of improving the service without the added pressure of making the proposed savings
- The removal of the reference to not making compulsory redundancies would have a detrimental effect on staff morale
- There was no evidence to show that the administration had taken account of previous scrutiny task group recommendations. For example, the group's recommendation in relation to charging district councils for planning obligations had not been implemented
- The scrutiny task group had found that the service provided an excellent award-winning countywide

service. Many of the recommendations of the task group focused on the commercial opportunities and income generation. The budget reductions could reduce the ability of the service to pursue these commercial opportunities

- It was right to bring this matter to the attention of Council in advance of the budget-setting process.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was agreed and became the substantive motion. Dr C Hotham requested that his abstention be recorded in the Minutes.

In debating the now substantive motion, the following points were made:

- There was a danger that certain niche areas of this service would suffer disproportionately as a result of the proposed budgetary savings
- Some consideration needed to be given to the timing of motions that had budgetary implications. Movers of motions were told that their proposals were either too early or too late for consideration as part of the budget-setting process
- The proposal to establish a MAG showed genuine willingness on behalf of the administration to engage with back bench councillors on the future plans for the service
- The service would struggle if the proposed savings of £405k were implemented. Although welcomed, the proposed role of the MAG was queried because if it was concerned with making savings then it would not change or achieve anything.

On being put to the vote, the substantive motion was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED "This Council calls on the Cabinet Member with Responsibility to endeavour to protect the County award-winning Archive and Archaeology Service from cuts in funding which would adversely change its nature and reduce its effectiveness.

Council calls upon the Cabinet Member with Responsibility to confirm how she will provide an effective service which recognises the historic significance of the county."

2065 Notices of Motion - Notice

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion set out in the agenda papers standing in the names of Mr R M Udall, Ms C M Stalker, Ms P Agar, Mr P Denham and Mr

**of Motion 3 -
Sexual
harassment in
the workplace
(Agenda item 6)**

R C Lunn.

The motion was moved by Mr R M Udall and seconded by Ms C M Stalker who both spoke in favour of it, and Council agreed to deal with it on the day.

The following amendment was moved by Mrs K J May and seconded by Mr M J Hart and accepted as an alteration by the mover and seconder of the motion which therefore became the substantive motion:

"Council believes it has a duty to take action to prevent sexual harassment for all of its employees and asks the Cabinet Member with Responsibility to issue a report to all members which will provide such a commitment and will illustrate how such a duty could be implemented by Worcestershire County Council."

In the ensuing debate the following points were made:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning emphasised that the Council took its responsibility to prevent sexual harassment of employees very seriously. She would commission a report to be brought back to all members that would highlight the activities already undertaken to prevent sexual harassment of employees. The report would outline all relevant activities including the bullying and harassment policy and an insight into the number of reported cases in this Council in the last 3 years. The Council was committed to treating all employees with dignity and respect in the working environment, free from bullying, harassment and intimidation
- The acceptance of the amendment by the mover and seconder of the original motion was welcomed. The Council had a duty as a responsible employer to address harassment of any kind of any individual of whatever sex.

On being put to the vote, the substantive motion was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED "Council believes it has a duty to take action to prevent sexual harassment for all of its employees and asks the Cabinet Member with Responsibility to issue a report to all members which will provide such a commitment and will illustrate how such a duty could be implemented by Worcestershire County Council."

2066 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 4 - Asylum seekers (Agenda item 6)

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

The motion was moved by Mrs E B Tucker and seconded by Mr M E Jenkins who both spoke in favour of it, and Council agreed to deal with it on the day.

Those in favour of the motion made the following comments:

- The motion was aimed at establishing clarity on the Council's values and restate the Council's support for the resettlement of a small number of refugees and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the county
- It should be emphasised that the Government, not the Council had funded the resettlement scheme. The motion was concerned with establishing the facts about this Council's approach to the Government's resettlement scheme, not to debate the merits or otherwise of the views of individual councillors
- The main concern was the impact on asylum-seekers and refugees, fleeing from persecution of the negative comments made by a member of the administration about them in the local press
- After the conclusion of the debate and during the mover's summing up, she indicated that she would be willing to propose an amendment withdrawing the first two paragraphs of the motion. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that Council had concluded the debate on the motion as printed and the opportunity to alter the motion had not been taken. It was too late to propose an amendment during the summing up after the debate.

Those against the motion made the following comments:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities commented that everybody had different views on immigration and it was not the role of Council to criticise individual councillors for expressing their opinion. The comments made by the individual councillor did not reflect the work being undertaken in the county to support asylum-seekers and refugees, particularly from Syria. She set out the history of the resettlement programme,

examples of successful integration and future resettlement proposals. She emphasised the important role the welcome groups and volunteers in supporting the programme in the county

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways commented that this motion addressed two issues, freedom of speech and "who cares most about what". Although he recognised the important role of immigration in the history of the country, he queried how the current level of immigration was sustainable, given the pressures on local council services and budgets.

On a named vote, the motion was lost.

Those voting in favour were:

Ms P Agar, Mr C J Bloore, Mr A Fry, Ms P A Hill. Mr M E Jenkins, Mr R C Lunn, Mr P M McDonald, Mr L C R Mallett, Mrs F M Oborski, Prof J W Raine, Mrs M A Rayner, Ms C M Stalker, Mrs E B Tucker, Mr R M Udall, Mr T A L Wells. (15)

Those voting against were:

Mr B Clayton, Mr A A J Adams, Mr R C Adams, Mr A T Amos, Mr T Baker-Price, Mr R W Banks, Mr R M Bennett, Mr G R Brookes, Mrs J A Brunner, Ms R L Dent, Mr N Desmond, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr P Grove, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr P B Harrison, Mr M J Hart, Mrs A T Hingley, Mrs L C Hodgson, Dr A J Hopkins, Mr A D Kent, Mr S M Mackay, Ms K J May, Mr P Middlebrough, Mr A P Miller, Mr J A D O'Donnell, Ms T L Onslow, Dr K A Pollock, Mrs J A Potter, Mr A C Roberts, Mr C Rogers, Mr J H Smith, Mr A Stafford, Mr C B Taylor, Mr R P Tomlinson, Mr P A Tuthill, Ms R Vale, Ms S A Webb. (37)

Those abstaining were:

Dr C Hotham. (1)

2067 Annual Report of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (Agenda item 7)

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board introduced the report. He thanked the Chairmen of the scrutiny panels, officers and all other participants for their contribution to the scrutiny process over the past year.

The Chairman answered questions on the report.

The report was noted.

2068 Annual Report of the Chief Executive (Agenda item 8)

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

- Strategic Leadership
- Delivering the Corporate Plan
- Governance
- Financial Management
- Partnership Working
- Organisational Culture and Staff Engagement
- Looking Forward.

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

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for his report.

2069 Question Time (Agenda item 9)

Nine questions had been received by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The answers to all the questions asked are attached in the Appendix.

2070 Reports of Committees - Audit and Governance Committee (Agenda item 10 (a))

The Council received the report of the Audit and Governance Committee containing a summary of the decisions taken.

2071 Reports of Committees - Pensions Committee (Agenda item 10 (b))

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

2072 Reports of Committees - Planning and Regulatory Committee (Agenda item 10 (c))

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

The meeting was adjourned from 1.10pm to 2.00pm and ended at 2.40pm.

Chairman

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COUNCIL 17 JANUARY 2019 - AGENDA ITEM 9 – QUESTION TIME

Questions and written responses provided below.

QUESTION 1 – Mr A Kent will ask Ken Pollock:

"The successful Superfast Broadband roll out in Worcestershire continues to provide a clear message that Worcestershire is Open for Business. Can I ask the Cabinet Member with Responsibility to clarify the opportunities available to those communities, that haven't yet benefitted from the roll out of a Community Fibre Partnership assisted by their local County Councillor and Worcestershire County Councils officers?"

Answer

I thank Cllr Kent for his question

The availability of superfast broadband in the county has increased from 70% to 95% since the ongoing programme first began. I would encourage residents and businesses to check if they can already order superfast broadband or are expected to benefit from our deployment plans in 2019 first. As when the infrastructure is built you do still need to sign-up to new packages to benefit from the improvements. The monthly costs for superfast connectivity can often be lower than what people on long term existing contracts are already paying.

I would also like to remind Councillors that last year, we were successful in securing £1.5m of additional funding from Defra. We are currently working with Openreach to model where this funding will be deployed and we expect to announce further details soon.

For communities without access and not in current plans there is action they can take to proactively secure full fibre broadband through a number of schemes.

The Local Body Partnership Scheme (LBP) launched by the County Council in early 2018, has proven very popular and over 1,000 premises have been successful in securing a share of the £1m funding pot from Worcestershire County Council, this is augmented by communities contributing themselves, central government voucher schemes and Openreach. The fund is now fully allocated, and communities are encouraged to consider the national Gigabit voucher scheme and community schemes such as Openreach's Community Fibre Partnership (CFP) instead.

Central Government extended the **Gigabit Voucher scheme** nationally in May 2018. The Gigabit vouchers aim is to extend gigabit-capable connections, a gigabit is 1000Mbps, to small and medium-sized enterprises. Businesses are eligible for vouchers up to £2,500; vouchers can be used individually or pooled together to form a larger group and crucially for communities for every business in a 'community solution' up to 10 solely residential properties are also eligible for a voucher of up to £500. Any shortfall in the cost of the solution must then be met by the business or community. The Superfast Worcestershire team have been very active in supporting local communities, and already c. £300,000 worth of vouchers have been requested in Worcestershire

The Community Fibre Partnership (CFP) scheme is an Openreach initiative set up to work with groups of residents or businesses to find a superfast broadband solution for their area. Openreach covers the costs in line with its commercial model and the community

provides the remaining gap funding, it should be noted that Gigabit vouchers can be used by communities in conjunction with this scheme. We are aware of a number of communities following this route in Worcestershire, many with the financial assistance of the Gigabit voucher scheme.

For premises in the county that still cannot access 2Mbps, around 0.5%, the Better Broadband scheme remains open, offering £350 vouchers to support a solution.

I would encourage communities and councillors to visit and register with the superfastworcestershire.com website and get in touch with the Superfast Worcestershire team, who will explain the schemes in more detail and support the communities through the process.

Supplementary question

In response to a query about the potential broadband speeds available to county residents and businesses, Ken Pollock commented that speeds of up to 24mbps could be achieved through Superfast Broadband. Speeds of up to 350mbps could be achieved through the formation of a community fibre partnership. There were a limited number of spots within the county where no broadband coverage was available but these tended to be restricted to rural and remote areas. There was still a huge variation across the county but progress was being made to improve broadband speeds.

QUESTION 2 – Mr P M McDonald will ask Karen May:

"Would the Cabinet Member please inform me how much money over the last three years has been paid out regarding: Non-Disclosure Agreements/Settlement Agreements and the individual amounts?"

Answer

Thank you again to Cllr McDonald for asking a further question on this issue.

With reference to 'Non-Disclosure Agreements' (NDA), as I highlighted at November Council, it is important to note that this can have different meanings. An NDA sets out terms by which one or more parties agree not to disclose confidential information that they have shared with each other as a necessary part of doing business together and can cover commercial or staffing matters.

The Council does not routinely use NDAs for employees in relation to commercial matters and these do not give rise to any payment. In the context of staffing matters we do from time to time use Settlement Agreements (a type of NDA) which relate to where the employer and employee seek to reach a mutual agreement on the terms of an exit from the business. All proposed payments require approval by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development (or nominated member of the HR Leadership Team) and involve advice from Legal Services before they are confirmed.

The total amount paid in Settlement Agreements in the last 3 years is £54,457.40.

I am unable to provide a breakdown on individual amounts as the numbers of individuals is very small which could bring forward a risk that an individual could be identified.

Supplementary question

This question related to the number of NDAs, not the names of those in receipt of an NDA and therefore there would not be a confidentiality breach. Karen May responded that under the Freedom of Information Act, the Council was permitted to refuse to disclose this information where a low number of NDAs could lead to the possible identification of an individual.

QUESTION 3 – Prof J W Raine will ask Simon Geraghty:

"I feel proud and grateful that our County of Worcestershire has made such a positive response over the past two years to the Government's call for local authorities to provide welcoming and safe resettlement for refugee families from war-torn Syria and surrounding countries. Indeed, against a background of unrelenting financial austerity, this Council's efforts to resettle fifty refugees in each of two years through the Home Office-led Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme has surely been one of its most worthwhile and heartening initiatives of recent years.

Sadly, of course, there remain many thousands more displaced refugee families waiting and hoping for their opportunity for resettlement in this country too. So will the Leader please commit this Council to continuing the good work and agreeing to accept and resettle a further fifty refugees in our County during the coming year 2019-20?"

Answer

Firstly, I would like to thank John for this question.

Worcestershire has worked with our 6 District Councils across the County in recent years, to co-ordinate our response to the Syrian resettlement programme through the Leaders Board.

Following the commitment made by Worcestershire Leaders last February, we have resettled a further 17 refugees in 2018/19 in addition to the 50 resettled previously.

A number of cases are being considered for the next scheduled charter flight in March, with a subsequent flight in June and possibly beyond, in order to fulfil our commitment to resettling a further up to 50 refugees.

The government programme is due to end in March 2020 and based on resettlement to date any additional commitments will likely go beyond the current programme. We are awaiting confirmation from the Home Office with regards any future programmes and associated funding arrangements.

Therefore, whilst fully committed to the existing programme and commitments made, it would be prudent to wait until future arrangements are known before a further decision is made by the Worcestershire Leaders' Board.

In the meantime, we will also continue to offer support to local communities who wish to consider becoming a community sponsor as successfully demonstrated in Malvern Hills and other communities.

QUESTION 4 – Mr R M Udall will ask Lucy Hodgson:

"Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities provide an outline of any proposals she has for the Gypsy and Traveller Service for the 2019/20 financial year?"

Answer

The Gypsy Service Team manages 7 residential Gypsy sites (providing accommodation for 118 traveller families) across Worcestershire and it owns the freehold of all of these sites. It is important that social, affordable traveller plots are provided, as well as privately managed sites, to meet the needs of traveller families in Worcestershire.

The Team is also responsible for dealing with unauthorised encampments on County Council land in association with the client department e.g. Highways, Countryside, Education. There are around 20 encampments per year on County Council land in Worcestershire. The Joint Protocol for the Management of Unauthorised Encampments of Gypsies and Travellers on Local Authority Land is a policy signed up to by all 6 District Councils and the police in Worcestershire and all encampments on local authority land are dealt with under this policy.

These two areas of work provide the day to day focus of the Team's activities.

The Team is 100% self-financing through income that it generates through its tenancy agreements with residents.

The South Worcestershire Councils are currently in the process of producing a new Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment which will provide a comprehensive and up to date assessment of unmet current need and future needs for permanent and transit accommodation of all groups of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. The County Council's Gypsy Service Team is currently contributing to this process.

Supplementary question

What action was being taken to establish temporary stopping places to prevent illegal encampments as recommended under the Gypsy Roma Traveller Assessment published in 2014? Lucy Hodgson agreed to look into the arrangements for the provision of temporary stopping places for Gypsy Roma Travellers in the county and whether they have been included in the Development Plan.

QUESTION 5 – Mr R C Lunn will ask Marcus Hart:

"Can the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills inform Council how many portable classrooms are in the grounds of the remaining Local Authority controlled schools?"

Answer

There are 37 mobiles classrooms across 21 schools sites.

Supplementary question

What plans were there to remove temporary mobile classrooms and did they have up-to-date insurance on them? Marcus Hart advised that temporary mobile classrooms would only be removed where funding was available for permanent replacement build. He anticipated that temporary mobile classrooms would be covered by each individual school's overall insurance schedule.

QUESTION 6 – Ms C M Stalker will ask Marcus Hart:

"It has been a year now since we raised a motion asking Council to look at the possibility of helping to alleviate Period Poverty by agreeing to investigate the placing of sanitary products into schools, colleges and community centre's for all girls and young women aged up to 18 years old. This motion was rejected due to the perceived lack of need in Worcestershire. Period poverty is a real issue for many females and other local authorities - e.g. Bristol have agreed to provide products for those who need them. Sanitary products cost every female around £7 - £13 per month and for those on low income this is a significant amount of money, and with other pressures is hard for many to meet this cost; periods are not a choice, all females have to deal with this aspect of their lives. I hope that we in Worcestershire can make the decision to help in this matter very soon?"

Could the Cabinet Member with Responsibility please advise me of what has been done to look into this matter and what results have been found?"

Answer

Over the last 12 months I have undertaken a number of visits to schools meeting Head Teachers and the Chair of Governors none raised the matter of period poverty.

In addition we have contacted 51 secondary and high schools and received responses from 36. All 36 are aware of period poverty and supply sanitary products available free upon request, in some districts supplied by community and voluntary sector groups. Only five of the 36 schools recognised period poverty as an issue at their school.

Council last year did reject the Notice of Motion because they were not persuaded that this was such an issue as was being made out. Indeed the question makes reference to the cost of sanitary products costing every female around £7 - £13 per month. Thanks to people in my group who have assisted me in establishing some facts around the matter that the Radio 4 programme more or less investigated what they asserted were bogus figures and in fact some sanitary products can cost as little as £1.20 per month for budget products and approximately £2 - £3 per month for more branded premium products, a very different figure from the £7 - £13 per month as quoted. He met a lot of head teachers and chairs of school governors around the county and not one of them mentioned it as a real, cogent or serious issue.

QUESTION 7 – Mr C J Bloore will ask Alan Amos:

"The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways will know of the ongoing problems of speeding and dangerous driving on the Redditch Road in Bromsgrove because of emails and letters he has received from local residents and from Sajid Javid MP. Would he agree to meet with me and local residents on site to see the problems first-hand and plot an acceptable way forward?"

Draft Answer

I thank Cllr Bloore for his question.

Whilst I fully understand the residents' desire for a lower speed limit, this has to be balanced against the demands of this route being a key strategic route for the county and one on which we are currently proceeding with a package of major improvements with initial works commencing in Spring. There has been a temporary lower limit of 30mph during the Highway England works on the M5 but there are no speed related incidents or other factors along this section that would support a lower permanent limit and potentially reduce the effectiveness of this route as a strategic route. I have looked at this issue on at least two occasions and sought appropriate advice from a number of officers. Whilst I have no problem with overriding such advice, I would only do so if there are compelling reasons to do so, and I'm afraid there aren't in this case.

So, I'm afraid in this case I must disappoint Cllr Bloore. Whilst fully understanding and appreciating the residents' concerns, unless something significant changes, a site visit will only lead to false hope that there will be a different outcome.

Supplementary question

Mr Amos noted the concerns expressed by the questioner about the serious nature of the matter and the need to look to address the problem in other ways.

QUESTION 8 – Mr R C Lunn will ask Alan Amos:

"Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways update Council as to how the pilot for residential 20mph zones progressing? Would he also consider extending the pilot to cover Smallwood and parts of Batchley in Redditch?"

Answer

I thank Cllr Lunn for his question.

The Rubery pilot is complete and the results and conclusions are informing our review and update of the traffic management policy on the subject, which I was very keen to get done, and which will be available this spring. Just to remind Council, this pilot involved the speed limit being introduced in Feb. 2014 after the first speed data was collected in August 2013 with the last speed data being collected in April 2016. Certainly, the areas proposed by Cllr Lunn can be considered against the new policy framework once approved.

QUESTION 9 – Mr C J Bloore will ask John Smith:

"Worcestershire County Council has a legal responsibility under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to look to reduce crime against its residents when exercising its core duties. In recent years, this has included partnership work to help prevent forced marriages. In light of this responsibility and work on a local level, does the Cabinet Member with Responsibility agree with me it is unacceptable for victims of forced marriages to be charged by the Foreign Office for airline tickets to escape forced marriages and that some of the most vulnerable members of our society should not be 'paying for their protection'?"

Answer

Thank you to Councillor Bloore for his question.

The Council has safeguarding and community safety responsibilities in relation to forced marriages and procedures and processes in place to support any victims that are identified. The policy regarding the repayment of costs associated with repatriation is a matter for the Foreign Office, but I note that recent publicity in relation to this issue has led to a number of MP's highlighting their concerns about this practice and the Foreign Secretary has asked for the matter to be looked into by his officials.