

Council**Thursday, 10 September 2020, Online only - 10.00 am****Present:****Minutes**

Mr G R Brookes (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, Mrs J A Brunner, Mr B Clayton, Mr K D Daisley, Mr P Denham, Ms R L Dent, Mr N Desmond, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr A Fry, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr P Grove, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr A I Hardman, 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 R J Morris, 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, Mrs E B Tucker, Mr P A Tuthill, Mr R M Udall, Mrs 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. 6 questions submitted to the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance (previously circulated); and
- C. The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2020 (previously circulated).

2202 Apologies and Declaration of Interests (Agenda item 1)

An apology was received from Mr R P Tomlinson.

2203 Public Participation (Agenda item 2)

None.

2204 Minutes (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and

signed by the Chairman.

**2205 Chairman's
Announcements
(Agenda item 4)**

Noted.

**2206 Overview and
Scrutiny Work
Programme
2020/21
(Agenda item 5)**

The Council considered the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board introduced the report and commented that the work of scrutiny had been overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic. As a result, it had not been possible to complete all the planned work. However, the scrutiny panels had examined their priorities and identified a programme of work which had been endorsed by the Board. The need to track the Covid recovery progress including the plans and financial implications would be a key area to examine. New subject areas had been identified including the 2021/22 budget process. Cabinet Members would be requested to attend relevant panels to identify emerging budgetary issues. The Board had identified the need to establish question time meetings with the Leader and Chief Executive. Other areas identified included the Council's preparedness for the new domestic abuse legislation, the Council's energy purchasing arrangements, issues around gateway drugs and training needs for new councillors post 2021 elections
- Given the impact of the Covid pandemic, it would be helpful to understand which items of business would be completed by the end of the municipal year and the hand over arrangements to the new council in May 2021. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board commented that the Board would monitor the activity of the panels and would publish priorities as necessary. It was intended to proceed as normal and carry out as much work as possible, albeit remotely. Consideration would be given to the hand over arrangements in due course
- When would the LEP Annual report be considered? The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board responded that there had been a written update to the Board earlier in

the year but he anticipated a further report would be brought to the Board before the end of the municipal year.

RESOLVED that the 2020/21 Scrutiny Work Programme be endorsed.

2207 Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy and Infrastructure (Agenda item 7(a))

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy and Infrastructure presented his report.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy and Infrastructure then answered a broad range of questions from members.

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

The report was noted.

2208 Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment (Agenda item 7(b))

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment presented his report.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment then answered a broad range of questions from members.

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

The report was noted.

2209 Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning (Agenda item 7(c))

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning presented her report.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning then answered a broad range of questions from members.

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

The report was noted.

2210 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 1 - Apprenticeship s and

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion set out in the agenda papers standing in the names of Mr A D Kent, Mr R J Morris, Mrs L C Hodgson, Mrs S A Webb, Mrs R Vale, Mr J H Smith, and Ms K J May.

The motion was moved by Mr A D Kent and seconded by

**employment for
the 16-24 age
group (Agenda
item 6)**

Mrs R Vale who both spoke in favour of it, and Council agreed to deal with it on the day.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- It was vital that young people could establish careers in areas that interested them. Inexperienced young people would bear the brunt of the impact of the downturn in the employment market as a result of the Covid pandemic. It was imperative that locally this Council did as much as possible to help young people learn and progress and that local employers had the confidence and support to be able to take on young people in challenging times
- The Council was already undertaking a lot of quality work with apprenticeships but it needed to increase the quantity of apprenticeship opportunities that were being created with the appropriate communication and marketing. All councillors should contact their local employers to encourage them to join this scheme. There was a danger that this tranche of young people could become the forgotten generation
- It was more important than ever for public sector partners, LEP partners and colleges of further education to work together to maximise the number of apprenticeship opportunities. It should be acknowledged that applicants for these positions might also be young people who had been furloughed and were now looking to change their career direction. It was therefore necessary to make available a wide range of apprenticeships to young people and provide them with the information to allow them to make an informed decision
- The Council needed an integrated and wide-ranging plan for apprenticeships so that young people were adequately prepared for the workplace
- Students needed to feel confident that everything was being done to help them in their future career
- The Cabinet Member for Children and Families commented that although there were frustrations, the needs of care leavers were being addressed through the apprenticeship scheme
- In relation to domiciliary care apprenticeships, the Council had had to return funds from the Government training levy because it had failed to provide sufficient training or apprenticeships
- The involvement of colleges in apprenticeship

schemes was welcomed, particularly for the skilled jobs necessary for the construction industry

- It was acknowledged that the Council initially did not fully utilise the apprentice levy however over the last 18 months there had been considerable progress and the levy was now being spent. A recent City and Guilds inspection had rated the service as good
- In rural areas, businesses were struggling to find people with the right skills or young people who were interested in acquiring these skills. In addition, young people were finding it hard to get work experience and training. All this was having a negative impact on social mobility
- There was a danger of exploitation of young people through apprenticeships. It was therefore important that the Council involved unions or other representative bodies to ensure that the Council was approaching the right kind of employer to support the scheme
- The Council might wish to replicate Sheffield City Council's approach of establishing an apprenticeship agency which acted as an HR facility at a cost to help small companies, who lacked the expertise to facilitate apprenticeships
- It was important for employers and colleges to get back to a level of normality at work albeit in a safe environment because learning in a remote setting was far from ideal and not conducive to the learning needs of young people
- It was important for people to shop locally to support local businesses in this difficult time
- The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning commented that since November 2019, the Council had fundamentally revised its strategy in relation to the apprenticeship levy and going forward the levy would be fully utilised including the opportunity to transfer the levy to local SMEs. The Strategy also explicitly focused on care leavers
- The Council should look to restart the training scheme for civil engineers to enable the Council to train apprentices and thereby keep more of the civil engineering contract work in-house
- The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Education and Skills gave an assurance that this tranche of young people would not be the "forgotten generation". The Council had established 93 apprenticeships, 17 being directly trained by the Learning and Development team and 28 due to start this autumn. A lot of work had

taken place through for example the NEET prevention team, the Employment and Skills Board, the Careers Worcestershire helpline, graduate improvement grants, graduate wage replacement, and apprenticeship grant schemes. In addition, many schools recognised the importance of apprenticeships

- The Council should work closely with the NFU to look at apprenticeships within the rural workplace particularly in the agriculture and horticulture sectors
- Local councillors should encourage each employer in their division to take on at least one apprentice
- It was important to have a strong robust careers advice service in schools to support the apprenticeship scheme.

RESOLVED: “Many Worcestershire residents have been affected by the lockdown and consequences of the Covid 19 outbreak.

However our younger residents in the 16-24 age group have been severely affected due to local job losses and redundancies removing opportunities that they need to start in employment.

Worcestershire County Council is an ardent supporter of apprenticeships both within the Council and outside.

This motion calls on the cabinet member responsible to identify what measures can be taken by ourselves, our partners and Worcestershire LEP to promote opportunities for apprenticeships and employment for the 16-24 age group, ensuring that support and help is available to local employers to encourage them to invest in our youth.”

2211 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 2 - Utilise heat from Energy from Waste plant (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, Mrs F M Oborski, Mr M E Jenkins and Prof J W Raine.

The motion was moved by Mr M E Jenkins and seconded by Mrs E B Tucker. Mr M E Jenkins spoke in favour of it. He commented that due to the lack of action by the Government, it was more important than ever for the Council to take action locally to address climate change. As a net importer of energy, it was important for Worcestershire to increase local renewable energy generation to improve resilience and keep value streams

within the local community and reduce carbon emissions. There was a huge potential to use the heat generated from the Energy from Waste plant at Hartlebury and thereby reduce the plant's carbon emissions by 30%. There were a number of vacant plots on the Hartlebury Business Park and more needed to be done to attract businesses to operate there to use this wasted heat.

There was insufficient time for the seconder to speak or for debate. Council agreed to deal with it on the day.

The motion was lost.

2212 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 3 - Adult Day Centres (Agenda item 6)

There was insufficient time to consider this motion within the allocated 60-minute time limit for the consideration of Notices of Motion.

2213 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 4 - Access to electric car charging points (Agenda item 6)

There was insufficient time to consider this motion within the allocated 60-minute time limit for the consideration of Notices of Motion.

2214 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 5 - Kinship Carers (Agenda item 6)

There was insufficient time to consider this motion within the allocated 60-minute time limit for the consideration of Notices of Motion.

2215 Question Time (Agenda item 8)

Six questions had been received by the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance and had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The answers to all the questions are attached in the Appendix.

2216 Reports of Committees - Audit and Governance Committee (Agenda item 9(a))

The Chairman of the Committee introduced the report and commented that despite the issues associated with the Covid pandemic, the Council was in a good position to sign off its Accounts with no outstanding issues, in line with the extended statutory deadline. This was a fantastic achievement and showed the progress made in improving the Council's auditing arrangements. He thanked Michael Hudson, the Chief Financial Officer and

**2217 Reports of
Committees -
Planning and
Regulatory
Committee
(Agenda item 9
(b))**

his team who had worked diligently, professionally and strategically to get to this position. The final Accounts would be considered at the Committee meeting on 2 October 2020.

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

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

The meeting was adjourned from 11.55am to 1.00pm and ended at 2.30pm.

Chairman

COUNCIL 10 SEPTEMBER 2020 - AGENDA ITEM 8 – QUESTION TIME

Questions and written responses provided below.

QUESTION 1 – Mr P Middlebrough will ask Alan Amos:

“There is a great deal of concern in Upton upon Severn that Old Street is a road, with a narrow carriage way and narrow footways, that has the inappropriate designation as the A4104. Listed and historic buildings, both residential and commercial front onto the road and given the size of modern HGV’s there is concern that their fabric is being damaged by the trundling and rumbling of traffic.

What advice can the Cabinet Member give to the residents of Upton upon Severn to achieve the downgrading of the A4104 to a B road through the town, by redesignating parts of the B4211, B4209 and B4208 as the new route of the A4104?”

Answer

I thank Cllr Middlebrough for his question and for his time in meeting with me to discuss the situation in more detail.

This is clearly an issue which merits investigation in the light of the concerns from residents’ and others. I would suggest that the best way forward is for me to facilitate a meeting for him with highways officers to review the situation and consider the alternatives, and possible options.

The A4104 forms part of the primary route linking Upton and Ledbury. Questions to be discussed could therefore include the diversion of HGVs, the impact on historic buildings and road surface, the implementation of a weight restriction, the number of HGV-related injury collisions, police injury collision data, and the consequences of any diversion route.

So, there is the basis for a constructive investigation with officers and myself as Cabinet Member working with Cllr Middlebrough as the local Member, although given the massive workload of the Department at the moment, there may be a slight delay in setting this up immediately.

QUESTION 2 – Mr R M Bennett will ask Marcus Hart:

“Can the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills advise me why some Schools in the North of the County are being allowed to sign up to single source arrangements for School Uniforms in contravention of the guidelines laid down by the Competition Markets Authority?”

Answer

The broad issue has been raised by the Competition and Markets Authority in 2015 and in 2019.

In summary, currently there is no specific law against it (although one is making its way through parliament) and it’s a decision taken by individual schools (not the Council).

Schools have a legal obligation to not distort competition and even when they sign a deal with a single shop, they should ensure that the prices are not excessive.

See below:

2019

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-andrew-tyrie-to-the-secretary-of-state-for-education>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/468358/School_uniform_open_letter.pdf

2015

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-the-cma-to-schools-and-school-uniform-suppliers-on-competition-law>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/468358/School_uniform_open_letter.pdf

There is a draft new law which had start to make its way through parliament in March this year but stalled because of coronavirus and there isn't a date for next stage yet:

"The Secretary of State must issue guidance to the appropriate authorities of relevant schools in England about the costs aspects of school uniform policies."

<https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2019-21/educationguidanceaboutcostsofschooluniforms.html>

This draft law amends the Education Act to include a new requirement on the DfE to issue guidance on school uniform supply and costs which schools would then legally have to comply with.

We will issue a reminder to schools of their legal obligations via the Worcestershire Association of School Business Managers reminding schools of this and the avoidance of negative impact for families experiencing financial challenges.

Supplementary question

In response to a request to write all schools, particularly in Redditch to ask them to review their policy, the Cabinet Member repeated his assurance that all schools in Worcestershire would be reminded verbally and in writing of their legal obligations via the Worcestershire Association of School Business Managers.

QUESTION 3 – Mr P Denham will ask Alan Amos:

"During the 2nd week of August, a copy of a slide used in a county council meeting was leaked to BBC Hereford & Worcester.

It was headed "Active Travel" and stated that Worcestershire County Council Leadership had set down "red lines" which would support Active Travel schemes where there was:

- *No loss of car parking spaces and*
- *No loss of road space*

This appears to be in conflict with the government's current advice.

Can the Cabinet Member please confirm or deny that this is indeed the Cabinet's policy?"

Answer

I thank Cllr Denham for his question and welcome his support for Government policy, and assume this will extend to other aspects of Government policy.

However, rather than fussing about an alleged leak involving some false slide, it would be much more productive, exciting, and interesting to be discussing the current biggest-ever investment in our road network, record spending on pavements, footways, gully cleaning, and street lighting because I know how keen the BBC is - in its impartiality - to report good news. Clearly, I can't comment whilst an investigation is under way except to deplore the irresponsible behaviour of those who encourage and applaud the gross misconduct of officers. Unlike the anti-car and anti-business policies of the Labour Party - which wants to ban vehicles from city and town centres and remove thousands of car parking spaces creating motoring chaos across the county - this administration's policy is to support all forms of travel to the detriment of none. He will know that as we came out of lockdown, County Highways had put in place a network in which our Liaison Engineers led and worked with a dedicated team of District/City/Borough officers to look at requests to temporarily readjust road space to accommodate the new situation for active travel and social distancing, a large number of which were met and particular pinch-points eased. At the same time, this Highways Department took its own initiative to allow businesses to use pavements where practical to trade to ensure that shops could reopen whilst preserving the need for social distancing. So our policy was and remains practical, sensible, flexible, balanced, and fair to all forms of travel – including the 1% of commuters who cycle – at a time when road traffic is now back to over 92% of pre-Covid levels even with many people still not back at their workplace, and the Government is urging us to reopen the economy. Consequently, and precisely because of our policy, Worcestershire Highways do not now have to waste time and resources undoing a whole host of unnecessary temporary measures which other councils across the country are now having to do at great expense after having created considerable local outrage and opposition to them. So, unfortunately for Cllr Denham – all so terribly keen to support Conservative Government policy – that false slide did not reflect the council's actual policy, as I have explained. Cllr Denham should know by now that our Active Travel policy, containing 34 schemes, is actually set out in LTP4 in sections WC1 – WC7 which, having been adopted in 2017, will have given him 3 years to have read it, if he had wanted to.

Supplementary question

Were all public highways, with a few exceptions such as motorways, designated as shared space for the use of cyclists, pedestrians and motorists with no priority given to motorised transport above other forms of transport? The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Highways responded that as the Council came out of lockdown, highways space was readjusted and pinch points were addressed to meet the needs of all forms of travel. There was no discrimination against any form of travel.

QUESTION 4 – Mr R M Udall will ask Simon Geraghty:

"Can the Leader of the County Council confirm if he has had any recent discussions with the BBC regarding any issues within Worcestershire?"

Answer

I would firstly thank Richard for his question.

As he would no doubt expect, I along with colleagues do engage with all media organisations including the BBC to help ensure residents and businesses are informed about the work of the Council and the services we provide. These vary in nature from purely local matters to more strategic issues facing this Council or the County.

Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Leader of the Council undertook to liaise with the BBC to discuss a possible link to Worcestershire as part of the celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the Archers radio show.

QUESTION 5 – Mr R C Lunn will ask Simon Geraghty:

"Would the leader of the Council join with me in expressing support for the Bullivant media employees at the Redditch Standard and other titles across the county in their campaign to be treated fairly and properly consulted by their employer. Would he also agree with me that a vibrant local media is vital for the health of Worcestershire democracy?"

Answer

Firstly, I would like to thank Robin for his question.

I would very much agree that a vibrant local media is good for local democracy. We support and work closely with all local media organisations, newspaper groups, local radio and the emerging online news organisations. Newspapers along with many parts of the media are undergoing significant change as the way people access and consume news is changing. Covid 19 has also had an impact as it has done with many sectors of the economy. These changes inevitably impact on those dedicated staff that work in the industry and in restructuring we would all I'm sure wish to see staff treated fairly and sensitively in making any changes required.

Supplementary question

There was a concern that many media reporting outlets were now based nationally and therefore the local perspective was being lost and which had a consequential impact local reporting. The Leader of the Council recognised the need for a vibrant local media. He would wish to retain jobs locally but recognised the constantly evolving approach to news production nationally and internationally.

QUESTION 6 – Mr R C Lunn will ask Ken Pollock:

"Can the Cabinet Member explain what actions the Council will be taking in assisting retail and other businesses in the lead up to the vital Christmas period, mindful of the impact of Covid 19?"

Answer

As part of the work we are undertaking on the Economic Recovery Plan, the Town Centres are one of our seven key priorities, the district councils are leading this workstream, they all have clear plans in place and are utilising the additional European funding to support promotion of the town centres reinforcing the open for business, staying safe and healthy message to give confidence to visitors.

On 1 April 2020 the County Council took responsibility for running Visit Worcestershire, it is now operated by the County's Growth and Investment Team. Visit Worcestershire is running a long standing 'Staycation Campaign' – with the focus on Escape, Explore, Enjoy. This encapsulates selling the best Worcestershire has to offer by way of attractions, its natural assets as well as accommodation and food and drink offerings. This campaign runs into the new year, moving with the seasons and we are developing the Christmas content currently which will have a focus on 'buy local'. The campaign actively promotes businesses to our 24,000 social media followers as well as being featured on the website which sees

approximately 50,000 unique visitors each month. Members can find further details of the campaigns on the Visit Worcestershire website <https://www.visitworcestershire.org/>

Our buy local Christmas campaign will also tie into the national Small Business Saturday campaign which is 5th December. This will be coordinated with the local Districts and BIDs to support the High Street.

Visit Worcestershire is also actively working with One Worcestershire and the Local Enterprise Partnership to promote – Make it Worcestershire. The focus is on Worcestershire produce and helping residents and visitors understand where their food comes from. Worcestershire is one of the UKs largest producers of food and drink – but how often do we think about this when out shopping? Twenty Farm shops have started promoting the initiative which see's point of sale signage on local produce and 'Make it Worcestershire' logos on a range of products, such as Pershore College Apple Juice. Visit Worcestershire have been promoting the various producers and participating Farm Shops via its Foodie Friday campaign and plans are afoot to further develop this work stream directly with Worcestershire Food and Drink Association – supporting several outdoor Foodie events across the County, starting at Halloween.

In addition, the County Council is working in partnership with the Worcestershire Growth Hub, (Worcestershire Business Central) and the Worcestershire LEP in the delivery of the Kickstarting Recovery Grant Programme which will launch in late September 2020. The County Council is the accountable body for the programme which is fully funded by the European Regional Development Fund. The programme which will provide two revenue grants, providing funding of up to £3,000 per business (100% funded); for companies in the visitor economy and for small businesses. The grants will be focused on revenue based activities with a focus on 1-2-1 specialist advice which businesses can call on to address their immediate needs in response to the impact of COVID 19 e.g. HR, marketing, accountants, legal, financial, H&S, IT / digital or sector specialists etc. Further details will be available once the programme has launched.

The County Council has also launched the Here2Help Business programme. This programme includes one to one business support for all sectors. The various strands of support have been developed following a survey of the impact of Covid 19 on Worcestershire business. 3 elements of the support have already been commissioned: business planning and finance, new technology and adaptation and support with marketing and digital content. This support will be made available to businesses across Worcestershire in late September. Further details will be made available on our website <http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/here2helpbusiness>

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