

Minutes of the Council

County Hall, Worcester

Thursday, 11 November 2021, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Steve Mackay (Chairman), Cllr Alastair Adams, Cllr Salman Akbar, Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Martin Allen, Cllr Alan Amos, Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cllr Dan Boatright, Cllr Bob Brookes, Cllr David Chambers, Cllr Brandon Clayton, Cllr Kyle Daisley, Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Nathan Desmond, Cllr Allah Ditta, Cllr Matt Dormer, Cllr Laura Gretton, Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Karen Hanks, Cllr Ian Hardiman, Cllr Adrian Hardman, Cllr Paul Harrison, Cllr Marcus Hart, Cllr Matt Jenkins, Cllr Adam Kent, Cllr Adrian Kriss, Cllr Aled Luckman, Cllr Emma Marshall, Cllr Natalie McVey, Cllr Tony Miller, Cllr Jo Monk, Cllr Richard Morris, Cllr Beverley Nielsen, Cllr Tracey Onslow, Cllr Scott Richardson Brown, Cllr Andy Roberts, Cllr Josh Robinson, Cllr Linda Robinson, Cllr Chris Rogers, Cllr David Ross, Cllr Mike Rouse, Cllr Jack Satterthwaite, Cllr James Stanley, Cllr Emma Stokes, Cllr Kit Taylor, Cllr Richard Udall, Cllr Craig Warhurst, Cllr Shirley Webb and Cllr Tom Wells

Available papers

The members had before them

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. 10 questions submitted to the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance (previously circulated); and
- C. The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2021 (previously circulated).

2301 Apologies and Declaration of Interests (Agenda item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Evans, Eyre, Hopkins, Mallett, May, Morehead and Muir.

2302 Public Participation (Agenda item 2)

Elizabeth Evans and John Dawson presented a petition to request a lowering of the speed limit in Hanbury village from 40mph to 30mph throughout the

village and to reduce the limit further outside Hanbury CofE First School to 20mph.

Joanna Kane and Jo Baker presented a petition “to keep our library at the heart of Redditch - with a guaranteed plan and full services”.

John Chatwin presented a petition to request traffic calming measures in Leach Heath Lane, Rubery.

The Chairman thanked all the public participants for their contribution and said they would receive a written response from the relevant Cabinet Member.

2303 Minutes (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2304 Chairman's Announcements (Agenda item 4)

Noted.

2305 Fire and Rescue Authority (Agenda item 5)

The Chairman welcomed Mr Keith Chance, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, to the meeting. The Chairman of the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority, Cllr Kit Taylor, presented his report to the Council and he and Mr Chance answered questions asked by members of the Council.

2306 Constitutional Matters (Agenda item 6)

The Council considered the appointment of the Vice-Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In the ensuing debate, the appointment of Mrs Smith was commended to Council on the basis of her experience and knowledge in this area.

RESOLVED that the nominee of the District Council representatives on the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Mrs Frances Smith, be appointed as Vice-Chairman of HOSC.

2307 Reports of Cabinet (Agenda item 7)

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

- School Sufficiency and Organisation for the Pershore Education Planning Area
- Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans
- Worcestershire Bus Service Improvement Plan
- Establishment of a Charitable Body to Support Museum Funding

- Adult Social Care – Annual Local Account
- Resources Report – Revenue Budget Monitoring – Month 4 (31 July) 2021/22.

2308 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 1 - Automated external defibrillators (Agenda item 8)

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion set out in the agenda papers standing in the names of Cllr Emma Stokes, Marcus Hart, Cllr Ian Hardiman, Cllr Bob Brookes, Cllr Emma Marshall, Cllr Alan Amos, Cllr Adrian Hardman, Cllr Kyle Daisley, Cllr Simon Geraghty, Cllr David Chambers, Cllr Scott Richardson Brown and Cllr Richard Morris.

The motion was moved by Cllr David Chambers and seconded by Cllr Ian Hardiman 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 made:

- How many local residents know the location of the nearest defibrillator in their locality, the importance of a defibrillator and how to use it? In the case of a cardiac arrest, the correct and timely use of a defibrillator could increase the chances of survival from 10% to 50%. The motion asked that the relevant cabinet members work with relevant agencies, officers and partners to raise the profile of automated external defibrillators; to inform residents of their location; encourage anyone with a defibrillator to register it with the ambulance service; and inform residents of their importance. There were applications that helped users to locate defibrillators but many residents were unaware of these apps. Members could encourage parish and town councils to install at least one defibrillator locally
- The process of defibrillator location was not easy and the records available on applications/web sites were incomplete, possibly as newly installed defibrillators had not yet been registered. Councillors could take a lead role in not only highlighting the location of defibrillators in their division but also by undertaking training in their use and thereby encouraging others to be trained
- The professional advice when someone was suffering a heart attack was to dial 999 before taking any further action but it would be beneficial to know where the nearest defibrillator was located in the first instance. The Cabinet Member was unable to attend the meeting today but had indicated that she would keep members updated on the progress on the implementation of this motion
- It was important to remove blocks to the installation of defibrillators for example expensive insurance premiums.

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

RESOLVED “This Council notes that across Worcestershire, sadly far too many people still lose their lives as a result of cardiac arrest.

This Council resolves to call upon the relevant Cabinet Member(s) with Responsibility to work with all relevant agencies and partners and our own officers to raise the profile and locations of Automated External Defibrillators (AED) across Worcestershire to ensure residents from across the County know the importance and location of them.

This Council requests the relevant Cabinet Member(s) with Responsibility update members following the conclusion of this work.”

2309 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 2 - Not every disability is visible (Agenda item 8)

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion set out in the agenda papers standing in the names of Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Richard Udall, Cllr Dan Boatright, Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Josh Robinson, and Cllr Luke Mallett.

The motion was moved by Cllr Dan Boatright and seconded by Cllr Lynn Denham who both spoke in favour of it, and Council agreed to deal with it on the day.

The following amendment was moved by Cllr Adrian Hardman and seconded by Cllr Marcus Hart:

“This Council notes that:

In the UK 1 in 5 people have a disability. 80% of these disabilities are invisible. The charity Crohn's and Colitis UK is encouraging venues providing accessible public toilets to install new signage. This is to help stop stigma and discrimination towards people with 'invisible illnesses' such as Crohn's Disease and ulcerative colitis.

There have been instances nationally where such individuals using an accessible toilet have been accused by staff members of being ineligible to use them, including those with temporary impairments, such as having knee surgery or a broken bone. This has caused considerable distress to individuals and unnecessary conflict.

The Government has decided recently that large accessible toilets for severely disabled people - known as Changing Places - will be made compulsory for large new buildings, such as shopping centres, supermarkets, sports and arts venues, in England from 2021. The signs produced by the charity Crohn's and Colitis UK have two standing figures and a wheelchair user with the words Accessible Toilet and the logo 'Not every disability is visible'.

Council resolves to ask the Cabinet member to aim to put in place arrangements for the Council in partnership with the District Councils of Worcestershire, and following consultation with HOSC and the Health and Well-Being Board as to whether it is helpful to have a different sign from the recognised standard to:

1. *Ensure that accessible toilets on Council premises bear these signs, including library facilities in shared spaces or rented from other organisations (such as the Hive or Pershore Library);*
2. *Work with contractors, service providers and companies renting county council owned premises to do likewise with their accessible public toilets;*
3. *Seek advice from the charity Crohn's and Colitis UK on the information and training we should provide to Council employees. This is to ensure they understand these illnesses and to prevent potential embarrassment for those who suffer with them;*
4. *Work with schools and libraries to promote inclusive attitudes to disabilities to prevent potential embarrassment.*
5. *Ensure that any Changing Places toilets in county buildings are properly signposted for visitors; and*
6. *Ensure that the requirement to provide new Changing Place toilets is included within the Council's future plans for new public buildings in the County."*

In the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- The motion was important because accessible toilets and the appropriate signage gave people with a disability the confidence to use them and provided a lifeline. Because not all disabilities were visible, people were being challenged as to whether they were disabled enough to use the toilet. This motion would have very practical implications for many individuals with disabilities
- There should be sufficient public toilet provision to prevent people with disabilities from feeling anxious about their condition, whatever that condition was. More needed to be done to ensure that people lived fulfilling and independent lives, particularly through the Changing Places programme
- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care commented that Crohn's and Colitis UK had suggested a more encompassing toilet sign. However, he would like to undertake further research on this issue to ensure that the most appropriate sign was selected which did not cause any difficulties from a health authority or district council perspective. The provision of disabled toilets was a private sector issue and affected all strands of the community in Worcestershire. The Changing Places programme had been successful with £34m of funds made available for bids but it was recognised that more could be done across Worcestershire. It was important to get cross party support for the amendment so that the facilities for disabled people could be championed and the stigma of the use of disabled toilets removed
- Education in relation to hidden disabilities was very important so as to understand that it was not necessary to challenge people for accessing a public toilet
- There was an opportunity to engage the private sector more for example, involving businesses and shops in promoting the Changing Places campaign

- The involvement of district council in the discussions was welcomed for example, Wychavon District Council had found a particular issue with the size of the Changing Places signage
- The use of the adjective “extremely” disabled in the original motion was not particularly appropriate language
- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care added that there was more to be done in respect of people with learning disabilities to ensure that everyone was treated with fairness and respect. One of the aims of the additional Government funding was to encourage the private sector to respond to the Changing Places initiative. Schools and education also had a key educational role.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried and put as the substantive motion which was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: “This Council notes that:

In the UK 1 in 5 people have a disability. 80% of these disabilities are invisible. The charity Crohn's and Colitis UK is encouraging venues providing accessible public toilets to install new signage. This is to help stop stigma and discrimination towards people with 'invisible illnesses' such as Crohn's Disease and ulcerative colitis.

There have been instances nationally where such individuals using an accessible toilet have been accused by staff members of being ineligible to use them, including those with temporary impairments, such as having knee surgery or a broken bone. This has caused considerable distress to individuals and unnecessary conflict.

The Government has decided recently that large accessible toilets for severely disabled people - known as Changing Places - will be made compulsory for large new buildings, such as shopping centres, supermarkets, sports and arts venues, in England from 2021. The signs produced by the charity Crohn's and Colitis UK have two standing figures and a wheelchair user with the words Accessible Toilet and the logo 'Not every disability is visible'.

Council resolves to ask the Cabinet member to aim to put in place arrangements for the Council in partnership with the District Councils of Worcestershire, and following consultation with HOSC and the Health and Well-Being Board as to whether it is helpful to have a different sign from the recognised standard to:

- 1. Ensure that accessible toilets on Council premises bear these signs, including library facilities in shared spaces or rented from other organisations (such as the Hive or Pershore Library);**
- 2. Work with contractors, service providers and companies renting county council owned premises to do likewise with their accessible public toilets;**
- 3. Seek advice from the charity Crohn's and Colitis UK on the information and training we should provide to Council employees. This is to ensure they understand these illnesses and to prevent potential embarrassment for those who suffer with them;**

4. Work with schools and libraries to promote inclusive attitudes to disabilities to prevent potential embarrassment.
5. Ensure that any Changing Places toilets in county buildings are properly signposted for visitors; and
6. Ensure that the requirement to provide new Changing Place toilets is included within the Council's future plans for new public buildings in the County."

2310 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 3 - Health impacts of pandemic (Agenda item 8)

This Notice of Motion was withdrawn by the signatories to the motion prior to the meeting.

2311 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 4 - Shortage of seasonal workers (Agenda item 8)

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion set out in the agenda papers standing in the names of Cllr Matt Jenkins, Cllr Beverley Nielsen, Cllr Natalie McVey, Cllr Martin Allen, and Cllr Tom Wells.

The motion was moved by Cllr Beverley Nielsen and seconded by Cllr Matt Jenkins who both spoke in favour of it, and Council agreed to deal with it on the day.

The following amendment was moved by Cllr Marc Bayliss and seconded by Cllr Adam Kent:

"Worcestershire County Council recognises the need to continue to support the horticultural industry, which is core to our county and reputation. It is suffering for its third year running under the allocations of the pilot Seasonal Workers Scheme, which has not been made permanent as a piece of legislation, making it challenging for these businesses to plan ahead for the next year. These businesses pay good salaries, National Living Wage as a minimum, offer good conditions and the sector is world renowned for innovation, investing around 5% annually in R&D – more than twice the government's national R&D target.

With the black pear as the symbol of our county and our fruit growers continuing to face challenges, we urge active engagement by our Cabinet with this vital sector on behalf of our county.

This Notice of Motion:

1. *Calls on Worcestershire County Council Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economy & Skills to continue to have regular discussions with local farmer and fruit grower representatives from the NFU in our county; and*
2. *Consider what more the County Council, working in partnership with district councils, can do to support this important sector of our economy."*

In the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- Horticulture was a key sector in the local economy with good wages and high levels of innovation. Recruitment had been an issue in the sector which had led to a huge wastage of crops. The Seasonal Workers Scheme was falling short of the number of workers required in the industry and its timing left farmers with very little opportunity to implement their plans for 2020/21. Attempts to recruit local workers had failed to produce the numbers required. An emergency response to the shortage of seasonal workers was requested from the Cabinet Member
- Produce was rotting in fields and farmers had stopped plans for planting next year due to the shortage of labour. Following Brexit, it had become harder to recruit workers from abroad. The attempts to recruit local workers had proved to be unsuccessful. There was a reduction in the country's food security at the same time as an increase in the travelling distance of food. Pressure should be placed on the Government to make the Seasonal Workers Scheme permanent and to increase the minimum worker target up to 80k
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy and Skills acknowledged the important role that the horticulture and agriculture sector played in the local economy as well as its culture, history and heritage. He accepted that the sector faced challenges but did not accept that it was in crisis. The County Council played an important role in supporting this sector and he, the Leader and other Cabinet Members had regular meetings with representatives of the NFU. The important role of district councils and partner organisations also needed to be recognised. Agritech was a key LEP priority and the Council had been pushing the importance of the increased use of technology in this sector
- The shortage in seasonal workers could partly be attributed to the raising of educational standards in the country. There needed to be a change in the perception of farm work so that it was seen more as a career. The Council needed to look at what it could do to raise awareness of employment opportunities in the sector and increase wages and the use of technology and innovation
- It was disputed that work in horticulture was well-paid albeit was a skilled job. The abolition of the Wages Council in farming had had a negative impact on wages and terms and conditions and consideration should be given to its reintroduction
- The Council should look into the possibility of liaising with other trade unions involved in the horticultural sector as well as the Co-operative movement as part of the partnership working arrangements
- There was a degree of market adjustment taking place in the horticultural sector as a reaction to the changing circumstances, although the soft fruit producers had yet to find appropriate technological solutions
- It was requested that the issue of animal welfare be included in the regular discussions with representatives from the NFU
- Although the amendment was accepted, it was disappointing that the words emergency and crisis had been removed from the original motion, given the thousands of tonnes of crops left to rot in fields. The Council should make representations to local MPs about the deficiencies in the Seasonal Workers Scheme. In the drive to develop

new technology, the present plight of the sector should not be ignored and jobs protected. There was a danger of increasing wages in the sector to the extent that it opened the market to foreign produce with the associated food mileage

- The ability to travel to jobs in the horticultural sector was a real issue for local workers and therefore local transportation needs should be incorporated in the ongoing discussions.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried and put as the substantive motion which was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: Worcestershire County Council recognises the need to continue to support the horticultural industry, which is core to our county and reputation. It is suffering for its third year running under the allocations of the pilot Seasonal Workers Scheme, which has not been made permanent as a piece of legislation, making it challenging for these businesses to plan ahead for the next year. These businesses pay good salaries, National Living Wage as a minimum, offer good conditions and the sector is world renowned for innovation, investing around 5% annually in R&D – more than twice the government's national R&D target.

With the black pear as the symbol of our county and our fruit growers continuing to face challenges, we urge active engagement by our Cabinet with this vital sector on behalf of our county.

This Notice of Motion:

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2. Consider what more the County Council, working in partnership with district councils, can do to support this important sector of our economy.”

2312 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 5 - Declare a Biodiversity Emergency (Agenda item 8)

There was insufficient time to consider this motion within the allotted 90 minute time limit for the consideration of Notices of Motion.

2313 Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being (Agenda item 9)

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being was unwell and unable to present her report

In her absence, a number of questions were asked by members and the Chairman indicated that written answers would be provided. (A copy of the questions and answers is attached as Appendix 1 to these Minutes)

2314 Question Time (Agenda item 10)

Ten questions had been received by the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance and had been circulated in advance of the meeting. 7 were answered on the day. The answers to all the questions are attached as Appendix 2.

2315 Reports of Committees - Audit and Governance Committee (Agenda item 11(a))

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

The Chairman of the Committee introduced the report and commented that it was very disappointing that the final Statement of Accounts had not been signed-off to-date due to factors beyond the Council's control. The Council had made every effort to ensure that its working papers were submitted to the external auditor in order and on time. The Council had a good relationship with the external auditor, Grant Thornton. Grant Thornton's advice prior to the last Council meeting was that the Council was on track to be one of the first in the country to sign-off their accounts. However, due to a last-minute technical issue, further examination of all local authority accounts was required by external auditors nationally. This meant that by the sign-off date, only 9% of councils had had their accounts signed-off on time. At the present time, only 18% of councils had had their accounts signed-off. External auditors had been faced with a more detailed process over a shorter period of time together with a national shortage of external auditors. He was comfortable with the work carried out by this Council and that the Accounts would be signed off with an unqualified audit in the coming weeks.

He also referred to the excellent progress that continued to be made in relation to Income and Debt Management. The function had now been centralised with an Income and Debt Manager appointed. Outstanding debt, both short and long term was reducing.

2316 Reports of Committees - Pensions Committee (Agenda item 11(b))

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

The UK average fossil fuel investment had been reported as £100m compared to Worcestershire Pension Fund which had been quoted as £122m. It was therefore queried when pension investment would move away from fossil fuels and into more greener schemes. In response the Vice-Chairman of the Pensions Committee commented that the questioner had misinterpreted the figures and not recognised the size of the LGPS in her calculations, which at 3.6bn was far larger than any other such scheme in the country. The Worcestershire Pension Fund's investment in fossil fuel was under 4% across the whole of the scheme and work was in progress for a transition.

2317 Reports of Committees - Planning and Regulatory Committee (Agenda item 11(c))

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

2318 Reports of Committees - Standards and Ethics Committee (Agenda item 11(d))

The Council received the report of the Standards and Ethics Committee containing a summary of the decisions taken.

The meeting was adjourned from 1.40am to 11.15am for the Armistice Day ceremony and from 1.30pm to 2.30 pm and ended at 3.15pm.

Chairman

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Answers provided by the Cabinet Member for Health and Well-being to questions raised at the Council meeting on 11 November 2021

Whether any additional funding would be provided for the Warmer Worcestershire fund in anticipation of the likely demand this winter? (Lynn Denham)

Plans are in place for a renewed boiler on prescription scheme which will run for the next 3 years. This scheme will provide funding for repairs and replacement of boilers, and provision of appropriate insulation for owner occupier/private rented households with cold related health conditions and in receipt of certain benefits or low income. There are a number of different funding streams, Covid-19 and non Covid-19 and therefore Public Health are working alongside partners.

Whether the funding provided to the Trading Standards Service would be reviewed to ensure it had the capacity to carry out its statutory functions? (Lynn Denham)

As Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Wellbeing, I have asked the Director of Public Health to consider whether an expansion of funding is necessary to build on the additional investment made between 2020 and now, following the move of the service, looking at a range of comparisons with others and any national data that may be available in relation to demand on the service.

What education is being provided for perpetrators of domestic violence to prevent a re-occurrence? (Richard Udall)

The primary approach to preventative education for perpetrators of domestic abuse is through the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programme (DAPP). This aims to help educate and support those who have been abusive towards their partners or ex-partners, to change their behaviour and develop respectful, non-abusive relationships. In Worcestershire (and Herefordshire) the DAPP approach is delivered through the nationally recognised Drive programme, which is run by Cranstoun and jointly commissioned by WCC Public Health and the Police and Crime Commissioner.

In the broader context, the Integrated Offender Management programme, led by West Mercia Police, also deals with persistent and prolific offenders including perpetrators of domestic violence

Whether it was possible to have a rethink of the process whereby the victim of domestic violence is required to leave their home etc and the perpetrator is not? (Andy Roberts)

There is no requirement for victim of domestic abuse to leave their home and, if safe and appropriate, they should remain at home to avoid any disruption or impact upon children, work arrangements and family and social connections. This is the outcome that all support agencies strive to achieve. However, on occasion this is not the safest option if there is a high risk of violence and abuse and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021

now requires Local Authorities (WCC) to support individuals to secure alternative safe and supported accommodation, at least as an interim solution.

There are also actions available to the Police to maintain the victim and their family in their home through Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPN/DVPO), which can provide short-term protection for a victim following a domestic incident involving a perpetrator over the age of 18.

In Worcestershire, West Mercia Women's Aid (WMWA) is piloting a Domestic Abuse Panel (DAP) with Wyre Forest DC, in which victims of domestic abuse presenting to the Council for assistance are considered for support by WMWA where appropriate. This can lead to a range of support options. It is likely that this will be extended to Redditch and Bromsgrove in the next instance.

All of these arrangements are an attempt to support victims and their families remain in their own home and legal advice and options will also be available. But there is the safety net of safe accommodation and support should the victim and family be at high levels of risk.

COUNCIL 11 NOVEMBER 2021 - AGENDA ITEM 10 – QUESTION TIME

Questions and written responses provided below. Questions 8 - 10 were not asked on the day.

QUESTION 1 – Cllr Mel Allcott asked Marcus Hart:

“Given that schools are now fully open without compulsory mask wearing or the operation of “bubbles”, even though the Covid virus is still prevalent in the community and at 27 September 2021, 40 schools had reported positive cases in staff or pupils. Could the Cabinet Member please tell me how many Schools in Worcestershire, both LA and Academies have now received the CO2 monitors promised by the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson MP?”

Answer

Worcestershire Children First are advised by the Department for Education that 32 schools should have received deliveries.

Supplementary Question

Was the Council doing all it could to help schools keep pupils and staff safe during the pandemic? The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills gave an assurance that schools across the county were doing everything they could to educate children in these challenging times. He thanked all the schools and colleges in Worcestershire for ensuring as many pupils as possible could be educated in school.

QUESTION 2 – Cllr Lynn Denham asked Alan Amos:

“What is the current waiting time between approval of eligibility for a disabled parking space and delivery on the ground outside a person’s home?”

Answer

I thank Cllr Denham for her question.

Disabled Parking Spaces on the public highway must be supported by a legally enforceable Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). The statutory process for the implementation of a TRO takes, on average 6 months, assuming no objections are received when a proposal is advertised to the public. Receipt of objections requires further consultation and therefore a considerably longer process.

The time between the approval of a resident’s application and commencement of the statutory consultation process is currently approximately 5 months.

Supplementary question

On receipt of further details from Cllr Denham, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport undertook to look into the reasons for the delay in the introduction of a disabled parking for one of her constituents.

QUESTION 3 – Cllr Josh Robinson asked Alan Amos:

"Following recent petitions and protests against the A38 Bromsgrove Route Enhancement Programme (BREP), does the Cabinet Member still have confidence that the plans are wanted by residents in Bromsgrove?"

Answer

I thank Cllr Robinson for his Question

The A38 is one of the most important and busiest roads in the county which suffers from heavy congestion at peak times leading to prolonged and unreliable journey times with subsequent environmental impacts. If nothing is done to address these issues, the situation will get significantly worse leading to more congestion, declining air quality and the risk of considerable tail-backs onto the M42 which could lead to accidents. Failure to act will have an impact on economic growth in Bromsgrove as well as affecting the lives of local people and businesses.

However, let me get to the real purpose of Cllr Robinson's question as I am well aware of the on-going and widespread interest in and concern about two particular aspects of the BREP scheme, on which I have received a number of representations from other Divisional Members, as well as carrying out a site visit to see for myself, namely **Scheme F** which will involve changes to how School Lane is accessed from the A38 and **Scheme 3** which is a pedestrian and cycle bridge over the A38 linking the railway station with the town centre following the course of Old Station Road. I always promised to listen to what people had to say before arriving at any decision. And that is what I have done.

On Scheme F, the original proposal was to close the junction of School Lane and the A38. However, I have decided that we will instead keep School Lane open and not close the junction, and will instead only be prohibiting the right turn from the A38, given both the danger of vehicles trying to cross two lanes of fast moving traffic, and the need to keep traffic flowing and reduce congestion, which is the objective of this scheme. It is anticipated that most drivers unable to make the right turn into School Lane will continue their journey via the M42 roundabout to access Alcester Road, so we will be monitoring this once the scheme is implemented.

On Scheme 3, I am pleased to announce that I have decided to pause this scheme and undertake no further work on it while other alternatives are explored that could deliver the same objectives.

With these significant decisions, I am pleased to confirm that the Outline Business Case requesting the £49 million that is required to deliver BREP **will** be submitted to the Department for Transport in the next fortnight.

Supplementary question

In response to a request for further public consultation, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport explained that the bid had now been submitted to the Government and there was no time for further consultation.

QUESTION 4 – Cllr Martin Allen asked Alan Amos:

"At the last Council meeting I asked the Cabinet Member if he would instruct officers to carry out a review of speed limits from the M50 to the Ketch Round about on the A38 within 3 months of the A38/A4104 new roundabout being completed. He was very gracious and said that he would. Following on from that, may I ask the good councillor if he would therefore also agree to a similar review on the A4104 from Boughton Hill in the East up to and including Tunnel Hill in the west?"

Answer

I thank Cllr Allen for his Question, and I'm pleased to confirm that flattery does certainly pay off, at least in my case. So, the short answer is YES, we will carry out a review, as requested.

I can confirm that for the A38, measures are already in hand to investigate and assess current speed limits, as requested, including the gathering of injury collision data. The A4104, in the immediate vicinity of the A38 junction roundabout has been assessed and speed limit TRO proposals are currently being processed, and I'm happy to send Cllr Allen a copy of the proposal plan. The proposed roundabout will be greatly beneficial in reducing congestion at this junction, as well as reducing through speeds on the A38, currently the priority route.

County Highways takes guidance from the Department for Transport (DfT). One of the key aims, when setting local speed limits, is to provide a consistent message between road geometry and environment, so that changes in speed limit reflect changes in the road layout and environment. This ensures that speed limits are effective in the absence of enforcement. Roadside development and the occurrence of speed related injury collisions are also important factors to be considered as part of this process. The DfT states that "it is important that traffic authorities and police forces work together closely and from an early stage when considering any changes to speed limits". Unrealistically low speed limits are not likely to be respected by drivers and can lead to a worsening of the injury collision rate due to increased incidents of overtaking. So, the first stage of the review of the requested section of the A4104 is to investigate the road traffic accident records and discuss with the Police Traffic Management Team. As soon as that has been done, I will then be in a position to respond more fully.

QUESTION 5 – Cllr Matt Jenkins asked Alan Amos:

"Worcestershire is behind many other parts of Great Britain with the pace of its EV charging point rollout. At a rate of 25 per 100,000 people, this is well below the UK average, of 39.

Worcestershire is moving at a slower pace than the national average when it comes to the installation of renewable heating systems. In Worcestershire over the past year installations have increased by 13%, whereas the national average is a 15% increase.

Can I ask the Cabinet Member with Responsibility what he is doing to increase the installations of both EV charge points and renewable heating systems in the county?"

Answer

I thank Cllr Jenkins for his Question.

However, as Council fully debated this issue only a few months ago on a Notice of Motion, I do not intend to rehearse all the same points again today.

Worcestershire County Council has installed a number of EV charging points across the County, including 26 fast charging points at Worcestershire Parkway station, at County Hall, and is committed to doing more in future developments such as Blakledown car park.

Charging points are also being provided by a number of other organisations including the City and District councils who have installed them in their car parks, such as St. Martin's Gate in the City where there is enormous spare capacity; as well as by the private sector, for example at motorway services and increasingly in private car parks such as Crowngate car park in Worcester.

Worcestershire County Council has a wider role in facilitating the delivery of EV charging points through its policy and guidance. The Streetscape Design Guide which I reviewed and updated recently, now requires the provision of charging points at 5% of spaces for non-residential development, which can be increased to a further 5% where necessary or on larger developments. The provision of EV charging points is also required on new residential development, including those with communal parking.

To strengthen this approach, as Local Plans are reviewed, we are working with the District/City/Borough councils to actively promote the delivery of EV charging provision in residential development.

But it is not the job of the County Council to be an EV charging point provider, any more than we own or manage petrol stations. The poor uptake of electric vehicles is not due to the availability of charging points since the capacity is already increasing to meet the demand, but rather the enormous cost of the vehicles, their range, and the sheer inconvenience of having to power vehicles in this way compared to fuel vehicles. The principle of *caveat emptor* applies to any potential EV purchaser to research their charging options in advance of purchase.

Renewable Heating Systems – I would not regard a difference of 2% between the levels of renewable heating systems installed in Worcestershire when compared to the national average as a statistically significant difference and would therefore conclude that our performance as broadly average.

Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport commented that the Council would endeavour to be in the top quartile performers for the roll out of EV charging points and the installation of Renewable Heating Systems.

QUESTION 6 – Cllr Richard Udall asked Marcus Hart:

"On Monday 1 November, a number of parents protested outside County Hall about the Special Education Needs provision and support in Worcestershire. They reported children with autism and anxiety being out of education for two or more years, they complained of a poor service and of shocking experiences, they suggested that statutory services were not being met. Does he believe they were right to protest and has he a message to the families concerned?"

Answer

It is a matter of personal choice as to whether an individual chooses to exercise their democratic right to lawful protest and therefore that is not a matter for me to sit in judgement upon.

In respect of our SEND services, we welcomed our recent Local Area inspection by Ofsted/CQC who came to Worcestershire last week (1st – 3rd November). I would like to thank all of the parents who responded to the public survey that was made available by Ofsted and CQC and those that joined the open meeting and spoke directly with inspectors. I would also like to thank all of the children and young people who met with inspectors and shared their experiences and views. A formal outcome letter will be sent by the regulators to both the Clinical Commissioning Group and WCC and will then be available in the public domain. We anticipate that this will be in December subject to the regulator's quality assurance processes. We will use this feedback to take into account for our Strategy and planning going forward.

Supplementary question

Further to allegations that had been made by service users, could the Cabinet Member confirm that the Council was compliant with all the statutory requirements in relation to SEN? The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills responded that he could not comment on individual cases but the CQC and Ofsted would be making representations to the Council if it was not fulfilling its statutory duties.

QUESTION 7 – Cllr Natalie McVey asked Tony Miller:

"I was disgusted by the recent decision of all Worcestershire Conservative MP's to protect water companies, rather than Worcestershire's rivers, streams and brooks.

It comes after data released by the Environment Agency shows that water companies dumped raw sewage into England's waterways more than 400,000 times last year.

Campaigners have also raised concerns that only 14 per cent of rivers in England are rated in 'good' ecological health and none meet chemical standards.

When I was growing up, I distinctly remember the UK being known as the 'The Dirty Man of Europe' because of the appalling state of our rivers and beaches. Who would have thought that we would be back in that unenviable position?

My question for the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment is, what specifically he is doing to put pressure on the government and/or water companies to clean up their act?"

Answer

Thank you for your question. It was not the dumping of raw sewerage, it is partly untreated sewerage that is allowed to seep into the water course, only with extreme weather conditions. So when we get excessive rainfall, when our gullies and drains cannot take anymore, neither can Severn Trent's stations deal with this amount of water and sewerage and that is when there is a release of untreated sewerage.

The figure of 400 times of year will be given by the water companies themselves. When they do not treat all products, they register that information. It is an honest assessment of what the water companies can handle. Why does this happen? For example Droitwich have had two new large developments (1,500 houses), all impacting on a little sewerage plant in Ladywood. With extreme weather conditions, that releases into Salwarpe which then goes into the River Severn. If you look at the houses that were built in the 1800s that abut the riverbanks, you will find that their systems go directly into the watercourse and have done so for many years. When they are modified or brought up to date, that practice stops. There will be one or two properties that still release untreated products into the watercourse.

What are we doing? The Council works hand-in-hand with Severn Trent Flood Risk Management. We examine their practices and look at improving the quality of water. The quality of water is monitored by the EA. That is then detailed to produce a quality of water graph.

What has happened over the year? If you go back many years when weirs were put into different rivers that prevented certain fish life migrating upstream. That fish life cleaned the water up. That is happening again with the fish passes being installed. This will start to improve water quality. It will not stop what Severn Trent are doing at the moment but Severn Trent do recognise this problem and they are bringing their stations up to a standard that can deal with the appropriate number of houses.

In my role as Cabinet Member for Environment, I have been highlighting this unacceptable practice for quite some time now. Fortunately, in my role, I sit on the Coastal River and Floods Committee which hold Severn Trent and the EA to account for water quality. We have the opportunity to engage with Defra and Ministers on this subject and that is why you have recently see in the news that the water companies have been tasked with cleaning this problem up. We will continue to hold these people to account and if you have any more questions on that, please come and see me.

Supplementary question

What were the top 5 actions identified by the Cabinet Member to improve air and water quality and improve, enhance and protect nature biodiversity and how and when would these actions be delivered? The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment confirmed that progress was being made to improve water quality. The Council was part of the Severn Rivers Partnership which looked at the quality of watercourses.

QUESTION 8 – Cllr Beverley Nielsen asked Marc Bayliss:

"Malvern Hills College has been the subject of negotiations over the past year since Warwickshire College Group (WCG) decided to close and sell it. The Bransford Trust has made an offer, but to-date this has, very regrettably, not been accepted by WCG. Could the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economy and Skills let us know if Worcestershire County Council is prepared to step in to assist in securing the future of the College for Malvern Hills residents in the event that this deal is not secured and in particular if the County Council would be prepared to assist in achieving this, for example, by providing a public works loan to the community company seeking to run this 100-year old educational facility into the future?"

Answer

Worcestershire County Council is supportive of the proposal from the Bransford Trust and in principle agrees that it is important to ensure that there remains the ability for adults to upskill, and impact positively their wellbeing in Malvern through learning. The Council currently through its Adult Learning Offer supports both a generalist arts and wellbeing learning curriculum that in light of the closure of WCG it will strengthen and embed further into the Malvern landscape.

Since the announcement of WCG's intention to close the campus, the Council both through its officers and members has extensively explored with WCG and other vested organisations how it could support the transition of the activity to either its own Adult Learning offer or other providers offer. The Council has also explored the potential to keep the site in Malvern as part of those conversations.

Councillor Nielsen can rest assured that WCC will support the Bransford trust to achieve its goals and as such would ask Councillor Nielsen in her role as a Malvern Hills Councillor to discuss further with Malvern Hills District Council, as such Worcestershire County Council would then be willing to explore a proposal with the District Council to match fund any contributions, they are able to make which can go towards securing the future of this site.

QUESTION 9 – Cllr Martin Allen asked Alan Amos:

"Following my communications to the Cabinet Member requesting that he considers if a Statue or Work of Art can be installed upon the new roundabout located on the A38/A4104 near Upton Upon Severn.

Could I please have an answer that I can relay back to Ripple Parish Council and Upton Town Council, both of whom are very keen to receive an answer?"

Answer

I thank Cllr Allen for his question.

I do support the installation of public art in appropriate locations, on or adjoining the Highway. They can enhance the environment and give focus to local communities by reflecting their history and culture. County Highways will consider such proposals where certain criteria can be met by the sponsor and we advise sponsors to contact us at the inception stage of any project.

Considerations for sponsors and the Council include:

- **Safety** to maintain visibility and not distract motorists, which is more likely to be achieved where the art is some distance from the carriageway and at locations where traffic speeds are lower. Where it is being proposed as part of a highway improvement scheme, the art should be suggested at concept or preliminary design stage so that it is included as part of the design and the Road Safety Audit process.
- **Cost:** The sponsor would normally need to cover procurement and installation costs including surveys, procurement, design, fabrication, installation, maintenance and the provision of any power/water supply.
- **Statutory requirements:** The sponsor would need to address any statutory requirements such as the need for ecological or archaeological consents and planning permission if required.
- **Design approval:** The County Council would need to approve the design of the art in terms of safety, engineering, maintainability and aesthetics. The scale, composition, design and materials used in the art should be in keeping with the surrounding urban scale, character and landscape setting.
- **Alternatives:** Where some of the criteria may not be achievable in the preferred location, it may be that they can be met elsewhere and, of course, it might be possible to modify aspects of the design such as height.

While this list may seem formidable, I would encourage sponsors to come forward with their ideas and not be put off. I have made it clear that we have a “can-do” approach with a default position of supporting any such proposal, not preventing it. Consequently, with regards to the new roundabout being constructed on the A38/A4104 near Upton-Upon-Severn, I am pleased to confirm that the Project Team would be happy to meet with the sponsors to review their proposals and discuss the key considerations above.

I am pleased this proposal has been put forward and I wish it well.

QUESTION 10 – Cllr Richard Udall asked Alan Amos:

"Can the Cabinet Member confirm the last time, if ever, he has ever cycled on the highway through St John's, The Bull Ring, Tybridge Street and New Road?"

Answer

I thank Cllr Udall for his Question .

I cannot be too precise, but I think the last time I did so in the St. John's area would have been in early autumn 2017 when my route took me down London Road, through the City Centre, along New Road, up the Bullring when I dismounted, along Malvern Road, to Lower Wick, finishing at Bloomfield Road. Throughout my ride, I did not ride on the pavement or in any pedestrianized area, nor endanger any other person.

To pre-empt his supplementary, demanding more cycle lanes all over the place as he now desperately courts the Green vote following his narrow majority in May. In order to facilitate this, if he can tell me exactly what roads he wants to close, which lanes he wants to remove, and what residents parking he wants to take away, I will look into it and publicly report back so his constituents in Dines Green and elsewhere will see the traffic chaos and congestion that he wants to create.