

Minutes of the Council

County Hall, Worcester

Thursday, 10 November 2022, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Chris Rogers (Chairman), 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 Elizabeth Eyre, Cllr Andy Fry, Cllr Simon Geraghty, 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 Steve Mackay, Cllr Luke Mallett, Cllr Emma Marshall, Cllr Karen May, Cllr Natalie McVey, Cllr Tony Miller, Cllr Jo Monk, Cllr Dan Morehead, Cllr Richard Morris, Cllr Tony Muir, Cllr Beverley Nielsen, Cllr Tracey Onslow, Cllr Scott Richardson Brown, Cllr Andy Roberts, Cllr Josh Robinson, Cllr Linda Robinson, Cllr David Ross, Cllr Mike Rouse, 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. 7 questions submitted to the Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager (previously circulated); and
- C. The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2022 (previously circulated).

2390 Apologies and Declaration of Interests (Agenda item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Alastair Adams, Salman Akbar, Laura Gretton, Bill Hopkins, Aled Luckman, and Jack Satterthwaite.

2391 Public Participation (Agenda item 2)

Hannah Cooper presented a petition requesting a city-wide 20mph limit for the residential streets of Worcester city.

The Chairman thanked Ms Cooper for her contributions and said she would receive a written response from the relevant Cabinet Member.

2392 Minutes (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2022 be confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2393 Chairman's Announcements (Agenda item 4)

Noted.

2394 Fire and Rescue Authority (Agenda item 5)

The Chairman welcomed Jonathon Pryce, the 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 Pryce answered questions asked by members of the Council.

2395 Reports of Cabinet - Matters which require a decision - Resources Report - Revenue Budget Monitoring - Month 4 (31 July) 2022/23 (Agenda item 6 (a))

Council considered the Resources Report - Revenue Budget Monitoring - Month 4 (31 July) 2022/23.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and set out the details of a number of additions to the capital programme, in particular he welcomed one of the largest investment awards received by the Council from the Government for the A38 improvement scheme in Bromsgrove.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- Although the size of the capital funding for the A38 was significant, it would not resolve the highways issues experienced in Bromsgrove. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills responded that the modelling of the A38 scheme had indicated that journey times would be improved
- The additional funding for schools was welcomed but in real terms, school budgets had been reduced especially with funding pressures related to increased staff salaries. Could anything be done to persuade the Government to increase funding for schools? The Leader of the Council confirmed that the Council had been and would continue lobbying for further Government funding for schools and education through whatever means possible including the Schools Forum and local MPs
- The addition of new lanes to the highway was only a short-term fix to resolve traffic congestion and future bids should look at moving away

from vehicular transport and consider other forms of transport. The Leader of the Council responded that Active Travel had been an integral part of the funding bid to Government

- The Leader of the Council emphasised that there would be opportunities to discuss the details of these schemes as they progressed. He welcomed all Government funding that improved the highway network. He considered that the additional funding would make a difference to the A38 as part of the strategic road network. This scheme was one of only four schemes of its type approved by the Government nationally
- Although the additional Government capital funding was welcomed, this Council needed much greater levels of Government support.

RESOLVED that the variations to the Capital Programme be approved as detailed relating to:

- a) **The receipt of external funding for infrastructure schemes including Local Transport Capital and Major Road Network Fund for the A38 Improvement Scheme in Bromsgrove;**
- b) **An increase in the Basic Needs Grant and other education and schools' grants; and**
- c) **Potential costs associated with a legal adjudication.**

2396 Reports of Cabinet - Matters which require a decision - Kepax Bridge - Award of Construction Contract (Agenda item 6 (a))

Council considered the Kepax Bridge - Award of Construction Contract.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills introduced the report and commented that the construction of the Kepax Bridge was an important part of the Council's Active Travel plans. The cost of the scheme had increased significantly due to delays in planning, increased steel prices, increased labour costs, and red diesel being replaced by white diesel. However, the scheme represented good value for money for council taxpayers. History had shown the success of similar schemes in the city of Worcester.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- There was another similar type of bridge within a short distance of this proposal and it would be more beneficial to use this funding for schemes in other areas of the county in greater need
- In response to a request, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills undertook to provide details of the final total cost of the Diglis Bridge, Worcester to a local councillor
- In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills explained that the original cost of the Kepax Bridge was approximately £9m but this had increased to £15.9m

which included an element of contingency funding. He was confident that the Bridge would be completed within that budget.

RESOLVED that amendments to the Capital Programme be approved necessary to progress the Kepax Bridge scheme, including the virement of funds previously allocated as part of the approved Capital Programme along with additional sources of funding from Worcester City Council and the Towns Fund.

2397 Reports of Cabinet - Matters which require a decision - Worcestershire Children and Young People's Plan (Agenda item 6 (a))

Council considered the Worcestershire Children and Young People's Plan.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families introduced the report and commented that the Worcestershire Children and Young People's Plan needed to be viewed in the context of the integrated care system and the governance arrangements. The Plan aimed to ensure that the voice of children was not lost in the system. The KPIs set out in the Plan ensured that the Council was held to account for the action it took to address targets. It was intended to make the Plan a very simple and easily accessed document. He thanked the Director of Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Services and her team for their work in producing the Plan and noted the important contribution from scrutiny.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education commented that the plan was short, easy to read, and had buy-in from partner organisations. It encompassed the necessary basic elements for example, ensuring children were at the expected level of development by the time they attended school, a focus on children's mental health, increasing the number of children with EHCPs being educated in mainstream schools so children were educated in the right type of school, and safeguarding
- It was requested that the Plan focused on the target for children with SEN or a disability that required much greater support to ensure that these children were also educated in the most appropriate school to address their needs. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education responded that more work was needed with parents and schools to improve the Council's inclusion rates
- The inclusion of the Get Safe initiative as a priority in the Plan was welcomed. It was essential that awareness of the impact of this issue on the lives of children was raised so that parents were able to identify the 'tell-tale' signs of their children becoming involved. Children were an easy target for drug dealers and it was important that this issue continued to be a priority and that councillors were aware of issues that arose in their division

- In response to a concern about the lack of reference in the all age disabilities initiative to young people between 18-25 years of age, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families commented that the KPIs for all age disabilities 0-25 initiative set out in the Plan were at a high level. There was a set of targets beneath these which included KPIs for the age range between 18-25.

RESOLVED that the Children and Young People’s Plan be adopted by the Council.

2398 Reports of Cabinet - Summary of decisions taken (Agenda item 6 (b))

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

- Open for Business
- DfE Multiply Programme
- Major Road Network Scheme Update
- Resources Report – Revenue Budget Monitoring – Month 4 (31 July) 2022/23
- Relocation of Redditch Library
- Worcestershire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2032
- Report of Pershore Area Review Consultation Findings and Recommendations
- Redditch Railway Station
- Treasury Management Mid-Year Update to 30 September 2022.

2399 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 1 - Free bus pass for Veterans and Service Personnel (Agenda item 7)

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

The motion was moved by Cllr Martin Allen and seconded by Cllr Tom Wells 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:

- The free bus pass scheme would work in a similar way to the pensioners bus pass scheme. It would benefit those younger veterans who were suffering from PTSD or physical injuries. Supporting this motion would show all veterans how much the Council cared for them. It was easy to check whether a bus pass was being used fraudulently, especially with the roll out of the veteran ID scheme. This motion provided an opportunity for the Council to take a lead on this matter
- The cost of introducing the scheme would be minimal but it would mean so much to the veterans of the county

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities affirmed the Council's commitment to veterans past and present in the county. Of the circa 20k veterans in the county, a large majority would already be eligible for a free bus pass as a pensioner. He welcomed the opportunity to work with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport to work out how such a scheme would operate in time for inclusion in the budget for 2024/25. It was difficult to assess the level of take-up at this stage and therefore cost of the scheme. It was important to show that the Council as a community leader supported veterans
- The Worcestershire's armed forces champion welcomed and supported the motion. The county had one of the most effective armed forces covenants in the country and local armed forces charities would be able to provide support for this initiative.

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

RESOLVED “In the fortieth anniversary year of the Falklands Conflict, this Council seeks to do more than provide tacit support for Veterans and Service Personnel in this County, by taking steps actively to help them and make a positive difference to their lives in recognition of their service contributions. Accordingly, this Council calls on the Cabinet member to bring forward proposals for consideration as part of the 2024/25 draft budget process to provide a free bus pass to all Veterans and Service Personnel living within Worcestershire, based on the principles of the existing scheme for pensioners in the County (i.e. free travel on production of a valid identity card).”

2400 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 2 - Cost-of-living crisis (Agenda item 7)

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 Luke Mallett, Cllr Dan Boatright, Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Josh Robinson, and Cllr Andy Fry.

The motion was moved by Cllr Mel Allcott 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 Adam Kent and seconded by Cllr Andy Roberts:

“Council acknowledges the cost-of-living pressure on Worcestershire residents and businesses. It calls upon the Leader of the Council to give responsibility to a member of the Cabinet to coordinate the Council's response, to enable the authority to continue to help provide support to Worcestershire residents and businesses.”

The mover and seconder of the motion accepted the amendment and the motion as amended became the substantive motion. Members spoke in favour of the motion with the following points being made:

- With people unable to pay their bills as a result of increased energy costs and rising inflation, targeted support was required through a One Worcestershire approach for those people in need. There was no reference on the Council's web site to a cost-of-living crisis and no signposts to support services. The Council should declare a cost-of-living crisis and treat it as a priority
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication commented that there was cost-of-living advice provided under the Here-to-Help section on the Council's website. The Government had provided huge amounts of support to residents and businesses over the last couple of years in response to covid and now in response to the huge increases in energy prices. The cost-of-living issues in the county were being acknowledged and addressed. The Council was providing support with partner district councils through a number of initiatives including the distribution of the Household Support Grant for free school meals in school holidays, walm homes via Age UK, oil fuel vouchers, walm boxes, act on energy support and Here-to-Help etc. Councillors had a role to play in helping local residents in need to access these support services. He would ensure that pathways to support services were highlighted in the media
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families indicated that the amendment called for a co-ordination of the Council's response to the cost-of-living pressures. This was a less bureaucratic approach than the proposals set out in the original motion. Children, especially the most vulnerable (including unaccompanied asylum seekers) would suffer the greatest hardship during this difficult financial period. Putting children first was a key strategy for the Council and children-in-need, particularly children leaving care, were at the core of this work
- It was disappointing that the amendment did not recognise the cost-of-living crisis because it was a crisis not a pressure. The key issue was the action to be taken to address the myriad of issues
- It was disappointing that this issue had not been raised through the scrutiny process to enable councillors consider and discuss a local level delivery plan to address this issue for local residents, identify gaps in provision and provide a clear steer and recommendations to Cabinet
- A lot more could be done in conjunction with district councils to support local residents particularly in relation to energy efficiency and targeted help for example, in co-ordinating and supporting walm spaces
- There was a lot of support available and the Council needed to communicate more effectively to ensure that the local residents received whatever help was available
- It was queried whether Council staff were receiving the support they required out of work hours and whether for example, a larder would be opened at County Hall
- All councillors needed to be proactive and inform local residents of the support that was available to them.

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

RESOLVED “Council acknowledges the cost-of-living pressure on Worcestershire residents and businesses. It calls upon the Leader of the Council to give responsibility to a member of the Cabinet to coordinate the Council’s response, to enable the authority to continue to help provide support to Worcestershire residents and businesses.”

2401 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 3 - Air Quality (Agenda item 7)

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, Cllr Tom Wells, and Cllr Richard Udall.

The motion was moved by Cllr Matt Jenkins and seconded by Cllr Beverley Nielsen 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 Mike Rouse:

“Maintaining good air quality is important for Worcestershire and as the Highways Authority the County Council has an important part to play in delivering good air quality for residents. This is why strategic infrastructure schemes such as the dualling of the Southern Link Road, building Worcestershire Parkway station and the new Hoobrook Island were all important in reducing congestion and improving the air quality of the County.

With this in mind, Council calls upon the Cabinet to:

- 1. Continue to work collaboratively with district councils, Worcestershire Regulatory Services and other partners to look at further ways in which air quality can be improved.*
- 2. Continue to support the lead work of district councils in addressing air quality issue hotspots where they exist.”*

Those in favour of the amendment made the following comments:

- The Cabinet Member for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills commented that the amendment provided a more balanced picture of the situation in Worcestershire setting out the importance of and progress made addressing the issue of air quality. The responsibility for air quality primarily rested with district and unitary councils who were required to regularly review air quality in their area. This Council recognised its roles and responsibilities to assist district councils as the county highways authority
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport recognised that transport was a large contributor to emissions which was why the Government would be banning the production of diesel and petrol vehicles from 2030. More work was required to address poor air quality hotspots in the county for example, through the introduction of Lowesmoor bus enforcement cameras. He was happy to review this

measure as long as any relaxation of these measures did not impact on air quality in Lowesmoor. It was important to retain the flexibility to take action whilst recognising and respecting the responsibilities of the district councils

- Different areas of the county had benefited from the sensible planned actions of this Council to resolve air quality issues caused by high traffic volumes for example, improvements to the sequencing of traffic lights, and improvements to road and rail facilities
- The 2020 Parliamentary Guidance made it clear that the responsibility for air quality rested with district councils. District councils would consult county councils on their action plans and taking account of any recommendations. This Council should not interfere with the work of district councils because they had a better understanding of the local issues.

Those against the amendment made the following comments:

- The mover and seconder of the motion did not accept the amendment because it drastically changed the original motion, taking out key actions
- It was queried whether the amendment represented a direct negation of the original motion. The Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager advised that although there were different actions included in the amendment, it was not considered to be a negation of the original motion
- The factual evidence to support the assertion in the amendment that “strategic infrastructure schemes such as the dualling of the Southern Link Road, building Worcestershire Parkway station and the new Hoobrook Island were all important in reducing congestion and improving the air quality of the County” was queried
- This Council had a leadership role in respect of air quality and should not be afraid of exercising it. The amendment lacked any proposals to take action to tackle air quality
- Although the district councils had responsibility for monitoring and reviewing air quality, it was impossible for them to meet the targets in the action plan without this council addressing highways issues. The Environment Act meant that this Council was required by law to deliver improvements to air quality and if the Council failed then district councils could enforce those targets. There was no mention in the amendment of when the next action plan would be delivered.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was agreed.

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

RESOLVED “Maintaining good air quality is important for Worcestershire and as the Highways Authority the County Council has an important part to play in delivering good air quality for residents. This is why strategic infrastructure schemes such as the dualling of the Southern Link Road, building Worcestershire Parkway station and the

new Hoobrook Island were all important in reducing congestion and improving the air quality of the County.

With this in mind, Council calls upon the Cabinet to:

- 1. Continue to work collaboratively with district councils, Worcestershire Regulatory Services and other partners to look at further ways in which air quality can be improved.**
- 2. Continue to support the lead work of district councils in addressing air quality issue hotspots where they exist.”**

2402 Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities (Agenda item 8)

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities presented his report to Council which covered various topics.

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

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

2403 Question Time (Agenda item 9)

Seven questions had been received by the Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager and had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The answers to all the questions are attached in the Appendix.

2404 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.

The Chairman of the Committee updated members on the progress of the Statutory Accounts for the County Council and Pension Fund 2021/22. The Council was in an excellent position as there were no outstanding issues. This was in a better position than most other top tier authorities. He expressed his thanks to the Chief Financial Officer and his Finance Team for their work. In normal circumstances, the Accounts would have been signed off by the external auditor in advance of the 30 November deadline. However, there had been a technical change to the accounting arrangements for infrastructure depreciation nationally which impacted on all top tier authorities. The consultation on a statutory override for the infrastructure depreciation arrangements closed this week. It would then be considered by the Parliament before 30 November, followed by a 21-day resting period. It was anticipated that the legislation would come into effect just before Christmas therefore it would be necessary for the Committee at its meeting on 30 November to grant

delegated authority to the Chairman of the Committee to sign-off the final accounts.

2405 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.

The Chairman emphasised that the Committee recognised that pension fund investment was a long-term activity and would not be taking “knee-jerk” actions in response to current uncertainty in markets. She thanked officers for the tremendous amount of work that had been put into achieve Stewardship Code accreditation for the Fund.

2406 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 11.40am to 11.55am and 1.30pm to 2.05pm and ended at 3.05pm.

Chairman

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COUNCIL 10 NOVEMBER 2022 - AGENDA ITEM 9 – QUESTION TIME

Questions and written responses provided below.

QUESTION 1 – Cllr Richard Udall will ask Cllr Tracey Onslow:

“Dysgraphia is a neurological disorder of written expression that impairs writing ability and fine motor skills. It is a learning disability that affects children and adults, and interferes with practically all aspects of the writing process, including spelling, legibility, word spacing and sizing, drawing and expression. However, its mostly untreated and very few people have heard of the condition and most schools do not test for it. Can the Cabinet Member confirm the state of awareness in Worcestershire schools, how many children have Dysgraphia in Worcestershire, how many children receive help with their learning because of Dysgraphia and what advice and support is on offer to Worcestershire schools to ensure awareness of the disorder is improved?”

Answer

How aware are schools of Dysgraphia?

The specific use of the term dysgraphia in Worcestershire schools is limited but schools are aware of the impact that the sorts of difficulties described within an identification of Dysgraphia can have. There were 5 types of Dysgraphia: dyslexic, motor, spatial, phonological, and lexical dysgraphia.

How many children have Dysgraphia in Worcestershire?

The only specific learning difficulty that the inclusion teams currently formally identify is dyslexia. We informally use the terms dyscalculia, dyspraxia and dysgraphia but these are always in the general context of maths difficulties, movement difficulties and handwriting difficulties. Because it is not formally identified it is not known how many children in Worcestershire schools have this condition.

How many children receive help with their learning because of Dysgraphia?

When a pupil is identified as having traits associated with dysgraphia, they can be referred to the Inclusion Support Services for further specialist support. All of the pupils referred will then undergo an assessment that will look at their general learning skills along with the more specific areas that are affected by dysgraphia; fine motor difficulties, visual-spatial difficulties and handwriting issues. In addition, spelling problems, difficulty with word retrieval and verbal fluency, and language processing problems will be assessed. The assessments recommended by most organisations are regularly used by the Learning Support Team when completing an assessment: DASH, (Detailed assessment of speed of handwriting) Beery VMI (Beery-Buktenica developmental test of visual-motor integration), TOMAL 2 (Test of Memory and Learning) CTOPP 2 (Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing). These help to identify difficulties which will then be addressed by the specialist teacher with recommendations to help improve outcomes or mitigate the negative effects of such difficulties. This is presented in a written report including findings, strengths and needs, and targets.

What advice and support is on offer to Worcestershire schools to ensure awareness of the disorder is improved?

The physical difficulties associated with dysgraphia are very similar for a child with DCD (developmental coordination difficulties) often called dyspraxia. There has been recent

liaison between LST and the Paediatric Occupational Therapy team to ensure that each is aware of the roles and responsibilities of the other. It must be an OT or Paediatrician who diagnoses DCD, although LST can recommend strategies and resources to help with handwriting difficulties. A joint training package for schools is currently in development. The linguistic stage of writing, matching auditory and visual information into symbols for letters links closely with dyslexic type difficulties. Worcestershire has recently issued an updated Dyslexia Pathway which helps schools to correctly identify children and provide the support that will help them at school. Schools can request individualised training or attend centralised training such as the Dyslexia training for SENCOs being held this month. Schools can be provided with resources to help, from writing slopes, to access to software that reduces the burden of writing. They can also borrow recognised motor skills programme that help to develop fine and gross motor skills. Although schools are not routinely identifying dysgraphia, most are very aware of the approaches that can be used to help including the use of technology with speech to text software for example. We find this approach of helping the individual more helpful on a day-to-day basis than using a blanket term that can present itself in many different ways.

Supplementary question

In response to a query by Cllr Udall, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education undertook to look at what action could be taken to improve awareness and understanding of Dysgraphia in both children and adults and the possibility of a report being brought to Cabinet.

QUESTION 2 – Cllr Josh Robinson will ask Cllr Simon Geraghty:

“Is there anything from the Worcestershire County Council side that would be delaying the publication of the Bromsgrove district plan?”

Answer

Firstly can I thank the member for his question.

Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) released a statement on 17 September concerning the development of their plan. The full statement can be found on BDC’s website. Bromsgrove District Plan Review - bromsgrove.gov.uk

Worcestershire County Council are currently working closely with officers from Bromsgrove District Council on the works to progress their Local Plan.

I understand that we are about to commence transport modelling work utilising the new Countywide Model to assess the likely impacts across the transport network and identify in detail the required infrastructure necessary to support growth. Similarly Worcestershire Children First (WCF) is also undertaking work to assess the impact of school provision and places within all phases of education.

This current body of work will inform the Infrastructure Delivery Plan which will form one of the many documents supporting the plan once submitted to the Secretary of State for examination, once the plan has progressed through its initial phases.

I am advised that this work is additional to that required by Bromsgrove District Council for their Preferred Options Stage and reflects the desire as set in their statement to provide the “the highest levels of certainty in our plan-making”.

QUESTION 3 – Cllr Lynn Denham will ask Cllr Mike Rouse:

“Yet again there are problems with school and college transport this academic year and the complaints are pouring in. By October half term there were still 600 students at Worcester

Sixth Form College who were awaiting bus passes, for example. In the meantime, parents who have already paid for these passes are having to buy ad hoc tickets for their children, which they are struggling to afford. There are also not enough buses so students are being left stranded at bus stops and unable to get into college to attend their classes.

What is the explanation for the County Council's failure to deliver on its statutory responsibility to enable children and young people to access an education and what plans are there to compensate families who are being left out of pocket?"

Answer

Can I thank Cllr Denham for her question and I am sorry that she is receiving so many complaints regarding school transport.

We received a significant increase in applications this year. There were 1,093 applications, 831 of which made the required post 16 contribution and passes were subsequently issued. The majority of passes were printed in August and September with 791 passes printed before October half term. There were only 40 passes outstanding at this point, due to late submissions, however I am pleased to report that these have all been printed and posted to parents.

There are only 8 Worcester Sixth Form College records still to be assessed, one of those contained inaccurate information and the remainder were received in the last week. These applications are assessed on a regular basis throughout the summer period and printed on receipt of the required contribution.

To specifically answer Cllr Denham's question regarding compensation and failure to comply with our statutory duties, we ensured all children could access transport for education, e.g. we suspended the requirement for a travel pass until October half term on WCC contracts. Where families have submitted eligible applications and use public transport they are being reimbursed accordingly. He invited the councillor to withdraw her accusation that the Council was failing to deliver its statutory duties and not to repeat it without sufficient evidence.

Supplementary question

The school age population in Worcestershire continued to grow. What plans were in place to avoid the issues that had been experienced this year with school transport? The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport recognised that there had been issues this year but he would be working alongside the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education to look at various adjustments to improve the service as well looking at resource issues. He emphasised that the Council had not failed in its statutory responsibilities to provide the service.

QUESTION 4 – Cllr Dan Boatright will ask Cllr Marcus Hart:

"I have received several queries about the Household Support Fund and the fact that people cannot obtain help because there is a waiting list after 2300 families applied for help. Given that £900,000 was allocated in the first round, how much funding would have been needed to meet the demand of all applications? I have also been informed that in the first round of funding support through the Household Support Fund was fully allocated to residents in all categories except pensioners. Does the council know why the pensioner allocation remained unused?"

Answer

The energy support scheme through the Household Support Fund is operated by a third party on behalf of the council. The scheme which ran from April to September had to close

and was only able to accept applications to a waiting list due to having to provisionally ringfence funding for every application until the required eligibility is confirmed and the required evidence is submitted.

Average support was around £431 per household which equates to around £1.24 million if every application received in the previous scheme evidenced their eligibility for support. Each application has to be manually checked for eligibility and required evidence submitted and viewed by the managing organisation in order to manage fraud risk. Unfortunately the evidence is not being sent at the time the household submits the application and staff resource is required to follow up on missing evidence. This is being continually monitored and processes trialled to improve the speed at which applications can be considered.

Additional budget to allocate would not have increased the speed that applications were processed as there is a restriction set by government on maximum administration costs, and there would not have been sufficient additional management and administration costs to make an impact. There was also the very tight delivery timeframes which would impact on the ability to process all applications in the timeframe.

As per the national guidance, a third of the funding had to be ringfenced and spent only on pensioners. Through previous schemes, the council and the third-party provider knew that the uptake would be much lower from our residents of pension age, but in order to comply with the government grant criteria, that funding was unable to be used for other household compositions. The scheme remained open for pensioners and whilst it was committed by the end of the programme, we expect all pensioner household recipients to have received their support by the end of November at the very latest. As some of the support provided includes new heating systems, these can take a significant amount of time to reach completion due to scheduling works with external heating engineers.

The new scheme is now open for applications via this link <https://actonenergy.org.uk/project/worcestershire-household-support-fund/>, this will be communicated alongside the wider Household Support Fund programme in November, and updated on our dedicated webpage https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20241/warmer_worcestershire/2519/household_support_fund. Our third party provider have offered to run an online session to brief members on the scheme.

Supplementary question

In response to a concern about poor communication and the promptness of the distribution of funding, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities undertook to ensure that applications for support from the Household Support Fund to the local community were dealt with in a diligent and expeditious fashion.

QUESTION 5 – Cllr Josh Robinson will ask Cllr Mike Rouse:

“Can we have an update on the 144 and 144a bus services please?”

Answer

The 144A (previously the 144) is being considered as part of the strategic network review currently being conducted by Transport for West Midlands. In the interim we are engaging with the incumbent operator regarding potential improvements and integration for services, and I have also engaged with Transport for West Midlands and will be meeting with them again soon where I will continue to relay the feedback we are receiving from the users of this service, which I may add is only running today thanks to the intervention of this County Council to provide subsidy funding whilst passenger numbers were so low that the route became commercially non-viable. As Cabinet Member, along with the officer team who are

doing excellent work, we remain committed to continuously reviewing, enhancing and securing the future of bus travel for all of Worcestershire.

Supplementary question

In response to a query from Cllr Robinson, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport undertook to provide updates on the progress of discussions about the future of the 144 bus service and confirm the date of the next meeting of the Bromsgrove Passenger Task Force.

QUESTION 6 – Cllr Richard Udall will ask Cllr Tracey Onslow:

“How many Worcestershire Schools have temporary classrooms, how many temporary classrooms are used for education in Worcestershire schools and how many children, in a typical school week, receive lessons in a temporary classroom?”

Answer

There are 55 single temporary buildings across 24 schools. The reason the word classroom was not being used was they were not all used for educational purposes as some were used as offices or storage etc. Of the 36 temporary classrooms, 22 of them were in the Wyre Forest area and most of those would be negated following the building at the Lea Castle site. The remaining 14 temporary classrooms were outside the Wyre Forest area.

Due to timetabling, there was no way of knowing how many children in a typical school week received education in a temporary classroom.

Supplementary question

In response to a request to commit to the removal of all temporary classroom/buildings by 2030, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility indicated that this would be achieved by 2025.

QUESTION 7 – Cllr Lynn Denham will ask Cllr Karen May:

“I welcome the Worcestershire Joint Local Health & Wellbeing Strategy which Council has now adopted. I applaud the aspirations to improve health & wellbeing & reduce health inequalities. Given that it is reported that 80% of children & young people felt that Covid has had a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing & that the Health & Wellbeing Strategy aims to reduce crime & anti-social behaviour, does the Cabinet Member believe that the provision of Positive Activities for young people, which her department commissions is adequate to meet current need?”

Answer

Public Health currently fund 14 providers of youth services across the county from the Public Health Grant. These VCS organisations also receive funding for delivery from other sources. There are also many other uniformed and non-uniformed youth groups delivering support for young people within Worcestershire adding to the overall wider ‘youth offer’. We also fund an infrastructure organisation to support all youth providers, and which also helps them to access more funding and build capacity.

The National Youth Agency estimates a third of young people are likely to benefit from regular contact with youth provision. We do not have this information for all youth provision delivered in Worcestershire but can estimate the youth provision funded by WCC in 2021/22 was regularly accessed by 14,539 young people.

Going forward, working with Districts and youth providers we are implementing district youth networks to help coordinate, build capacity and increase the reach of the wider local youth offer in addition to the public health funded delivery.

Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being undertook to liaise with Cllr Lynn Denham to discuss the additional funding and support being provided to young people to promote positive activities.