

Minutes of the Council

County Hall, Worcester

Thursday, 16 February 2023, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Chris Rogers (Chairman), Cllr Alastair Adams, Cllr Mel Allcott, 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 Laura Gretton, Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Karen Hanks, Cllr Ian Hardiman, Cllr Adrian Hardman, Cllr Paul Harrison, Cllr Marcus Hart, Cllr Bill Hopkins, 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 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 Richard Udall, Cllr Shirley Webb and Cllr Tom Wells

Available papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. 6 questions submitted to the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance (previously circulated); and
- C. The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2023 (previously circulated).

2419 Apologies and Declaration of Interests (Agenda item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Salman Akbar, Martin Allen, Aled Luckman, Richard Morris, Jack Satterthwaite, Kit Taylor, and Craig Warhurst.

2420 Public Participation (Agenda item 2)

None.

2421 Minutes (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2422 Chairman's Announcements (Agenda item 4)

The Chairman informed Council that Sheena Jones, Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager and Michael Hudson, Chief Financial Officer were both leaving the Council in March 2023. He thanked them both for their contribution to the work of the Council and wished them well for the future.

Noted.

2423 Reports of Cabinet - Matters requiring a decision by Council - 2023/24 proposed budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2026/27 (Agenda item 5 (a))

Council considered the 2023/24 proposed budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2026/27.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and moved the recommendation as set out in paragraph 1 of the report; this was seconded by Cllr Marcus Hart, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities. The Leader commented that the net budget for 2023/24 had increased to over £400m. In addition, the capital programme totalled approximately £430m. He thanked all those who had contributed to the budget-making process including contributors at the County Roadshows, scrutiny members, MPs, staff and stakeholders. The budget would improve services, invest in the county, and help residents and businesses deal with all the challenges that were collectively being faced.

He added that the backdrop to the budget was the increasing demand-led pressures in Adult Social Care, pay and contract inflation, higher home-to-school contract costs, a tighter labour market, considerable cost and supply issues on capital projects and the impact of a growing county. Cumulative pressures totalled approximately £67m and these proposals addressed them with three key elements: Government funding, Council Tax and the reform programme.

He considered that the local government settlement was one of the best in many years providing significant additional resources totalling £26.3m with more money particularly for Adult Social Care. This was on top of the 3-year extension of the high-needs deficit payments and record investment in schools. Residents would be asked to contribute more through Council Tax with a rise of 2.94% together with a 2% precept ring-fenced for Adult Social Care. The additional income would contribute an extra £14m. The rise was half the rate of the Consumer Price Index inflation. The Council continued to set one of the lowest levels of Council Tax in the country for comparable councils. The

efficiency and reform programme totalled £22m. A quarter of that total had resulted from the excellent stewardship of the Pension Fund which following the triannual review had lowered employer contributions without impacting on pensions.

This significant package would ensure that the Council provided adequate resources to protect the most vulnerable members of society, meet rising costs and fulfil the Council's core duties. The budget sought to address the public's priorities as outlined in the residents' viewpoint survey including better roads and pavements, tackling congestion and transport.

The budget included further capital funding of £19m to keep the county's highways in top condition for all users, negating the impact of inflation, to deliver the targets in last year's budget. The capital programme included cutting congestion schemes, major infrastructure upgrades and funding for Redditch Railway Station and improvements to other rail stations. In total, an additional £5.5m of revenue to fund the cost of borrowing had been included to deliver projects set out in the 3-year programme agreed last year in relation to the economy, environment, school places and highways. It also included the roll out and completion of LED lighting, planting of 150k trees, contribution to flood defences and mitigation works, highways drainage and support for businesses.

The budget sought to empower all members of the Council through the continuation of the divisional funding scheme, the capital highway fund, small-scale works and pedestrian crossings and £500k for revenue funding for highways. Parish councils had also benefitted with an uplift of 5% on top of the 15% added to the lengthmen's scheme last year. The budget would tackle the ambitious agenda set out in the plan last year, protect the most vulnerable and keep improving the county and he commended it to Council.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities commented that the budget had struck the right balance between competing communities and competing pressures by using the Adult Social Care precept of 2% and a general Council Tax increase of 2.94%. This compared to the majority of upper tier authority increases of 4-5%. The budget invested in the most vulnerable members of society through adult and children's social care. The City Council had announced that they would be recommending to not continue to fund the net revenue expenditure of £178k for St John's and Warndon libraries. He confirmed that the County Council would meet this funding gap out of the Business Rate Reserve for 2023/24 and then include it as part of the Council's base budget if that decision was made. The Council continued to invest in highways to the benefit of everyone and detriment of nobody. The Government had listened and provided one of the best settlements for this council for many years.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Communication commented that it was a major achievement to present a balanced budget with a Council Tax increase less than the rate of inflation given recent global events and inflation pressures. It was vital for local residents that the Council provided value for money, increased productivity, reduced bureaucracy and innovated in

the way services were delivered. Income generation had been achieved with changes to the County Hall campus and staff were returning to work in the building.

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport commented that over the last 3 years, the Council had invested in the quality, safety and accessibility of the highways network across the whole county as well as in a wide range of travel options. The proposed additional investment of £500k for maintenance projects alongside the net passenger transport budget of over £10m demonstrated the continued commitment to improving highways at all levels to ensure that it remained safe, accessible and sustainable. He welcomed the hybrid approach adopted to enhance and support bus services with the benefit of demand-responsive services alongside arterial services. The Council was committed to improving the quality of the road network, enhancing public transport services and continuing to invest in active travel options to promote healthy and sustainable transport options.

A budget amendment relating to the investment in St John's and Warndon libraries in Worcester was withdrawn by the mover and seconder based on the commitment expressed by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities to provide the necessary funding should Worcester City Council decide not to fund the net revenue expenditure of £178k.

An amendment was moved by Cllr Mel Allcott and seconded by Cllr Lynn Denham proposing:

Capital Amendment: Disposal of Farming Estates

Unity Group Capital Budget Amendment Proposals 2023/24	£m	£m
Capital Receipt – Disposal of a portion of WCC Farming estate	(12.5)	
Increased investment in Green Technology		2.0
Investment in Positive Activities for Young People		2.0
Investment into Educational settings for SEND		2.0
Investment into Adult Social Care to promote Independence at home		2.0
Investment into Libraries		2.0
Repayment of Capital Borrowing		2.5
Net Total Impact 2023/24	(12.5)	12.5
Balance / Gap		0

Unity Group Revenue Budget Amendment Proposals 2023/24	£m	£m
Reduction in income		0.10
Reduced cost of borrowing	0.10	
Net Total Impact 2023/24	0.10	0.10
Balance / Gap		0

The mover and seconder of the amendment then spoke in favour of its adoption; Comments made in support of the amendment included:

- The Council owned a lot of land much of which was not in use. It was proposed that this land be sold to enable it to be put to good use. Despite the higher than usual Government settlement, there remained budgetary pressures. The money from the sale of the land would be invested in a number of different areas: Green technology, for example solar and wind energy (£2m), positive support for young people who had suffered as a result of the pandemic; Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) (£2m) to support mainstream schools support and improve the education of these children, technology and equipment to promote independence at home; and investment in library services, particularly the insulation of buildings
- The farming estate was a significant but under-utilised asset which did not produce a significant income and was not activity used for the community, sustainability, food security, carbon reduction, or address climate change. It was therefore appropriate to sell these assets and reinvest the funds in capital projects that would make a difference to local residents
- The promotion of independent living, particularly assistance to younger adults was particularly expensive. This additional funding would bolster existing funds and help these individuals be supported at home
- The Council had failed to use its smallholding assets in a more progressive way, for example as places for education and training, to enable young people to gain experience through short tenancies and develop traditional and new skills to help small industries, environmental protection and create jobs and opportunities. It was therefore important to look at other ways to use these assets to benefit the community
- The sale of a smallholding would not necessarily impact on the tenancy arrangements. The funding could be used to support youth centres that would not lead to revenue spend
- The Council had a record of selling off areas of land in the past. The intention of this amendment was to sell the land not to the detriment of the rural economy but for better use
- £60k was being spent to educate SEND children in private settings. This extra money could prevent this expenditure entering the private sector.

Comments made against the amendment included:

- The Council's smallholdings were a gateway and opportunity for young people to enter into farming that would not exist in any other way. The amendment would result in the large-scale sale of the Council's portfolio potentially for housing development and the potential for the land to become fallow and disused
- There had been no attempt to raise this budget amendment during the budget scrutiny process to allow it to be properly evaluated
- The amendment included a fire sale of half the Council's entire landholding over a one-year period and would not achieve the best

value for the assets. A sale value of £12m would not be achievable in one-year. The impact of this amendment would lead to smallholders being thrown off their land

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care commented that the sale of the smallholding estate would create revenue demands which had not been addressed in the proposed amendment. The Disabled Facilities Grant already existed to provide funding for assisted technology for Adult Social Care. The sale of the Council's smallholdings was not the right way to provide these additional funds. The Council's smallholdings provided produce to a number of major retailers in the county
- A number of the funding suggestions in the amendment were already being done
- This amendment would have a negative impact on local rural businesses, local communities and the environment with produce being transported greater distances. The Council's smallholding tenants were receiving support through the NFU
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education commented that it was difficult to invest £2m in a SEND capital project without incurring revenue costs which had not been included in the amendment
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being commented that youth provision and positive activities was funded annually through the public health ring-fenced grant £530k. Part of this funding was spent on an infrastructure contract which helped to build and bid for additional youth capacity. District councils had also received an extra £350k from 2021-2024 for additional youth work following the pandemic. Every effort was being made to enhance youth provision and engage with young people
- The Leader of the Council commented that when assets were rapidly sold the best price would not be achieved. It would also be difficult to protect the future use of the land, leading to unintended consequences as well as impacting on the tenants.

At the conclusion of the debate and on a named vote this amendment was lost.

Those in favour of the amendment were: Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Dan Boatright, Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Andy Fry, Cllr Luke Mallett, Cllr Josh Robinson, and Cllr Richard Udall. (7)

Those against the amendment were: Cllr Chris Rogers, Cllr Alastair Adams, Cllr Allan Amos, Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cllr Bob Brookes, Cllr David Chambers, Cllr Brandon Clayton, Cllr Kyle Daisley, Cllr Nathan Desmond, Cllr Allah Ditta, Cllr Matt Dormer, Cllr Elizabeth Eyre, Cllr Simon Geraghty, Cllr Laura Gretton, Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Karen Hanks, Cllr Ian Hardiman, Cllr Adrian Hardman, Cllr Paul Harrison, Cllr Marcus Hart, Cllr Bill Hopkins, Cllr Adam Kent, Cllr Adrian Kriss, Cllr Steve Mackay, Cllr Emma D Marshall, Cllr Karen May, Cllr Natalie McVey, Cllr Tony Miller, Cllr Jo Monk, Cllr Dan Morehead, Cllr Tony Muir, Cllr Beverley Nielsen, Cllr Tracey Onslow, Cllr Scott Richardson Brown, Cllr Andy Roberts, Cllr Linda Robinson, Cllr David Ross, Cllr Mike Rouse, Cllr James Stanley, Cllr Emma Stokes, Cllr Shirley Webb and Cllr Tom Wells. (42)

Those abstaining were: Cllr Matt Jenkins. (1)

An amendment was moved by Cllr Matt Jenkins and seconded by Cllr Beverley Nielsen proposing:

Revenue Amendment: Revenue Budget for Environmental/Sustainability Feasibility

Green & Independent Alliance Revenue Budget Amendment Proposals 2023/24	£m	£m
Establish a dedicated revenue budget for feasibility study/business case development into environment and sustainability schemes.		0.150
Funding – further drawdown on usable reserves	(0.150)	
Net Total Impact 2023/24	(0.150)	0.150
Balance / Gap		0

The mover and seconder of the amendment then spoke in favour of its adoption; Comments made in support of the amendment included:

- With the increase in energy prices, it would be appropriate to look at reducing energy use to save money and reduce CO2 emissions to meet net zero targets. The pay back for such schemes was usually under 7 years. The extra £150k would allow for 7-8 feasibility studies to be carried out. The level of capital funding required would follow from the business cases which showed the best return on investment
- This amendment asked for a low-cost investment of £150k with potentially lead to a high yield for the Council. It was becoming increasingly difficult to find energy saving measures which was why it was important to look at this issue now from a strategic point of view
- There did not appear to be any financed schemes to deliver renewable energy within the budget
- As part of the proposed feasibility work, the Council could re-examine its decision not to purchase green gas on the basis that it was too expensive
- The work done to date by the Council to meet its net zero targets had been the easier aspects to achieve. There remained considerable work to be done. This amendment intended to speed up progress.

Comments made against the amendment included:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication commented that the amendment was suggesting that the Council employed additional consultants to undertake work that was already underway. The Council had undertaken a number of initiatives to reduce carbon emissions leading to an 83% reduction since 2010. The Council continued to pursue opportunities to find efficiencies, to secure further grant funding and make business cases for energy saving schemes. The review of county buildings would lead to a

reduction in costs and the Council’s carbon footprint. There was sufficient funds in place to allow the necessary work to take place including capital consumption and staffing levels

- The budget scrutiny process was the best way for this proposal to be assessed, not via a budget amendment
- The Leader of the Council commented that resources and work was underway to review the Council’s buildings and assets to ensure they were fit-for-purpose and energy efficient. It was essential that schemes met the 7-year payback criteria. Given the limited resources available, existing cases were given priority which would deliver quicker and higher expected return payback and value for money. There was always more that could be done but great progress had been made.

At the conclusion of the debate and on a named vote this amendment was lost.

Those in favour of the amendment were: Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Dan Boatright, Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Andy Fry, Cllr Matt Jenkins, Cllr Luke Mallett, Cllr Natalie McVey, Cllr Beverley Nielsen, Cllr Josh Robinson, and Cllr Tom Wells. (10)

Those against the amendment were: Cllr Chris Rogers, Cllr Alastair Adams, Cllr Allan Amos, Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cllr Bob Brookes, Cllr David Chambers, Cllr Brandon Clayton, Cllr Kyle Daisley, Cllr Nathan Desmond, Cllr Allah Ditta, Cllr Matt Dormer, Cllr Elizabeth Eyre, Cllr Simon Geraghty, Cllr Laura Gretton, Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Karen Hanks, Cllr Ian Hardiman, Cllr Adrian Hardman, Cllr Paul Harrison, Cllr Marcus Hart, Cllr Bill Hopkins, Cllr Adam Kent, Cllr Adrian Kriss, Cllr Steve Mackay, Cllr Emma D Marshall, Cllr Karen May, Cllr Tony Miller, Cllr Jo Monk, Cllr Dan Morehead, Cllr Tony Muir, Cllr Tracey Onslow, Cllr Scott Richardson Brown, Cllr Andy Roberts, Cllr Linda Robinson, Cllr David Ross, Cllr Mike Rouse, Cllr James Stanley, Cllr Emma Stokes, and Cllr Shirley Webb. (39)

An amendment was moved by Cllr Matt Jenkins and seconded by Cllr Beverley Nielsen proposing:

Revenue Amendment: Revenue Budget for Fuel Poverty Advisors

Green & Independent Alliance Revenue Budget Amendment Proposals 2023/24	£m	£m
Additional Expenditure – Fuel Poverty Advisors		0.105
Funding – further drawdown on usable reserves	(0.105)	
Net Total Impact 2023/24	(0.105)	0.105
Balance / Gap		0

The mover and seconder of the amendment then spoke in favour of its adoption; Comments made in support of the amendment included:

- The amendment aimed to help local residents who were suffering the most from the energy crisis. Action on Energy had been working with

the county and district councils as part of the warmer Worcestershire home energy efficiency partnership. They had indicated that the additional funding for 3 advisors would make a huge difference to support struggling local residents. Advice given included cutting energy debt, reducing energy bills and helping people apply for grants. It helped people move out of fuel-poverty and improved quality of life especially as the Government support was ending in March 2023

- The Council had managed to employ staff at short notice in other circumstances so it should be possible in this case,
- The Council had under-estimated the cost-of-living crisis in this country and anything that could be done to improve matters should be done
- The debt advisors had full case-loads and therefore were not able to support every request for support
- The proposed amendment was not a duplication of existing work but an enhancement to help more people.

Comments made against the amendment included:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication commented that although the energy market was uncertain at present, energy prices had been reducing. Under this amendment, the Council would need to recruit 3 people in a short period of time on short-term contracts. There were a number of energy projects already underway in liaison with district councils and partner organisations which had received significant investment. Further investment was therefore unnecessary in this area especially as it impacted on the Council's reserves
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being commented that this amendment represented unnecessary duplication of work being undertaken
- The Leader of the Council commented that a well thought out a co-ordinated programme was in place to tackle this issue in Worcestershire. The Council had already pledged to use some of its business rate reserve to support libraries if required. Those reserves could only be used once.

At the conclusion of the debate and on a named vote this amendment was lost.

Those in favour of the amendment were: Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Dan Boatright, Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Andy Fry, Cllr Matt Jenkins, Cllr Luke Mallett, Cllr Natalie McVey, Cllr Josh Robinson, Cllr Richard Udall, and Cllr Tom Wells.
(10)

Those against the amendment were: Cllr Chris Rogers, Cllr Alastair Adams, Cllr Allan Amos, Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cllr Bob Brookes, Cllr David Chambers, Cllr Brandon Clayton, Cllr Kyle Daisley, Cllr Nathan Desmond, Cllr Allah Ditta, Cllr Matt Dormer, Cllr Elizabeth Eyre, Cllr Simon Geraghty, Cllr Laura Gretton, Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Karen Hanks, Cllr Ian Hardiman, Cllr Adrian Hardman, Cllr Paul Harrison, Cllr Marcus Hart, Cllr Bill Hopkins, Cllr Adam Kent, Cllr Adrian Kriss, Cllr Steve Mackay, Cllr Emma D Marshall, Cllr Karen May, Cllr Tony Miller, Cllr Jo Monk, Cllr Dan Morehead, Cllr Tony Muir, Cllr Tracey Onslow,

Cllr Scott Richardson Brown, Cllr Andy Roberts, Cllr Linda Robinson, Cllr David Ross, Cllr Mike Rouse, Cllr James Stanley, Cllr Emma Stokes, and Cllr Shirley Webb. (39)

An amendment was moved by Cllr Matt Jenkins and seconded by Cllr Beverley Nielsen proposing:

Capital Amendment: Capital Budget Business Energy Efficiency

Green & Independent Alliance Capital Budget Amendment Proposals 2023/24	£m	£m
Increase Capital Programme Allocation - Business Energy Efficiency Programme		2.000
Decrease Capital Programme Allocation – Structural Carriageway/Bridgeworks Programme	(2.000)	
Net Total Impact 2023/24	(2.000)	2.000
Balance / Gap		0

The mover and seconder of the amendment then spoke in favour of its adoption; Comments made in support of the amendment included:

- The Business Energy Efficiency Programme was due to end in June. It was very popular and demand had been very high. As the energy crisis was likely to continue for some time, it made sense to extend the programme. £500k per annum was needed over 4 years to continue the programme. This reduction in energy costs would help to keep small-to-medium sized businesses afloat in the county as well as help to meet the net-zero emissions target for 2050
- The request for £2m funding out of an £120m Capital Programme Allocation would not have any significant impact on highways maintenance
- It made sense to allocate this funding to the Business Energy Efficiency Programme now and if necessary, add funding to the capital programme for highways maintenance at a later date. It might slow the highways maintenance programme down but the Council needed to recognise a greater need at this particular time
- The amendments had been carefully considered including officer input before being submitted to Council
- Highways maintenance contracts tended to go to large firms which had no financial benefit for local residents
- The cost of energy was impacting on local businesses ability to retain staff and invest in their business
- The Council needed to look at the bigger picture, not just what residents were telling them on the doorstep.

Comments made against the amendment included:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport commented that the proposed transfer of funding from the highways maintenance budget could result in significant losses for highways

maintenance and infrastructure projects and impact on the Council's Active Travel aims. If the highways and transport infrastructure budget was reduced, there could be negative impacts on the productivity of local businesses, and the economic well-being of the county. It was important to find a balance between supporting local businesses and the maintenance and improvement of the highways network.

- There was a danger that this amendment would divert funds away from Active Travel routes that had already been commenced or were planned
- The amendment called for the Business Energy Efficiency Programme to be extended for 4 years whether or not a need had been established
- The Council was delivering the main priority for local residents which was the maintenance of the highways infrastructure
- A key issue for local businesses was the ability of their employees to get to work and therefore highways maintenance and tackling congestion was important to them
- The Leader of the Council commented that the Council spent extensively on local businesses, for example through Open for Business programme albeit the way funding was accessed would be changing in the future. A large proportion of highways funding was received from the Government for specific projects and if funding was not allocated, it would be returned. Therefore, the proposed budget reduction represented a bigger reduction to Council spending than it appeared. Roads and pavements were a key priority for the public. The amendment would undermine years of good work to create high quality roads and pavements. The impact on cyclists would be particularly significant from a safety point of view.

At the conclusion of the debate and on a named vote this amendment was lost.

Those in favour of the amendment were: Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Dan Boatright, Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Andy Fry, Cllr Matt Jenkins, Cllr Luke Mallett, Cllr Natalie McVey, Cllr Josh Robinson, Cllr Richard Udall, and Cllr Tom Wells.
(10)

Those against the amendment were: Cllr Chris Rogers, Cllr Alastair Adams, Cllr Allan Amos, Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cllr Bob Brookes, Cllr David Chambers, Cllr Brandon Clayton, Cllr Kyle Daisley, Cllr Nathan Desmond, Cllr Allah Ditta, Cllr Matt Dormer, Cllr Elizabeth Eyre, Cllr Simon Geraghty, Cllr Laura Gretton, Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Karen Hanks, Cllr Ian Hardiman, Cllr Adrian Hardman, Cllr Paul Harrison, Cllr Marcus Hart, Cllr Bill Hopkins, Cllr Adam Kent, Cllr Adrian Kriss, Cllr Steve Mackay, Cllr Emma D Marshall, Cllr Karen May, Cllr Tony Miller, Cllr Jo Monk, Cllr Dan Morehead, Cllr Tony Muir, Cllr Tracey Onslow, Cllr Scott Richardson Brown, Cllr Andy Roberts, Cllr Linda Robinson, Cllr David Ross, Cllr Mike Rouse, Cllr James Stanley, Cllr Emma Stokes, and Cllr Shirley Webb. (39)

In debating the budget as originally moved and seconded the following points were raised:

Comments made in support of the proposed budget included:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care commented that the Council had committed £26m of the budget to the demands in the People Directorate with £6.3m directed to older people, £4m increase to mental health, £2.4m increase for young people with disabilities and £7m to cover pay inflation to enable a full weight budget across services. The full amount of the Adult Social Care precept would be taken up. He thanked colleagues in health for their contribution of £2.5m to the budget from the Better Care Fund. It still meant that a savings programme was necessary of over £10m. The Council had also adopted a vacancy management process
- It was appropriate to keep Council Tax as low as possible to reflect current financial difficulties of local residents
- A lot of work had gone into producing what was a balanced and substantial budget
- The Leader of the Council commented that he would not wish to increase Council Tax to 4.99% whilst local residents were struggling financially. The environment was a core element of the Corporate Plan and not only had funds been directly included in the budget but it had also been recognised as a cross-cutting theme. £3.5m was being added to the budget to support bus services as well as support for the train network, walking and cycling. The budget had been adjusted to take account of inflation. In relation to Council Tax, the Council should only ask for resources that were absolutely required and justified. He encouraged anyone with a budget amendment to put it through the scrutiny process before bringing it to Council. The Government settlement had been received later each year which had put pressure on the budget-making and scrutiny process.

Comments made against the proposed budget included:

- The proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.94% rather than the full 4.99% represented an increase of just 70p a year for a Band D property and under 20p for Band B. The continued insistence on being one of the lowest Council Tax rates in the country had implications for the quality of the services provided to local residents
- The Council had been subject to the Government's austerity programme since 2010 and services had been reduced as a result. Although this year's settlement was better than usual, it did not make up for the money lost over the years. There were huge demand pressures in Adult Social Care and education and extra funding was necessary. Over the long-term, the funding mechanism for Adult Social Care needed to be reformed nationally
- Scrutiny of the budget process needed to take place earlier in the budget-setting process
- There was no acknowledgement in the budget that the County was facing an ecological crisis. There was a lack of funding and urgency to tackle what should be a core part of the budget
- The Council's General Fund Reserve was 6.38% whereas the LGA recommended that the minimum should be 5%. The LGA had

expressed concern about the Government settlement and emphasised that reserves could only be spent once

- Concern was expressed about the Council's pay policy which meant that the lowest paid council employees received as little as circa £18k per annum
- The Council's decision to only take 1% of the Adult Social Care Precept in 2021 meant that that deficit in funding had accumulated over time so that a considerable amount of funding had been lost since then
- The Chairman of the OSPB suggested that the budget scrutiny process should be reviewed so that scrutiny took place earlier. It would also be preferable for budget amendments to be considered earlier in the process.

On a named vote RESOLVED that the budget be approved as follows:

- (a) The budget of £400.813 million as set out in Appendix 1;**
- (b) The capital programme of £432.720 million as set out in Appendix 2;**
- (c) The Earmarked Reserves Schedule as set out in Appendix 5;**
- (d) That the Council Tax Band D equivalent for 2023/24 be set at £1,465.78 which includes £197.40 relating to the ring-fenced Adult Social Care precept, and the Council Tax Requirement be set at £317.337 million, which will increase the Council Tax Precept by 4.94% in relation to two parts:**
 - **2.94% to provide financial support for the delivery of outcomes in line with the Corporate Plan 'Shaping Worcestershire's Future' and the priorities identified by the public and business community; and**
 - **2.00% Adult Social Care Precept ring-fenced for Adult Social Care services, in order to contribute to existing cost pressures due to Worcestershire's ageing population;**
- (e) The Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators as set out at Appendix 6; and**
- (f) The Pay Policy as set out at Appendix 7.**

Those in favour of the motion were: Cllr Chris Rogers, Cllr Alastair Adams, Cllr Allan Amos, Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cllr Bob Brookes, Cllr David Chambers, Cllr Brandon Clayton, Cllr Kyle Daisley, Cllr Nathan Desmond, Cllr Allah Ditta, Cllr Matt Dormer, Cllr Elizabeth Eyre, Cllr Simon Geraghty, Cllr Laura Gretton, Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Karen Hanks, Cllr Ian Hardiman, Cllr Adrian Hardman, Cllr Paul Harrison, Cllr Marcus Hart, Cllr Bill Hopkins, Cllr Adam Kent, Cllr Adrian Kriss, Cllr Steve Mackay, Cllr Emma D Marshall, Cllr Karen May, Cllr Tony Miller, Cllr Jo Monk, Cllr Dan Morehead, Cllr Tony Muir, Cllr Tracey Onslow, Cllr Scott Richardson Brown, Cllr Andy Roberts, Cllr Linda Robinson, Cllr

David Ross, Cllr Mike Rouse, Cllr James Stanley, Cllr Emma Stokes, and Cllr Shirley Webb. (39)

Those against the motion were: Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Dan Boatright, Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Andy Fry, Cllr Matt Jenkins, Cllr Luke Mallett, Cllr Natalie McVey, Cllr Beverley Nielsen, Cllr Josh Robinson, Cllr Richard Udall and Cllr Tom Wells. (11).

2424 Reports of Cabinet - Summary of Decisions Taken (Agenda item 5 (b))

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

- Request to Consult in Relation to Care and Support
- Education Sufficiency Annual Update
- Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity.

2425 Notices of Motion - Notices of Motion to change the constitution - Process for amendments and removal of time limits at the meeting (Agenda item 6 (a))

As required by paragraph 29.3 in Appendix 2 of the Constitution (Procedural Standing Orders), any proposal to alter or amend the Procedure Rules is, once proposed and seconded, adjourned to the next meeting of the Council to receive a report from the Monitoring Officer. This Monitoring Officer report covered two Notices of Motion deferred from the Council meeting on 12 January 2023 which propose changes to the Procedure Rules.

Council agreed that the Council consider the report as part of debating the Notices of Motion relating to:

- a) removing the time limit for considering Notices of Motion, CMR reports, and Questions, and
- b) the process for Amendments to Motions,

noting the advice about validity set out in the report, and

If the Council decided to amend the constitution, the Monitoring Officer was authorised to update the Constitution accordingly.

Notice of Motion 1 - to change the constitution – Process for amendments and removal of time limits at the meeting

Those in favour of the Motion commented:

- There were few opportunities for ‘back bench’ councillors to influence policy and ask questions in public. There were occasions when there was time for Council meeting to be expanded without time limits

- The purpose of the original motion in 2016 was to better utilise the knowledge and experience of, and give a voice to non-Cabinet members. However, the scrutiny exercise turned into a debate about meetings being too long and how could they be shortened. This motion was aimed at returning to the ethos of the original motion and improve the level of debate. The time limit meant on occasion that time ran out to consider timely and important motions
- Full Council meetings were the chief forum for councillors to discuss key issues. The time-limit rules had been tested and had failed, resulting in motions not being debated, questions unasked and decisions not being taken
- It was not good practice to effectively limit discussion of motions by Council to 9 hour per annum.

Those against the Motion commented:

- A cross-party member group had been established to examine this process and as a result these time limits had been democratically approved by Council. Times had changed and the Council needed to change. There was no reason to return to previous working practices
- The Council could be considering more important issues to local residents at this meeting rather discussing the organisation of debate
- The current system worked well and there were plenty of opportunities for councillors to contribute. Members could raise issues with the Leader and Cabinet members at any time.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was lost.

Notice of Motion 2 - Process for Amendments to Motions

Those in favour of the Motion commented:

- Advanced notice of amendments gave members the opportunity to read them, consider them and come to a sensible conclusion. At present, amendments were handed out at the last minute with little opportunity to absorb them which was not good governance. It did not seem onerous for amendments to be approved by the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance and presented 3 days in advance of the meeting to political groups. This motion would lead to better decision-making. Minor amendments at the last minute would not be an issue. Large-scale rewrites of motions put the Monitoring Officer in a difficult position determining whether the amendment negated the original motion
- It was difficult for the movers of the original motion to respond to an amendment when they were only circulated via hard copy at the time the amendment was moved at the meeting
- It was requested that as soon as the Monitoring Officer had approved the wording of an amendment, it was released to all councillors, a few days before if possible. It would give the mover of the motion time to accept the amendment or not, or suggest changes.

Those against the Motion commented:

- The approval of this motion would not preclude other amendments of any nature (other than a negation) from being tabled at the last minute. The constitution allowed members the ability to request a recess to have time to consider an amendment. Amendments proposed by the administration were always checked with the Monitoring Officer to ensure that they were acceptable constitutionally. The system worked well in its current form
- The current procedure allowed a degree of flexibility which meant that often, with some rewording, motions could become acceptable and agreed.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was lost.

2426 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 3 - Cycling Facilities (Agenda item 6 (b))

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion set out in the agenda papers standing in the names of Cllr Beverley Nielsen, Cllr Matt Jenkins, 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 Mike Rouse and seconded by Cllr Marc Bayliss:

“By facilitating cycle integration with train travel through enhanced cycle parking facilities at train stations, we as County Councillors will, in turn, help to deliver improved modal choice for the travelling public. Council calls on the Cabinet Member with Responsibility to bring a report to Cabinet to outline how County Councillors can support improvements to active travel facilities at train stations, including potential use of their Divisional and/or Highways funding, which can be matched from a range of sources and be deployed in partnership with partners and other organisations for best effect and compliance with prevailing standards, details of which should be included in the report.”

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 amendment with the following points being made:

- Only approximately 1% of the Council’s budget would be spent on Active Travel. This motion aimed to improve the environment, health and well-being, lower emissions and cases of asthma and cut congestion and ask the Cabinet Member to bring a report to Council. It was disappointing that the amendment did not refer to the Travel England zero Active Travel rating because that reflected the scale of the problem and that reference to councillors driving a modal shift had also been removed

- Travel England had given the Council a zero-rating for Active Travel. It was important to do as much as possible to improve this rating because it impacted on the Council's ability to seek funding in the future. In particular, the cycle facilities at the county's train stations were lacking
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport explained that the amendment removed hyperlinks and reduced the length of the motion without changing the overall meaning of it. He was happy to bring a report to Cabinet
- A paid-for cycle locker facility had been introduced in liaison with Wychavon District Council at Pershore Railway Station. Members might wish to support similar facilities at their local railway stations
- Local councillors had an important role in supporting active travel using divisional funds, not just in railway stations but across their division
- A lot more work was required to get cycling and rail travel synchronised. However, there were also issues with the integration of bus travel and cycling
- The standard and type of cycle locker facilities at railway stations needed to be reviewed to ensure that they were standardised, fit-for-purpose and safe
- There did need to be dialogue with train operators to improve the experience for cyclists using rail services. Safety was a key aspect in encouraging people to take up cycling.

A point of order was raised and the Monitoring Officer undertook to produce a note for consideration by members about whether the process for dealing with amendments at meetings complied with equalities legislation, especially for members who have neurodivergent issues. A decision would then be taken as to whether a future report to Council was necessary.

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

RESOLVED “By facilitating cycle integration with train travel through enhanced cycle parking facilities at train stations, we as County Councillors will, in turn, help to deliver improved modal choice for the travelling public. Council calls on the Cabinet Member with Responsibility to bring a report to Cabinet to outline how County Councillors can support improvements to active travel facilities at train stations, including potential use of their Divisional and/or Highways funding, which can be matched from a range of sources and be deployed in partnership with partners and other organisations for best effect and compliance with prevailing standards, details of which should be included in the report.”

2427 Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility (Agenda item 7)

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care presented his report to Council which covered various topics. He thanked staff in Adult Social Care for their work over the Christmas and New Year period to keep the Acute hospital and other domiciliary care services running in a satisfactory way. He

also thanked the carers in the county for their efforts keeping people in their homes to live independent lives for longer.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care answered a broad range of questions from members.

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

2428 Question Time (Agenda item 8)

Six 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.

2429 Reports of Committees - Report of the Planning and Regulatory Committee (Agenda item 9)

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

The meeting was adjourned from 11.30am – 11.45am and 1pm – 1.40pm and ended at 3.45pm.

Chairman

COUNCIL 16 FEBRUARY 2023 - AGENDA ITEM 8 – QUESTION TIME

Questions and written responses provided below.

QUESTION 1 – Cllr Richard Udall asked Cllr Andy Roberts:

"According to the Kinship Charity, Worcester City has 297 children in Kinship care, saving this local authority £11.88m in paying for looked after care. Is he aware that in a survey for the charity, 35% of Worcester Kinship Carers say they are worried about support they receive and claim they may have to stop caring for their child. 70% of Worcester Kinship Carers feel they do not get the support they need from their local authority. 58% are struggling to meet their Child's need due to the current financial pressures. Does he recognise these figures and statistics."

Answer

There are five questions contained in what is asked. I need to add some context before I try to address them.

Our 'Family and Friends policy' (updated in 2022) outlines how those children and young people unable to live with their parents can be cared for on a voluntary basis by "friends, family or connected persons". These are 'Kinship Carers' who have been assessed and approved as foster carers. It means the children are 'looked after children' and as councillors we are their corporate parents.

Financial support offered for kinship carers is in line with that of our mainstream foster carers, based on the age of the child. With it comes access to training, support, and special payments. A foster carer may also be entitled to claim benefits and tax credits.

Our aim is to strengthen families, rather than break them apart. However, when it is best for the child to be cared for elsewhere (and that is a devilishly difficult decision) the wider family is explored first. If this is not viable, a foster carer is sought. I've explained that Kinship carers are foster carers and receive similar support.

I can't properly verify the source of the data in the question. I couldn't find any reference to the 'Kinship Charity' (as cited). Though I am very familiar with the excellent work of 'Kinship Carers UK' (whose CEO is a Worcestershire resident). I'm also aware of 'Kinship' which is the leading Kinship charity in the UK, as well as Grandparents Plus. Nevertheless, I've correlated the data presented with the results of a survey of our foster carers and kinship carers.

I don't recognise the £11.8m saved by the Council. The value of foster carers cannot be exaggerated. All foster carers change lives, but kinship carers offer a "unique" family relationship. I give this absolute assurance: It is our duty to consider a kinship arrangement first, and it is what is best for the child. The option is not preferred for financial reasons.

We currently have 146 approved kinships foster carer households looking after 215 children, rather than the 297 cited in the question. This represents 22% of our children in foster care (a recent slight drop).

The question suggests that a third of kinship carers may have to stop caring for their child. Following my meetings with Kinship Carers UK, we now extend financial support to families who move from kinship care to special guardianship arrangements (which gives the family greater independence). If this accounts for the recent 1% drop in the proportion of kinship carers, it is welcomed.

Regarding the suggestion that 70% of Worcester kinship carers feel they do not get the support they need. The local survey showed 100% of carers answered that they felt 'supported by their supervising social worker'.

The question states that 35% of Worcester Kinship Carers say they are worried about support. The local survey found that 97% of carers feel they have a good relationship with their social worker.

Regarding the cost of living. Families are finding things difficult, but Councillors can be reassured that 96% of our kinship and foster carers find our social worker's regular supervision is helpful in supporting children's needs. The question suggests that 58% of our kinship carers are having financial difficulties. This compares with 90% of all families, according to a recent national survey. I think the 58% suggested should be disregarded. There is no room for complacency. We, as corporate parents, and our dedicated staff, must remain committed to supporting families and extended families through these difficult times.

Sometimes children live within an extended family through an informal arrangement. This doesn't involve assessment. The child is not a 'looked after child' so we are not their corporate parent.

I'll be happy to answer any supplementary question, but I would be grateful if it could be made clear whether it refers to kinship carers (where we are corporate parents) or to arrangements made outside the sphere of children and family social services.

Supplementary question

In response to a request, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families undertook to provide Cllr Richard Udall with details of the payments received by Kinship Carers.

QUESTION 2 – Cllr Beverley Nielsen asked Cllr Mike Rouse:

“Could the Cabinet member for Highways and Transport produce the latest cycle routes across Worcestershire with timetables for implementation and proposed sources of funding? If priorities are allocated to certain routes can this also be provided so we know which routes are due for early development?”

Answer

Worcestershire County Council are currently working to prepare Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure plans (LCWIP's) for key towns across the County. The LCWIP's will set out our strategic approach to walking and cycling.

In the interim we continue to deliver, the current programme includes:

Name of ATC	Location	Funding	Outline of Works	Completion Due
Kidderminster canal towpath	St Mary's Ringway to Falling Sands Bridge	Wyre Forest Levelling Up fund	Works comprise localised widening, and resurfacing of the towpath. Also	Autumn 2023

			links to earlier works between St Mary's Ringway to Oxbow Way (delivered 2022)	
Worcester canal towpath	Blackpole and Sixways,	Worcester Towns Fund	Works comprise of localised widening, signing and resurfacing of the towpath. This links into earlier works undertaken between Friesland Close (bridge 16) and Blackpole Road (bridge 19)	Autumn 2023
Worcester Riverside	St Marks Close and Dace Road	PROW	Works comprise of resurfacing of existing footpath to between 2.5m and 1.5m	Summer 2023
Worcester Riverside	Diglis Bridge to St Peters	Worcester Towns Fund and s106	Works comprise resurfacing of newly created PROW, installation of the first parallel crossing in Worcestershire, and removal of barriers to active travel along the route and signing and waymarking.	Summer 2024
Ronkswood Routes	Spetchley Road and Lyppard Grange (Warndon)	Worcester Towns Fund	Work comprise of upgrading rights of way for cycling use, localised widening along the route, installation of a toucan crossing and signing and waymarking.	Summer 2024
BREP A38 – Scheme 3	Rail Station to Town Centre	Bromsgrove Route Enhancement Programme (BREP)	Scheme proposes a shared use facility with improved crossing points, upgraded lighting, signing and waymarking.	2024/25 TBC
BREP A38 – Scheme 9	Harvington Road/Fordhouse Road	Bromsgrove Route Enhancement Programme (BREP)	Scheme proposes a mix of shared use and on-road cycle facilities, traffic calming, improved crossing points, upgraded lighting,	Autumn 2023

Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport commented that the Council was committed to delivering the Worcester to Malvern cycle route subject to funding opportunities. Active Travel England had allocated a small sum which allowed the Council to develop the LCWIP and this included Malvern Hills. Developing the LCWIP would then allow the Council to pursue further funding opportunities.

QUESTION 3 – Cllr Matt Jenkins asked Cllr Mike Rouse:

"What is the county council's strategy for rolling out EV charge points on the highway?"

Answer

Worcestershire County Council recognises the importance of developing a comprehensive strategy that addresses the various factors involved in the rollout of EV charge points, including the locations and types of charging points, the impact on local communities and businesses, and the funding and procurement mechanisms required to implement such a strategy.

Our current strategy for this issue will be reviewed and developed further as part of the Local Transport Plan 5, preparations for which will start soon. Local Transport Plan 4 identified the need to support the development of EV charging infrastructure, and this will continue to be a priority in LTP5.

We will continue to engage with stakeholders and consult on our proposals to ensure that we deliver a strategy that meets the needs of the county and supports the transition to more sustainable transport solutions.

Supplementary question

It was queried how residents without off-road parking could be helped to access EV charging points. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport responded that there was a whole range of issues that needed to be considered with respect of the roll out of EV charging points but every effort would be made to make them available throughout Worcestershire.

QUESTION 4 – Cllr Natalie McVey asked Cllr Tracey Onslow:

"Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility tell me whether there is a forum, or any support network, to assist teachers and pastoral staff in their education of Ukrainian children and young people in Worcestershire schools?"

Answer

To assist teachers in the education of Ukrainian children, WCF utilises existing forums and communication structures to share information and resources to support Ukraine arrivals.

Most commonly this would be through:

- The regular education bulletins that go to all schools in Worcestershire which include updates and links to resources to support Ukraine pupils. In addition, we issued a 'special edition' of this bulletin in May 2022 that was entirely focused on the support to schools for these children.
- Termly Phase Meetings where Headteacher representatives from each school phase (including First, Primary, Middle, Secondary, High, Special and Alternative Provision)

meet with WCF senior leaders to discuss challenges and strategic support. As part of these meetings, the support for Ukraine pupils has been discussed.

Advice and signposting referred to in Education bulletins include:

- Free Training to become a Trauma Informed and Attachment Aware Setting;
- Transport Assistance where eligible;
- Language support, through the WCF Learning Support Team;
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for post-16 and adult learning, community based with funding support;
- Early Help Offer;
- Access to Oak National Academy, who have rolled out an auto-translate function across all 10,000 of its online lessons;
- Free School Meals for all Ukraine arrivals;
- Ukraine Culture Briefing Sessions for schools;
- Support to access remote education during the pandemic that has been extended to those Ukrainian pupils who need laptops.
- Access to Ukrainian learning materials and the Ukrainian curriculum to compliment Ukrainian pupils' education;
- Ukrainian Educational Materials to support both pupils and families;
- Access to Twinkl, English/Ukrainian language resources.
- Starting Well Partnership events for Ukrainian families living in Worcestershire

On a related note, where families from the Ukraine enter the UK under the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme there is additional funding available to support the education of children. The Secretary of State for Education lays down the terms and conditions on which assistance is given in relation to the Homes for Ukraine scheme's education.

WCF are currently undertaking a check of school aged children that District Councils have recorded as entering the UK under the Home for Ukraine scheme against school admission information to ensure that all children have a school place, and that schools have received the appropriate funding.

Supplementary question

It was queried whether this information was being communicated to schools and families because there appeared to be a lack of awareness. In addition, Ukrainian children were receiving remote school lessons from their homeland which could be prove excessive. On receipt of information from Cllr Natalie McVey, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education undertook to look into how details of the support available to teachers and pastoral staff in the education of Ukrainian children and young people could be better communicated. She added that it was important that the Ukrainian children were able to keep in touch with their own curriculum.

QUESTION 5 – Cllr Dan Boatright asked Cllr Adam Kent:

"I have recently requested information on the various bids for the new school in Worcester. I was informed this was commercially confidential. It would be very easy to release the information without names and institutions. Given this is taxpayers money, a publicly owned school and in the public interest, why is there no mechanism to allow public scrutiny?"

Answer

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication undertook to arrange a meeting with Cllr Dan Boatright to discuss the answer to his question.

QUESTION 6 – Cllr Richard Udall asked Cllr Karen May:

"A Worcestershire MP, who also happens to be a former Health Secretary, has suggested the introduction of payments for patients attending GP appointments and for making a trip to A&E. Does she share my view that this would be an extremely bad idea and would further damage relationships between Doctors and their patients and could increase health inequalities in Worcestershire, will she join me in calling upon all Worcestershire Members of Parliament to oppose such a suggestion?"

Answer

The fundamental principle of the NHS is that it delivers free care at the point of need, for all. The concept of charging patients to access services would not incentivise people to visit their GP, or to attend Accident and Emergency in urgent situations. Such approach could exacerbate already worsening health disparities for those unable to pay and undermine trust between doctors and patients.

We continue to recognise and communicate the importance of preventative care and encourage people to attend GP appointments or access urgent care services in serious or life-threatening situations.

I feel there is no necessity to call upon Worcestershire MPs on this matter.

Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being did not agree with the sentiment that the employment of GPs should be nationalised. She did believe that the employment contracts for GPs should be re-examined, particularly regarding pension contributions to encourage GPs to continue in work longer.