

Minutes of the Council

Parkside Hall, Bromsgrove District Council offices, Market

Street, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B61 8DA

Thursday, 9 November 2023, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Kyle Daisley (Chairman), Cllr Alastair Adams, Cllr Salman Akbar, Cllr Martin Allen, Cllr Alan Amos (Vice Chairman), Cllr Marc Bayliss, Cllr Dan Boatright-Greene, Cllr Bob Brookes, Cllr David Chambers, Cllr Brandon Clayton, Cllr Andrew Cross, Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Nathan Desmond, Cllr Allah Ditta, Cllr Matt Dormer, Cllr Andy Fry, Cllr Simon Geraghty, 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 Richard Morris, Cllr Tony Muir, Cllr Beverley Nielsen, Cllr Tracey Onslow, Cllr Josh Robinson, Cllr Chris Rogers, Cllr David Ross, Cllr Mike Rouse, Cllr James Stanley, Cllr Emma Stokes, Cllr Kit Taylor, Cllr Malcolm Victory, Cllr Craig Warhurst, Cllr Shirley Webb and Cllr Tom Wells

Available papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. 10 questions submitted to the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance (previously circulated); and
- C. The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2023 (previously circulated).

2476 Apologies and Declaration of Interests (Agenda item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mel Allcott, Elizabeth Eyre, Laura Gretton, Peter Griffiths, Aled Luckman, Scott Richardson Brown, Linda Robinson, and Richard Udall.

Cllr Alan Amos declared an interest in Notice of Motion 2 – Vaping - as a Member of the Advisory Council of ASH.

2477 Public Participation (Agenda item 2)

Peter Marrs presented a petition about resurfacing of footpaths in Droitwich.

Steve Todd presented a petition about traffic issues on Chaddesley Road, Kidderminster.

Emma Hamer commented on Notice of Motion 1 - Pesticide/Herbicide-free Worcestershire.

The Chairman thanked Peter, Steve and Emma for their contribution and said they would receive a written response from the relevant Cabinet Member.

2478 Minutes (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2479 Chairman's Announcements (Agenda item 4)

Noted.

2480 Reports of Cabinet - Matters requiring a decision by Council - Resources Report - Revenue Budget Monitoring - Month 4 (31 July) 2023/24 (Agenda item 5(a))

A query was raised in the debate about the overall cost of the Council's borrowing arrangements and the interest rates being paid. The Leader of the Council responded that out of a total capital programme of £370m, the Council had long-term borrowing arrangements for £146m. Each scheme was assessed for value for money and funded through different mechanisms, for example Government funding or partner contributions. The Council always ensured that the most prudent form of long-term borrowing was used. As the cost of borrowing had increased recently, the Council had entered into temporary borrowing arrangements and other methods of internal borrowing to keep the cost of long-term borrowing down. At some point, the Council would need to crystallise its long-term loans but not in the present financial environment.

RESOLVED that:

- a) **The updated Capital Programme which contains number of variations within the value, profile of spend and funding be approved; and**
- b) **The updated Capital Strategy 2023-2026 be approved.**

2481 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:

- Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2021-22
- Worcestershire Strategy for Children and Young People with SEND 2023-2026
- Resources report - Revenue Budget Monitoring Month 4 (31 July) 2023/24
- The Healthy Worcestershire Programme
- Shrub Hill Towns Fund Funding Agreement
- Treasury Management Mid-Year Update to 31 August 2023
- Worcestershire County Museum.

2482 Constitutional Matters (Agenda item 6)

(a)Warndon Parish By-Election and Political Balance

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and commented that the outcome of the recent Warndon Parish By-election meant that in relation to overall political balance, the Conservative Group would lose 2 seats and the GAIA group would gain 2 seats. The Appointments Etc Panel had a very important role within the Council with responsibility for the appointment of chief officers. It would therefore seem appropriate for the GAIA group to gain a seat on that Panel so that all groups were represented. The GAIA group would also be able to gain a seat on the Environment Scrutiny Panel. The Monitoring Officer considered that these proposed changes reflected political balance. An updated version of the Appendix would be included on the web site.

The Leader of the GAIA group indicated that he supported the proposed changes to the membership of the Appointments Etc Panel and the Environment Scrutiny Panel as outlined by the Leader of the Council.

RESOLVED that the recalculation of political balance set out as an Appendix to the report be approved and the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance be required to give effect to it in accordance with the nominations from the respective Group leaders from time to time.

(b)Vice-Chairmanship of Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Chairman of HOSC introduced the report and indicated that Cllr Christine Wild was being nominated to serve as the Vice Chairman of the HOSC. The Vice-Chairman had been selected by and from the District representatives on HOSC.

RESOLVED that the nominee of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Cllr Christine Wild, be appointed as Vice Chairman of the HOSC.

(c)Independent Remuneration Panel

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and commented that two vacancies existed on the Remuneration Panel. Council had therefore authorised the recruitment process to fill these vacancies. The recruitment process had now concluded and it was recommended that Mr Raymond Tomkinson be appointed to serve alongside the three existing members. A further member of the Panel would need to be recruited and appointed by the Council to bring the Panel up to its full complement of 5 members. Nominations would be sought from a variety of backgrounds.

In response to a query about the lack of diversity amongst the membership of the Panel, the Leader of the Council commented that he would wish to see as a diverse Panel as possible but it depended on the nature of the candidates that applied. No female candidates had applied for these positions up to this point.

In relation to a query about the Leader of the Council explained that the Panel did not release an Annual Report but instead reported on a monthly basis. He was keen to ensure that the Panel was up to its full complement so that it could conclude its work and report to Council accordingly.

RESOLVED that the appointments be made to the Independent Remuneration Panel as set out in paragraphs 20 - 22 of the report.

2483 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 1 - Pesticide/Herbicide-free Worcestershire (Agenda item 7)

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

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

Those in favour of the motion commented:

- Pesticides including herbicides were used by the Council to control a range of perceived problems including weeds in community spaces, regularly used by local residents. Pesticide use could have serious impacts on health and biodiversity including contamination of water supplies. There was growing evidence that glyphosates, the most used weed killer was a much higher health risk than previously assumed. The

manufacturers of glyphosate had been campaigning to undermine and discredit the work of scientists in this area. As a pollinator-friendly Council, the Council should eliminate the use of glyphosates and seek alternative options. The Council should work with partners to create a stakeholder forum to help with this process and help local residents understand the reasons behind the changes and how they could follow suit themselves

- There was a growing recognition of the drawbacks of glyphosates including the impact on pollinators and, for example, the impact on the ability of bees to regulate their temperatures. The motion aimed to provide a strategic focus on the Council's use of herbicides
- The motion was not concerned with the use of glyphosate in farming but how it was used by the Council on the streets and in and around community buildings.

Those against the motion commented:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment commented that glyphosate herbicides could support the environment. There was no recognised alternative that did no harm to the environment. It was crucial to focus on responsible and regulated use of glyphosate because when used judiciously, herbicides could aid in preserving natural habitats by controlling the growth of invasive plant species that threatened biodiversity. At present, the Council carried out weed control as part of its highway maintenance operations, treating noxious and invasive weeds and targeting the removal of ragwort from roadside verges. He outlined the environmental, health, financial, sourcing, effectiveness and other issues associated with alternatives such as Acetic Acid or foam. The pollinator strategy promised a reduction in the use of herbicides, but did not advocate a total ban. The Council had adopted an approach of minimising the use of pesticides through wildlife friendly approaches, promoting pollinators and other less intensive forms of management of open spaces. The use of glyphosates would continue to be overseen by the Member Advisory Group
- Experiences at Wychavon District Council had shown that there were no other successful measures to remove weeds or eliminate weeds other than to manually remove them. Glyphosates did not harm insects, animals or humans when used correctly. The Council just needed to use the right amount of the right product in the right place
- Glyphosates had an important role in ensuring the production of excellent quality food
- Insect infestations had become incredibly problematic in recent years, particularly in rural areas. It was therefore necessary sometimes to use chemicals in a very controlled way and in a way which was to the benefit of those using the land. In particular, the impact of weeds on pavements in rural areas lead to them to becoming even more unsafe to use and costly to repair
- The motion if agreed would drastically increase the cost of food across the UK as the need for imported food increased. Without the use of glyphosates, an extra 12 million tons of CO2 emissions would be released into the atmosphere

- It was clear that this motion had been brought forward without being fully investigated or any consultation with local farmers, Pershore Agricultural College or the Council's Lengthsmen
- It was important to leave decisions on the use of glyphosates (and the intensity of use) to individual farmers
- This motion would lead to an increase in the price of food and a reduction in the nation's food security
- The mover of the motion claimed that the motion only related to use by the Council and not by farmers but failed to recognise its impact on the Council's tenant farmers.

On a vote, the Motion was lost.

2484 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 2 - Vaping (Agenda item 7)

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

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

The following amendment was moved by Cllr Karen May and seconded by Cllr Adrian Hardman:

“Whilst acknowledging the benefits of vaping for those trying to stop smoking, this Council is deeply concerned about vaping among those people who have never smoked and, in particular, vaping among young people.

We call on the Council:

- *to support the cross party LGA view that disposable vapes should be banned*
- *to build on successful enforcement work in Worcestershire, which has just this year removed over 12,000 illegal vapes from the marketplace and disrupted sales to young people via test purchase operations*
- *to continue to work with schools to highlight the dangers of vaping in young people*
- *to promote the ways in which disposable vapes can be recycled.”*

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:

- There had been an exponential rise in the use of disposable vapes, especially by young people and those who have never smoked before. It was clear that something needed to be done to address this issue. Vapes played an important part in moving people away from smoking and therefore the motion was not calling for an outright ban on vapes,

just disposable ones. Disposable vapes were readily available to buy and made attractive to purchase by children. It was disappointing that despite reports of illegal sales to young people being reported to Trading Standards, a mystery shopper exercise had not been carried out by the service. The Motion also called for work to be targeted at schools to highlight the dangers of vaping to young people and to recognise the impact of disposable vapes had on the environment by promoting ways in which disposable vapes could be recycled

- A considerable amount of Lithium was used to create disposable vapes. Lithium was a valuable natural resource that was being lost through the disposal of vapes as there was a lack of facilities in the country to recycle it
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being commented that the national curriculum included an approach to building young people's resilience to peer pressure so that they could make better choices and did not try things that might impact on their long-term health. The Council's view was that young people who had never smoked should never vape and schools should be a focal point for efforts to reduce vaping. The Council had proactively work with public health to combat illegal vaping, including youth vaping as well as undertaking extensive enforcement operations, innovative working with schools and surveys of use by young people. This work was ongoing and Council would be kept updated on its progress particularly in relation to trading standards and enforcement work. The Council would also need to incorporate the forthcoming details from the government's commitments outlined in the King's speech. Whilst this work was important, the Council must not lose sight of the impact of tobacco consumption on the health of smokers and how important vapes could be in getting people to give up smoking
- It was clear that manufacturers were blatantly promoting and encouraging the sale and use of disposable vapes to the 11–18-year-olds by using brightly coloured packaging and flavours that enticed children in total disregard to their health
- It was a major cause for concern that not only was nicotine being added to vapes but in certain parts of the country other additives were added which made the product more in the line with an illegal drug
- The Council should do all it could to discourage children from vaping by raising with children the impacts on physical, mental health, and financial well being
- Evidence from litter collected at local litter picks showed that there had been a very large increase in the number of discarded vapes
- The question was how the Council could stop the import, production and marketing of these vapes
- It was queried why the e-cigarettes were being sold without the required CE mark or the CE marks on them not being a regulated
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities supported the amended motion and referenced the lack of current scientific evidence to demonstrate how harmful vaping was. There was a role for trading standards to prevent the unlawful underage sale of vapes. He noted that there remained a couple of vacancies within the trading standards service and the head of service was actively recruiting to these posts

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education commented that this amended motion would be welcomed by schools because the use of disposable vapes was a major issue for them. The recycling of disposable vapes was also an issue and this Council needed to work with district councils to find a solution
- It was disappointing that the amended motion had removed the reference in the original motion to the need to fill vacancies in the Trading Standards service.

RESOLVED: “Whilst acknowledging the benefits of vaping for those trying to stop smoking, this Council is deeply concerned about vaping among those people who have never smoked and, in particular, vaping among young people.

We call on the Council:

- to support the cross party LGA view that disposable vapes should be banned
- to build on successful enforcement work in Worcestershire, which has just this year removed over 12,000 illegal vapes from the marketplace and disrupted sales to young people via test purchase operations
- to continue to work with schools to highlight the dangers of vaping in young people
- to promote the ways in which disposable vapes can be recycled.”

2485 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 3 - Local Bus Services (Agenda item 7)

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

The motion was moved by Cllr Lynn Denham and seconded by Cllr Andy Fry, 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:

“Worcestershire residents want reliable bus services so they can get to work, to school, to hospital and GP appointments, to go shopping, and to meet their friends. We therefore welcome the Government’s announcement of £3.4 million proposed funding for Worcestershire to “improve services and make buses cheaper and more reliable”.

This Council made an ambitious bid last April for £84 million, which the government has so far supported with more than £2.8m, and so the council recognises that £3.4m is a significant additional sum during a time of constrained public finances and a cost-of-living crisis, along with the £2 fare cap that is helping thousands of Worcestershire citizens on a daily basis. The council also acknowledges the more than £7m worth of intervention it made

last year to secure local bus services. The council also acknowledges the work to bring about a new Statutory Enhanced Partnership under the Bus Services Act 2017 and eagerly awaits its impending activation following successful support from all local operators.

Council therefore supports the LGA's call for greater long-term investment in local bus services, which is the approach this council is already taking. We request the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport to bring forward a Cabinet Report that provides updated information regarding the last 12 months of activity and outlines the forward and ever-evolving strategy to protect, enhance and secure Worcestershire's bus services, including further details of the Enhanced Partnership, Demand Responsive Transport, Community Transport and long-term sustainable approach."

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:

- Buses were a lifeline for people to be able to get to work, go shopping, get to doctor's appointments etc. The question was how the Council could use the Government funding from the decision not to expand HS2 to stop the decline in bus services. Receiving old buses from Birmingham was not the answer especially given the potential negative impact on air quality. New buses were expensive and it was hard to see how the £3.4m extra funding would make a difference
- The extra funding for buses from the Government merely replaced the funding that was previously removed from Council finances through budget reductions. The bus services, particularly in the north of the county were very poor
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport commented that bus services had been an area that had been slowest to recover post-pandemic. Efforts were being made in liaison with district councils to improve bus use especially by concessionary passholders. There had been a degree of negativity surrounding buses which had had an impact on usage therefore it was important to maintain a positive approach to the future of bus travel. There were examples of new services being created in response to demand in Bromsgrove and Droitwich. These services had been well-received by users and employers. The overall pattern of bus usage was complicated with some services being very successful and other services less viable commercially. In terms of overall spending nationally on buses above the baseline subsidy, this Council was somewhere in the middle of the pack. Records had shown that additional funding did not necessarily result in additional bus usage. Clarification was awaited from the Government as to whether that the additional £3.4m would be a one-off lump sum or whether there would be an element of phasing to that.

RESOLVED: "Worcestershire residents want reliable bus services so they can get to work, to school, to hospital and GP appointments, to go shopping, and to meet their friends. We therefore welcome the Government's announcement of £3.4 million proposed funding for

Worcestershire to “improve services and make buses cheaper and more reliable”.

This Council made an ambitious bid last April for £84 million, which the government has so far supported with more than £2.8m, and so the council recognises that £3.4m is a significant additional sum during a time of constrained public finances and a cost-of-living crisis, along with the £2 fare cap that is helping thousands of Worcestershire citizens on a daily basis. The council also acknowledges the more than £7m worth of intervention it made last year to secure local bus services. The council also acknowledges the work to bring about a new Statutory Enhanced Partnership under the Bus Services Act 2017 and eagerly awaits its impending activation following successful support from all local operators.

Council therefore supports the LGA’s call for greater long-term investment in local bus services, which is the approach this council is already taking. We request the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport to bring forward a Cabinet Report that provides updated information regarding the last 12 months of activity and outlines the forward and ever-evolving strategy to protect, enhance and secure Worcestershire’s bus services, including further details of the Enhanced Partnership, Demand Responsive Transport, Community Transport and long-term sustainable approach.”

2486 Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility (Agenda item 8)

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment presented his report to Council which covered various topics. In particular, he thanked members and previous members of the Cross-Party Member Advisory Group (MAG) for Carbon Reduction, Biodiversity and Water quality for their contribution. He also thanked the Chairman of the Environment Scrutiny Panel and the late Andy Roberts for their contributions.

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

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

2487 Question Time (Agenda item 9)

Ten questions had been received by the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance and had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The answers to seven questions were provided at the meeting. Question two was withdrawn by the questioner at the meeting. The answers to all the questions are attached in the Appendix.

2488 Reports of Committees - Audit and Governance Committee (Agenda item 10 (a))

The Chairman of the Committee introduced the report and commented that the Council had met the statutory deadline for publication of the draft financial statements by the end of May 2023. All local government bodies were required to publish their final accounts by 30 September 2023. However, only 1% of English Councils had managed to do sign off their accounts on time which provided an indication of the significant pressures experienced nationally within the external audit sector. This Council was in a good position and he hoped that the accounts would be signed off by the end of November.

It was queried why the external auditors were failing in their duties nationally to complete the audits of accounts on time. The Chairman of the Committee responded that the reasons for the failure in the system were multifaceted. When the Audit Commission was abolished, a new tendering framework for external audit was introduced which aimed to bring in the private sector and drive down costs. However in hindsight, those costs were artificially too low. This resulted in key external auditors leaving the market. There was therefore an impact on the capacity of those external auditors remaining in the process. In addition, local authority accounts had become too complex and technical which made the auditing process very challenging and time-consuming. There was therefore a need for the Government to review the auditing system.

In response to a query about the Council’s approach to risk management, the Chairman of the Committee explained that with the development of the Power Bi risk management system, the Council was now able to introduce a more integrated, holistic approach to risk management.

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

2489 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.

2490 Reports of Committees - Standards and Ethics Committee (Agenda item 10 (c))

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

The meeting was adjourned from 11.25 to 11.40am and 1.00 to 1.45pm and ended at 2.30pm.

Chairman

This page is intentionally left blank

COUNCIL 9 NOVEMBER 2023 - AGENDA ITEM 9 – QUESTION TIME

Questions and written responses provided below. Questions 1 and 7 were not asked on the day. Question two was withdrawn by the questioner at the meeting.

QUESTION 1 – Cllr Richard Udall will ask Cllr Marc Bayliss:

“I have received a large number of residential concerns about Royal Mail service and delivery. It’s clear the postal service is in crisis, with many people complaining they no longer receive a daily delivery, this is despite a legal obligation for Royal Mail to deliver post daily to every property, six days a week. Residents have missed credit card payment deadlines, job offers and hospital appointments. Many small businesses still depend on royal mail postal deliveries for payment, invoices, statements and orders. Many concerns have been expressed that the service is prioritising the more profitable parcel delivery over essential letter delivery. Will he investigate the reliability and the service provision of Royal Mail in Worcestershire, and take any appropriate action to raise these concerns with Royal Mail management and to seek assurances of any plans or proposals to improve postal services within Worcestershire?”

Answer

We understand the impact that poor service by the Royal Mail can have on our residents, on initial investigation we have found that:

Ofcom launched an investigation in May 2023 which is still ongoing, as Royal Mail performance was poor nationally. Under Ofcoms rules, Royal Mail is required to meet specific performance targets across the year, excluding the Christmas period. Among other targets, Royal Mail must:

- deliver 93% of First Class mail within one working day of collection;
- deliver 98.5% of Second Class mail within three working days of collection; and
- complete 99.9% of delivery routes on each day that a delivery is required.

Royal Mail did not meet the above performance targets in 2022/23, as it:

- delivered 73.7% of First Class mail within one working day;
- delivered 90.7% of Second Class mail within three working days; and
- completed 89.35% of delivery routes for each day on which a delivery was required.

Issues such as staffing, recovery of operations following the Pandemic are exceptional circumstances have impacted the service, and with more suppliers entering the market place it is becoming much more competitive with businesses using alternative parcel/mail carriers.

The move the online banking

Businesses and consumers are moving to more online banking and delivery of financial services. YouGov report highlighted that usage of these services following the pandemic has doubled by the population.

Also the highest rise of using online web based banking was the over 55s with over 60% using this service. Under 35 are also more likely to use app based banking or phone payment systems. Nearly 50% of over 55s see this online service as value and essential to

their daily lives. The most successful companies all have one thing in common: they regularly test their digital journeys with real customers and use the insights gained to optimise and drive conversions, avoiding the trap of making decisions on a "hunch".

Possible responses based on the above are:

1. It is evident that the issue with the Royal Mail is a national one and we will therefore await with interest the conclusion of the Ofcom investigation and the recommendations for service improvements and how these will impact and improve the service for Worcestershire Businesses and residents.
OR
2. While it is evident that the issue with Royal Mail is a national one, we will investigate if the information we have obtained to date can be acquired at a county level, we would also welcome further details of the issues that have been raised with Cllr Udal and the number of businesses and residents who have expressed their concern, we will then consider if this issue should be passed to the scrutiny committee .

QUESTION 3 – Cllr Matt Jenkins will ask Cllr Mike Rouse:

"In January 2021 the Council agreed to set up a cross-party group to review our 20mph policy. At the full council meeting in May this year, I asked about the lack of progress, as the review had not started. I was told by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Highways that a review was unnecessary, as a new method for councillors to request 20mph zones would be added to the member portal in July, with a review of this in November.

It is now November and there is no new 20mph policy or any way for councillors to request 20mph zones via the member portal, as was promised.

Can I ask the CMR for Highways when we will finally get to see the new 20mph policy and have a way to request a 20mph zones in our Divisions?"

Answer

Can I thank Cllr Jenkins for his question regarding 20mph policy.

Members can currently raise a 'Speed Issue Request' on the Member Portal. As part of the ongoing development and improvements of the Member Portal, we have requested that there is additional enquiry type 'Speed Limit Review Request' and a corresponding 'drop-down field'. It's here that Members will be able to request 20mph zones or conversely ask for an existing speed limit to be reviewed. I am told this may already be available.

As an aside, a detailed speed limit review took place from 2007-2012 on A and B classification roads which was funded by the Department for Transport. We continue to improve road safety through the casualty reduction capital programme which prioritises locations for improvement based on the potential to reduce casualty accidents.

Officers are finalising criteria and a prioritisation process in response to requests for speed limit reviews which will necessarily require support from the local member, including use of their devolved funds, as well as a successful consultation with any community affected. A Member Advisory Group was being arranged for the end of the month, pending confirmation of one final appointee for the group.

QUESTION 4 – Cllr Josh Robinson will ask Cllr Mike Rouse:

“Whilst I recognise from time-to-time planned highways work can change date, but what more can be done to ensure local residents and members are kept up to date on when these changes are happening and for what reason?”

Answer

Our planned highways works are programmed to ensure efficiency in terms of use of our resources and also to co-ordinate schemes to avoid unnecessary disruption. Our smaller works tend to be planned at least 6 weeks ahead to allow for the necessary road space to be booked and permits raised. However, our larger works such as road and footway resurfacing scheme are usually programmed much further in advance as they often require road closures, which have a minimum 12-week lead in period. These works are co-ordinated by our streetworks team to ensure co-ordination with other works such as works by statutory undertakers. Whilst we publish and share our programmes of work, there are times where these have to change.

Changes to programmed work can be a result of a number of issues such as overrunning works elsewhere on the network, meaning that road space is no longer available. An example of this could be a new gas main being installed with an open trench at a busy location, where the works that are on the ground would usually take priority particularly if it would be more disruptive to close that site down temporarily only to have to reopen it again after the following work was completed or if there were customers without supply. Plant breakdown is also one of the key causes for last minute changes. The failure of an essential piece of machinery on site or the failure of a tarmac batching plant operated by a third party could also have a significant impact and cause a delay at short notice.

Without doubt the single most reason for change is the weather. We do plan our works so that temperature sensitive activities are undertaken during the spring and summer months, however rain has the biggest impact on our works and can occur at any time. The adverse impact of rain also impacts us in other way such as flooding both in terms of the impact on the network but also in terms of the impact on our workforce as it is sometimes necessary for us to suspend works to allow the use of the workforce resource as part of emergency flood response. Snow and freezing temperatures also affect us in similar ways during the winter months.

When we notify residents and business of any changes to the programme we endeavour to use the same method of communication used to contact the about the works in the first instance. We typically use range of channels to communicate with residents and businesses including letter drops, on-site signage as well as social media. In addition to this we also update the local member via the Liaison Officers. In most cases are able to notify residents, businesses and members of any changes as soon as we confirm that the programme has been impacted. These changes are communicated using a range of ways and to a range of recipients, depending on how far away from the start date the change occurs. Whilst we try to reduce disruption where possible, if last minute changes do occur it can sometimes be difficult to communicate these changes to residents before they have been impacted in some way.

We undertake to contact all affected parties related to programme changes as quickly as possible. In most cases delays are identified in sufficient time to allow effective communication however in certain circumstances, when delays to the programme happen at short notice (usually because of issues outside our control) we will continue to try and communicate these changes and quickly and effectively as possible.

Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport agreed to meet Cllr Josh Robinson to review the live highways work to see if more can be done to keep the local member and residents updated on events.

QUESTION 5 – Cllr Lynn Denham will ask Cllr Adam Kent:

“It was a shock to discover that County Hall is no longer safe due to RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete), the upper floors are blocked to access and people going to the Register Office to get married now have to enter via the Lakeview Restaurant entrance. When will we be able to return to our normal Council Chamber back in County Hall?”

Answer

County Hall is safe to be open. The measures we have taken in recent weeks are precautionary and temporary and have been done in accordance with the guidance issued by the Health and Safety Executive and Institution of Structural Engineers. These arrangements have been established in a manner that causes minimal disruption or change to operations, and ensures the complete safety of our staff and the general public. I'd like to thank the officers and the team for the speedy action that they've taken in terms of making sure that services are still provided from County Hall and that we can continue to operate with no adverse effects to our residents.

A project to undertake further surveys and investigations has commenced with a report to be produced outlining options, costs and timescales for possible remedial works. The findings of the report will be available by the end of calendar year. This will then allow a consideration of the options and for an informed decision to be made on next steps.

The temporary closure of the main entrances and the erection of fencing has been put in place due to the potential risk of RAAC boards failing in the balcony areas. The re-opening of the entrances and removal of fencing in this area is being prioritised and a date for when this will be done will be provided imminently. Once completed, this will allow people attending weddings to then access the Registrar Office using the usual entrances.

Supplementary question

In response to a request, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication undertook to ensure that councillors are provided with updates on the reopening of County Hall, following the discovery of RAAC.

QUESTION 6 – Cllr Natalie McVey will ask Cllr Mike Rouse

“Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility tell me, and the residents of Malvern Trinity Division, how we will benefit from the unceremonious scrapping of HS2?”

Answer

The Government published their Network North plan on 6 October which sets out both specific transport schemes and themes where additional funding will be made available following the decision on the Birmingham – Manchester HS2 route. The Birmingham to London Euston route is currently being delivered and will bring capacity and journey time benefits to the Midlands.

The full Network North document can be found at:

[Network North: Transforming British Transport \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

As we heard earlier in relation to the buses motion, we're already seeking clarification around an additional £3.2 million that we've received for buses that will benefit the bus network as I outlined around things like demand and responsive transport.

The following schemes will directly benefit Worcestershire:

1. Implementation of Midlands Rail Hub in full which will improve East / West connectivity across the Midlands and benefit Worcester, Malvern and Hereford through proposals for 2 trains per hour £1.75bn
2. Cross City Line rail routes to have 10 minutes frequency
3. Funding for local bus travel and bus on demand
4. Funding for smart ticketing and contactless ticketing on rail
5. Retention of the £2 bus fare until end of 2024
6. Additional funding for rail station accessibility
7. £650 million Midlands Road Fund
8. £2.2bn for potholes across the Midlands

Further Midlands schemes are funded but have not been included in the list above if there is not a direct benefit. We are working with Midlands Connect and other partners as further details of the themes develop and to bring benefits to Worcestershire.

QUESTION 7 – Cllr Richard Udall will ask Cllr Karen May:

“It’s a sad fact that most Worcestershire residents do not participate in any team sport once they leave school. Physical activity is not only good for the body but good for the mind, helping to also reduce social isolation and keeping people active. What action can she take to encourage participation in physical activity, especially for socially isolated individuals, who find it difficult to participate due to caring commitments?”

Answer

I agree that regular exercise is vital to maintaining our health, mental wellbeing and social connectedness. This is why increasing physical activity is a key aim in our Corporate Plan.

Our track record is impressive across all ages. For example, among young people, the latest data shows that four out of the six most physically active areas in the whole region are right here in Worcestershire. But we’re not complacent and new initiatives, such as our investment in a new junior parkrun in Worcester, show the level of our ambition. In addition, I’ve been working with Cllr Onslow on a very popular Public Health grant scheme into schools, which is already allowing schools to do so much more to keep children active.

The same is true for adults. The latest Sport England data shows a year on year increase in activity levels across Worcestershire. We provide free training and resources for local organisations to deliver strength and balance sessions and Public Health grants for a range of community driven physical activity projects.

In the near future, we’ll be investing a new community-based running project in collaboration with Cllr Kent, which will focus on accessibility and people just getting started on becoming more active.

Finally, Members may be aware that Cabinet recently approved the proposals from Cllr Hardman and myself for significant investment in the new Healthy Worcestershire programme. This will provide exercise sessions, alongside support for healthy living, community safety advice and help to reduce isolation, all together in one place in the heart of local communities. The focus will be on reaching those, such as carers, who are vulnerable to becoming socially isolated and, to that end, we’ll be offering grants on top of the core service to voluntary sector groups who can help us achieve that aim.

QUESTION 8 – Cllr Matt Jenkins will ask Cllr Simon Geraghty:

“Can I ask the Leader of the Council whether there are any plans for the Council to stop banking with Barclays Bank?”

Answer

The Council has used Barclays for its day-to-day banking arrangements since the current 5 year contract was entered into following a review in September 2020. This contract expires in August 2025 and has an option to extend for a period up to 3 years. As with all contracts we will assess nearer the time to ensure it meets the needs for the council's business and provides value for money.

Supplementary question

It was queried whether the Council would consider appointing a bank with a more ethically responsible approach to banking when the next contract was due for renewal. The Leader of the Council responded that the contract with Barclays ended in August 2025 with an option to extend it for a further 3 years. The Council had a duty to ensure that all contracts met the business needs of the Council and provided value for money.

QUESTION 9 – Cllr Josh Robinson will ask Cllr Richard Morris:

"With the recent flooding in Bromsgrove which affected Burcot Lane, Shenstone Close, Blackmore Lane, Alcester Road, Littleheath Lane and Ford Road amongst others in my county division, do you agree with me that more work needs to be done to prevent this and if so what will the County Council do to prevent this from happening again?"

Answer

All of the locations referred to are known to be at ongoing risk of flooding and they are covered by the Bromsgrove Flood Risk Management Plan. This document describes the flood risk at each location and articulates the actions already taken and still due to be taken by the range of organisations with a role. This includes: Environment Agency, Bromsgrove District Council (including through the North Worcestershire Water Management Team), Severn Trent Water and Worcestershire County Council.

The context of this recent, extremely unfortunate, flooding is record breaking rainfall in many parts of Worcestershire which simply overwhelmed the ability of the ground to hold the water, the drainage network to remove it and the network of small watercourses to receive it. At all of the locations referred to, initial investigations indicate that the flood impacts resulted from the networking of small watercourses overflowing and flooding the roads and properties.

However, the group of agencies focused on flood risk in and around Bromsgrove, very much including the County Council, will continue to strive to further reducing the risk of flooding at all of these locations by further:

- working with landowners to change land management practices in order to hold back and slow the flow of water on and from agricultural and other land;
- making further amendments and improvements to the drainage network;
- working with property owners to bring about property level protection improvements;
- working with impacted to communities to build local resilience;
- working with property owners to ensure the best warning and informing service;
- review and amend if necessary maintenance regimes;
- review and improve if possible flood response processes.

In the meantime, there is a strong ongoing multi-agency focus on flood recovery support, investigation and data gathering following the flood event. All of the findings will be fed into further development of the Flood Risk Management Plan and its action plan.

Cllrs Robinson's support for the flood response and subsequent recovery and investigation effort are very much appreciated.

Supplementary question

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for the Environment agreed to meet Cllr Josh Robinson to address flooding issues within his electoral division.

QUESTION 10 – Cllr Lynn Denham will ask Cllr Adrian Hardman:

"In September, the government announced a £600m package over the next 2 years to boost the capacity of the social care workforce in England. How much does Worcestershire expect to receive and when?"

Answer

Thank you for your question, Cllr Denham and for bringing this matter to full Council's attention.

The funding that you refer to is an increase to the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund (MSIF) of £600m nationally, which will now be allocated to Council's in the following way.

The announcement has now been clarified and consist of £570m nationally allocated over financial years 2023/24 & 2024/25, with Worcestershire expected to get its usual 1% allocation of national funding, giving a total for 2023/24 of £3,626,617, which has now been paid in full.

The allocation for Worcestershire in 2025/26 is expected to be our 1% share of £200m nationally, which means an allocation of £2,000,000 because it was front-loaded.

£30m of the original £600m had been held back by DHSC for an UEC ASC grant to fund Council's with Adult Care responsibility that are part of Tier 1 & Tier 2 challenged Integrated Care Systems. This Council was in Tier 2. Worcestershire awaits its response to a bid to this fund for a possible further £1,100,000.

The MSIF in 2023/24 has been used to fund additional assessment work up to the value of £0.6m and £3m used to fund increases in fee rates paid to ASC Providers. Both these options met with MSIF grant conditions.

The £2m in 2024/25 will likely be used for similar purposes. The good news is that yesterday the Council received notification that the bid has been successful and will be paid in full.

Supplementary question

It was queried whether any of the additional Government funding would be used to retain staff, ensuring that they are paid more than the minimum wage without the use on zero-hours contracts as well as providing access to training and qualifications. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care responded that £3m of the £3.6m additional funding had been directed to contractors and suppliers of these services who would be paying above the minimum wage.

This page is intentionally left blank