

COUNCIL 12 MAY 2016 - AGENDA ITEM 12 – QUESTION TIME

Answers given at the meeting may have been a précis of the full answer which is set out below. In some cases additional information is also included. Where, due to time or other constraints, it was not possible for the question to be asked formally the written response is also included below.

QUESTION 1 – Mr G J Vickery asked Mr J H Smith:

“Amongst the formal recommendations from the Transport Task & Finish Group to the Future of Acute Hospital Services in Worcestershire Board Proposed Clinical Model of Care is the improvement of the 350 bus service connecting the Redditch and Worcester hospitals to a regular hourly ‘clock face’ service, and that the County Council be tasked with scoping this action. Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Wellbeing give an initial response?”

Answer given

The County Council has obtained an indicative cost for augmenting the frequency of the 350 bus service between Redditch and Worcester. This has been sent the appropriate colleague in the NHS for consideration.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question aimed at the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Wellbeing that Cabinet Member with Responsibility confirmed that he wished to add nothing at this stage.

QUESTION 2 – Mr G J Vickery asked Mr M J Hart:

“How do you see the evolution of the Health & Wellbeing Board in the context of the NHS 5-year Sustainability and Transformation Plan defining the local unit of planning now as Herefordshire and Worcestershire together and the wishes of provider organisations to be represented at and participate in the functioning of Health & Wellbeing Boards as happens in other local authority areas?”

Answer given

The NHS has defined Herefordshire and Worcestershire together as a unit of planning for the purposes of its 5-year Sustainability and Transformation Plan. Council officers, at a senior level, are working closely with the NHS to make sure that we have a common vision and approach to this important planning exercise and of course we are able to build on our mature integration work which has been funded through the Better Care Fund for a number of years.

The shared approach with Herefordshire will include a common understanding of the health and well-being, quality, and financial gaps that face the two counties, and the extent to which mutual benefit can be found in shared solutions.

I support this approach, and will want to be assured, as it develops, that our 5-year NHS plans drive improvement and affordability throughout the health and social care system across the two counties and in particular for the people of Worcestershire.

I note that different areas have very different membership of HWB Boards, and membership here has already been reviewed and has evolved over the 3-4 years the Board has been in place. We do look for active provider involvement through the Health Improvement Group and this could be greater and we would encourage that. We continue to review and develop the HWB Board but the specific issue for example, of the two main provider trusts in Worcestershire coming onto the Board has previously been considered and at the current time, we don't have any plans to change the makeup of the Board. The HWB Board is particularly focussed on overseeing commissioning plans and the oversight of the Better Care Fund is one of the Board's key functions and therefore, having large provider trusts around the Board table is not appropriate at this time.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about the balance of representation on the Board Mr Hart confirmed that he was content with that.

QUESTION 3 – Mr P M McDonald asked Mr M L Bayliss:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Change please inform me how many officers from PO5 upwards are from BAME backgrounds?"

Answer given

The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to record relevant protected characteristics (such as race) but there is no corresponding requirement for employees to disclose this information to the Council. A small percentage of our staff do, indeed, choose not to disclose this information to us. The percentage of BME staff known to be at level PO5 and above may therefore be a slight under-representation

As at 31 March there were 80 employees on Grade PO5, (not all have ethnicity recorded), 4 are from BME backgrounds which equates to 5%, the overall WCC BME is 6.84%.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about whether this was an appropriate level Mr Bayliss said the 2011 Census data showed 7.6% of the Worcestershire population to be of BME origin and the Council's workforce represented that.

QUESTION 4 – Mr P M McDonald asked Mr J H Smith:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways inform me how much the Council has paid out in compensation and in additional staff time in relation to damage caused by pot holes?"

Answer given

The compensation claims for damage arising from incidents that have occurred due to potholes paid in 2015/16 is £2,262, which is the lowest level for many years. The County Council with its Highways Term Service Contractor Ringway has a comprehensive system in place to identify, investigate and repair potholes. This is achieved via our agreed Highways Inspections & Review process and addressing issues raised from the public in line with Government guidance. As such, there is no additional officer time spent in relation to damage caused by potholes.

QUESTION 5 – Mr R C Lunn asked Mr S E Geraghty:

"Does the Leader of the Council regret the cancellation of the annual Worcestershire Youth Music concert at Symphony Hall which had run for 14 years? Why was it cancelled and what does he plan to do to restore it in 2017, and thereby provide once again a memorable and uplifting occasion for all the children involved showcasing the best of Worcestershire Youth Music?"

Answer given by Mrs Hodgson

- A strategic decision was taken in 2014 not to stage the Symphony Hall concert in May 2016. The event, whilst being a regular part of the Worcestershire Youth Music (WYM) calendar, was not actually planned to take place and, strictly speaking, was not cancelled.
- Many Music Services in the West Midlands stage similar events in Symphony Hall but these tend to take place every 4-5 years in order to offer the opportunity to each school generation - **it is highly unusual and possibly unique that an annual concert be staged by a Music Service at Symphony Hall.**
- WYM is going through a period of significant change (particularly with regard to its establishment as a social enterprise) and there is currently not the management capacity to organise such a large- scale event.
- Falling audience numbers, schools being less willing to be involved with an event staged on a Bank Holiday weekend and the rising costs of booking Symphony Hall all led to the event incurring losses in recent years. The relatively small number of children and young people able to take part in the event was also a factor in the suspension of the event.
- There is a commitment to return to Symphony Hall at some point in the future but, in the meantime, we will continue to offer thousands of Worcestershire children and young people an increasing number of high –profile performance opportunities

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question Mrs Hodgson reiterated that the event has been suspended and not cancelled.

QUESTION 6 – Mr R C Lunn asked Mrs L C Hodgson:

"Will the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Localism and Communities, consider the sensible suggestion of allowing Redditch Library to open half an hour later from Monday to Friday but keeping the same evening closing times? Does she agree that this is a more reasonable alternative than simply cutting opening hours and will enable more people particularly children and working people to use the library?"

Answer given

Yes we will consider this. However when the proposals were put forward to close at 4.00pm on Monday and Tuesday we analysed customer usage data and chose those hours to minimise disruption to customers. Analysis of customer usage patterns shows that any change to opening after 4.00 p.m. on Monday and Tuesday would inconvenience less than 5% of computer users and a tiny fraction over 3% of borrowers, compared to 24% of computer users and 6.5% of borrowers in the first hour of the day therefore the action was based on that.

QUESTION 7 – Mr P Denham asked Mr John Campion:

"Why has the planned provision of primary school places caused such a high level of dissatisfaction this year?"

Answer given

I do not agree that the planned provision of primary school places has caused a high level of dissatisfaction.

QUESTION 8 – Mr P Denham asked Mr John Campion:

"Why does the Council's policy on subsidising the cost of travel to assist students aged 16-18 to attend college courses discriminate unreasonably against those from poor families who wish to take courses not available at their nearest college?"

Answer given

I do not believe the Council's policy discriminates against poor families.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question Mr Campion stated that he thought the Council's policy was appropriate.

QUESTION 9 – Mrs F M Oborski's printed question to Mr J H Smith:

"Given the ongoing concerns in the Wyre Forest area about the poor performance of Diamond buses will the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways help to facilitate a meeting between councillors whose Divisions are badly affected and the local management of Diamond?"

Answer now given

Diamond Bus are currently reviewing their senior management structure, officers have convened a meeting with Diamond on 16 May to ascertain what the changes mean in terms of:

- (1) The senior management team, and
- (2) Who will be the point of contact for officers.

I can convene a meeting when the new team is in place and are in a position to engage in a meaningful discussion.

QUESTION 10 – Mrs F M Oborski's printed question to Mr J H Smith:

"Students living in Wyre Forest are no longer able to access land-based courses at Pershore College due to the cancellation of the bus service which they used to use. What steps is the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways able to take to allow students without their own transport to access these courses?"

Answer now given

Students from Kidderminster and Stourport have access to the 294 service to Worcester, where they can change to the 550 service to Pershore College. Students are able to purchase Severncards from the County Council to facilitate this journey.

In 2012 a policy change regarding the placement of students in Post 16 education relates to the level of course provided, this means that transport is only an option for the nearest college or school offering the appropriate equivalent level of course, the course subject is considered to be personal preference and has no influence on the offer of transport.

QUESTION 11 – Mrs E B Tucker asked Mr John Campion:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families please state how many of our ex-employees who were transferred to Babcock Prime on 1 October last year have since left that company by reason of redundancy, how many have left for other reasons, and how many postholders are still at formal risk of redundancy.

Would he also confirm that Freedom of Information rights continue even when services have been contracted out. "Public Authorities can only withhold commercially sensitive information where the public interest in Maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing information" (Freedom of Information Act - Annexe to Awareness Guidance No 5 Commercial Interests)."

Answer given

Clearly employment matters are the responsibility of Babcock, however they inform us that after full consultation with staff and unions, the process resulted in 65.8FTE redundancies, the vast majority voluntary redundancies. Babcock confirm that to date they have not dismissed anyone that TUPE transferred from the Council for any reasons other than redundancy.

Information that a contractor holds on behalf of a public authority can fall within the scope of a Freedom of Information request to the Council, subject to the statutory definitions and exemptions, and our standard contract clause requires contractors to co-operate and assist the Council in its duty to comply with the legislation.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question Mr Campion stated that if members were having difficulty in finding information he would do his best to assist.

QUESTION 12 – Mr A T Amos asked Mr John Smith:

"I would like to ask the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways if he will pass on my thanks to our Highways Inspectors for their valiant efforts to ensure Severn Trent Water carry out works in a professional manner.

However, would he acknowledge that all too often Severn Trent Water show no care or consideration for public or private property, leave damage and defacement, and fail to co-operate with our Inspectors, and would he not agree with me that Severn Trent would have gone out of business long ago were it not a monopoly from whom customers cannot escape?"

Answer given

Thank you for your compliment for the street works inspectors they carry out an important role overseeing highway works and reinstatement.

We work very closely with all utilities including Severn Trent. If there are any issues as a result of utilities undertaking work on the highway the new Permit Scheme together with

more inspectors will enable us to carry out additional site visits to ensure compliance with standards of workmanship are complied with.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question Mr Smith restated that the Council were able to require statutory undertakers to comply with standards of workmanship.