

## COUNCIL 8 NOVEMBER 2018 - AGENDA ITEM 11 – QUESTION TIME

Questions and written responses provided below apart from Question 5 which was withdrawn and Question 8 which was not answered on the day.

**QUESTION 1** – Mr P Middlebrough will ask Alan Amos:

*"During the last two years could the Cabinet Member inform the Council what is the cost of repairing damage to County Council signs caused by rotary flail hedge cutters? Would the Council consider working with contractors on a code of practice? In the event that damage continues, will the Council seek recompense from contractors who are responsible?"*

**Answer**

I thank Cllr Middlebrough for his question and commend him for his hard work in pursuing his constituents' interests.

Unfortunately, we do not separate out the costs of different types of damage that occur to County Council signs, so we cannot provide detail on damage by flail hedge cutting. However, we will in future look to identify specific costs for this and other key types of damage separately. I would add that most hedge cutting that takes place adjacent to the highway is completed by landowners who have a responsibility to ensure their hedges do not cause any issues on the highway. The County Council does do some hedge cutting where, for example it is necessary to clear highways safety signing.

I like Cllr Middlebrough's suggestion of a Code of Practice and I do believe that developing a Code of Practice jointly with landowners, other parties and the County Council in relation to this issue would be a positive step forward so I will take this up with our Highways Officers. Certainly, we will seek to secure recompense from all offenders who damage our highways signage where we are able to secure adequate evidence to effect this.

**Supplementary question**

The Cabinet Member for Highways agreed with the assertion that the Parish Lengthman Scheme was a good example of partnership working and he would encourage its expansion whenever and wherever possible.

**QUESTION 2** – Mr R J Morris will ask Alan Amos:

*"I thank the Cabinet Member for Highways taking time to visit me in Droitwich West to see some of my concerns regarding highways issues and for taking these on board and working with his team. Could the member please update us with regards to work on Westlands Roundabout which he knows is an area where pedestrians often take dangerous risks crossing?"*

**Answer**

I thank Cllr Morris for his question and commend him for his work looking after the safety of his constituents and raising their concerns direct with me.

From my recent site visit, I am aware of the two primary crossings along this section of the A38. I am delighted to confirm that plans for the 'northern' crossing are well advanced, and that this crossing will be receiving the following improvements:

- Installation of tactile paving to assist crossing this location alongside 'look left', and 'look right' markings
- Existing signs are to be changed to an 'exclamation' warning sign with a 'Pedestrians crossing' sub-plate on yellow backing and
- Relocation of the lit 'no entry sign' to provide better visibility to and of waiting pedestrians

These works will be completed by the end of this financial year. In addition, vegetation will be cut back on the approach to this crossing; and we will also be doing the retracing of the 'SLOW' markings approaching the roundabout (northbound) and the lane/destination markings on the roundabout near to the southbound exit.

We are continuing to investigate other improvements to the 'southern' crossing point. It is hoped that proposals for minor but worthwhile interventions can be presented to relevant Cllrs by the end of this calendar year.

I would add that the A38 is included as part of the Department for Transport's new Major Road Network (MRN) from 2020 and, therefore, any funding for larger-scale improvement schemes could be developed and funded via this route, subject to the relevant business case. I expect more detail of the MRN to emerge in the coming months.

#### Supplementary question

In response to a request, the Cabinet Member for Highways agreed to look into the possibility of providing lighting on the Westlands Roundabout and continue to seek to find a long term solution to the issues experienced at the Roundabout

#### **QUESTION 3** – Mr A D Kent will ask Alan Amos:

*"Could I ask the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways, in light of the clear push by car manufacturers to move to electric vehicle production imminently, what steps are being taken to look at providing for on street electric charging points attached to our network of lamp posts to assist both residents and commercial users?"*

#### **Answer**

I thank Cllr Kent for his question and the strong interest he shows in highways matters.

While Worcestershire currently doesn't have on-street EV charging facilities, the County is relatively well provided with a growing number of public off-street charging facilities at locations across the county where users of electric vehicles can charge. This includes a number of rapid charge points where it is possible to charge in about 1/2hour. An interactive map is available online, which provides details of this growing network of facilities. Worcestershire County Council also promotes the provision of charging points within all new developments in its Streetscape Design Guide.

At present, the UK Government is offering a limited amount of capital funding to local authorities on a first come first served basis. This provides up to 75% to fund the costs of installation of on-street charging infrastructure in residential areas where there is no off-street parking. The scheme is intended for the County to facilitate charging provision for individuals or groups of residents who apply for funding. However there are obvious limitations to this scheme, namely there is no revenue funding available from Government to cover the maintenance and insurance costs that the provision of these additional infrastructure assets will incur.

The County Council does not have a statutory duty to provide such infrastructure, nor the available funding for a significant roll-out programme and so we are not in a position to provide on-street electric charging points for vehicles at the present time. The technology is developing quickly, but there are significant challenges to the industry about the utility

network ability to support rapid charging, and the impact of new infrastructure on the footway.

So, the central issues include:

1) the ability of the utility companies and the power network grid to supply the charging points countywide;

2) the considerable problem of congestion. I understand that it is not so much of a problem with the 16 amp charging points but the fact that the vehicles would need to be there for around 4 hours. Just as we're working hard to reduce and remove congestion on our roads and streets, we cannot at the same time countenance introducing any measures which will create new or add to existing congestion on roads which are built for moving vehicles, not for car parks. So the future will be for off-street re-charging provision for EVs just as we have off-street re-fuelling provision for fuelled vehicles, and that applies to whether we have fixed or flexible charging posts. The larger cabinets for the fast chargers would be an unacceptable intrusion onto most if not all footways.

3) And this relates to the growth in demand for EVs. From 9th November 2018, plug-in hybrid grants will be scrapped, and grants towards all-electric cars will be significantly reduced. So we need to have a realistic assumption and calculation about the increase in demand for electric vehicles if they are to be sold at nearer to their actual economic cost, not to mention the still limited range for most batteries. Those 2 factors may both improve over time but they will ultimately determine the number of these vehicles around.

However, I do recognise that provision of on-street charging facilities will be an issue for residents where off-street parking is not available.

Officers will continue to monitor this emerging and dynamic market, particularly the role market investors may play as take-up of electric vehicles becomes clearer.

#### Supplementary question

In response to a request, the Cabinet Member for Highways agreed to arrange a meeting with Adam Kent and the Cabinet Member for Environment to look at the potential commercial benefits and needs of electric vehicles. He would also continue to monitor the emerging and dynamic market for electric vehicles.

#### **QUESTION 4** – Mr P M McDonald will ask Karen May:

*"Would the Cabinet Member for Transformation and Commissioning please inform me how many non-disclosure agreements have been entered into over the last two years?"*

#### **Answer**

I would like to thank Cllr McDonald for his question. With reference to 'Non-Disclosure Agreements' (NDA) it is important to highlight that this can have different meanings. An NDA sets out terms by which one or more parties agree not to disclose confidential information that they have shared with each other as a necessary part of doing business together and can cover commercial or staffing matters.

The Council does not routinely use NDAs for employees in relation to commercial matters and there are none on record for the last two years. In the context of staffing matters we do from time to time use Settlement Agreements (a type of NDA) which relate to where the employer and employee seek to reach a mutual agreement on the terms of an exit from the business. In the last two years, we have agreed 5 settlement agreements.

#### Supplementary question

The Cabinet Member for Transformation and Commissioning did not agree with the assertion that NDAs were not open and transparent arrangements. She added that they represented a mutually agreed settlement arrangement which included a non-derogatory statement clause to allow a clean break for both sides.

#### **QUESTION 5** – Question withdrawn

#### **QUESTION 6** – Mrs F M Oborski will ask Tony Miller:

*"With an increasing number of countries refusing to accept plastic recyclables can the Cabinet Member tell me what implications this may have for disposal of plastic recycled across the county?"*

#### **Answer**

I thank Mrs Oborski for her question

Over the last twelve months, there has been a significant 'shake up' in the market place for recycled plastics. China, one of the main importers of plastics for recycling, tightened up their specifications for acceptable material. This has meant that alternative markets for the recycling of plastics have opened up in countries such as Poland, Turkey and Malaysia. At the same time there have been a number of reported incidents of waste being exported as plastic for recycling, particularly in relation to waste exported to Poland. All of this has put pressure on the lower grade recyclable plastics market for 'pots, tubs and trays'.

Our Waste Management Service Contract, places the price and disposal risk with our contractor and they are currently advising us that all the plastic waste placed in the green recycling bins by our residents is being sorted and sent for recycling. They also confirm that based on their recent experience the market for the lower grade mixed recyclable plastics is under pressure and they are currently paying for this material to be sent for recycling. However, the market for plastic bottles still remains relatively strong. I can also confirm that in 2017, more than 5,000 tonnes of plastic from our residents was sent for recycling and I expect the figure for 2018 to very similar.

#### Supplementary question

Could district councils be encouraged to make residents more aware of those plastics that could or could not be recycled? The Cabinet Member for Environment responded that a generic approach to recycling had been adopted by all district councils. The 'Let's Waste Less' website contained all the necessary information for residents and a leaflet would be sent out shortly.

#### **QUESTION 7** – Mr R M Udall will ask Lucy Hodgson:

*"Can the Cabinet Member confirm what enforcement action Trading Standards have taken this year to control the illegal sale and storage of fireworks?"*

#### **Answer**

I thank Mr Udall for his question

The County Council is the Licensing authority for the storage of explosives and each year around 120 premises are licensed to sell fireworks for the limited periods around Bonfire Night and the New Year. A handful of premises have licenses to sell fireworks all year round. These are generally owned by qualified pyro-technicians who have a greater understanding of the risks.

The Trading Standards service does not visit licensed premises without a reason. This is in line with government policy on de-regulation and limiting the burdens of business.

The Trading Standards Service has strong intelligence links with both West Mercia Police and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue and the organisations share intelligence from members of the public on issues such as:

- Perceived risk in storage methods
- Underage sales, and
- Firework misuse.

Where the intelligence picture suggests an issue either in a particular area or with a particular outlet, multi-agency joint visits can be organised quickly to tackle any issues around storage and warnings are given regarding sales to minors. Individual complaints about poor storage practices will be responded to directly due to the potential risks to the public and neighbouring properties. Most of these are dealt with through advice and warnings.

This will be the first year where fireworks manufactured to the old British Standard (BS7114), can no longer be sold. A period of grace of seven years has been allowed to ensure these were sold out through the supply chain, although a few weeks ago one shop owner was asked to remove some from sale (and did so immediately). These fireworks are safe to use but they can no longer be retailed legitimately.

So far there have been no reports of larger, display type fireworks ending up in the wrong hands and no complaints of sales to minors. Trading Standards will continue to monitor the intelligence picture and respond where necessary.

#### Supplementary question

In response to a request to back a campaign to restrict the licensing of fireworks to professional and organised displays, the Cabinet Member for Communities explained that the Council's statutory duties were restricted to ensuring the safety of the product, its safe storage and the prevention of sale to minors.

#### **QUESTION 8** – Mr R J Morris will ask Ken Pollock:

*"I thank the Cabinet Member for the Economy and Infrastructure for taking time to visit Droitwich West ward with me and look at some of the issues which exist. One of these was with the commuter parking around the residential areas by Droitwich Railway station. Could the member please update us on when Droitwich Railway station will be reviewed and if parking matters will be included in this?"*

#### **Answer**

I can confirm that Droitwich railway station, as the 6th busiest station in the county with over 560,000 annual passengers using the station, is one of the stations we have ambitions for, especially in terms of parking and accessibility. As you are aware, increasing car park capacity is a key component of the Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy and additionally Droitwich Station is specifically mentioned in the LTP4 (Scheme ID D7 on page 45). We will continue to monitor opportunities as they come forward.

In addition, the Department for Transport launched its Inclusive Transport Strategy which will improve accessibility across all types of travel for those with both visible and less visible disabilities. As part of this, the government will put up to £300 million of funding into extending the Access for All programme, making railway stations more accessible, including through step-free access. Droitwich is one of the stations that we will put forward for funding.

**QUESTION 9** – Mr P M McDonald will ask Marcus Hart:

*"Would the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills agree with me that the time limit agreed by Cabinet, that councillors have to put forward a nomination for a governor of a school, means that governors can keep refusing nominations until the time limit has expired and then put forward who they wish. Therefore, ensuring the local authority does not have an input on governing bodies?"*

**Answer**

No, I don't agree with the assertion made in your question.

It is of course however critical that the process of identifying suitable candidates for and filling all governor positions for Worcestershire maintained schools is robust and timely. Local authority governors are nominated by the Local Authority and appointed by the governing body under Regulation 8 of The School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012. To ensure this responsibility is carried out effectively it is incumbent on the council to liaise closely with the governing body in order to identify a suitable candidate.

The agreed process for the appointment of LA Governors expects that a suitable nomination is made by the local member within a *two month period* from notification. Should a suitable nomination not be received within that timescale, the process is clear that the officer with responsibility for Governor Services will make the nomination instead of the local member. The Notes of Guidance clarifies this as part of the process, a decision taken to ensure that vacancies do not go unfilled.

The practicality is that the local member and school need to work together to identify a mutually agreeable candidate.

**QUESTION 10** – Mr R C Lunn will ask Alan Amos:

*"In view of the time taken to replace the linings at the junction of Salop Road and Mount Pleasant in Redditch, can the Cabinet Member inform Council of the agreed timescale to replace such lines after a road resurfacing? Does he know how often this timescale is met?"*

**Answer**

I thank Cllr Lunn for raising this matter with me.

Where surfacing works have been completed, road marking and studs should be renewed within 7 days where they are safety-related markings, such as give way lines; and other general lining should be renewed within 14 days. In the large majority of circumstances these timescales are met. However, I understand that there were issues with parked cars which prevented the lining from taking place for some time at this location. I have asked my Highways officers to monitor progress on such lines being completed in a timely fashion in the future.

**Supplementary question**

The Cabinet Member for Highways undertook to provide a written answer to Robin Lunn on the percentage of timescales met for replacing the linings after road surfacing.