

COUNCIL 12 NOVEMBER 2020 - AGENDA ITEM 10 – QUESTION TIME

Questions and written responses provided below.

QUESTION 1 – Mr P Middlebrough will ask Alan Amos:

“There is a great deal of concern in Kempsey that the A38 needs more controlled foot crossings along the A38. Will the Cabinet Member undertake a review to identify suitable locations for new crossings to be installed in Kempsey?”

Answer

I thank Cllr Middlebrough for his question, always assiduously looking after the interests of his constituents.

Worcestershire County Council recognises the need to frequently review the changing needs of developing communities like Kempsey, as a result of which Kempsey has been subject to regular monitoring in recent years.

Data collected at 3 locations in 2019 was compared against data collected in 2018, the data focuses on the points below:

- **Speeds** - speed of traffic would determine what type of crossing could be installed or not if speeds are too high; and
- **Gap analysis** i.e. how many gaps are available in traffic for people to cross the road safely during peak times.

I am happy to provide Cllr Middlebrough with this data if he would like to have it.

Whilst the data showed that traffic speeds have remained consistently the same, it did identify that the number of gap crossing opportunities appears to have reduced by approximately 1/3 indicating that there has been a volumetric increase in traffic, which in turn has impacted on the number of crossing opportunities. However, the number of crossing opportunities does not fall below 12 during the survey, which is considered a trigger point for intervention, as the data in the written answer shows.

Summary Data

Location	2018	2019
	85% Speeds	
A = Close to the Community Centre	31.1mph	31.mph
B = Close to the junction of Old Rd North & Church St	32.9mph	32.21mph
C = Close to The Lawns, Residential	36.2mph	36.35mph

Currently, as there are adequate gaps in the traffic during peak times at each of the locations, we would not at the moment support the installation of controlled crossings.

However, having said that, the monitoring does indicate that there is demand and - with the level of local development being undertaken - that this demand will increase. Consequently, I can confirm that we will undertake monitoring again in the Spring of 2021 to establish whether the demand has increased and if gaps have reduced. At that point, I will report back to Cllr Middlebrough to discuss whether and how a crossing improvement can be pursued.

Appendix attached with detailed comparable data for Kempsey

QUESTION 2 – Mr P M McDonald will ask Karen May:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility please inform me of the cost from travelling expenses so far this year, compared with this time last year?"

Answer

Thank you for your question. I can confirm we have had the opportunity to look at officer travelling costs related predominantly to mileage, for claims between April-September 2020 compared to the same period last year. Overall, including WCC & WCF, there has been a 48% reduction in claims over the two periods. In 2019/20 the total travelling costs paid for the areas outlined was £847,970 compared to £439,589 in 2020/21.

Travelling costs continue to be highest in our two frontline service areas being Worcestershire Children First and People Services.

Because of the restructures that have happened since September 2019, including the Councils' review of its overall functional design which was effective 1 December 2019, it's not straightforward to conduct a direct comparison between the two dates by Directorate. We would however expect to see a significant reduction in the amount of officer travelling costs during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020/21 which has seen an instruction of 'work at home wherever possible' for the workforce for the majority of this time period.

I am also able to inform you that Member mileage claims between April and the end of September 2019 were £10,663 compared to Member mileage claims between April and the end of September of 2020 were £1,768.

QUESTION 3 – Dr C Hotham will ask Alan Amos:

"The A441 at Bordesley, outside Alvechurch, has had horrendous problems with temporary traffic lights causing asymmetric traffic flow. The provision of "spotters" had little impact as they seem to spend most of their time in the van on their phones. Does the Cabinet Member for Highways agree that the Council's proposed new "lane rental" road repair scheme should also address this costly and frustrating annoyance with sanctions for transgressing operators?"

Answer

Can I thank Cllr Hotham for his question, which is very helpful.

As he will know, this Council's top priority is to address traffic congestion which, as surveys regularly tell us, is the biggest area of concern amongst the County's residents. Last Cabinet approved another four huge congestion-busting schemes across the County with widespread support from residents and the business community. Easily the biggest cause of traffic congestion is roadworks, mainly but not exclusively undertaken by the utilities, not the County Council.

There is no doubt that a Lane Rental Scheme, whereby undertakers are charged by the day or hour within which to carry out their works, will bring about a dramatic reduction in road closures and delays as the undertakers will have a real incentive - the financial one - to carry out their work efficiently and with the interests of the motorist, not themselves, at the centre.

There are currently two trial Lane Rental Schemes in operation in England, one run by Transport for London and another by Kent County Council, so there is a good cross section of locations, including both a major urban area and a County Council. I'm very pleased to say that the initial indications are positive, with both schemes reporting a reduction in the duration of road works during peak hours and an increase in collaboration between works promoters on streets covered by the Lane Rental Scheme.

In Worcestershire, we are currently working to establish a scheme for a Worcestershire Lane Rental Scheme.

In answer to Cllr Hotham's specific question regarding sanctions, under the current legislation, the Traffic Management Permit Scheme Regulations 2007, enable a Local Authority to issue fixed penalty notices to offences set out in the regulations, and this will be the same for authorities operating a Lane Rental Scheme. However, whilst charges that are already being applied under Lane Rental Schemes do vary considerably, Cllr Hotham can be assured that it is our intention to charge across the maximum extent covering as many aspects of any work as possible, and at the highest levels allowable under the law which will necessarily include an assessment of how traffic-sensitive the lanes are. This will maximize the incentive for undertakers to get the work done in a timely manner and reduce the burden of congestion on the motorist.

A Lane Rental Scheme will be an important tool for Worcestershire and, alongside works promoters, we would be able to bid for investment in equipment, technology etc, to improve the efficiency of Street Works. So under such a scheme, residents, businesses, and the County Council are all winners.

QUESTION 4 – Mr R M Udall will ask Ken Pollock:

"The government has announced measures to help some of the self-employed during the current lockdown, however, many Worcestershire self-employed residents do not meet the eligibility criteria for support. What help and support can he provide or offer to assist those in Worcestershire who are self-employed during this difficult time?"

Answer

As we entered the second lockdown the government announced additional support for businesses, which included extending the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme grant, from 1 Nov to end of April 2021, with eligible people being able to claim up to 80% of profits. The third grant payment will cover a 3-month period from 1 November 2020 until 31 January 2021. Under the new offer the government will provide a grant calculated at 80% of the 3 months average monthly trading profits, paid out in a single instalment and capped at £7,500 in total. This is an increase from the previously announced amount of 55%.

Changes to the Local Restrictions Support Grants also announced:

- For properties with a rateable value of £15k or under, grants to be £1,334 per month, or £667 per two weeks;
- For properties with a rateable value of between £15k-£51k grants to be £2,000 per month, or £1,000 per two weeks;

- For properties with a rateable value of £51k or over grants to be £3,000 per month, or £1,500 per two weeks.

Funding will also be available from district councils to support local businesses; they will receive funding of £20 per head. This is a discretionary sum, and our district colleagues are expecting additional guidance this week. This funding will be administered at the discretion of the district councils but primarily targeting those businesses that have been required to close, those severely affected, and can also provide direct business support.

As part of Worcestershire County Councils Here2Help business programme, start-up businesses can take advantage of our support package which will provide access to business experts in the fields of Finance, Marketing and Technology.

On 4 November the Council launched the new Enterprising Worcestershire programme. We can offer grants of up to £15,000 (on a 60/40 match funded basis, with 60% from the business), to a business that has been trading up to 3 years and to meet our funders requirements the business must be trading predominately business to business. Both revenue and capital funding is available. The first grant call will close on 27th November 2020. We have also commissioned advice and support for people wishing to become self-employed. The service will launch later this month once the procurement process is complete. The Enterprising Worcestershire programme is supported by the district councils and we are working together to put in place support for people starting "business to consumer" businesses, to ensure support is available for all. District Councils are also making available grants of between £500 and £1,000 on a 50/50 match funded basis to these businesses.

While we have worked to ensure support is put in place where we can, we do acknowledge that there are freelancers and owner-directors and the newly self-employed who have not been able to access government support.

QUESTION 5 – Mr R C Lunn will ask Lucy Hodgson:

"Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility explain how the success or otherwise of the Careers advice given to 14-18 year olds in the County is measured?"

Answer

This in itself is a challenging question, careers advice can be measured for its quality but it alone is challenging to use as a measure of success due to the complexity of lives and external factors, that regardless of good careers advice, will affect our young people. We can only ensure that the advice they receive is quality, relevant to our labour market, explores their options realistically and allows young people to progress.

In December 2017 the government's Department for Education launched the latest version of their "Careers Strategy". This new strategy commissioned the Careers and Enterprise Company to driving forward careers provision for young people. Their enhanced role is to add pace in improving the landscape of careers and enterprise, supporting programmes that work, ensuring quality delivery, filling gaps in provision and ensuring coverage across the entire country.

This new strategy adopted the Eight Gatsby Benchmarks which measure the schools strategy. It also measures how information is provided to young people and the interactions with young people as well as engagement with young people and employers. These benchmarks were formally adopted by OFSTED at the start of the 2018/2019 academic year and now form part of their school inspection process.

The County Council has been supporting the delivery of these programmes in Worcestershire through the “Inspiring Worcestershire” programme, born out of the LEPs Employment and Skills Strategy 2012- 2017. This is reiterated within our Corporate Plan, ensuring that Worcestershire actively works towards meeting both the Worcestershire LEP and Worcestershire County Council key priorities which were to help strengthen the relationship between educational establishments and business.

The Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) delivery in Worcestershire delivered by WCC in partnership with Worcestershire LEP incorporates every school with a year 7 and over pupil within including Middle, Secondary, Special Educational Need, Pupil Referral Unit and Further Education College. (65 establishments).

The Careers Hub initiative has just completed the 2nd year of its contract, having met all, and in most places exceeded, its contractual targets. Worcestershire had an exceptional year in terms of performance in comparison to the other Careers Hubs which have been developed across England. Worcestershire’s average benchmark performance is currently at 5.05 out of 8 benchmarks, exceeding the England average of 3.86 out of 8.

Supporting information on the delivery team’s work and the eight benchmarks used.

The delivery team work with member educational establishments to ensure they are meeting the mandatory requirements set out within the Department for Education’s Careers Strategy and achieve all eight of the Gatsby Benchmarks. The team also ensure that Worcestershire students are able to understand through increased employer encounters and activities the needs of the Worcestershire economy moving forward which will in turn prepare them to enter Worcestershire’s workforce.

The team supports those schools as follows: -

- Supporting educational establishments to engage local business by bringing employer encounters to support careers such as through event participation i.e. careers fayres, industry talks, assemblies, mentoring and work experience.
- Implementing careers strategy and embedding into school culture and values, ensuring that all levels of management such as Senior leadership teams and governors have buy in to the strategy and support the career planning in line with the needs of the Worcestershire economy.
- Embedding Worcestershire careers into curriculum by supporting to design and deliver lessons plans that bring curriculum to life and explore the industrial make-up of Worcestershire.
- Ensuring that all post 16 options relevant to young people and the needs of Worcestershire economy are highlighted to all students, including available apprenticeship in county, Higher Education pathway needs and Further Education college options
- Access to high quality careers advice which is locally relevant and discusses the economy of Worcestershire and its needs.

The team has recruited over 80 Advisers from local business working actively in educational establishments within the initiative as well as over 200 other Worcestershire employers pledged to offer support to educational establishments through activities.

This support continues virtually throughout this period.

The Eight Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance are:

- 1) A stable career programme
- 2) Learning from career and labour market information
- 3) Addressing the needs of each pupil
- 4) Linking curriculum learning to careers
- 5) Encounters with employers and employees
- 6) Experience of workplaces
- 7) Encounters with further higher education
- 8) Personal guidance

 Department
for Education



**Careers strategy:
making the most of
everyone's skills and
talents**

December 2017