

COUNCIL 12 JANUARY 2023 - AGENDA ITEM 8 – QUESTION TIME

Questions and written responses provided below.

QUESTION 1 – Cllr Richard Udall will ask Cllr Marcus Hart:

“Local Worcestershire artists have been struggling since Covid lockdowns and some have been unable to promote and sell their work. Will he consider allowing a rolling programme, throughout 2023 of supporting and encouraging local artists by allowing individuals to have a month of free access to local libraries, to promote and exhibit their work and to promote local art; it would allow artists to place their skills on show throughout the county. Libraires are more than just a place to borrow books, such a scheme would increase footfall into our libraires and could be showcase for the service, a dedicated and organised campaign to support local artists would be appreciated?”

Answer

Absolutely.

Supplementary question

It was queried whether the Council would support all artists, who had struggled through the pandemic, in finding ways to put their works on show in Worcestershire. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities responded that the Council received a modest income from charging local artists to display their work. He would do everything he could to provide support to local artists and have access to council facilities including libraries. He would liaise with Severn Arts to establish an eligibility and selection process.

QUESTION 2 – Cllr Lynn Denham will ask Cllr Simon Geraghty:

“I am grateful to the Council’s communication department for sharing the Leader’s Christmas message reflecting on ‘another exceptional year’. That means it has been an unusual year and the Leader seems to believe the Council has done rather well in 2022. Parents who struggling to get an Education Health Care Plan for their child and those waiting for home assessment of their care needs may disagree.

The Leader states that the ‘local economy is on course to grow by a third by 2025 from 2015 levels’. What measures is he relying on for this prediction? How are they likely to be affected by the increase in energy costs and inflation?”

Answer

Firstly, can I thank Lynn for her question and the opportunity to restate my thanks to our staff, partners and all those who have contributed their voluntary time during another exceptional year. I do believe that collectively Worcestershire has risen to the challenges – whether that be our One Worcestershire response to the impact of the war in Ukraine and welcoming some 1000 guests to our County, the Jubilee celebrations, or the arrangements to mark the death of HM The Queen and the accession of King Charles. They are just three examples of another exceptional year and I do believe people deserve to be thanked for their contribution, often unseen, like our gritter drivers that go out in all weathers to keep our County moving or those caring for the most vulnerable.

However, I also recognise the challenges too and specifically Lynn asks about EHCPs and our performance. This has been an area of challenge for many Councils and the Health Service that contribute to the plans. The Accelerated Progress Plan for SEND has helped drive improvement and I'm assured this January we are on course to have completed and issued the backlog of EHCPs awaiting Annual Review.

New processes and practices, including an investment to increase SEND casework staff and Educational Psychologists are in place. This will minimise delay re-occurring and respond to the assessment process needs. We will see service capacity grow during 2023, as recruitment is completed. The challenges experienced does include health agencies, where limited resources has impacted on the ability to carry out assessments in a timely manner. Processes for sharing information, tracking cases, and prioritising children are part of the WCF internal process and the Hereford and Worcestershire NHS Trust Transformation Programme.

Turning to Lynn's second point, the target to grow the local economy by a third by 2025 from 2015 levels. This is an agreed partnership measure set by Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership and my statement quoted is from our Corporate Plan. It's measured by GVA – a recognised measure of the size of the local economy – and even with the drop in GVA in 2020 we are still on track to meet the 2025 target, assuming a straight-line trajectory having exceeded the targeted year on year growth. We have also already exceeded the 25,000 additional jobs target mentioned in the plan. Therefore, whilst the economy does undoubtedly face challenges from inflation, a tight labour market and energy costs, I remain confident that by working in partnership to support businesses through our LEP and other investments in place we will achieve the targets we have collectively set.

Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Leader undertook to provide a written answer to Cllr Lynn Denham to explain how the Council was going to ensure that all residents including those on Universal Credit would benefit from economic growth

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

“Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport give me an update on the progress of improving the junction of Bilford Road and Astwood Road, to both reduce congestion and improve the safety for pedestrians?”

Answer

A written response will be provided.

Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport agreed to meet Cllr Matt Jenkins on site at the junction of Bilford Road and Astwood Road, Worcester.

QUESTION 4 – Cllr Richard Udall will ask Cllr Marcus Hart:

“Is the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities aware that according to the 2011 census, over 200 Worcestershire residents were born in Iran, even more are descended from or have Iranian heritage. Will he agree to consider how to celebrate the growing Iranian community in Worcestershire by celebrating Iranian culture, food and history and the close historic ties between Worcestershire and Iran. Many Worcestershire Iranians are currently very concerned about the current problems in Iran , which includes mass arrests, torture and extensive use of the death penalty for those who are protesting against the current government of Iran; many local Iranians have been unable to contact

their friends or family for months and are worried about their safety and welfare. Will he agree that by celebrating our support for the Worcestershire Iranian community, at this difficult time for Iran, it would help to offer our solidarity and sympathy with Worcestershire Iranians and would help them at this difficult time?"

Answer

In principle – yes. He was happy to consider anything. Notwithstanding events in Iran at the moment, it is important to put in context that we celebrate the very diverse range of citizens and residents from across the whole of our community. Cllr Udall makes reference to the 176 residents in the 2011 census. In the 2021 census, there were 268 residents from Iran with 60 in Malvern Hills and 60 in Worcester City alone. There were 2,700 plus residents in Worcestershire from India, 2,500 from Pakistan, 600 plus from Bangladesh, and 774 from the Philippines.

Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities echoed the support expressed by Cllr Richard Udall for the slogan of the Iranian protesters "Women, Life, Freedom".

QUESTION 5 – Cllr Lynn Denham will ask Cllr Mike Rouse:

"I have been on the case of the Brickfields Road disappearing bus stop since I was elected to this chamber in May 2021. Various explanations have been offered by officers but there has been no progress on delivering the promise made to my predecessor. Installation of the zebra crossing was to include relocation of the bus stop. In response to a Worcester News journalist at the beginning of December 2022, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility said he was 'confident a solution can be found'. So am I. What do we have to do to get a solution in place?"

Answer

Following road safety advice, It was not possible to re-site the removed bus stop, however we will look at alternative locations in the vicinity of Lime Avenue and Glenthorne Avenue. It was agreed that a "both sides" sticker would be placed on the downhill bus stop, adjacent to Ash Avenue, and that buses travelling towards Warndon should pick up and drop off opposite this, where safe to do so, just after Poplar Avenue. Unfortunately this was removed and replaced with a flag. This has caused some issues and we have contacted the bus operator to ensure that drivers are aware that they need to pick up on both sides of the road.

Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport agreed to meet Cllr Lynn Denham on site to try to seek a solution to the issues associated with the bus stop on Brickfields Road, Worcester.