

COUNCIL 18 MAY 2023 - AGENDA ITEM 15 – QUESTION TIME

Questions and written responses provided below.

QUESTION 1 – Cllr Lynn Denham asked Cllr Andy Roberts:

"What advice can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility give colleagues when approached on a Saturday afternoon by a mother who needs help because she has no money left to buy formula feed for her baby?"

Answer

Thank you for your question. It might have been put to my colleague Councillor Marcus Hart in his 'communities' role. Indeed, I am grateful to Hannah Perrott for helping me with my response, which I make in the knowledge that poverty puts an additional strain on families, which can lead to parental mental health and relationship problems, which can impact on children's wellbeing.

Adults struggling with the cost of living can call the Adult Front Door at Worcestershire County Council, where they will speak to a friendly advisor. Advisors are trained in the cost-of-living support available and will signpost residents to local foodbanks, citizens advice support, support from health professionals and also local support schemes and groups. Advisors have a database of community support available and, alongside the 'Help for Households' national scheme, we have also collated local support schemes, groups and activities. On calling the team, the resident will have a supported conversation with an advisor where their strengths as well as their needs will be explored, the advisor will then signpost them to local support available in their area and follow this up in an email with links and telephone numbers needed. If the advisor ascertains that the level of support needed is higher than what can be provided through signposting then they will refer on to the appropriate team. (Targeted Adult Support Team (TAST), ASC Area teams or Safeguarding Team – depending on level of need).

With respect to this lady specifically, she can get help to buy food and milk through the Healthy Start Scheme programme. I will see that the links are provided: [Applying for Healthy Start – Get help to buy food and milk \(Healthy Start\)](#)
Vitamins can also be obtained through the Healthy Start Vitamin Programme: [Healthy Start - Vitamins | Starting Well \(startingwellworcs.nhs.uk\)](#)

You could also encourage her to ring the team where she will receive more personalised support and information about her local foodbanks and other district-based support.

Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families undertook to provide details to all councillors of the emergency duty team contact number for the 24/7 Family Front Door for Adults and Children.

QUESTION 2 – Cllr Matt Jenkins asked Cllr Mike Rouse:

“In January 2021 the following motion was approved by the full council:

“Requests for more 20mph speed limits, particularly in residential areas and near schools, are often made to councillors. This motion requests that a task group or member advisory group be set up to review how 20mph areas are currently considered and look at the feasibility of creating a process that would allow a 20mph area to be created within a councillor’s division.”

It has been well over two years since this motion was approved, but no group has met. Can I ask the Cabinet Member with Responsibility to set a date for the first meeting of such a group as soon as possible, and before the full council meets again in July?”

Answer

I have decided that actions speak louder than words, and so a group has not been necessary yet because I have asked for the implementation of a process for consideration of a new 20 MPH zone within a given division. Officers have been working on this and it will be added to the Member Portal with the changes going live from July 2023. I will convene a group in November to review the impact of these changes and suggest further improvements.

Supplementary question

In response to a query about the lack of a response from the Council to the previously agreed motion, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport commented that as the work was ongoing, it not been necessary to convene a meeting to date. A meeting would be arranged in November to review this work.

QUESTION 3 – Cllr Beverley Nielsen asked Cllr Mike Rouse:

“Councils up and down the country use Fix My Street, www.fixmystreet.com, to help residents to report pressing highways issues supplementing whatever IT solutions they have of their own, such as our ‘Report It’ solution. Does Worcestershire County Council capture comments made online from ‘Fix My Street’ in addition to those made via ‘Report It’ as well as tracking time to respond to any such comments?”

Answer

Can I please thank Cllr Nielson for her question regarding Fix my Street.

Our approach has always been to improve the customer experience and provide an enhanced self-service model with end-to-end reporting. Our Highways Report-it tool went live in July 2022 and incorporated our customers’ feedback. Information is captured correctly at first point and prioritised by our Highways & Transport Control Centre to ensure that we provide the right response at the right time. Enquiries are received real-time and our customers can also talk to officers directly to seek further help or information.

Prior to launch of the County Council’s Report It, we carefully considered use of Fix my Street but identified that there was often double handling of information and insufficient information to enable us to provide a full response. Where a customer opts to log an enquiry or report on Fix my Street, they can be directed to the County Council’s site, negating any need to navigate the web further.

We pride ourselves on a system that easy and intuitive to use; customers are provided with a reference number and can track/follow up enquiries and check on progress. We provide updates to reassure customers that there are enquiries are being dealt with.

Supplementary question

It was queried whether the Council monitored and responded to enquiries made through the Fix My Street website. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport responded that Fix My Street was a third-party commercial service and the Council had to act in accordance with its procurement framework. The Council did not monitor or respond to enquiries on the Fix my Street website as it was considered to be an unjustifiable use of public resources.

QUESTION 4 – Cllr Matt Jenkins asked Cllr Marc Bayliss:

"Concerns have been raised by residents about the impact of the installation of full fibre in their streets. For example, where cabling was installed under the footway/highway, it has been left in poor condition. Elsewhere, telegraph poles were installed with no consultation. This led to residents arguing with City Fibre staff about the location of the poles. Clearly, this is not good enough.

Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility ensure that there is improved communication by City Fibre with residents and that we ensure that work is completed to a high standard?"

Answer

The Electronic Communications Code legally allows listed network providers, to place mobile masts, poles and other broadband apparatus on public land, providing the Local Authority are notified accordingly and it does not cause an access issue e.g. reduce the width of a footway below the minimum width or interfere with visibility splays at junctions.

They have a statutory right, as telecommunications providers, to install network in the public highway. Whilst some operators will agree to re-locating new poles, providing they are required and do not cause access or safety issues, it is at their discretion as to whether they do so or not. Worcestershire County Council are part of trials with at least one operator exploring alternatives to new poles in areas that underground infrastructure is not viable.

Any operator, or contractor acting on their behalf, must comply with national legislation and meet the specific requirements of Worcestershire County Council. As the Highways Authority we manage and maintain the Highway to ensure its physical integrity, longevity and clearly the immediate safety of users on the network, therefore we must be satisfied by the working practices of those organisations seeking to work upon it, the quality of work and reinstatements they undertake.

I understand you received a response from the Broadband team to specific enquiry within your Division, confirming they had spoken with CityFibre and asked them to rectify a particular issue, with the Streetworks team also confirming that they are inspecting all of CityFibre's works and that they had already identified some defects to the areas in question, that were with CityFibre to put right.

To conclude, work will always be inspected and only agreed as complete when it meets the required standards of WCC as the Highways Authority, following this Council a briefing will be issued to all Councillors to aid with messaging to communities and I have already asked the broadband team to ask each operator that they review their communications processes.