

COUNCIL 14 JANUARY 2016 - AGENDA ITEM 10 – 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. Where a question has been withdrawn that is also indicated below.

QUESTION 1 – Mr P M McDonald asked Mr J Campion:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families please inform me of the amount of money paid out in compensation to students over the last two years for accidents that have occurred in our schools, on school trips and of any other amounts paid out to children in our care such as foster children for any other reason?"

Answer given

The answer is zero in relation to payments made by the Council for compensation due to accidents which happen on school trips or for any amounts paid out as a result of accidents of any kind to children in our care.

QUESTION 2 – Mr P M McDonald asked Mr J H Smith:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways please inform me of the costs of filling in pot holes over the last two years and how much work remains to be done despite the current spend?"

Answer given

We have a holistic approach to repairing Defects, and our Highway Maintenance Contract is based on Target Prices with actual Costs collected for the whole Service. The Target Price for each Defect is £65.35.

In 2013/14 we repaired nearly 29,000 defects, of which 57% (16,500) were carriageway defects with a Target Price of approx. £1,080,000.

In 2014/15 we repaired nearly 33,000 defects, of which 44% (14,500) were carriageway defects with a Target Price of approx. £947,000.

This year to date we have completed 13,000 defects of which 34% (4,420) were carriageway defects with a Target Price of approx. £290,000.

There are currently 276 recorded awaiting repair all of which will be completed before the "due date" (as all defects are). There will of course be more carriageway defects recorded between now and 31 March as we continue to carry out Safety Inspections in accordance with the programme, however as you can deduce from the figures already given the overall number of carriageway defects is falling.

As usual the advice is if you know of a problem let us know too.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about the resources required for this area Mr Smith said this was under constant review to see the Council achieved the best outcomes and the best value for money.

QUESTION 3 – Mr A T Amos asked Mr J H Smith:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways please provide me with an update on progress in installing real-time bus indicator boards at bus stops in Worcester city as a means of assisting passengers to plan their journeys and monitor bus cancellations and delays?"

Answer given

The central system is now fully operational and tracking buses that have been appropriately equipped and predicting their arrival times at stops. 70+ buses have been fitted with on-bus equipment and 34 in-shelter displays have been procured and built.

There are currently 8 Information Points which have been procured with 5 currently being built. Audio functionality is installed on all on-street infrastructure, which is activated by the user's key-fob

In-shelter displays will be installed and made operational in 5 shelters on the Tolladine and Ombersley Road for testing purposes in the week commencing 18 January 2016 (subject to confirmation). Once it has been established that the system is functioning correctly, a further 16 displays will be installed along Key Corridor Locations, week commencing 1 February 2016 (again subject to confirmation) and these will include:

- Ombersley Road
- Bromyard Road
- Lowesmoor
- Newtown Road
- Woodgreen Drive.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about further progress in this area Mr Smith said the process would be monitored as real-time indicator boards were of genuine assistance to the travelling public.

QUESTION 4 – Mr M E Jenkins asked Mr A N Blagg:

"Following the agreement made at the recent International Climate Talks in Paris to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment inform me when Worcestershire County Council will be joining other councils in signing up to the Local Government Association's Climate Local Initiative?"

The Climate Local Initiative (<http://www.local.gov.uk/climate-local>) aims to support councils both to reduce carbon emissions and to increase resilience to a changing climate."

Answer given

Worcestershire County Council (WCC) have been working broadly in line with Climate Local Guidance and clearly Climate Local are aware of our work, (e.g. recent article in LGA 'First' magazine showcasing WCC's work incorporating climate resilience into our new buildings), however we don't currently report our annual progress to Climate Local and so aren't listed

on the website. There's no reason why we can't report our progress going forward. Not being listed certainly doesn't mean a lack of action to tackle climate change. The Council has a long history of work on this agenda. Below are just some examples:

- WCC co-ordinate the Worcestershire wide Climate Change Strategy: 2012 – 2020 (a partnership strategy with other Worcestershire based organisations)
- WCC run a carbon management programme which has enabled a reduction of 14% of the Council's carbon emissions since 2010. From 2012/13 to 2014/15 we reduced our energy costs by £145,000 and generated over £80,000 savings by investing in our own renewable energy systems
- Through ERDF & WCC funded programmes we have helped more than 160 small businesses save 1,500 tonnes CO₂ and reduced their energy costs by 24% in the last 2 years and supported approximately 90 businesses in the green services and products sector to develop their businesses
- Through the WCC Coordinated Warmer Worcestershire programme more than 4,000 families have been supported to reduce their energy consumption in the last 3 years. We are currently enabling 750 families to insulate their solid wall homes through a DECC funded programme
- WCC have installed a countywide electric vehicle charge point network (funded by OLEV and private sector)
- Flood Risk Management Strategy is currently out for consultation
- WCC currently bidding for funding to continue and widen low carbon support to businesses and to help those in fuel poverty.

There is vast disparity between councils in terms of activity on this issue, however we and others, e.g. Sustainability West Midlands, consider WCC one of the more active councils. In order to reaffirm the Council's commitment it's recommended the Council sign up to the climate local commitment which I intend to make available to all Councillors. It affirms what WCC is already doing through the Worcestershire Climate Change strategy and action plan (progress report and updated plan due in next few weeks) and the Council's own carbon management and sustainability programmes (reported through the balanced score card and Corporate Environmental report). The Climate Local website is also an extremely useful source of information and guidance for future development of the council's work in this area.

QUESTION 5 – Mr R C Lunn asked Mr J H Smith:

"Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways explain when the "Choose How You Move" survey report about Redditch is due to be published? What has caused the delay?"

Answer given

The Choose How You Move Redditch final evaluation report has been published on Worcestershire County Council's website and can be viewed here:

http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20055/strategies_plans_and_bids/808/the_worcestershire_local_sustainable_transport_fund_bid

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about a possible integrated transport plan for Redditch Mr Smith outlined that the Council continued to work with partners to achieve the best possible outcomes for all residents.

QUESTION 6 – Mrs F M Oborski asked Mr A N Blagg:

"When the Energy from Waste Plant being built at Hartlebury was planned it was intended that non-recyclable plastics would be burnt. The Paris Climate Change Conference appears to rule that out.

Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment inform me what the change to materials to be incinerated will have on the facility when it comes in to operation and what the medium- and long-term impacts are likely to be on the business case?"

Answer given

The Energy from Waste Plant currently under construction in Hartlebury has been designed to treat all residual household waste including any plastics that have not been separated for recycling.

My understanding of the Paris Climate Change Conference agreement is that the Government has agreed to limit the increase in global temperatures, ensure that emissions peak as soon as possible and then start to fall, but as yet there are no specific details of how this is going to be achieved.

Assuming that following the Paris Climate Change Conference legislation is changed and 'non-recyclable' plastics are 'banned' from being incinerated then that would potentially reduce the Calorific Value of the input material being delivered to the Energy from Waste Plant. The impact of this would be that, subject to any other constraints, more residual waste could be processed at the facility, allowing the Council to cater for any additional waste growth, due to increases in housing across both Worcestershire and Herefordshire. This diversion, of waste, from landfill to energy recovery would reduce the CO₂ impact of its disposal. The Energy from Waste Plant has been designed to cope with waste inputs covering a range of Calorific Values and this diversion of material is currently believed to have a minimal impact on the Calorific Value of the total input material. In the medium to long term this will mean that the Council will have a reduced reliability on alternative disposal routes and therefore the implications of any associated costs, which could be a benefit to the Council in terms of the business case. What is more difficult to determine is the consequences of separating and disposing of the non-recyclable plastics and any associated cost implications that this work may have.

QUESTION 7 – Mrs F M Oborski had given notice that she wished to ask Mr J H Smith:

"In view of continuing problems with Diamond Bus what steps are being taken to ensure that bus services across the county, and in particular in the Wyre Forest area are provided by a competent, reliable and responsible company?"

In light of the discussion on this subject under Minute Number 1750 Mrs Oborski withdrew her question.

QUESTION 8 – Professor J W Raine asked the Leader of the Council:

"It has been a full year in coming, but it was wonderful news last week to learn that the Worcestershire Leaders have at last agreed to go ahead with a formal bid to the Home Office to relocate Syrian refugees across the county. Indeed, it is pleasing that negotiations

are set to begin this month with the Home Office and West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership to host up to 50 people in Worcestershire by the end of 2016.

But can I emphasise to the Leader that this whole initiative began in Malvern with the local Amnesty group who have worked tirelessly on this issue to keep the momentum going, in compiling an ever growing database of voluntary offers of assistance from the community – including from many professionals with highly relevant expertise and experience to ensure a successful relocation, rehabilitation and recovery process for the arriving Syrian families after so much tragedy and trauma in their lives.

While being delighted that our councils of Worcestershire will be providing leadership and expertise in the process, it is equally important that local community and voluntary organisations in our county are also empowered and welcomed as key partners with the statutory bodies on this initiative, and that we tap into the fund of enthusiasm, energy and expertise that volunteers have will bring to the process of providing help and support to Syrian families relocating in the County. Particularly in these austere financial times for local government, when money is so tight, it would indeed be opportunity lost were councils to fail to take full advantage of the voluntary contributions on offer. In Malvern, for example, the group which started it all - Malvern Welcomes Syrian Refugees – is in the process of establishing a Charity specifically to spearhead the work of planning, co-ordinating and delivering support to families when they arrive. So will the Leader please therefore give his assurance that groups like ‘Malvern Welcomes...’ will indeed be invited to play their part alongside this and the other councils in ensuring the success of this initiative?"

Answer given

Firstly I would like to thank John Raine for his question. As he will know, Worcestershire Leaders met last week and I chaired that meeting. We agreed to make an application to accommodate up to 50 Syrian refugees in the next year across Worcestershire. Whilst it is entirely right that we seek to play our part as local authorities, I agree that we should seek to utilise the help and support that community groups and individuals have offered to contribute.

I hope this assures Councillor Raine that collectively we will be looking to work with community groups, including Malvern Welcomes Syrian Refugees as the plan moves forward.

QUESTION 9 – Mr C J Bloore asked the Leader of the Council:

"Could the Leader of the Council tell me when he intends to meet with Greg Clark to discuss this Council's funding settlement from the Government?"

Answer given

I would like to thank Chris Bloore for his question and the opportunity it gives me to update Council in relation to both the Devolution Deal and our response to the funding settlement. I and other partners to the Devolution Deal were due to meet the Secretary of State yesterday to discuss our proposed deal. However, unfortunately the meeting needed to be rearranged at short notice due to the Secretary of State being required to attend a Select Committee. We are, therefore, seeking to arrange this meeting to discuss our Devolution Deal at the earliest opportunity. Our Devolution Deal is linked to the ability of the Council to reform services and boost economic growth, which increases our income base, and therefore is linked to the financial sustainability of the Council and the services we deliver. We are also intending to submit a full response to the Government settlement as part of their consultation, in order to ensure the Government is fully aware of the impact of the settlement on this Council.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about the Council's response Mr Geraghty reiterated that this would full and detailed.