

COUNCIL 11 FEBRUARY 2016 - AGENDA ITEM 9 – 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Where any questions have been withdrawn that is also indicated below.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 number of children in care who eventually go to university?"

Answer given

Six per cent of 18/19 year old looked after children started university in September 2015.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about the actions being taken to improve this figure Mr Campion gave a comprehensive list of actions aimed at closing the current attainment gap.

QUESTION 2 – Mr P M McDonald asked Mrs Hodgson:

"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Localism and Communities please inform me how many books are now held in our libraries compared to the number held six years ago?"

Answer given (by the Leader in Mrs Hodgson's absence)

The number of books held in the libraries today is 770,159 (including 2,284 e-books and 255 e-audio books), compared to 678,264 six years ago. For The Hive, analysis shows a current total of 302,001 items, of which 135,085 are University of Worcester items. A similar exercise done at the end of 2013/2014 showed a total of 304,911 items, of which 134,103 were University items. The new library in Bromsgrove brought 870 new books to add to their collection.

QUESTION 3 – Mr R M Udall asked Mrs S L Blagg:

"Will the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care confirm if any internal review has taken place into the impact of the reductions in the Supporting People Budget?"

Answer given

There is no Supporting People budget.

Between 2003 and 2009 the Council received a Supporting People Grant. This was subsequently subsumed into the revenue support grant, which has then been progressively reduced by central government.

In November 2013 the Council consulted on a range of proposals for savings from services formerly funded by the Supporting People grant. Following consultation these proposals were amended and a final decision was taken in March 2014.

Anyone directly affected by a reduction in service was reassessed to ensure that if they were eligible for adult social care then their needs continued to be met.

Following implementation of the savings the Council has been monitoring the impact on adult social services. There is no evidence that the savings have led to an increase in demand for adult social care.

The number of new assessments has remained constant or decreased:

5,322 in 2013/14

5,557 in 2014/15

4,424 in 2015/16 (estimate to date).

The number of people in receipt of Council funded care has decreased slightly although the level of care required has tended to increase:

6,196 in 2013/14

5,986 in 2014/15

5,977 currently (to date).

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about a specific provision within the questioner's Division Mrs Blagg set out that eligibility criteria existed for adult social care and applicants making claims would be assessed under those criteria.

QUESTION 4 – Mr P Denham asked Mr John Smith:

"Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways please confirm whether or not fire engines are able to negotiate the turning space provided at the new highway layout in front of Worcester Cathedral?"

Answer given

A standard HGV chassis fire appliance successfully tested the turning facility before the scheme was opened. This manoeuvre was comfortably achieved. The Chairman of the Fire and Rescue Authority also advises me that larger rescue vehicles have also undergone the same assessment successfully.

Supplementary Question

Mr Smith answered a supplementary question about other large vehicles and air quality generally at this location.

QUESTION 5 – Mr P Denham asked Mr John Smith:

"I have been given dates by highways officers starting on 3 December last year for the installation of double yellow lines at the western end of Rainbow Hill, Worcester. Last week I was told that the contractor had advised highways that the job had been completed in early January. I personally inspected the location on 4 February and there are no yellow lines to be seen! Will the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways please tell me is the contract between highways and Ringway preventing accurate communication between the two, and is it being properly managed and monitored?"

Answer given

No, on the contrary, the management of the Highways Maintenance Service Contract encourages good communications. In general this is borne out by the many hundreds of schemes that are delivered each year on time, within target and to specification. The Highways Maintenance Service Contract requires for a Contractor's Plan detailing resources and a works programme to be accepted by the Service Manager each month. This is backed up by regular progress and planning meetings for every area of the Contract.

With regards the works at Rainbow Hill, this had been scheduled in the Contractors Plan. However, the application of thermoplastic lines is very, very weather dependent and due to bad weather the work has not yet been completed. I understand the works is scheduled for completion within the next 2 – 3 weeks, again this is very weather dependent.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about when the work would be completed Mr Smith undertook to provide a written response for Mr Denham.

QUESTION 6 – Mrs F M Oborski asked Mr Campion:

"As Corporate Parent the County Council is ultimately responsible for educational placements of Worcestershire Looked After Children (LAC).

Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families please tell me under what circumstances, if any, would we allow LAC to be the subject of Elective Home Education and if any current LAC are educated in this way, how many?"

Answer given

The only circumstances in which Looked After Children have been designated as 'Educated Otherwise' is to enable the young person to access further Education provision as an alternative to full time school education. This is in line with national Guidance for the enrolment of 14-16 year olds in Further Education. We currently have three Worcestershire Looked After Children who are registered as 'Educated Otherwise' all of whom to allow them access further Education provision.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about unregistered educational provision Mr Campion stated that it would not be the Council's practice to use such provision.

QUESTION 7 – Mrs F M Oborski asked Mr Campion:

"Recently the Sunday Times exposed Worcestershire in general and Wychavon in particular as one of the worst areas in the country as far as social mobility, life chances and educational outcomes for children from deprived backgrounds are concerned.

What steps is the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families initiating to rectify this awful situation?"

Answer given

While this report is well worth examining, and makes many interesting and indeed some valid points, its methodology is not always well suited to measure mobility in every local area. For example, Wychavon's poor position in the rankings arose because it has

relatively few disadvantaged children in a well performing school system, and relatively more of the adults in highly paid jobs commute to jobs outside the area.

However, the main thrust of the report is one that I completely agree with – we most close the gap in educational attainment and progress between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and the rest. Worcestershire as a whole could improve in this area, and it is one of Babcock's most important objectives.

I would encourage all councillors who are school governors to look at the indicators used by the Commission in their own school, and seek reassurance from the Headteacher that these children are being prioritised. Governors should also ask for information on how the Pupil Premium is being spent, and make sure that is directly impacting on relevant children, using evidence-based interventions.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question Mr Campion said it was recognised that geographical variations did exist but that the Council employed appropriate effort and resources to address these.

QUESTION 8 – Ms P Agar asked Mr John Smith:

"What is your purpose in joining the West Midlands Rail Partnership and how will this improve rail services within Worcestershire and inter-regional rail links?"

Answer given

As set out in the report received by the County Council's Cabinet at its November meeting, we have joined the West Midlands Rail partnership because our view is that devolution of rail services will deliver many benefits to the rail passengers and businesses in the county. Having a targeted, locally accountable rail contract with proper incentives on the operator will in our view, enable West Midlands Rail to specify and manage rail services more effectively than the current national arrangements led by the Department for Transport.

West Midlands Rail will be able to:

- Stimulate economic growth through targeting rail investment and specifying a rail service that is responsive to local needs.
- Create a more efficient railway that is better value for the taxpayer.
- Actively manage the contract and hold the operator to account for delivery.

The proposals cover the services currently operated by London Midland and our view is that those rail services can be improved through:

- Provision of additional **capacity** to reduce overcrowding.
- Improving **connectivity** to other parts of the West Midlands region and Birmingham Airport.
- Becoming more **customer focused**.
- Offering a **clearer** approach to the passenger experience – such as rolling stock, station quality, timetables and fares.
- Delivering a rail service that is **cost – effective** for the taxpayer.

Those five C's are the outputs that West Midlands Rail is concentrating on during the public consultation phase. At the same time West Midlands Rail is working to achieve a network that is responsive to the needs of rail passengers and businesses supporting economic development and job creation.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about the use of new transport technology Mr Smith confirmed that the Partnership would investigate all possible options to obtain the best outcome for local people.

QUESTION 9 – Ms P Agar asked Mr John Smith:

"Now that the Council has joined the West Midlands Rail Partnership, are there any plans to extend the West Midlands concessionary rail fares for pensioners' scheme to Worcestershire?"

Answer given

There are no plans at the current time to extend the West Midlands concessionary rail fares scheme to Worcestershire. Doing so would have significant on-going revenue funding implications for the County Council, which the County Council would be unable to meet.

For regular rail users over 60 years of age the senior citizen's rail card is available for £30 per year, which gives one third off Standard and First Class Anytime, Off Peak and Advance rail fares throughout England, Scotland and Wales. These can be bought online through the National Rail Enquiries website or at any staffed railway station.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about the ease of use of various rail travel sites Mr Smith said one of the benefits of belonging to a group of this kind was the opportunity to look for improvements for travellers across the whole region.

QUESTION 10 – Mrs E B Tucker asked Mr Hart:

"A plan for joint delivery of social care and health care in Worcestershire must be in place and agreed with the NHS in 2017 for implementation in 2020. Could the Leader of the Council and/or cabinet members with responsibility indicate what parts of the Children, Families and Communities budget and the Adult Social Care and Public Health budget will remain with the County Council as at present and how much of those budgets will move to joint decision making under the new proposals. Can they assure us that all councillors will be kept informed of progress as this plan is prepared and that the new plan will include mechanisms to ensure that all members are kept up to date on future service policies and developments and are able follow up local issues and casework with regard to this major area of county council responsibilities?"

Answer given

In December 2015 NHS England issued new planning guidance requiring that the NHS develop place based Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs) to cover the period October 2016 – March 2021. STPs are required to have a sub-regional planning footprint larger than Health and Well-Being Board and CCG boundaries. An initial response was submitted to NHS England by the CCGs on 29 January detailing a proposed Worcestershire and Herefordshire planning footprint. A report was submitted to the Worcestershire Health and Well-Being Board on 9 February which described the proposed approach including governance for the development and implementation of the STP which is to be submitted to NHS England by the end of June 2016.

The draft STP is required to reflect local Health and Well-being Strategies and to reference better integration with local authority services, including public health and social care. Whilst the financial aspect of the plan must identify how commissioners and providers will work

together, there are **no** current plans for the County Council to devolve or cede any control over budgets, nor to delegate any of its statutory duties to another agency. The Health and Well-Being Board will have a role in governance of the STP to ensure that it reflects the Worcestershire Health and Well-being Strategy and that it aligns and takes into account the County Council's own plans for public health and social care.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about the devolution of budgets Mr Hart reiterated that there were no current plans for the County Council to devolve or cede any control over budgets, nor to delegate any of its statutory duties to another agency.

QUESTION 11 – Mr G J Vickery had planned to ask Mr Hart:

"In the light of the Health and Well-being Board report on the impact of the Obesity Plan, does the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being feel that there is further scope for intervention by any organisations to address the fact that over 50% of the adult population of Worcestershire is overweight or obese?"

In light of the discussion on this subject at the Health and Well-being Board earlier in the week Mr Vickery withdrew his question formally.