

ELECTED MEMBER QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 14 February 2024

1) Question from Councillor E Fordham to Councillor C Cupit, Cabinet Member for Highways Assets and Transport

“Given the emotional ties and investment from so many people over the bridge locks in Bakewell, can the Council give a public commitment that the solution to the dilemma will be sensitive, in close proximity to the bridge and will ensure no locks are disposed of? Can the council consider progressing a scheme that is comprised public metal framed hearts whereby existing locks can be affixed and to which future locks could be added?”

Response:

“Both Highways’ officers and I fully recognise that this is a sensitive and emotive topic and that locks have been placed on the bridge sometimes in celebration but also sadly sometimes in commemoration of loved ones. We also recognise the huge importance of engaging and communicating with the public on these works that we have to do. Equally, I think as was recognised by a recent *Derbyshire Life* article the future of this issue does divide local opinion and we have received representations on both perspectives and about a variety of issues related to the bridge.

As many will know, but just for the benefit of the Chamber, we have to carry out maintenance works on the bridge which are planned for later this year now which will mean that the locks on the bridge do need to be removed and cannot be reattached. When the works have a confirmed date we have committed to provide several months’ advance notice of this and to communicate it as widely as we can so people can remove their locks if they do want to. Equally we will try and organise a storage period for the collection of any existing locks for any who wish to.

In terms of the future of any future locks that aren’t collected, as well as future ones, we are looking at the possibility of a lock tree or similar. Again I know there are mixed views on this but we are looking at the options and I am happy to reassure you of that. We will discuss these locally when it becomes clearer in terms of location possibilities, so whilst I can’t commit to a specific future scheme here today I hope this does reassure you, Councillor Fordham we will look at all the options. We will be clear on advance communications and updates because we do appreciate this is an emotive issue and we will engage with the local member, community and stakeholders on future options. I know it is something that I have already discussed with Councillor Sutton several times.

Supplementary question:

“Having heard that answer this is a disproportionately emotive issue to those for whom it matters. I understand it is easy to dislike the locks, to hate the locks, to resent the locks, but for those who have placed them there in some context (and I have two constituents for whom this is literally a matter of life and death to them) can I just urge that in the removing of the locks and the “You can collect them period” an alternative will come forward that the timeframe is not over-extended, that there is some point at which it actually ends and the alternative gets put in place because I think if we remove the locks and place them in store to be claimed there is a real risk it will look like we have swept them all away. I don’t believe that all the people who placed locks there will be watching Derbyshire’s media strategies to see those sorts of announcements and I worry that it will just give the impression the Council has swept it away and put it in a shed and the alternative won’t come forward. I would much rather we had a tree coming forward that would be implemented on such and such a date so as to remove that storage uncertainty.”

Response:

“I think the problem is that the manner by which, unless residents who placed the existing locks on the bridge remove them themselves we will have to cut them off because of the nature of it so therefore we wouldn’t be able to place them on a new tree, I think was what you are asking Councillor Fordham wasn’t it?”

Councillor Fordham responded with: “If it is helpful, we will have this dialogue outside the meeting.”

2) Question from Councillor E Fordham to Councillor C Cupit, Cabinet Member for Highway Assets and Transport

“The pot holes across the County are only getting worse as storm after storm batters the country. Is the Council content that it has in place the correct materials, approach and workforce that is enabling an effective repair policy or does the Council recognise the concerns of many residents that the current quality of repairs is poor, botched, hasty and costing the authority excessive money in damage pay-outs and repeat repairs of many of the same pot holes?”

Response:

“I fully acknowledge, understand and share the frustrations of local residents at the current challenges we are facing with our highways. That is why last month, as many will know, I wrote an open letter to residents acknowledging the problems which we are facing and how we are trying to deal with them.

We are in an exceptional period, as I think your question acknowledges, and we have been taking steps to manage this as best we can and to tackle the rise in potholes.

To take the key points of your question in turn, in terms of materials and equipment we are trying to increase hot tarmac and wider sectional resurfacing as well as bumping up with additional equipment and teams. Equally we are still scheduling our planned reactive materials trial for the spring that I have mentioned before to test out new technologies and make sure we are fully utilising them but also what works for the different parts of our county and the different geography.

In terms of approach no one wants to see the same pothole need fixing twice. I think we all agree on this. Sometimes it is necessary just to make a pothole safe particularly under current weather conditions but we are trying to focus on permanent repairs or resurfacing as far as we can. This includes the sectional resurfacing programme I have previously mentioned which is rolling out to over 250 pothole hot spot sites to try to prevent these areas suffering issues with potholes. I understand that includes Newbold Road and Linacre Road in Councillor Fordham's patch in the near future.

To further boost this our reactive teams are being bolstered with additional teams who are carrying out sectional resurfacing in further hot spot areas as well on top of that. Given the weather, the issues and the scale of the county though we do have to do reactive maintenance and pothole repairs which on some occasions are temporary to make an area safe for drivers and pedestrians.

As a final point, and to cover the workforce point, I don't believe it is intended with the question but some of the strong language in your question, and mentioned earlier today again, could be considered a bit offensive to many of our Highways staff who are out in some of the toughest conditions we have seen in decades across the county, including during the storm after storm you mentioned in the many weather warnings we have had. They have been working each day of the week including over the Christmas period, so separate to your question, Councillor Fordham, I just want to note on record my support for our Highways workforce and to thank them for the relentless work that they are doing."

3) Question from Councillor E Fordham to Councillor B Lewis, Leader of the Council

"Following the debate on anti-semitism, can the Leader give an update on measures he has undertaken to pro-actively liaise with groups and individuals associated with that debate across the County - and in Chesterfield in particular? The request follows the undertaking that he personally gave that

he would look to such an approach to calm and aid positive community relations in the light of the Israel-Gaza conflict.”

Response:

I looked at the verbatim minutes the last time that we had the discussion about this. I might have misunderstood what you said but the wording in there and my understanding of what you said at the time led me to believe I would be undertaking some of this work with you or alongside you and hence I was quite glad to get that invitation at the Holocaust Memorial Day in Chesterfield the other Saturday and the ceremony that took place there, so very happy to have a further conversation with you offline about this.

We have had conversations internally with the Community Safety Team and myself and Councillor Hart looking at the situation with regard to issues like anti-Semitism/racism in Derbyshire. We are beginning now to get one or two contacts from residents in Derbyshire about such issues particularly around anti-Semitism as well.

Interestingly the information we have is there has been a 6.5% increase in reported religious hate crimes across Derbyshire in the period between January and December of last year so it is something we definitely need to keep an eye on.”

Supplementary question:

“I am grateful to the Leader for his attendance and participation at the Holocaust event I organised in Chesterfield. He will be equally appalled, I am sure, to know I have had now annual complaints through my door, you know writing of green ink, reporting that I am standing up for foreigners.

Can I ask the Leader to reflect on the significance of the Holocaust Memorial Day and the role he has. When he says “Albanians should not come here” I would suggest he shows a lack of understanding on issues of religious persecution; of LGBT homophobia in Albania and a lack of awareness of the Greater Hitler Plan for Greater Albania leading to some of the Kosovo rebellions.

I am hoping he didn’t mean it in that way but I would ask him to reflect that demonising a race, a nation or a State is identified by the Holocaust Memorial Trust as the first step on the ladder of hatred that leads to genocide.”

Response:

“Councillor Fordham, that is frankly ridiculous. I made those comments in the context of the situation with regard to boats coming over here and the Government and what they did around reducing those numbers of Albanians coming over here. If indeed they are coming over here because of persecution or anything else that is entirely different and they would be dealt with in that way in the asylum system, I am sure. That is not what was meant at all and I will not have that conflation of my words. That is frankly disgusting.”

Due to time constraints, the meeting ended at this point. Members were given the option to forward their questions to the next meeting or request a written response.

4) Question from Councillor J Barron to Councillor J Patten, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

“Will the Cabinet member please update the Council on the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection of Children’s social Care Services?”

This question was forwarded to the next Council meeting on 27 March 2024.

5) Question from Councillor G Kinsella to Councillor S Spencer, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Budget

“The Council’s current financial position will result in significant reductions in non-statutory services. Some of these planned service reductions can be mitigated by attracting external funding. However, cuts to staffing means the remaining staff will only have the capacity to deliver day to day operations. How does the Council propose that officers are given the capacity to carry out the work necessary to identify, bid and develop ‘oven ready’ schemes, attracting external funding?”

Written response:

“In developing the savings proposals, the County Council has gone through a vigorous process to first of all identify savings opportunities and then undertaken work to ensure they can be delivered. The resources to deliver against these proposals is an important factor and departments recognise the priority to deliver the proposals to maintain the financial standing of the organisation.

A programme management approach is therefore being adopted to support delivery of proposed savings and efficiencies in 2024/25 and provide transparency and assurance over delivery. This approach is designed to ensure that all significant proposals are underpinned by a delivery plan and risk assessment and ensure that Council resources are directed appropriately. The Portfolio Direction Group will oversee and monitor delivery

of the savings, alongside financial monitoring. Fees and charges are applied where appropriate to recover the costs of the services provided this is in the line with the County Council's charging policy.

In relation to capacity to develop projects and bids to attract external funding, we are confident that we have the ability to do this. Project lifecycles mean that officers are at different times able to change the mix of their activity between delivery of current projects and securing funding for future projects. In addition, we will make best use of grants designed to support feasibility studies and capacity building across regeneration, sustainable travel, highways and climate change."

6) Question from Councillor R George to Councillor N Hoy, Cabinet Member for Adult Care

"Please can the Cabinet Member explain why spending on private sector care homes has risen by £42 million a year in the last 5 years to £113.6 million, whilst almost 40% of the beds in Derbyshire's own care homes are vacant?"

Written response:

"The figures you have quoted for the spending on private sector care homes is the totality of the spend across residential care homes and nursing care homes for both older people and people of working age and as such any cross reference to vacancies in our directly delivered residential care homes is not relevant."

7) Question from Councillor R George to Councillor C Cupit, Cabinet Member for Highways Assets and Transport

"Please can the Cabinet Member let me know when Whaley Bridge Footpath 105 Wharf Road will be fixed following the complaint last year from a lady with a disability who fell on the huge holes whilst 8 months pregnant?"

Written response:

"Thank you for the question. I know this has been the source of concerns and complaints, and a previous question. I'm sorry to hear of the issues residents have had.

I understand this area is a private non-adopted road, but as footpath 105 runs through it, Derbyshire County Council have a responsibility to keep it accessible as a right of way. In this way, the County Council have, as I understand it, carried out repairs in May 2022 and March 2023 as two recent examples.

An inspector has recently attended the site, but no further defects have been raised at the current time. I'd be happy to discuss this further if that would be helpful."

8) Question from Councillor R George to Councillor S Spencer, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Budget

"Please can the Cabinet Member explain why the Council have abandoned the custom and practice of many decades of engaging in collective consultation on redundancies being made across multiple departments?"

Written response:

"In the spirit of the Trade Union Recognition Agreement, the organisation engaged the recognised trade unions early on its financial position, with discussions on the in-year position being held from September 2023. It is acknowledged that the organisation in previous years has undertaken collective consultation with the recognised trade unions at the respective team level and aligned to the scope of the review in question, irrespective of the scale of anticipated dismissals. However, our organisational context and landscape has significantly changed in the recent months and as a result of these pressures the organisation is required to deploy an increased scale and pace of change, to enable the effective delivery of a balanced budget both in-year and from 2024-25 onwards.

The organisation will continue to undertake collective consultation at the respective team level where it is anticipated that there will be more than 20 dismissals, aligned to our statutory obligation with our recognised trade unions, as opposed to applying this to all service redesigns/reviews. Where the organisation anticipates there will be fewer than 20 dismissals as a result of a service redesign within a particular team, our commitment remains that we will engage with recognised trade unions and impacted employees, as well as continuing to undertake individual consultation where required.

In addition, the organisation remains committed to its continued dialogue with recognised trade unions through ongoing organisational change meetings, Corporate Joint Committee (CJC), Departmental Joint Committee (DJC) and HR workstreams. At the last CJC in January 2024, recognised trade unions commended the work of officers for sharing the forward plan of change and deploying the policy forum which regularly meets to discuss changes to employment policies. Recognised trade unions have been offered a further meeting with both HR and departmental leaders to provide further details on the proposed budget savings, and to further outline the approach to both consultation and engagement within which joint trade unions will be involved."