

Public Document Pack

13. **Question Time - Answers to Written Question** (Pages 3 - 10)

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Council Meeting

5 September 2023

Booklet 1a

Answers to Written Questions

1.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor P Male

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor R Brown, Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources and Councillor O'Boyle, Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change

TEXT OF QUESTION:

“Can the Cabinet Member provide a brief summary of the financial position of City Centre South, with particular reference to the Subsidy Advice Unit report published 3rd August 2023?”

ANSWER:

“The Council has made a mandatory referral to the Subsidy Advice Unit within the Competition and Markets Authority (‘CMA’) as is required under legislative requirements. As the Council has successfully secured £98m from the WMCA, which will be used to support the delivery of City Centre South (‘CCS’), it was required to undertake a Subsidy Analysis Assessment, which was submitted to the CMA under section 53 of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 on 22 June 2023. Their advisory report in response to the Council’s referral was issued on 3rd August and is available to view on the Competition and Market Authority’s website. The report stated clearly that:

“Overall, we consider that the Assessment shows that the Council has carefully considered the subsidy control principles. The Council provided a significant number of documents evidencing decision-making prior to the giving of the subsidy, including for instance the report to Council Cabinet seeking approval for the project, the full business case prepared by West Midlands Combined Authority and several independent reports commissioned by the Council to assist with its decision making.”

The report (together with the recommendations) has been considered by the Council’s legal advisory team who have recommended the next steps to the Council. We now anticipate that the Council will record details of the subsidy on a public database maintained by the Department for Business and Trade in accordance with Section 33(3)(c) of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and will make some minor amendment to the Subsidy Analysis Assessment as recommended by the Subsidy Advice Unit.

The overall financial position in respect of the CCS project remains challenging but positive. SPRL are currently working to submit the Reserved Matter planning application (‘RMA’) later this autumn and are targeting a start on site (demolition) in late Q1 2024. Submission of the RMA has been delayed as a result of very recent changes introduced by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, which require at least two stair cores and fire fighting lifts to be introduced to all residential buildings over 18m high (approximately 6 storeys”).

2.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor P Male**TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor P Hetherton, Cabinet Member for City Services****TEXT OF QUESTION:**

“Can the Cabinet Member provide details of the current maintenance arrangements for the city’s cemeteries?”

ANSWER:

“The bereavement team have had a challenging year in maintaining the city’s cemeteries linked to wet weather conditions and a number of targeted thefts of maintenance equipment. As a result, the team has reviewed existing maintenance programmes to reduce the impact on families and visitors to our facilities.

The maintenance arrangements across the City’s cemeteries are detailed below and are subject to some change mainly linked to weather conditions”.

Activity	Frequency	Other information
Grass Cutting	Every 3 weeks (Feb to November)	Lentons Lane wildflower area cut once a year
Weed Spraying	Throughout March to September as required	
Road Sweeping	Quarterly (Lentons Lane and Canley)	Other cemeteries as required.
Clearing of roads (blowing)	Daily during grass cutting season	
Removal of dead wreaths	As required (daily)	
Top up of graves	As required (daily)	
Litter picking	Daily	
Grave section turfing programme	April and September	
Hedging	October to January (winter works)	
Tree works	Throughout the year as required	

3.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor P Male

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor R Brown, Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources and Councillor J O’Boyle, Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change

TEXT OF QUESTION:

“Can the Cabinet Member provide details of the current working at home arrangements, including the extent of under used office space within the Council estate?”

ANSWER:

“As an employer the Council has always offered flexible working including home working, but the type of flexibility offered is dependent on service need/provision. During Covid, as an employer, we developed a flexible and agile toolkit to support both employees and managers on navigating their way through the new ways of working. We developed four worker ‘types’; homeworker, fixed worker – where their pattern of work is set and takes place in one location, flexible worker, so the employee works from one council location and/or home and finally the agile worker who can work from numerous council locations and/or home. As part of this process, we undertook several health and well-being surveys across the council to ensure we were providing effective support including one post- covid where employees were very clear they wanted to retain their flexibility for a variety of reasons including better work life balance and improved mental health. In the marketplace, flexible and agile working is now an essential part of the recruitment and retention of employees, and we offer flexible working from commencement. For many employees, the greater flexibility also means they have reduced travel costs which is a plus point in the cost-of-living crisis. However, we are currently reviewing the effectiveness of this approach, to ensure that we are maintaining overall productivity levels as well as remaining an attractive and considerate employer.

This increased flexibility has created a decrease in occupancy over our office estate; surveys have been undertaken to measure occupancy over the last few months. Obviously, occupancy varies dependant on working patterns, days of the week and time of day however average occupancy of Friargate (excluding meeting rooms) is between 25-30% over a working week with Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday generally being busier whilst Monday and Friday are less busy. This reduced occupancy is mirrored across our estate albeit Broadgate House tends to be slightly busier than Friargate.

This reduced occupancy creates opportunities to rationalise our estate and contribute to the Council’s overall budgetary position. In consultation with the Cabinet Member Property Services are currently undertaking a strategic property review of the Council’s property holdings, both commercial and operational, to identify efficiencies. A significant savings target has been attributed to this review. As a result of this we are in detailed discussions with three external organisations each of whom are interested in leasing a floor at Friargate. If lettings are achieved this will create significant additional income for the Council subject to team relocation within the building and the rent generated would contribute towards this target.

In addition, our work to address current and future budget deficits will include options for wider estate rationalisation”.

4. **QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor P Male**

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor P Hetherton, Cabinet Member for City Services

TEXT OF QUESTION:

“Can the Cabinet Member confirm the amount of money received from the Combined Authority specifically for pothole repair and how this money has been allocated across the city?”

ANSWER:

Amount	Works Description	Status
£67,253	A444 Jimmy Hill Way - Planned Patching	Complete
£46,586	A4114 Whitley Interchange - Planned Patching	Upcoming
£500,000	Potholes and other carriageway defects across all wards in the city, as and when identified via routine highway safety inspections throughout the financial year 2023/24	Ongoing
£613,839	Total Received from Combined Authority	

5. **QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor J Gardiner**

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor D Welsh, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities

TEXT OF QUESTION:

“As part of the Local Plan review, is the Cabinet Member considering stronger policies to protect our listed building heritage and high value vegetation covered by TPO’s from those who see their sudden, summary removal as a means to effect the development they want, regardless of any fines that may be incurred? Furthermore, is he able to confirm there will be an absolute presumption against the redevelopment of such lands affected by the sudden loss of heritage buildings and vegetation except for the like for like reinstatement of what was lost?”

ANSWER:

“All Councillors will be aware from the Local Plan Review consultation documents that we are asking various questions about heritage, tree protection and wider environmental management. The purpose of the review process is to assess whether our existing Local Plan policies are fit for purpose - which will include whether they are strong enough to meet our needs and objectives.

I can confirm that there is and there will remain a presumption against the redevelopment of sites for alternative uses where a protected heritage or environmental asset has been inappropriately lost.”

6.	<p>QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor R Simpson</p> <p>TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor P Hetherton, Cabinet Member for City Services</p>
<p>TEXT OF QUESTION:</p> <p>“How much has Coventry City Council been fined for failing to meet its recycling targets in the last five complete financial years?”</p> <p>ANSWER:</p> <p>“Nothing. There are no official recycling targets in place and no system for fining authorities”.</p>	

7.	<p>QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor J Lepoidevin</p> <p>TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor P Seaman, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Councillor K Sandhu, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills</p>
<p>TEXT OF QUESTION:</p> <p>“The Council for Disabled Children has produced learning examples from local authorities who have been successful in their bids for a slice of the 30M innovation funding to support children and young people with a variety of needs, including learning difficulties and complex needs.</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member provide colleagues with further information as to why Coventry was unsuccessful in its bid to the DfE, for short bid innovation funding?</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member commit to the LA exploring best practice in other LA's disability services for families who do not meet the means tested thresholds for disability provision? This would include putting a programme of activities together delivered through community organisations across the City, so that all families with disabled children can have an equal opportunity to access services?”</p> <p>ANSWER:</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member provide colleagues with further information as to why Coventry was unsuccessful in its bid to the DfE, for short innovation funding?</p> <p>“The vision for the innovation bid was that children and young people would be enabled to design and commission the services they want and need to match their interests, skills and talents. Breaks would be delivered in an environment of their choosing and approved activities would demonstrate the development of a skill / outcome supporting the Preparing for Adulthood pillars: Good health,</p>	

meaningful employment, independent living and housing, friends and relationships.

The offer would be open to a broad range of need across the 6 to 25 year age range. The scoping exercise had identified a range of non-profit traded services that have proven experience in working with CYP with complex needs across the City, and there had been an initial commitment from these services to expand their offer. It also sought to establish community 'bases' where children and young people could meet regularly to partake in and plan future activities together.

The DfE response to Coventry's bid for Innovation funding highlighted strengths relating to the identification of gaps within the city and the vision held for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). However, more specific information was required by the DfE around the long-term qualitative and quantitative outcomes for children and young people based on the proposal for the development of services”.

Can the Cabinet Member commit to the LA exploring best practice in other LA's disability services for families who do not meet the means tested thresholds for disability provision? This would include putting a programme of activities together delivered through community organisations across the City, so that all families with disabled children can have an equal opportunity to access services?”

“The Local Authority is aware of challenges faced by the families of disabled children in relation to accessing local activities, where families do not meet the thresholds for disability provision. This has been highlighted via feedback from families and has been raised by Councillors and several constituents this summer. Whilst there is no statutory duty to make arrangements unless a family meets the relevant thresholds, the Local Authority is committed to improving equal opportunities to access services. For example, the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) programme does make provision for eligible children with SEND as do many community providers including CV Life. SENDIASS do include details of any activity brought to their attention in their newsletter to parents, however we will further improve the coordination of this information.

The Local Authority is committed to exploring best practice in other Local Authorities, and to coordinate the programme of activities already delivered through community organisations across the City. We can also explore whether the HAF programme can extend its reach to support more children with SEND, however this would have financial implications and would result in direct costs to parents to access resources where they did not meet eligibility criteria.

The development of services will be in coproduction with children, young people and their families”.

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