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Law and Governance

Julie Newman
Director of Law and Governance
Council House
Earl Street
Coventry CV1 5RR

14. **Question Time** (Pages 3 - 10)

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Council Meeting

2 September 2025

Booklet 1

Answers to Written Questions

1.	QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor J Lepoidevin TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor N Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities
	TEXT OF QUESTION: "Many of our constituents are concerned about the apparent lack of information as to the number of asylum seekers in the city and the inevitable speculation that arises leading to community tension. Would the Leader be prepared to clarify how he proposes to deal with these concerns?" ANSWER: "I share the concerns raised regarding transparency about the asylum system. As leaders of our communities', we must tackle misinformation and unhelpful speculation, and advocate proactively for building social cohesion and strong supportive communities. The UKs asylum and immigration arrangements are managed by the Home Office and controlled by the UK Government. Information on the number of asylum seekers in the City is published by the Home Office and is publicly available and can be found at https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-regional-and-local-authority-data#latest-table. There is an inevitable lag in the publication of this data. Since 2019 the Council has experienced several instances of decisions being made by the Home Office or their contractors Serco with little consultation or local discussion. Since last year's General Election, however, we have noted the reduction in the number of asylum hotels in the city from three to one and welcome the Governments policy to end hotel use for asylum seekers. Hotels are not appropriate accommodation for asylum seekers and we have increased confidence that the representations made and the lobbying on behalf of the city is being listened to and acted upon. Following recent protests and demonstrations regarding the location of asylum contingency hotels, I understand that the Home Office are currently reviewing the levels of transparency in this system, and the Council very much welcomes this."

2.	QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor E Reeves TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor O'Boyle, Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change
	TEXT OF QUESTION: "We live in one of the most nature deprived cities in one of the most nature deprived countries in the world so Rachel Reeves comments about councils being allowed to build on allotments is alarming. This council has committed to protecting green spaces and biodiversity in the climate change strategy and to

the 30by30 pledge. Allotments are a haven for biodiversity and important for peoples physical and mental health. As yet we do not have a working metric in the One Coventry plan to measure biodiversity loss in the city and so it is vital we protect what green spaces we have while we get that up and running.

With that in mind will the Cabinet member commit to protecting all allotments and not allow any more to be put forward for planning?

ANSWER:

“The Council are committed to supporting nature recovery across the city, which is a key objective within our Climate Change Strategy. We are working on developing a metric to measure progress on nature recovery, linked to the West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy which will be formally adopted later this year.

Allotments are important assets for our communities to grow food, as well as supporting wildlife and no land has been sold for development. The Council is committed to protecting all of the city’s allotments as part of any future development.”

3.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor G Lewis

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor R Brown, Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources

TEXT OF QUESTION:

“In February, Coventry City Council signed a £500,000 contract with Palantir, a company that has attracted significant public concern over its work in defence, surveillance and policing, including its role in Israel's Genocide in Palestine. When the council has previously enacted cuts to vital organisations and services across the city including libraries, will the cabinet member for finance state on record that this contract will not be renewed, and instead the money be reappropriated to public and community services which the people of Coventry deeply value and rely on?”

ANSWER:

“This matter was raised during a recent Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) item discussing the Council’s Procurement Strategy. A review is therefore currently underway.”

4.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor G Lewis

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Cllr G Duggins, Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership

TEXT OF QUESTION:

“Can the Cabinet Member justify why Coventry City Council, through its wholly-owned company Tom White Waste, is breaking the strike in Birmingham, thereby undermining the workers fight for fair pay and conditions, weakening the pressure for a fair local government settlement offer and effectively prolonging the dispute to the detriment of residents?”

ANSWER:

“Birmingham City Council has experienced service disruption as a result of industrial action by their waste management service teams, which caused domestic and commercial waste to remain uncollected across Birmingham for periods of time.

Birmingham declared a ‘major incident’ on 31 March 2025 to allow emergency powers for Birmingham City Council to address the heightening environmental and public health issues resulting from the uncollected waste across the city. As well as a number of internal measures by Birmingham, these powers also allowed them to engage with other local authorities and local commercial operators to request assistance to control the environmental and public health issues.

Coventry City Council were not in a position to respond with support given that the Council operates a lean service with no additional capacity for external deployment.

Birmingham City Council approached Tom White Waste as a local commercial operator to provide support. Whilst Tom White is owned by Coventry City Council, it is an arm’s length commercial company with delegation to pursue and deliver services to customers across the Midlands and nationally.

Tom White entered into a short-term contract to provide Birmingham City Council with waste collection services from the end of April 2025. Tom White continues to provide this service on a short-term basis.”

5.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor J Gardiner

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor J O'Boyle, Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change

TEXT OF QUESTION:

“What is the current status of the Riley Square redevelopment following IRD’s administration?

Can the Council provide a timeline for resuming the project, and will it seek new developers or take direct control of the regeneration to ensure it meets community needs?

How much public funding has been allocated to the Riley Square project to date, and how will the council ensure that future redevelopment prioritizes affordable housing and public benefit over private profit, especially given IRD’s failure?”

ANSWER:

“The Council granted a long leasehold over Riley Square to Innovative Retail Developments Limited (IRDL), at the end of 2019, providing the opportunity for the private sector to invest funds into the commercial retail elements of Riley Square. No public money was allocated to this project.

Unfortunately, IRDL experienced financial difficulties and were placed into administration by their creditors. The Council has recently been advised that as from the 4th August 2025, Joint Receivers, Charles Ranby-Gorwood and Arabella Ranby-Gorwood of CRG Insolvency & Financial Recovery have been appointed to take possession and control of the assets of IRDL.

As the Joint Receivers of IRDL now hold the long leasehold interest in the commercial elements of Riley Square, the Council does not have control of the property. As such the Receivers are responsible for managing the property but also are required to look to recover funds relating to the loan agreement with IRDL’s creditors. It is anticipated that the Joint Receivers will be looking to sell the leasehold interest to another investor / developer to take on the development opportunity at Riley Square.

The Council will be notified of any proposed change to the ownership of the leasehold interest and will be extending an invitation to any new party to discuss their intentions.

In the meantime, the Council is in dialogue with all parties to consider what options may be available to facilitate the development of Riley Square. “

6.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor M Lapsa

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Councillor P Seaman, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

TEXT OF QUESTION:

“Could the Cabinet Member please confirm:

1. Whether any children in the care of Coventry City Council were identified among the victims of the grooming and sexual abuse crimes committed by the individuals convicted in 2017 in relation to the Coventry rape gang case?

2. How many children currently or previously in the care of the Council have reported concerns or made complaints regarding grooming or sexual abuse over the past twenty years?”

ANSWER:

Answer to Question 1 above

“For reasons of confidentiality and to protect the identities of the victims, the Council cannot disclose details of individual cases in a public forum.

What can be stated is that, in direct response to the serious concerns raised by the convictions in 2017, the Council worked with partners to strengthen its approach to tackling exploitation. A dedicated, multi-disciplinary service, the Horizon team, was established to identify, prevent, and respond to child exploitation in all its forms. This team works collaboratively with police, health, education, and voluntary sector partners to ensure that risks are addressed swiftly and children receive the protection and support they need.

The Council fully recognises the seriousness of these crimes and the profound impact on victims, families, and the wider community. Safeguarding children is our highest priority, and we are committed to ensuring lessons are learned and acted upon. Ofsted has noted improvements in our safeguarding arrangements, and we continue to build on these through ongoing training, strong partnership working, and a relentless focus on protecting vulnerable children.”

Answer to Question 2 above:

“Providing a precise number in response to this question would require a manual review of thousands of individual children’s case records over a twenty-year period including paper records for more historic case records. This would not be appropriate or proportionate given the scale of the task and the sensitivity of the information involved.

What is important to highlight is that the Council recognises that all children can be at risk of exploitation and sexual abuse, and that children who are in care may face increased vulnerability. Safeguarding children and young people remains our highest priority. The Council has robust policies, procedures, and specialist teams in place to identify, respond to, and support children where concerns about grooming or sexual abuse are raised.

In addition, the Council works closely with partners, including the police and health services, to ensure that all allegations or concerns are taken seriously, investigated thoroughly, and that appropriate protective and therapeutic support is provided.”

7.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor M Lapsa

TO BE ANSWERED BY: Cllr N Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities

TEXT OF QUESTION:

“Could the Cabinet Member confirm how many hotels and how many houses of multiple occupancy are currently being used within the Coventry boundary to house illegal migrants/asylum seekers and how many bed spaces they provide?

How many of these premises have received planning permission for a material change of use to facilitate the housing of migrant/ asylum seekers and how many are awaiting a planning decision?”

ANSWER:

“Arrangements for the accommodation and support of asylum seekers in the UK are made by the UK Government’s Home Office with the support of their contractor Serco Ltd.

The Council understands that at present the Home Office / Serco are utilising one Coventry hotel for the purpose of contingency asylum accommodation. There has been no application submitted for any change of use of this hotel as described in the question. Capacity at the hotel depends on the number of rooms being utilised by Home Office / Serco and the configuration of those rooms. Numbers have varied over the course of the period the hotel has been used for this purpose with the last published data identifying 64 residents.

Records show that there are currently 278 Houses in Multiple Occupation either with licenses issued or pending application for housing Asylum Seekers with a total of 1287 maximum permitted occupants. This number is the maximum number permitted to occupy each of the premises through the HMO license and does not necessarily reflect the actual number of individuals in occupation.

In respect of the question in relation to planning, when granting planning permission for a material change of use of premises to a HMO, the end user is unlikely to be a material planning consideration. Small HMOs would not necessarily need planning permission due to matters such as permitted development/article 4 Directions at the time.

Larger properties being occupied as hostels or sui generis HMOs (7 or more occupiers) need planning permission. Of the 16 within the City understood to be occupied by asylum seekers, all have planning permission or Lawful
Development Certificates for 7 or more occupiers.

The Council takes HMO licensing particularly seriously given the known impact of large numbers of HMO properties in some Coventry communities and uses the powers available to us to ensure compliance.”

8.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY: Councillor M Lapsa

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

TEXT OF QUESTION:

“Can the Cabinet Member for City Services inform us how many skips have been supplied to housing estates and other areas where there has been an issue with fly tipping for large items to be disposed of within the last 3 years?

Could the Cabinet Member also give us a breakdown for specific wards with the associated cost?”

ANSWER:

“We have not provided skips for residents across the City to dispose of large items for a number of years.”