

b) Question asked by Councillor RG Allen and addressed to the Leader of Council

“Will the Leader please provide Members details of and key conclusions of the research undertaken by and on behalf of HBBC on the anticipated effects of footfall in Castle Street and Hinckley town centre, as a result of moving the council offices from Hinckley Town centre out to Hawley Road?”

Response from Councillor SL Bray

“It is important to set the context that there are many impacts on footfall in the town centre, of which this development is but one. There are a number of other developments, some involving this Council, but others also of a private nature.

The Town Centre Partnership, working with this Council, has installed footfall counters at various locations in the town over the last year and, whilst week by week monitoring is proving useful, longer term comparisons and projections can not be made on the information period over which data has been collected. This will be undertaken and analyses made as we build up our information base.

As Cllr Allen will be aware, the location of the Hub, at the south of the centre, is a balance to the developments already in place in the north west quarter of the town - the Atkins Building and the New College; both of which are fully anticipated to increase town centre footfall from that area. I will be happy to show longer term comparisons and projections, when we have more meaningful information to present.”

c) Questions asked by Councillor PS Bessant and addressed to the Leader of Council

“Would the Leader please provide Members with an update on progress around securing appropriate and considerate redevelopment of the Council Offices site adjacent to the Argents Mead Park – whilst still achieving the £3 M capital receipt the Administrations Medium Term Financial strategy recent adopted?”

Response from Councillor SL Bray

“The procurement process agreed by Executive on 12 October 2011 has commenced. At the end of Stage One - inviting expressions of interest - three bids were received from potential developers. Stage Two of the process will commence imminently and all three bidders will be asked to prepare schematic proposals and submit financial offers.

The outcome of this process should be known by the end of June 2012 and will be reported to the next available Council.”

d) Question asked by Councillor PS Bessant and addressed to the Executive Member for Housing

“Would the Housing Portfolio Holder please update Members on how many new Council Houses this authority will be adding to its stock in the next 10 years given the financial ‘headroom’ the HRA buyout now provides?”

Response from Councillor DS Cope

“Can I remind him of the answers given to both Scrutiny Commission and Council recently on the positive steps being taken to address this issue.

As Cllr Bessant is aware, HRA self financing provides an opportunity, never before available to council landlords, to positively invest in and develop their council house services for the benefit of current and future tenants. This Administration is embracing these new opportunities and from the 1 April 2012 we are able to drive our own priorities and make decisions which will impact for future generations.

The new arrangements offer a package of exciting opportunities relating to: increasing the amount of housing stock by new build, acquisitions and bringing empty homes into use, as well as improvements to our existing properties to raise our standards even higher than they are already. Whilst I would want to ensure that any adopted strategy is for the benefit of all tenants, present and future, it is important that we consult existing tenants as part of this process.

Now that the Council has agreed the overall structure for the debt repayment which secures the maximum headroom, work has begun to produce a strategy which will be underpinned by robust information, informed by tenant consultation and produce maximum value for money. As stated to both Scrutiny Commission and Council, a HRA Strategy and Business Plan will be presented to Members in June. Until that point, it would be purely speculative to put forward any figures, whilst that work is undertaken. I am sure that Cllr Bessant and all Members in this Chamber would want a strategy of this magnitude and impact to receive full and detailed consideration; which is what this Administration intends to do.”

e) Question asked by Councillor JS Moore and addressed to the Leader of Council

“The Council’s letterheads bear the ‘Fairtrade’ logo and claim Hinckley and Bosworth is proud to be a Fairtrade Borough. Therefore, would the Leader detail in precise terms to what extent the Council’s commitment to Fairtrade is reflected in terms of the drinks, snacks, refreshments, foods, wines, buffets, etc that are available on a regular basis in all of the Authority’s premises (including the Mayor’s Parlour) and at all events, receptions, etc organised by the Borough Council?”

Response from Councillor SL Bray

“As it happens, I have much of the information readily to hand, as Cllr Hulbert raised the same query last August. The response that was given then still applies. It was:

Committee Rooms 1 and 3 - Café Bar only dispenses Fairtrade Coffee, with optional Fairtrade sugar. The coffee that is available from the Café Bar in Committee Room 3 is Fairtrade coffee which is purchased in large tins, with the machine being replenished as required.

Committee Room 2 - Flavia Machine dispensing Rainforest Alliance tea and coffee. To ensure ethical goods are used, we did request that Flavia supply Rainforest Alliance as they do not currently supply Fairtrade. With the type of machine, we are unable to use alternative suppliers for the drinks sachets. This has been assessed recently, and was agreed that it was not economically viable to replace the machine at this stage with the imminent relocation to the Hinckley Hub. Fairtrade options are to be available when we move to the Hub.

There are three hot drink pay vend machines within the council offices and one at Middlefield Lane Depot, all of which have Fairtrade options for coffee, hot chocolate and tea. This is supplied by Selecta who replenish and maintain the machines.

In addition, it is a requirement in any contracts we have with outside caterers that they provide a specified amount of Fairtrade goods in any provision they make for

Council events. Provision in the Mayor's Parlour is at the discretion of the Mayor in office in any specific year."

Agenda Item 8 - Position Statement of the Leader of the Council – 17 April 2012

Mr Mayor, fellow Members, Officers, members of the public and media.

As you will have seen recently in the local press, most notably on the front page of the Hinckley Times, the final procedural hurdle in the development of the Hinckley Bus Station site has been cleared successfully. The Secretary of State has approved the Compulsory Purchase Order to enable the necessary land acquisitions to be made, which means that it is now all systems go for completion by the end of 2014.

This has been a necessarily lengthy process, to ensure that all interested parties have been engaged and consulted, and, where possible, relocation of existing business secured. We have stuck with it over the last five years, knowing that the prize to be gained would be worth all the effort. As a result, the town and the surrounding area can look forward to an exciting regeneration – economically, environmentally and socially – and to having a town to be proud of!

Much sooner than that, everyone can look forward to joining in the many events planned nationally and locally to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. As a Borough Council, we are playing our full part in promoting events and ensuring that unnecessary red tape and costs are not put in the way of local people wishing to hold street parties of other events to celebrate an almost unique event in our history. We are proud to be giving this support.

We also, along with other Councils, face a number of challenges during 2012/13. Whilst this Council has an enviable record of sound financial planning and effective management – a record which I expect will be confirmed for 2011/12 – the financial challenges in the lead up to 2013/14 will test even this Council to our limits!

We still await the detailed arrangements and requirements relating to the localisation of business rates, but it has become increasingly clear that we are unlikely to see benefits of the scale originally envisaged during the consultation in late summer 2011. In recent weeks announcements have been few, so it remains a case of 'watch this space, but don't hold your breath'

Whatever happens, localisation of business rates and of Council Tax Discount (as it now seems to be) will both commence from April 2013; and the latter is of even more concern than the former, requiring, as it does, that local authorities meet a reduction in expenditure (because of a reduction in grant) of 10%. At the same time, our room to manoeuvre is severely limited by a requirement that we give protection to over 50% of current claimants. Whilst few, if any, would argue with this position, the fact is that the more protections on offer, the greater is the pressure to either significantly reduce the support to those who remain unprotected or to reduce costs by reducing other services: a choice we will face in the very near future.

In an attempt to meet this challenge, the seven 'billing' authorities in Leicestershire (the District Councils) and the main precepting authorities (the County Council, Police and Fire and Rescue) are working together to identify if a countywide scheme, with some local variations, can be developed to minimise the financial risks to all. The timescale for this work is very tight, as we must have developed a scheme, have consulted on it publicly, set the Council Tax Base and put the whole thing in place by January 2013 – and we have yet to see any regulations, still to be agreed and published! Yet again, local authorities, and especially Districts, are being asked to achieve the near impossible; and, yet again, we will do it – but it will not be easy.

We also are working very closely and constructively with our District and county partners on the issue of Troubled Families (formerly 'Families with Complex Needs'). Whilst there are a number of different criteria which determine such families, on whatever measures used, there are estimated to be between 250 and 300 such families in Hinckley and Bosworth; the second highest in the county after Charnwood. Unusually, but helpfully, up front funding is being provided by Communities and Local Government in the form of an 'attachment' payment per family, as well as ongoing payments by results in the longer term. Discussions on the necessary match funding are taking place between partners and this Council will play its part in ensuring that the families in our Borough who are most in need of help receive that support in a far more integrated way than hitherto, so that their lives and those of the wider communities are improved now and for the future.

Mr Mayor, this statement is a mix of celebration, but also of challenge. That is the role of local District government in the twenty-first century; a role that we should be proud to undertake on behalf of our communities.

Agenda Item 17 – Motion (a) received from Councillor MT Mullaney

This motion has been withdrawn.