
Essex County Council Meeting 8 October 2019

Answers to Written Questions

Agenda Item 12

1. By Councillor Butland of the Leader of the Council

'It is now over 18 months since the Essex Economic Commission published its report 'Enterprising Essex: Meeting the Challenge'

The report identified four keys challenges:

- (I) Exploiting the potential of the Greater Essex economy;
- (II) Enabling business growth;
- (III) Addressing the skills challenge; and
- (IV) Improving connectivity.

Would the Leader inform members of the progress being made by his Administration in tackling each of these four key challenges?'

Reply

'Challenge 1. Exploiting the potential of the Greater Essex economy

The multi-centred character of Essex was strongly identified in the commission and ECC have led the targeted response to this challenge. Our strategy is to ensure that Essex has a business environment that targets and enables productive and knowledge-based industries to thrive.

As of June 2019, Essex has secured more than £100m of SELEP LGF grant funding which has so far delivered 5,684 jobs, significantly higher than Kent LEP so far (3,094). Projects in Essex have included the Chelmsford City Growth Area Scheme, Colchester Broadband Infrastructure and the A127/A130 Fairglen Interchange new link road. GPF loan funding of more than £9m has also been secured to support projects such as the Parkside Office Village (business space targeting SME's at Uni Essex) and Harlow West Essex (Harlow Enterprise Zone access project).

We are taking a targeted approach to intervention through focusing on four locality areas of Harlow, Tendring, Clacton and Basildon. Through this work we have worked closely with District colleagues to secure development funding of £300,000 to develop business cases for government as part of the Future High Streets Fund in Clacton and Harlow with the opportunity to secure investment from government of up to £25m. Work is also ongoing with Basildon Borough Council to deliver a piece

of work in partnership with the National Infrastructure Commission which will develop strategies to improve local transport connections, unlock job opportunities and deliver much-needed new homes.

In light of the commission highlighting the limited supply of 'grow on space' in Essex, we commissioned BBP Regeneration (in 2018) to carry out a survey into the Employment Land Opportunities across Essex encompassing the current supply and demand of Industrial and Office space. We are currently reviewing different sites identified and exploring opportunities where these can be taken forward.

ECC's inward investment provision (Invest Essex) supported 61 Inward Investment projects in 2018/19, leading to the relocation of 8 businesses into Essex, including 3 large employers, and the creation of 1290 new jobs.

Challenge 2: Enabling business growth

We have been enabling and supporting the development of strategic commercial space across the county to enable business growth. Projects include; the new Innovation Centre (40,000 sqft) and Parkside Office Village phase 3 (51,355 sqft) at the University of Essex's Knowledge Gateway; ARU's Innovation Centres in Chelmsford (10,000 sqft) and at Harlow Science Park (10,000 sqft, due to open in early 2020); and the Flight Path phase 2 development in Epping 40,000 sqft).

Development of growing and emerging sectors is key for the success of the Essex Economy, therefore we are working with partners to establish platforms to enhance the growth of these. These include supporting the North Essex Energy Group (NEEG) to unlock energy and low carbon-related growth in the North Essex area and beyond; and the Chelmsford Tech Ambassadors group to support the growth of the cluster of tech business located in Essex.

Challenge 3. Addressing the skills challenge

We have enhanced further education provision in Essex - working with colleges, SELEP and local district authorities to establish the Stansted Airport College, the Centre for Health and Development (Colchester) and to deliver the second phase of the STEM Innovation Campus in Braintree. The ground-breaking Stansted Airport College is the first on site college of any airport in the UK, focussing on developing a highly skilled and diverse workforce that a growing and nationally significant airport requires.

Alongside partners, we have been working to increase the uptake and achievement of higher level technical skills for both young people and adults through a number of initiatives, these have included; the Harlow Works programme to support in work progression; influencing how £2m ESF money is spent across Essex; and ensuring that residential & commercial developments will be required to submit an Employment and Skills Plan (ESP) as part of their Section 106 to support apprenticeships, outreach, work placements and employment opportunities.

We produce and administer the Essex Skills Evidence Base for use by district

colleagues, schools and training providers to secure additional funding for the area and to direct central government provision.

Progress has continued to be made on reducing NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) in Essex. Numbers have continued to fall, to 842 (0.6% of the cohort), this figure being lower than the same period last year. In June 19, Essex was ranked 60 out of 152 Local Authorities for NEET & Unknown with 4.4%

Challenge 4. Improving connectivity

Essex is to receive £318 million of government Housing and Infrastructure Funding (HiF) across two multi-million-pounds projects. These are the North East Bypass and Beaulieu Railway Station in Chelmsford, and the A120/A133 link road and rapid transit system in Colchester and north east Essex. Improvements to infrastructure are also being made to boost the economy through the creation of junction 7a on the M11 and to junctions 7 and 8.

In 2018/19 Superfast Essex enabled more than 20,500 homes and businesses to access superfast fibre broadband. Meaning that over 120,000 homes and businesses are now enabled. Superfast Essex has also secured a £5m DEFRA Grant to help rural businesses access full fibre broadband.

In order to support our coastal communities, we have commissioned (along with 13 other local authorities and SELEP) work to develop a Coastal Communities Economic Prospectus. This prospectus will be used to identify and focus on action that will grow coastally based business or create conditions for growth and to influence government for coordinated action in coastal areas.'

2. By Councillor Butland of the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care

'In September 2013 an Independent Commission, led by Sir Thomas Hughes-Hallett, published a report entitled 'Who will care?'. The report set out "five high-impact solutions to prevent a future crisis in health and social care in Essex".

The five solutions were:

- (I) Agree a new understanding between the public sector and the people of Essex;
- (II) Prevent unnecessary crises in care;
- (III) Mobilise community resources;
- (IV) Use data and technology to the advantage of the people of Essex; and
- (V) Ensure clear leadership, vision and accountability.

Would the Portfolio Holder for Health & Adult Social Care make a statement setting out the progress made in implementing these five solutions?'

Reply

‘The Who Will Care commission was a helpful and influential piece that has impacted strongly on the development and work of the Wellbeing, Public Health and Communities team’s Strategic Approach as well as Adult Social Care. I should, of course, acknowledge my own involvement therein as vice-chairman. Much has happened:

Agree a New Understanding ~We are recasting of the role of the County Council with communities including working with local place-based Facebook Administrators who identify and tackle their local issues. We support them with microgrants, events and training. In parallel our recast relationship with EALC is seen nationally as best practice in enabling parishes

Prevent Crises ~Adult Social Care are working with NHS and other partners around early intervention and prevention with new Early Intervention and Prevention teams including social workers as part of multidisciplinary neighbourhood teams preventing needs from escalating. Crucially we have seen permanent admissions into residential care fall steadily since Who Will Care.

Mobilise Community Resources~We have developed community led solutions to tackle wellbeing challenges including a peer-led weight management service that has increased activity by a third with weight loss compatible with the best NHS services. Work with wider partners includes the Livewell Child childhood obesity work with Braintree District Council recognised as best practice in the NHS prevention green paper and the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot

Technology~ We have piloted the assistive technology to support people to live independently and are currently considering Essex-wide role out. We are working with NHS partners on a shared care record. We are exploring the potential of smart wearable clothing in prevention including the potential for ‘smart socks’ to prevent falls. We have improved access to sexual health services (as well as cost effectiveness) by using an on-line service SH24 offering confidential online advice supported by postal diagnostic kits and prescriptions.

System Leadership~ Partnerships have matured including the Essex Assembly, the Essex Health and Wellbeing Board, District County Health and Wellbeing Forum, and the NHS Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships. This has yielded benefits – the success in the Sport England LDP award was in large part due to the strong united leadership across borough, district, county, NHS and community demonstrated to Sport England.

There is, of course, much more to be done. Expectations of what the state can provide at national or local level continue in large measure. We must continue to reach into communities too often forgotten or on the margins, such as those with mental illness. System leadership has to be achieved within the context of a

National Health Service determined to focus on STPs which is, of course, conflicting with our own county-wide responsibilities. Finally, all of this is placed in the context of a population whose needs are growing in quantity and complexity.'

3. By Councillor Pond of the Cabinet Member for Customer, Corporate, Culture and Communities

'Will the Cabinet Member please consider making access to those services provided by the Essex Record Office which are behind a paywall free for local historians and researchers to use within Essex Libraries, as they are in ERO itself? Otherwise, such researchers who live elsewhere in the County are at a great disadvantage compared with the Chelmsford based.'

Reply

'The Essex Record Office's online subscription service has been in place since 2011. Access to records is free to users who attend the office itself, but in line with other local authority archive services, users pay for the convenience of accessing or using the records online.'

To provide free access to material behind the paywall to users within all Essex Libraries would require a technical solution which is expected to carry significant cost.

However, Essex Archives Online (of which the subscription service forms a part) does include a wide range of material which is available free to logged on users, including pictorial collections, as well as sound and video material.

The ERO in Chelmsford is centrally located in Essex and therefore readily accessible. However, free access to the material behind the paywall is also available at the staffed ERO Archive Access Point located in Saffron Walden Library.'

4. By Councillor Buckley of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

'Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that whilst a single pavement defect is often rightly rated as low risk, an accumulation of such low risks on a short stretch of pavement becomes a significant risk and should be considered a higher priority for repair.'

Reply

'I thank the member for Wickford Crouch for his question regarding pavement defects.'

Inspectors will take into account the overall condition of a footway when inspecting it

and this condition assessment informs our consideration of patching or more extensive surface treatments. However, each defect found will be categorised accordingly in case any individual defect needs more urgent attention within a shorter time period than a planned, more extensive surface treatment.'

5. By Councillor Buckley of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

'Will the Cabinet Member give an update on the works and performance of the redesigned roundabout at Golden Jubilee Way Wickford, in particular with regard to the significantly increased congestion at Southend Road and regarding outstanding works left incomplete when the main contractor left the site.'

Reply

'I thank the member for Wickford Crouch for his question regarding Golden Jubilee Way, Wickford.

The works are programmed for the half term week to minimise the impact on the wider community and I thank residents for their understanding while the works are carried out. In addition, the Developer was instructed to attend site last week to ensure everything was safe and unnecessary equipment was removed. Once the work is complete after half term, we will make sure the site is clear before signing them off as complete.'

6. By Councillor Scordis of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

'How much has the council's legal team spent on defending personal injury cases due to highway defects?'

Reply

'I thank the member for Abbey for his question regarding costs relating to personal injury claims.

Essex County Council legal dept has spent £151,705.46 defending personal injury claims in 2018/19. For context, it is important to understand that our claim repudiation rate is over 90%.'

7. By Councillor Young of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

'Given our climate change emergency, and the dangers associated with using glyphosates please will ECC desist from using this weed killer as soon as possible as this product has been linked to serious conditions and is detrimental to wellbeing.

Will ECC consider planting wildflower corridors to encourage insects?’

Reply

‘Essex County Council only uses chemicals when needed. Where possible, we use other alternatives, such as vinegar sprays.

ECC are proud to say that in most of our Country Parks, no chemical weed killers are used at all. If a chemical weed killer is used, it is used in a specific way for a very specific purpose. For example, Japanese Knotweed is plant that must be controlled in Country Parks due to the fact it grows up to a metre a month and can quickly suffocate other plants. When controlling Japanese Knotweed, the chemical is applied either through stem injection or applied to plant leaves via weed wipe or spot-spray, which limits any possible effects to surrounding areas.

We sometimes use a chemical weed killer to remove ‘weed’ trees, which we are required to remove by Natural England to maintain and improve our SSSI (Site of special scientific interest) status. These types of trees include sycamore, cherry laurel and turkey oak.

We do not use weed treatment on highway verges or around trees (both rural & urban), road signs or street furniture that is on a highway verge.

We currently have over 63km of designated Special Roadside Verges in Essex, which provide an invaluable habitat for wildflowers and other native species.

Essex County Council works with a range of partners - including its own ecology team; its highway contractors; Essex Wildlife Trust and Saffron Walden Museum - to maintain these verges, ensuring that they are effectively managed and continue to support a wide range of species. The verges are monitored each year by a team of volunteer verge representatives from Essex Wildlife Trust.’

8. By Councillor Scordis of the Leader of the Council

‘What contingency plans do we have in place for a No Deal Brexit?’

Reply

‘Our response plan was explained to the public Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee on 24 September – the full report and recording from which is on our website. In summary:

As a county council we have reviewed the impacts of a no deal Brexit on our operations and identified the risks and changes needed. We have not identified significant risks to our operations immediately after Brexit, though there are some uncertainties in the medium term. We have business continuity plans for our own operations, which cover a range of scenarios. In the unlikely event of significant

travel disruption, we would base our response on the travel elements of the plan and in the unlikely event of any significant disruption to fuel distribution we would use the fuel plan. These plans have been reviewed for Brexit.

In turn we have asked our suppliers to update and review their own business continuity plans and have provided national guidance on no deal preparation.

Through the Essex Resilience Forum, ECC and other local public services have reviewed the national risk assessment and prepared localised responses covering the potential for issues such as localised traffic disruption at ports and a Common Transit Convention site operated by HMRC at North Weald.'

9. By Councillor Reid of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

'When is ECC going to declare a climate emergency in the County and what strategy are we going to use to implement this going forward?'

Reply

'Essex County Council are passionate about working to combat the effects of Climate Change. Rather than simply declaring a Climate Emergency, we believe instead in delivering a robust programme of Climate Action.'

10. By Councillor Reid of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

'Could the Cabinet Member consider changing the criteria for potholes?'

I feel that reducing the depth of the pothole would be beneficial and economical. Financially I believe it would be cost effective and save the council money both in the cost of the repairs to our county's roads but also cost effective in the amount of claims we receive on an annual basis and legal fees which we have to pay. This would also be of great benefit to all road users in our county.'

Reply

'I thank the member for Pitsea for her question regarding potholes.

The Council has a clear strategy for dealing with potholes and has in recent years injected additional investment, such as the Member Led Pothole Repair Scheme, to ensure more are fixed. The depth for investigation and treatment is to ensure that we are fixing the potholes which are a hazard to road users in line with national guidance, rather than surface dressing minor defects, which, although not nice to look at, are not a risk to safety. Therefore the current process for assessing and dealing with potholes is appropriate and ensures our resources are spent well. In the long term, we continue to look to innovative new materials and techniques to change

the way we build our roads, so that the maintenance cost and the safety risk of potholes may one day be a thing of the past.'

11. By Councillor Henderson of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

'Could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on any discussions that have taken place between the council and Highways England regarding the future joining of the bypass between Horsley Cross and Harwich?'

Reply

'I thank the member for Harwich for his question regarding the bypass between Horsley Cross and Harwich.

The Council's priority for the A120 is for a dual carriageway between the Braintree Bypass and the A12 at Marks Tey and we continue to make representations to Government for this much needed improvement following our work to identify a favoured route option. However the A120 serves a wider strategic purpose linking a major seaport and a major airport. At the seaport end there is a need for further dualling of the road between Hare Green and Harwich and I have previously raised this matter with the relevant Minister. I will of course continue to press for the resumption of design work to progress this scheme given the continued importance of Harwich port to the national economy.'

12. By Councillor Aspinell of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

'Following the recent Place Services presentation by Highways, can you please confirm that the highways planning advice is simply advice and is non-enforceable as our highways officer stated. There was a planning application in Brentwood where a plan was withdrawn as highways were insisting they had legal right to keep a condition on the application.'

Reply

'I thank the member for Brentwood North for his question regarding local planning applications.

Essex County Council as Highways Authority provides a highways response to the local planning authority, for example district, city and borough councils, on planning applications. In these responses we may suggest conditions to ensure the development is acceptable in highway terms but we do not have a power of direction and therefore it is ultimately at the discretion of the local planning authority as to whether they are applied to the grant of planning permission. However, once these conditions become part of a granted consent the Local Planning Authority would seek our advice before accepting a request to remove them and we may well have

grounds to refuse this request if the original justification for its imposition still remains.'

13. By Councillor Kendall of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

'Following the announcement at the Conservative conference that there will be significant investment in buses, please can the Cabinet Member clarify what funding Essex is going to get and what difference it will make to bus users in our county.'

Reply

'We are delighted that the conservative government have announced plans to invest £220m to fund a National Bus Strategy which looks to transform bus services across England. We will be looking to put Essex in the forefront of the delivery of this strategy most notably through opportunities the Government is creating to

- Create Britain's first ever all-electric bus town
- Launch low-fare, high frequency, superbuss networks
- Deliver demand responsive services for our rural areas

We will also engage in any changes to Bus Service Operators Grant to maximise the benefits it delivers here in Essex where it is often critical to supporting commercial rural routes as well as supported services.

At this stage the details of these opportunities are unknown, but we are as always working closely with the Department for Transport.'

14. By Councillor Kendall of the Leader of the Council

'Having attended the Brexit briefing I remain unclear what the effects of a no-deal Brexit will be for Essex. Can the Leader of the Council please clarify this?'

Reply

'The changes that a no deal Brexit may bring to Essex reflect the national effects. There is uncertainty, but official guidance on the worst case national economic effect is provided in the BoE guidance updated 4 Sept and on the worst-case disruption in the Yellowhammer document of 2 August published 11 September. We cannot locally provide greater certainty against national uncertainty However we know that Central Government has accelerated plans for no-deal since that date which will act to reduce, but not eliminate, the probabilities and scale of impacts and are participating in that response.

Locally we are engaging business through a commission with BEST Growth hub,

reviewing the approach to groups that the settlement scheme may not reach and working with local partners in the ERF to strengthen and support preparations made by Highways England for the local Strategic Road Network, Harwich port and HMRC as operators of a Common Transit Convention site at north Weald.'

15. By Councillor Baker of the Leader of the Council

'Two years ago in this chamber, I asked if the Leader of the Council would be prepared to explore the possibility of negotiating and setting up a cross-party working group to meet on a regular basis, with senior officer input, in order to identify potential opportunities and possible threats for the County of Essex arising out of leaving the European Union. The recent briefing meeting on Brexit, to which all councillors were invited - although not a cross-party working group - was the first time that all members, so far as I recall, were invited to a meeting at which the matter of the United Kingdom leaving the EU and possible implications for Essex was raised.

Has Essex County Council been sufficiently proactive in preparing its residents, businesses, ports, hospitals, etc and ensuring adequate food supplies and the supply of vital medicines, etc for the possibility that we could be leaving the European Union at the end of this month?'

Reply

'The national discussions on Brexit continue and at present focus on the nature of the UK's exit from the European Union. Consensus on the nature of a future relationship with the European Union and other trading relationships is yet to be achieved. Until that way ahead is clear we can have limited insight on the opportunities for Essex and so basis for discussion.

The LGA has been representing the interest of all councils on a cross party basis and has been proactive in its engagement with government to represent the interests of the sector. It presented key evidence to the HCLG Select Committee which was reflected in the 10 recommendations in the report on Brexit and Local Government published 3 April. Our own Deputy Leader Cllr Kevin Bentley leads that LGA Brexit task force.

As the no deal exit scenario started to be defined in October 2018, we have worked to understand the complex no deal guidance and to identify the impacts on councils, residents and business. We are largely dependent on the response of central government and its agencies to manage issues such medicine supply, food availability, border flow and the management of the Strategic Road network that includes the M11, A12 and A120. We have been proactively feeding back to national government where they have seen the need for greater clarity or gaps in preparation guidance on issues as wide ranging as the settlement scheme, European funding, trading Standards resources, legislative guidance, border preparations or customs agent capacity for business.

As the no deal scenario has developed our team has briefed formally at Policy and Scrutiny Committee on 27 Nov 2018 and 23 Sept 2019 and informally to the member development committee in April 2018, 24 June 2019 and 24 Sept 2019 with a further session expected 24 October. Cllr Bentley has also attended some of these sessions in his LGA capacity. I hope that has provided the basis for members to understand the national preparations and review locally how we are preparing.

Locally we are working with partners in the Essex Resilience Forum to identify the specific local risks to Greater Essex and the response. We have used existing policy groups such as Essex Leaders and Chief Execs to review preparation across the county and have been proactive in establishing working relationships with District and Unitary planning leads in Greater Essex and setting up co-ordination meetings.

The campaign for business and resident preparation has been nationally driven, we have filtered and signposted that guidance from own web site. We are strengthening the local communication with business on preparation by engaging the BEST growth hub and also by identifying how we can promote and facilitate access to the EU Settlement scheme for the residents that the national scheme has not reached. That response isn't just for day 1 of a no deal but the period afterwards.'

16. By Councillor Baker of the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

'Following the decision to sell Essex Education Services last year, could the Cabinet Member provide an update on the current position over the sale in terms of:

1. What is the situation with regard to local authority schools accessing the full range of services formally provided by Essex County Council?
2. Who was the buyer and what was the finally agreed price?'

Reply

'To be clear EES has always been a traded offer to schools which ECC ran for profit. Schools that use or have used these services do so on a commercial basis even if they are local authority schools.

All other services including our statutory offer to schools are still provided by ECC and will continue to be provided by ECC and are unaffected by the sale.

All EES contracts with Essex Schools were transferred to Juniper Education Limited on 21 June 2019. Juniper Education is providing the same services on the same terms as before the sale.

The buyer is Juniper Education Limited. I cannot release the price at this time owing

to the terms of the agreement and commercial sensitivity.’

17. By Councillor Wood of the Cabinet Member for Children and Families

‘Can the Cabinet Member please clarify that Essex County Council do not have any children in our care in unregulated homes. If we do, could you please confirm that Essex County Council have done all the necessary checks to make sure the children are safe, in light of the BBC investigation.’

Reply

‘It is important to distinguish between unregulated provision and unregistered provision in the context of children in care.

Unregulated provision is allowed in law. This is when children (usually over the age of 16) need support to live independently rather than needing full-time care. Ofsted do not regulate this type of provision.

Unregistered provision is when a child who’s being provided with some form of ‘care’ is living somewhere that is not registered with Ofsted. This is illegal. Once a provider delivers a care element as well as accommodation, they must register as a children’s home. It’s an offence not to.

All local authorities place some of the 16 and 17-year-old young people in their care with unregulated providers where this is considered appropriate. Essex has around 110 young people in this type of provision.

In Essex there has been a closed framework agreement in place for semi-independent provision since October 2017. Officers from our Commercial Team and the Children and Young People Placement Team:

- Undertake health and safety checks as new properties are established
- Undertake contract monitoring visits with providers
- Complete a Memorandum of Understanding agreement with the provider around their response to missing young people
- Undertake both announced and unannounced visits to the properties that are being used
- Complete an annual quality assurance procedure to ensure all necessary checks and processes are in place e.g. health and safety assessments
- Monitor feedback provided by the provider against agreed key performance indicators

To be clear Centurion Care mentioned in the BBC article were an unregulated provision, however Centurion were not part of our framework and as such Essex did not place children with this provider. Essex had one young person transferred from Thurrock who was already in a placement with Centurion homes prior to transfer of his care to Essex. He was moved from the placement in August 2017 due to

concerns being raised about his care with this provider.'

18. By Councillor Wood of the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care

'Can the Cabinet Member please clarify what arrangements are in place for ECC staff employed at EPUT given the contract is due to expire in March 2020. Can the Cabinet Member also confirm if the Social Workers will continue to be employed by EPUT and how they will be paid?'

Reply

'The agreement with Essex Partnership University Trust is a partnership agreement (using section 75 of the National Health Services Act 2006) not a contract for services. This allows EPUT to provide social care functions on behalf of the council under delegation. We want to focus on more prevention and early intervention for people with serious mental illness and, as a result, are currently reviewing how these functions are undertaken and looking at future plans. We are proposing to extend the agreement for a further six months to complete this work and re-negotiate this agreement.

The impact this will have on staff will depend on the outcome of the review and recommendations. However, we are talking about a highly-skilled and well-trained workforce. Whatever the outcome of the review, we will be fully committed to ensuring that they are adequately supported and remain in our health and care system. We are as committed to the wellbeing of these staff as we would be to those directly employed by the county council.'

19. By Councillor Deakin of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

'With many councils changing emphasis to clean energy and investments, can the Cabinet Member confirm if this council is now fully divested from oil and gas company investments?'

Can the Cabinet Member also confirm if this council now uses 100% renewable electricity across all its premises and if not, what plans and timetable does this council have for achieving the above?'

Reply

'The Council invests its funds in accordance with the criteria approved by full Council annually, which are articulated in our annual Capital Strategy.

In accordance with this Strategy, the funds invested by the Council for Treasury Management purposes are placed with:

- UK and Overseas Banks meeting the minimum credit rating criteria approved by

full Council

- Money market funds with an 'AAA' credit rating
- Other local authorities.

The approved strategy does **not** permit the Council to invest in the equity of any company. Therefore, in answer to the first part of your question, the Council has never held any oil and gas company investments from which to divest itself.

With respect to the Essex Pension Fund, which is administered by ECC, its main responsibility is to ensure it has sufficient funds available to pay pensions on behalf of more than 160,000 people, including employees at councils, schools, colleges, universities and the fire and rescue service.

The aim is to ensure maximum return on investment and we recognise our responsibility for managing a range of risks faced by long-term investors, including those potentially posed by climate change.

The fund's investment strategy, as determined by the Investment Steering Committee, is under constant review and there are regular consultations on the strategy. The committee has recently agreed a timetable for reviewing the Fund's strategy.

Regarding your second question, ECC purchase 100% certifiably renewable power.'

20. By Councillor Mackrory of the Leader of the Council

'For the past 15 years ECC has provided, in association with Cambridge Open Access, a platform for parish councils for their web sites free of charge. I understand due to a change in legislation coming into effect in September 2020 this platform will no longer comply. I further understand that as from March 2020 ECC will withdraw this funding and parishes will have to find alternative providers and transfer all the information on their web sites from their own resources.

For small parishes finding £1,500 for a new platform will be extremely difficult, let alone transferring all the information. The previous arrangement enabled economies of scale and valuable back-up which will be lost.

Will the Leader reconsider this decision to, at the very least, allow some interim arrangements to prevent hardship and loss of goodwill with our parishes?'

Reply

'Cambridge Open Systems informed the County Council in June 2019 that they had taken the business decision to shut down all their dotCommunity systems, including EssexInfo.net as it was non economically viable to continue to invest in the product, and therefore they will cease operation of the service from 31st March 2020.

Essexinfo.net enabled community organisations to have a basic web presence when there was limited ability to do so in the market. However, since then the online world has changed significantly in terms of possibilities and there are numerous ways to have an online presence, including via free and affordable website providers and social media platforms. Social media training has been offered to LA's and initiatives such as The Essex Map allow organisations to promote locally available services and community assets free of charge.

The Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) have been consulted on this matter, a full discussion was held at the EALC Executive and they have engaged with their members to establish current alternative provision and seek other providers. Essex County Council has offered free 1:1 training with members to assist in the use of Facebook Pages and Groups, to enable Parishes and Partners to transition information effectively, they are in the process of circulating details to their members. Small parish councils (under 25k) have previously been awarded funding via the Essex Association of Local Councils from Central Government to assist with meeting transparency requirements, how they used the funding was at their discretion.'

21. By Councillor Abbott of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

'During the recent planning application processes for two housing developments (Rickstones Road Rivenhall, where I am the local ECC Member and near the B1018 Tye Green where I am a District Ward Councillor) requests were made for pedestrian crossings to be funded in part or whole via developer contributions. In both instances, children living in the new houses would have to cross busy roads to get to nearby primary schools. But in both cases ECC rejected those pedestrian crossing requests despite in one case where the developer had suggested helping with funding. For the Rickstones Road site I have now submitted an LHP bid for a zebra crossing. Can the Cabinet Member explain please, given his welcome stated support for modal shift, why ECC is resisting infrastructure to support safe walking to school? Could he say why in these two cases developer contributions for zebra crossings were rejected by ECC when alternative LHP funding would come directly from taxpayers?

And can he also please consider reviewing his position that ECC members should not be involved in discussions over developer contributions, even when they can so directly relate to local highway safety matters such as these?'

Reply

'I thank the member for Witham Northern for his question regarding two local housing developments.

Essex County Council positively encourages infrastructure to support safe walking and cycling to schools. In both the two instances referred to in your question the option for controlled crossings was examined and the most appropriate option was found to be a simple dropped kerb crossings with tactile paving which was agreed.

S106 contributions can only be taken for works which are necessary to mitigate the impact of the particular development that they relate to. It is unlawful to use them for any other purpose. S106 contributions are therefore secured for specific highway schemes which are in the immediate vicinity of the site and can only spent in line with the terms of the S106 legal agreement for that development.'

22. By Councillor Abbott of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

'In Braintree District recent planning consents have resulted in significant losses of mature native rural hedgerows and in these cases ECC Highways through its recommendations has effectively agreed to the losses, even when they were greater than needed to achieve sight lines. Given growing concerns about climate change and species decline due to habitat loss, could ECC please review its approach such that discussions with developers and LPAs for access arrangements to development sites take full consideration of a positive conservation approach to minimise damage to hedgerows?'

Reply

'I thank the member for Witham Northern for his question regarding rural hedgerows.

The requirement for removal of hedgerows and the necessity for replacement, and the impact of this, is a matter for the Local Planning Authority to consider. Essex County Council as the Highways Authority would require a condition to provide clear to ground level visibility splays appropriate for the speed of vehicles at that specific location, for obvious safety reasons.'

23. By Councillor Smith of the Leader

'Following the recent article within the Yellow Advertiser regarding what is known as the Kenward Files, can the Leader please issue a public statement to directly address the points raised within this story?'

Reply

'We are being as open and transparent as possible without breaching GDPR; having shared the report with the police we would support any investigation they may wish to conduct.'

24. By Councillor Smith of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

'Basildon Borough Council is now seeking to make the Borough the most disabled friendly authority within Essex. This aim is now being hampered by the Essex Design Guide's support of shared spaces within new housing estates. These shared spaces mean that both vehicles and pedestrians must use the same shared space to travel.

For disabled, blind/partially sighted and frail persons, these shared spaces create a barrier which will create more isolation for these groups of people living within these new housing developments.

Therefore, will the highway authority review this situation to put the safety of pedestrians above the profits of housing developers that are seeking to cut corners by not building pavements?'

Reply

'I thank the member for Basildon Westley Heights for his question regarding the Essex Design Guide.

Shared spaces are intended in areas where traffic speeds are very low, for example a cul de sac, and will make clear that car drivers do not have priority over other types of users, as is assumed when separate footways are created. The Essex Design Guide was established in 1973 by Essex County Council; It is used as a reference guide to help create high quality places with an identity specific to its Essex context, and has no purpose related to developer profits. However, we will keep the Guide under review as it will continue to change so that we may take into account the socio-economic impacts of place design.'

25. By Councillor Davies of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

'It is my understanding that before 2005, local Borough and District Councils undertook highways management on behalf of Essex County Council. Since 2005 Essex County Council manages highways. As local leaders are best placed to ensure efforts are directed to the areas of most need does the Cabinet Member believe that this was a wise decision to bring highways management under Essex County Council and wouldn't District Councils be better suited to make quicker and more efficient repairs and upgrades?'

Reply

'I thank the member for Laindon Park and Fryerns for his question regarding highways management.

The former agency arrangements ceased in 2005, a change instigated by a previous portfolio holder. I am a supporter of local involvement as I have shown with the member led pothole and footway repair schemes and the devolution pilot which sees Parish Councils directly undertaking routine work on our behalf. I am keen to extend this model to District Councils but not a return to the previous model which resulted in significant inefficiencies. We need a model which is fit for the circumstances we currently face not simply reverting to the previous arrangements which saw multiple contractors and multiple management arrangements which did not allow a consistent approach to either carrying out the work or informing the public of the works programme.'