
ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING 12 February 2013

Answers to Written Questions (Standing Order 16.11.3)

11(b)

1. **By Councillor B Aspinell of the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Environment and Culture**

‘There are two three bedroom semi-detached houses at Weald Country Park in Brentwood. I understand that one has been empty for six years and the other for two years. These houses are being maintained by the taxpayer, but have been allowed to get damp and devalue. Why have these properties not been let or sold, as they could have raised thousands of pounds for the County Council and provided much needed housing for Brentwood residents?’

Reply

The two properties referred to are both within the boundary of Weald Country Park.

Essex County Council does not release houses that are inside the boundary of Country Parks for private sale – as our experience has been that new occupiers can cause significant operational problems – in what are public facilities. These houses are in an extremely visible position and Essex County Council needs to ensure that they are maintained to a high standard and that there are no use or maintenance issues that detract from the park.

A project has been undertaken to see if the entrance to the park could be adjusted so that these sites could be screened from the rest of the park; unfortunately this was not feasible.

As a Local Authority we cannot enter into direct tenancy agreements, as this can infer a variety of rights, including ‘right to buy’.

Essex County Council are able to ‘lease’ the sites to a third party under a business tenancy and we are in discussion with a charity that provides housing for ex-serviceman.

Two country park properties that have become vacant and fall outside

the boundary of any country park have recently been sold and realised a capital receipt for the County Council.

2. By Councillor J Deakin of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation Programme

‘Would the Cabinet Member please give me an update on the plans for the Hayward School site in Maltese Road, Chelmsford?’

Reply

The site is currently being assessed for a number of potential re-uses.

The proposals include:

- a new primary school to meet growing basic need in the area and a new hub premises for children’s services, bringing these together from across Chelmsford with the new family solutions operation,
- a post 19 facility for young people transitioning from the Columbus College to adulthood. This is being worked up by the Academies Enterprise Trust,
- as a potential site for the provision of alternative education,
- The King Edward Grammar School, which adjoins the site, has expressed an interest in acquiring part of the open area of the site for playing field expansion.

The bids will be considered by Cllr Castle as part of the Education Estates Strategy and by Cllr Finch once all the necessary information is available and alternative accommodation options for some of the proposals have been explored.

3. By Councillor J Deakin of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

‘Would the Cabinet Member please advise how many zebra crossings have been installed since 2009 in the County that did not meet the policy?’

Reply

Thank you for your question.

If you could clarify which policy you are referring to in your question, I would be happy to have an answer provided to you.

4. By Councillor D Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

‘When members in Brentwood were recently discussing the dangerous Ongar Road / Sandpit Lane junction, and the possibility of constructing a small solid island roundabout, they were told that any significant improvements were likely to involve diversion of statutory undertakers’ equipment. Early indications from EDF and Transco suggested that the diversion of their equipment alone would cost in the region of £480,000. No figures had been provided at the time from other utility companies whose equipment is known to pass through the junction. Members were also told that an alternative traffic light scheme would also incur the same statutory undertaker costs.

Would the Cabinet Member please clarify the following points:

1. How does the County Council challenge or seek to validate these statutory undertaker costs at this particular junction or at any other junction scheme across the County?
2. How can the same statutory undertaker costs for a small solid island roundabout scheme be the same as for a traffic signal scheme?
3. As the statutory undertaker costs for EDF and Transco equate to £480,000, which is more than Brentwood's total Local Highways budget for the year, how are we ever going to get the much-needed safety improvements we need for our area?’

Reply

Thank you for your question.

1. High level estimates to identify potential costs are sought as part of the detailed design stage. Every attempt is made to ‘design around’ the need to move utilities, and costs are challenged wherever possible, although the scope to reduce these is very often limited.
2. The feasibility study for installing traffic signals at this junction indicated extensive kerb alterations would be required to widen both main road approaches. This would incorporate dedicated right-turn lanes to prevent right turning vehicles from obstructing through traffic and the estimated costs for this were in the same order as those for the utility diversion costs for the roundabout scheme. Any schemes that require changes to the

kerbs in this location are highly likely to require the relocation of utilities.

3. The answer is the same as when you asked a similar question back in October 2012 i.e. The prioritisation of local schemes by Members is an important function of Local Highways Panels (LHPs) and where a scheme is too large to deliver in a single year, LHPs have the option of spreading the cost of these over more than one year.

5. By Councillor A Turrell of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation and The Cabinet Member for Education, Lifelong Learning and the 2012 Games

‘Many Primary Schools are on main routes, and roads outside their schools are gritted during cold weather. However, there are many Primary Schools that are on minor roads, and these become very dangerous because they are not gritted.

Parents in my Division who have children at Queen Boudicca are having great difficulties during icy conditions; the conditions are made even worse because the road is on a slope.

One solution would be to include all Primary Schools on the list of roads to be gritted. Would the two Cabinet Members please advise if they would work together to find a way to solve this issue?’

Reply (from the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation)

Thank you for your question.

Essex County Council prioritises its resources on A and B roads and Bus routes which together constitute 80% of all traffic movement with the remainder of the network receiving treatment once the priority network is secure, and in line with available resources.

We do however recognise that other roads are important to local residents and in addition to our hugely popular scheme where we provide salt to town and parish councils, this year ECC also operated a salt scheme for Members in urban areas. This enables local Members to arrange for salt to be used in locations that are important to the local community, for example, outside schools. I have been advised that Councillor Turrell did not opt to take part in this scheme.

6. By Councillor D Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

‘Would you please tell me how many claims Essex County Council has received from motorists for compensation for damage sustained to their vehicles caused by potholes on the County's roads over the last three financial years?’

Would you please provide a breakdown of this figure for each year?

How many claims has the County accepted and paid compensation for each year over the same period?

How much has the County actually paid out in compensation regardless of the original claim date for each year?’

Reply

Thank you for your question.

Financial Year	Total amount paid during year, regardless of claim date	Number of claims paid	Total Claims received
2009/2010	£171,475.98	557	1830
2010/2011	£174,361.97	481	1306
2011/2012	£155,656.71	464	611
Grand Total	£501,494.66	1502	3747

Please note that the totals given above are based on the entire claim, not just the compensation paid to residents, as we do not record this separately; so it can include solicitor's costs, compensation for injuries, benefits to DWP, hospital charges, special damages, loss of earnings etc.

7. By Councillor J Whitehouse of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

‘In reply to my question at the December Full Council meeting, you were unable to tell me which footways would be resurfaced in 2013 / 2014, as this would not be known until the Highways Capital Programme was finalised within the overall Council budget.

Are you now in a position to list these works, or – if not, when will details be available?’

Would you please list the footways in Epping and Theydon Bois which will be resurfaced in whole or part and how each one came to be on the list – e.g. was the poor state of the footway noticed by a highways inspector, was it reported by a Councillor or member of the public, together with details of the date on which it was first reported. Are reports of falls on a footway recorded and what action follows from such a report?’

Reply

Thank you for your question.

Based on the outcome of the Council meeting on 12 February 2013 I will provide you with the information you have asked for when the detailed programme is finalised.

With reference to your request regarding reports of falls on a footway; if such falls are reported to Essex County Council, an inspection of the footway is undertaken to assess if any remedial action is required.’

8. By Councillor J Whitehouse of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation Programme

‘Which Credit Unions received financial support from ECC in the last 3 years and how much was this for each one?’

Of this financial support how much for each credit union was a direct grant, how much was retained for officer time, how much was for posters and leaflets provided by ECC and how much was for equipment?

Did the financial support cover anything else? If so, what and for how much?’

Reply

‘Which Credit Unions received financial support from ECC in the last 3 years and how much was this for each one?’

There are five active credit unions in Essex – Basildon Credit Union; Colchester Savers; Essex Savers; HarlowSave; and Holdfast. Over the last three years, Essex County Council has funded them all. The levels of financial support are as follows:

- *Colchester Savers* – 2010: £14,000; 2011: £5,000
- *Essex Credit Unions Together* (four Essex credit unions:

Basildon Credit Union; Colchester Savers; Harlow Save; Holdfast) – 2012: £70,000

- *Essex Savers* – 2010: £55,000; 2011: £15,000; 2012: £15,000

‘Of this financial support how much for each credit union was a direct grant, how much was retained for officer time, how much was for posters and leaflets provided by ECC and how much was for equipment?’

These figures are all direct grant – no element of these grants were retained for officer time, poster, leaflets or equipment. Officer time, posters, leaflets and equipment and similar has been offered and should be considered as in-kind support.

All credit unions have received elements of in-kind support, from publicity and design work, to the offer of access to libraries as credit union collection points and business planning and bid-writing support. Take-up has depended on the appetite of individual credit unions.

It is not possible to cost the officer time accurately, given the varying degrees of involvement credit unions have sought from the local authority. Essex Savers has received the greatest level of officer support, conservatively estimated at £12,000.

Essex Savers has also received additional support for publicity materials, costed at £5,000 over the period in question.

There are no additional costs for equipment.

‘Did the financial support cover anything else? If so, what and for how much?’

The figures outlined above for financial support to local credit unions were direct grants.

In addition to direct grants and officer time, posters, leaflets and equipment (categorised as in-kind support), the provision of rent-free volunteer-run collection points in libraries has also been made available to local credit unions.

Essex Savers has taken up this offer, resulting in an estimated opportunity cost (based on access to eight libraries each week for three years) to the local authority of c. £28,000.