
ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING 11 December 2012

Answers to Questions (Standing Order 16.11.3)

14(b) Written Questions (Standing Order 16.11.3)

1. **By Councillor M Lager of the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Waste and Recycling.**

'Is the Cabinet Member happy that, in spite of a fully evidenced case for early investment in faster broadband in Essex, especially in rural areas such as the Braintree District, we are ranked 31 out of 35 project areas, and is he prepared to take every step to secure earlier funding for Essex?

Will he report back to the Council any success he achieves?'

Reply

Background

We have worked hard to secure investment totalling almost £26million through the BDUK model for this project; comprehensively mapping just what Broadband capacity we have across the county and really understanding where BDUK can help bridge the gaps; established a strong project team ready to go; engaged with all our local government colleagues across Essex to support this; and raised the level of understanding amongst our residents around what this could mean for them.

Essex County Council invested a great deal of time from the outset to ensure this investment represented good value for our residents and businesses, and as a result our Broadband Delivery Plan was very comprehensive when submitted in March this year. Unfortunately Government ranked the submissions based on when they were received and not the content.

Action

Since the spring, we have been working hard to better our position in the following ways:

- Talking to the Department for Culture, Media and Sports, our local MPs and others in government to ensure the quality of our plan and the importance of Essex is recognised in economic, location and population terms.
- Stimulating demand and helping our residents understand the benefits of Superfast Broadband in Essex through publicity campaigns
- Mobilising our project team so that we were ready when we needed to be

Progress

Following this I am delighted to be able to announce to Members that Essex has now been approved as ready to procure. Due to our preparation and hard work we are now expecting to award contract in late July, a marked improvement from our earlier target of late August/September. This means that we could potentially start works in the summer period, when conditions would be optimal for these types of utilities based activities.

We will continue to push as hard as we can to ensure we get the best and fairest deal for Essex and will keep you updated as to progress. We all recognise how vital it is for the people, businesses and the economy in Essex to have high speed good quality broadband. I am confident that this good news will play an important part in supporting economic growth and investment in our businesses.

2. By Councillor L Barton of the Leader.

'The BBC claims that many local councils are filling posts through limited companies and, as such, employees can avoid paying PAYE if they so choose. They can opt to pay themselves in dividends which are taxed at a lower rate; they can also pay National Insurance at a lower rate. This is, in effect, a tax avoidance scheme.

Would the Leader of the Council confirm how many Essex County Council employees are paid through limited companies?'

Reply (provided by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation Programme)

The vast majority of Essex County Council employees are paid through our payroll system and as such do not have any company status. We are not aware of any ECC employees that are paid through limited companies.

The County Council has a number of safeguards in place to ensure

that this does not happen, in particular; where we are being invoiced for services by individuals, for the first time, the team in ECC requiring their services is asked to complete a self-questionnaire (based on HMRC guidance) on their 'worker' or 'self-employed' status which is reviewed prior to payment and challenged accordingly.

Essex County Council engages its temporary/agency (contingent) workforce through the contract in place with Capita (Working for Essex). No worker who is on site in any of the Council locations, via this arrangement, are employees of ECC.

These individuals work via a "Contract for Services" with either Capita or Capita's negotiated supply chain. It is for Capita to determine how they choose to engage the individual, be that via PAYE or a Limited Company.

The Temporary agency workforce is currently broken down as:

PAYE:	414
LTD Company:	304

The vast majority of individuals who are engaged, via a Limited Company, work as experts in their particular field. These types of workers benefit our organisation as we are able to engage them to deliver work for specified periods of time, without entering into a more long term, binding arrangement.

These individuals operate as "their own business" and move from assignment to assignment across organisations. Whilst they do not get the benefit of permanent PAYE employment (annual leave, pension contributions, etc), this is their choice and to not engage them, would mean putting ECC at a significant disadvantage, particularly during this period of change, when other organisations are also attempting to attract experts from the same pool.

3. By Councillor D Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation Programme.

'What practical support is the County Council going to be giving to the City, District and Borough Councils across Essex to help them deliver the Coalition Government's Welfare Reform agenda at a local level?'

Reply

ECC has actively worked in partnership with Borough, District and City Councils in the Essex area in order to achieve workable solutions and the best possible outcomes for the citizens of Essex. Three projects in particular have been a focus of attention for officer and

member collaboration.

Localisation of Council Tax Support (LCTS):

From April 2013 council tax relief will no longer be provided with central government support, meaning that each local authority has to ensure that a system of appropriate support is put in place. There is a central government grant to support the cost, but this has been set at a level around 10% below the previous cost of the centralised system

ECC officers have been part of a countywide project team working together to implement the new schemes, with the aim of achieving a consistent model across the county. Whilst each billing authority has had to ensure that they design the scheme in their area to support their own demographic, there are common approaches to the change across the board. ECC officers have provided;

- Detailed assistance with understanding and modelling the financial implications of funding cuts and scheme designs.
- Financial modelling of the wider implications of LCTS on the collection fund position and understanding the mitigating impact of other changes to council tax discounts
- Support and advice on the consultation with the County Council and other major preceptors
- Support on the billing authorities consultations with the public, whereby Essex County Council hosted a central consultation survey and provided analysis of the results

ECC has also agreed to provide joint funding for additional investment on council tax collection activities and provision of a hardship fund to support the implementation of the new schemes

Social Fund Emergency support

Again, from April 2013, responsibility for emergency welfare support transfers to the local authorities (ECC) from the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP). In the past, this support has taken the form of emergency cash benefit payments or loans to support individuals through times of immediate and extreme hardship. Whilst this is an ECC responsibility, it is understood that this issue cannot be seen in isolation and therefore the work in establishing the replacement system has been conducted in partnership with the billing authorities in Essex.

- Specific activities undertaken in support of this project are:
- Engaging with districts from September on potential pan Essex approaches to emergency welfare,
- hosting a workshop of upper tier authorities to explore what others are planning and sharing ideas,
- presentation to All Essex Chief Executives group in November on proposals for the SLA and pan Essex funding,

- liaising with CABs and CVS representatives across Essex on delivery options,
- liaising with DWP and other local authorities on data sharing and communication issues, also
- liaising with Thurrock and Southend on communications strategy to ensure districts are ready for the change

General Welfare Reform preparation

In addition to the specific work on the projects listed above, ECC officers have embarked on a project in partnership with Borough, District and City council colleagues. This project will focus on the impact of welfare reforms on the citizens of Essex and explore potential solutions to support individuals in difficulty. This project will pay particular attention to the potentially unforeseen impacts of the changes on demand for council services. Work has begun on scoping the project and project management resource has been provided by ECC in support of this initiative.

4. By Councillor L Barton of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

‘The latest Lifelines report shows the quality of road markings on the UK’s roads is in decline.

In my division the road markings on Pownall Crescent in Berechurch are now almost invisible, meaning that markings for speed bumps and a “no entry” sign can no longer be clearly seen. I reported this at least 6 months ago.

Would the Cabinet member for Highways give some assurances that, in view of the safety implications, the Department has a timescale for these repairs and that there is a planned maintenance scheme in place?’

Reply

I take road safety extremely seriously and have read the Road Safety Markings Association ‘Lifelines’ report mentioned by Councillor Barton and I note that the focus of this report is the Highways Agency.

Given that Councillor Barton raised the issue of safety with regard to the road markings on Pownall Crescent in her question I am surprised that she has left this to the Full Council in December rather than contact me directly or raise it with me personally on the occasions I have met with her to discuss Highways issues in Colchester.

However, having been made aware of this issue on Tuesday 4 December this work was completed on 8 December.

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

'I understand that there were 31,365 pothole repairs completed across Essex between June 1st 2012 and October 26th 2012 using the Jet Patcher. Would the Cabinet Member please clarify the following points:

- 1) What is the projected life span of a pothole repair using the Jet Patcher, set against other methods used to repair potholes?
- 2) What ongoing monitoring is being done on the pothole repairs that have been completed using the Jet Patcher to ensure that they are providing a long term cost effective solution to maintaining the County's roads?
- 3) If this monitoring has been taking place please could members be sent details of the results?'

Reply

Thank you for your question.

- 1) The longevity of a Jetpatcher repair is dependent on a number of factors external to the actual repair such as its position within the carriageway and the volume and type of traffic using the road.
- 2) Formal monitoring of the repairs is undertaken by Highways Inspectors in accordance with our normal cyclic routine inspections or where a defect is reported.
- 3) We will be formally reviewing the impact of the pothole recovery programme on road condition, and results will be shared with Members once available.

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

'How many Highways officers were employed by Essex County Council at 1 December 2009, 1 December 2010, 1 December 2011 and 1 December 2012 and how many of these were involved in designing the types of highway schemes that are within the Local Highways Panels' remit?

I have been advised that Essex County Council will soon no longer directly employ officers that design these schemes. At present these officers come on site visits with members to discuss problem highway

sites and advise on solutions. Under the Ringway Jacobs contract, what will the future arrangements be for such visits and advice?’

Reply

Thank you for your question.

1. The following information shows the headcount for Highways staff on the following dates:

01/04/2012 – 718

01/04/2011 – 711

01/04/2010 – 884

01/04/2009 – 906

2. Scheme design is not undertaken by ECC Highways Officers
3. At present there are 4 Highways Liaison Officers and 4 Principal Transport Planners that support the work of the Local Highways Panels. There are no plans to reduce this level of resource.

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

‘1.How many metres of footpaths alongside the highway have been resurfaced in each district in the financial years 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13, and how much has this cost?’

2.Which footpaths in Epping Forest are being resurfaced in this 2012-13 financial year and which footpaths are on the list for 2013-14?’

Reply

1. Footway 2012/13 programmed treatments by metre

Area	Metres of footway works
Braintree	6620
Chelmsford	8744
Maldon	400
Colchester	6190
Tendring	1800
Uttlesford	2435
Harlow	3100
Epping	650
Brentwood	1320
Basildon	4200
Rochford	1050

Castle Point	1035
A127	6385
Total	43529

Footway 2011/12 treatments by metre

Area	Metres of footway works
Braintree	3250
Chelmsford	10394
Maldon	1350
Colchester	3970
Tendring	3080
Uttlesford	3200
Harlow	3400
Epping	4450
Brentwood	1400
Basildon	5591
Rochford	1270
Castle Point	650
A127	800
Total	42805

Footway 2010/11 treatments by metre

Area	Metres of footway works
Braintree	23150
Chelmsford	4175
Maldon	600
Colchester	5690
Tendring	5620
Uttlesford	1800
Harlow	1980
Epping	3700
Brentwood	1400
Basildon	5000
Rochford	760
Castle Point	2000
A127	400
Total	56275

Footway 2009/10 treatments by metre (please note during this period information is only available via Area Office rather than District)

Area	Metres of programmed footway works
West Area	19550
Mid Area	15264
East Area	13045
South Area	8350
A127 Area	570
Total	56779

Footpath spend

Spend (£m)	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Capital	4.655	2.073	3.658	2.026 *
Revenue	3.382	2.942	2.662	2.762
TOTAL	8.037	5.015	6.320	4.782

*£0.828 spend to end of October

The Footway Programme in Epping Forest for the current financial year (2012/13) comprises;

Sewardstone Road (Leading to Beachfield Walk
Queens Road (High Road to No 88)
Hornbeam Road (from Loughton Lane for 150 Metres)
Stanwyck Drive (Manor Road West for 100 Metres)

2. With regard to which footpaths are on the list for 2013-2014; footpath resurfacing forms part of the Highways Capital Programme within the overall Council Budget. As these will not be presented to Full Council until February 2013, I am currently unable to answer this part of the question.

8. By Councillor T Higgins of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

'A-Boards:

Colchester made national headlines with its cluttered streets.

When will the Cabinet Member ratify the decision made by the Economic Development, Environment and Highways Policy Scrutiny Committee?

When will Essex devolve the Highways enforcement powers to districts, borough and city councils, so that they can deal with this

“growing menace”?’

Reply

If Cllr Higgins can clarify which recommendation (noting that Policy and Scrutiny Committees do not have the power to make decisions) she is referring to I would be happy to answer her question.

9. Councillor M Fisher of the Cabinet Member for Education, Lifelong Learning & the 2012 Games

‘Following on my question at the Council meeting on 16 October, would the Cabinet Member please tell me how many responses were gathered by the survey on attitudes to the Olympic Legacy and what was learned from them?’

Secondly, what is the budget for Sportivate, which seems like a positive initiative and has it already started?’

Reply

For the ‘Taking the Olympic Pulse of Essex’ survey, 1100 phone interviews were completed across a representative sample of residents across Essex. We also carried out a further 100 to boost specifically for those in Hadleigh, to allow further analysis of the data gathered from those in closer proximity to the Hadleigh Farm Olympic Mountain Bike Venue.

It was important for us to ask questions around attitudes to sport, the Olympics and what impact people felt this had on them. Some of the results showed significant increase in areas since last year, examples include:

1. Respondents were asked how interested they were in a number of activities with answers given on a scale of 1 to 5, where one was ‘*not interested*’ and 5 was ‘*very interested*’. The % below shows the proportion of respondents who said they were ‘*interested*’ in each activity by giving a score of 4 or 5.
 - a. Being Active up from 65% in 2010 to 74% in 2012
 - b. Taking part in sporting activities up from 39% in 2010 to 50% in 2012
 - c. Volunteering up from 35% in 2010 to 40% in 2012

This is fantastic news for the council as this shows that not only are people feeling more inspired and active since the summer of sport but areas such as volunteering are also on the increase after the highly

successful Essex Ambassadors Scheme and something that we can now utilise as part of the Good For Essex initiative.

2. Levels of interest in these activities increased significantly between 2010 and 2012 and this was particularly true amongst those with a disability when talking about '*being active*', where the proportion indicating that they were '*interested*' almost doubled (2012: 59% vs. 2010: 32%).

Once again this information is something we can use moving forward. The 'open weekends' where residents were able to try out all different kinds of sports, coupled with the wonderful Flames Festival we had with the Lions Club and appearances from our Paralympic Team Essex Ambassadors, Dan Bentley, Hannah Stodel and Emma Hollis have encouraged more of our disabled residents to be active. This is something we can now look to develop through further schemes.

Such data gathered from the survey enables us to understand how the works the Legacy and Comms team have done around the 2012 Games was received and how it affected people's attitudes. It will also inform our future work as it allows us to identify areas where fewer respondents felt touched by the Games, such as Tendring, and also identified areas where we can ride on and build on the current enthusiasm in other areas. Residents who feel that the Games will have a positive impact on them increased from 53% in 2010 to 69% in 2012.

Sportivate

Sportivate is a Sport England initiative, delivered through the network of County Sports Partnerships, to engage or re-engage more young people 14-25 years of age in more sport and physical activity. Sportivate is part of Sport England and the government drive to create a legacy from London 2012 and sits within a programme called Places People Play.

Sportivate is based around the concept of making available short 'taster' courses of different sports and activities, with the participants then being guided in to further opportunities to continue the activity within a community club or facility setting.

Sport England's target group for Sportivate is the so called 'semi-sporty'; those who do some activity already but do not have a major commitment to sport.

The budget for the Sportivate initiative in Essex between April 2011 and March 2015 is £957,400. The level of funding awarded to Essex

reflects the county's status of being one of the most populous counties in England and represents approximately 30% of the total funding available across the whole East region.

The funding is drawn down six-monthly from Sport England and administered through Active Essex team based within the directorate of Strategic Services.

The Sportivate project is now 18 months into delivery and has shown significant success. For year one, an investment of £170,000 was made to support 175 projects across the county in a wide range of activities. A total of 3,199 participants were retained within these projects against Sport England's target of 1,792 (178% of target). *(‘Retained within the project’ means participants who attended at least five of the six coaching sessions provided and are therefore judged to be significantly engaged by the activity. Sport England carries-out a survey of participants three months after their course to evaluate the success of retention in activity.)*

Year two of Sportivate delivery in Essex has now reached the half-way stage. Against a target of 2,400 retained participants, 1,471 has been achieved in the first six months. Traditionally, the autumn and winter months see a greater uptake of projects and so there is a very high level of confidence that the annual target will again be significantly exceeded.

Active Essex is now looking at ways to take advantage of additional Sportivate funding above the original allocations being made available by Sport England for counties over-achieving on targets. The original time-line of 2011 to 2015 has been provisionally extended by a further two years until March 2017 and would take Sportivate through the next Olympic cycle; an interesting prospect in terms of evaluation.

The long-term commitment to the Sportivate initiative provides an excellent opportunity to make a significant impact to the activity levels of young people in Essex and achieve greater engagement with sport.