
Essex County Council Meeting 14 May 2019

Answers to Written Questions

Agenda Item 18

1. By Councillor Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Customer and Corporate

‘Please could the Cabinet Member tell us which libraries under threat of closure have had offers from the local community to run them? When will members be able to see the details of these arrangements?’

Reply

‘In parallel with the consultation on the draft libraries strategy Council has welcomed expressions of interest from community groups etc who may want to take on the library. We have received 51 Expressions of Interest across proposed tier 3 and tier 4 libraries, which put forward proposals to establish community library services. As of 7th May, only three locations within tier 3 and seven in tier 4 are yet to receive an expression of interest. We are keen to get EOIs from the community for every single tier 3 and 4 library. The Community Library Services team continue to actively seek out potential interested parties in these locations to encourage EOI submissions, this includes engaging with local members, village trusts, the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC), and the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE).

Following the consultation, the Future Library Strategy is still being finalised. Further information on expressions of interest will be communicated in due course.

The community library services delivery model and support offer is in the process of being developed and will be made available once the final strategy has been approved. The Community Library Services team have actively engaged with parish councils and community groups and are developing information packs to assist in the development of proposals.

Information regarding community library services and the process by which they will be delivered is available on the Community Library Services webpage, which will continue to be updated. This can be accessed at the below link

<http://libraries.essex.gov.uk/libraries-consultation/community-library-services/>

I would welcome opportunities to discuss the future of any proposed tier 3 and 4 library with the local Councillor and representatives from the community’

2. By Councillor Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Economic Development

‘I understand that there are going to be a number of redundancies made in the Economic Development team following an internal consultation. Please could the Cabinet Member tell me why there was no external consultation on this issue and why the matter has not been brought before the relevant Scrutiny Committee before any final decisions are made?’

Reply

‘This relates to the recent restructure of the Employment and Skills team and the staff consultation which closed on 30 April 2019. This reconfiguration of the staffing complement has been undertaken within the existing policy and strategy objectives of the organisation. It retains the focus on supporting the economic inclusion of our residents by concentrating on young people who are NEET or are at risk of being NEET.

The changes to the staff team have been made based on the resources required to undertake the work. Following an internal review of staffing across this team and the youth services team, it was found that economies of scale could be achieved by aligning activity and that costs could be reduced by bringing the two teams together into the education team. Whilst this restructure will result in a small reduction in staff, the embedding of the remaining staff within the youth service will support us to continue to deliver great outcomes for our young people.’

3. By Councillor Robinson of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

‘Will the Cabinet Member commit to ensuring that Members are informed when highways projects are to be undertaken in their Division?’

Reply

‘I thank the member for Chelmsford North for his question on highways communications.

We continue to improve the way in which we communicate our highways activity and I have talked at length before about recognising the role of elected County Councillors and their importance in the sharing of highways information with residents. To this end I have already asked officers to ensure that the County Member is notified when we are undertaking significant works in a particular area. It isn't of course practical to provide that kind of notification every time we fill a pothole but I am in agreement that it is important that we do so when major activity is

undertaken. We also send out a monthly communication called Highways Highlights to the parishes, districts, county members and MPs.'

4. By Councillor Robinson of the Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer

'Will the Cabinet Member agree to retain the inter-lending service between all libraries of all types and will the Cabinet Member also commit to meeting district and parish tier councils to discuss retaining libraries in their areas?'

Reply

'As part of the proposed Future Library Strategy, the inter-lending service between libraries is currently being reviewed to explore how it can best meet requirements.

Since Jan 2019, I have met in person with a significant number of Parish Councils, as well as a range of other groups interested in submitting an expression of interest, including Residents Associations and District Councils. I am keen to continue this level of engagement and work with members to support community solutions for maintaining library services.

On Tuesday 7th May, I e-mailed all Essex County Councillors to remind them of my offer to have individual meetings with Members and representatives from their community that are interested in submitting/discussing an expression of interest. I am surprised at how few County Members have actually approached me for a meeting to discuss the future of their local library.

I would welcome opportunities to discuss the future of Chelmsford Libraries with Cllr Robinson in this context.'

5. By Councillor Baker of the Cabinet Member for Education

'Following my call-in last year of the decision to sell by auction Essex Education Service, I would be grateful if the current situation with regard to this vital service for all types of schools across Essex could be clarified.'

Reply

'Thank you for your question Cllr Baker.

I believe you are referring to our fully traded service 'EES for Schools' which has long been distinct from the County Council's education services directorate.

As you note, Cabinet agreed last May to seek a buyer for the EES for Schools business. We have had over 52 expressions of interest and selected a preferred

bidder in January. We are currently in the final stages of completing a transaction with this bidder and anticipate, subject to cabinet approval, that EES for Schools will be in new ownership as of 1st June 2019.

All the EES for Schools staff are transferring under TUPE to the new owners, with full LGPS pension provision protected through a bond. Furthermore the new owners are committed to retaining the EES headquarters in Essex and we look forward to an excellent relationship with EES for Schools as it goes from strength to strength with new ownership and investment.'

6. By Councillor Deakin of the Cabinet Member for Education

'It is recognised that primary school aged children are being groomed by gangs and often by the time they reach the age 13 it's too late.

In light of this, can Youth Services/YSG commission work for children from aged 10 to 19 rather than the current 13 to 19?'

Reply

'Under our statutory duty in regard to the provision of youth services (Section 507B of the Education Act 1996, as amended by section 6 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006) a local authority is required to provide sufficient recreational leisure-time activities for qualifying young persons which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities,. 'Qualifying young persons' are those aged 13–19, and up to age 24 for young people with a learning difficulty or particular disabilities. (*Taken from APPG on Youth Affairs; Youth Work Inquiry, April 2019*)

The Essex Young Carers Service does work with young carers aged 0 – 18 yrs, and is already providing workshops around gangs, grooming, and online safety – including a session to be delivered by 'The 2 John's' in Colchester on 31st May, which is open to all young carers with some groups being transported from other quadrants to provide access to the opportunity.'

7. By Councillor Mackrory of the Leader of the Council

'Concerning A-Block; given the extensive and costly recent external repairs to this building, what recompense is the Council seeking from the building contractors who carried out the same work at enormous cost in 2013?'

Reply

‘The recent repairs to A Block follow the identification a defect in the original repairs – which has been deemed a breach of contract.

The Council is in discussion with the original Project Manager and Principal Contractor to rectify this defect. Containment measures are in place for Health & Safety purposes.

The proposal is to commence rectification works on 15th May for a duration of 16 – 18 weeks. The work will be undertaken at no cost to the Council – however, for expediency, ECC has instigated measures to enable minimal disruption to its day to day activity for which it has placed instructions/purchase orders. ECC will be seeking full reimbursement of these costs.

While the work is progressed, the integrity of the superstructure integrity will also be checked.’

8. By Councillor Mackrory of the Leader of the Council

‘Concerning Shire Hall, Chelmsford; can the Leader explain why eight years after this ECC owned historic listed building was closed it still remains empty with the interior rapidly deteriorating? Can he further explain why a suggestion from an interested private individual that part of the building be used for an Art Gallery has been rejected?’

Reply

‘I am surprised by this question from the Member as he, along with all Members – particularly those on the Chelmsford Member Panel – have received updates from officers on progress with Shire Hall and will be aware of the scale of activity that has been required since the Magistrates’ Court vacated in 2012.

The building initially required urgent repairs to the external fabric following an incident of falling masonry. Subsequently it was necessary to undertake significant survey and repair work in order to ensure that the building was safe, and that information on the potential of the building could be gained to inform the future strategy. Thereafter, market testing was undertaken to identify proposals and gauge the appetite for possible future uses.

The member references the 8 years since the building was closed. As I’m sure he knows, it is approximately 250 years old. It is a Listed Building and development has significant constraints: it would be inappropriate for ECC, stakeholders and bidders to proceed with any commitments without thorough due diligence. In addition, there has been significant public interest and engagement, all of which has

taken time to address.

A contract with Aquila to purchase Shire Hall for a mixed-use development has been reached after significant marketing, engagement, and legal work. We are now within the timescale set out in the contract for Aquila to develop their scheme and secure planning permission which runs until September 2019.

With reference to the comment about the interior “rapidly deteriorating”, officers advise that the interior is not “rapidly deteriorating” other than some issues with superficial cleanliness. Low-level heating is being maintained to prevent damage from damp and mould during periods where external temperature fall below 12 degrees Celsius.

Finally, in regard to the Art Gallery proposal: The proposal was an unsolicited intervention which also came with suggestions to dramatically alter the contract arrangement with Aquila, would have lost the current £1m receipt to ECC, and would have re-introduced considerable financial risk to the council.

There is no stated ambition for ECC to create or support an art gallery in Chelmsford that would align with this proposal. This intervention, and the lack of availability of key planning staff at Chelmsford City Council, has resulted in a significant slowdown in progress which has needed to be rectified. The Cabinet Member for Finance, together with property officers, have been assured that the proposed development scheme can go ahead as proposed within the contract – meaning without the gallery – and Aquila have been advised accordingly.

Given the intervention on the art gallery and the lack of historic planning resource at Chelmsford City Council it is likely that the contract extension period set out for securing planning consent will be invoked. I therefore look forward to providing a further update to all Members once planning consent has been received and the next stage of the process begins.’

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

‘What discussions are taking place between ECC and Districts/Boroughs to ensure that poor Air Quality is being effectively monitored and ameliorated. Particularly, what are we doing as an authority to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account when discussing new housing developments?’

Reply

‘I thank the member for Harwich for his question on air quality.

This is an issue that I personally take a great deal of interest in, and improving air quality across the county is a goal I wish to achieve.

Quite rightly this issue is being prioritised and we play an active role in the planning of Air Quality management areas which are the responsibility of District Councils to identify and lead on. Air Quality as it affects individual schemes and planning for new areas of growth is a material consideration in planning and delivery of transport investment. We are in a position where we need to bridge the gap between where we are now with conventional transport modes, and the ever increasing and helpful move to electric vehicles and indeed autonomous and connected vehicles. We are keen to play a major role in the use of new technology and to reduce the amount of motorised travel through our integrated transport proposals for cycling and walking and to reduce journey length by cars to efficient means of mass transit wherever possible.'

10. By Councillor Scordis of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

'Considering the recent Climate Change protests, documentaries and the damning UN report on climate change, would the portfolio holder considering reversing the current policy not to replace trees and look at more trees where possible across the County, perhaps also working with Parish Councils as well as District and Boroughs?'

Reply

'The greening of Highways and the public realm is a key issue for the Green Essex Strategy which is out to consultation now, closing on the 14th June. The Green Essex Strategy emphasises the multiple benefits of trees as capturers of carbon and roadside pollution, protecting us from the sun's harmful UV rays, in cooling our towns and cities, in reducing flooding, as habitats for biodiversity, creating green streets which reduce our stress levels and improve our mental health and for making our Essex City, towns and countryside pleasant places to live. In addition, the Green Essex Strategy emphasises the importance of the public realm as the space where most people live their lives, either walking, cycling, driving or commuting to school, work or leisure activities.

A key proposal in the Green Essex Strategy is 'Public Realm green infrastructure is improved to reduce pollution and improve character and sense of place'

The draft strategy has a number of actions to support this Proposal, such as establishing a Green Essex Fund to fund the planting and maintenance of trees and hedges by roadside, the areas of most concentrated pollution. However, the Green Essex Strategy also supports wider tree planting to absorb carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas e.g. support for Thames Chase Community Forest.

Essex Highways is actively working with Parishes under the Devolution Initiative to explore how Parish and Town Councils can assist in caring for the public realm in local areas. Whilst the planting of trees needs to be considered carefully due to the potential for damage to the highway and underground apparatus, Essex Highways very much supports adjacent property owners to plant trees in their land in order to encourage an attractive and beneficial environment.'

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

'Would the Cabinet Member agree to support the aims of Colchester Cycling campaign's new cycling charter? It states:

We recognise that...

- Cycling has an important part to play in addressing Colchester's challenges of congestion, inactive lifestyles, pollution and population growth
- Cycling supports business, boosts economic productivity and contributes to the health and well-being of our workforce
- Pressure on the growing town will be relieved if more people cycle
- Increased physical activity helps ease the burden on our health and social care services

We want Colchester to be a town where...

- Children can cycle to school or college safely
- People can travel to work safely, directly and easily on a convenient and connected cycle network
- Our roads and public spaces prioritise people and make cycling the safe, natural choice for a large proportion of everyday journeys
- Cycling contributes to our prosperity, helps us stay healthy and keeps people and goods moving'

Reply

'I thank the member for Abbey for his question on policy regarding cycling.

Personally, I am a great supporter of cycling, which we will see increase across the county with our focus on offering sustainable transport. We appreciate the principles of this charter and have been approached by the Borough Council and others so we will be discussing this initiative with the Borough Council and the local county councillors. We also have a countywide Cycling Strategy and a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan initiative being prepared with input from Colchester Borough Council officers and sponsored by Department for Transport. This plan is being drafted and will be the subject of consultation. It is one of several LCWIPs we

are preparing across Essex in the hope that the Autumn Statement will include an opportunity to bid for funding.'

12. By Councillor Young of the Cabinet Member for Customer and Corporate

'Would the Cabinet Member confirm what investigations they have done on the educational impact library closures would have on young people under the age of 16. As under 16-year-olds heavily feature as a library user and so maybe detrimentally affected by the library closures.'

Reply

'As part of the Future Library Strategy work programme, a detailed equality impact assessment is being prepared, which looks at each proposed tier 4 library and considers the impact on children and young people (and other groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010) and identifies nearby alternative services and venues.

The intention of the proposed Future Library Strategy is that the council would still run a countywide network of libraries, which would be invested in and modernised over the course of the strategy. This investment could include the creation of study zones and chill out spaces: both of which young people have told us they want. Smart library technology and an enhanced eLibrary would also help make the service more relevant to young people and their expectations for the future.

The proposed Future Library Strategy also places a strong emphasis on outreach, allowing the library service to engage with a greater number of young people in a wide variety of community settings.

We will continue to deliver Bookstart, which delivers free book packs to all children at age one, three and 4-5. All children are entitled to the packs.

We will continue to offer a range of services for children with special educational needs and disabilities. These include sensory facilities, sensory story times and the promotion of volunteering opportunities to develop confidence. Tailored Bookstart packs for children with Special Educational Needs are also produced, such as braille books for blind children.

We are also one of the largest authorities delivering the Summer Reading Challenge - an activity that encourages reading over the long summer break. This year's theme is Space Chase – inspired by the 50th anniversary of the moon landing.

I would welcome opportunities to discuss the future of Greenstead and Wivenhoe

libraries with Cllr Young and representatives from her community.'

13. By Councillor Reid of the Cabinet Member for Education

'With youth services slowly being slowly eroded and the budget reduced dramatically. What plans are the ECC putting in place to help those young people who are vulnerable and are increasingly being targeted and groomed into gangs and coerced into County Lines. Does ECC agree that we need to do more than sit in our meetings talking about these problems. Do we agree that more funding needs to be injected into youth services, breakfast clubs etc. so that teams of youth workers can work with our young people to encourage them to focus on their future in society?'

Reply

'Following the announcement by the Leader at Full Council earlier this year, Essex has pledged £500k to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to development a multi-agency approach to dealing with gang related crime in Essex.

Also contrary to Cllr Reid's comments Essex County Councils contribution to the youth service has grown each year from 2015.

2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
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2,404,610	2,812,087	2,876,474	3,312,303
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The youth service has also increased the income it receives from traded services to provide youth work for the young people in Essex. This includes schemes such as the National Citizen Service and others which has resulted in an overall spend on Essex Youth work last year of £3,538,144

The youth service is leading the way in Essex and the East of England in supporting our significant challenge to the issues of County Lines and gang activity. They recently commissioned an applied theatre play to raise awareness around Child Criminal Exploitation – specifically the strand of the County Lines drug trafficking model that sees vulnerable young people targeted by organised groups and gangs to groom, trick, trap and manipulate them into trafficking drugs and sometimes weapons.

The play raised awareness around:

- What is County Lines and how it can affect young people
- The grooming process and how it can apply to County Lines
- The similarities and potential crossover Between Child Criminal Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation

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- Where to go for help and advice

For adult audiences it also:

- Raised awareness of the warning signs of CCE
- Raised awareness of the coercive process that young people may have been through that has resulted in them being criminally exploited

Across the county over 80 performances were offered free of charge to secondary schools, over 13,000* young people/community members/volunteers/professionals watched the performance. They also arranged a version for elected members and senior leaders at Essex County Council.

In addition, they are currently starting to pilot a project where youth workers will be based in A & E at Basildon Hospital to engage with young people involved in violent crime with a view to encouraging them away from gangs.'

**post meeting correction*

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

'Could the Cabinet Member inform council of any plans to improve the quality of footpaths? Basildon New Town celebrates its 70th Birthday this year but the footpaths on some estates are in an appalling state and are in desperate need of a facelift.'

Reply

'I thank the member for Laindon Park and Fryerns for his question on the quality of footpaths.

With the further investment of £700,000 we announced in February, we are now asking County Members to nominate the top five footway defects they would most like repaired locally, including Basildon, and today I have written to all members with details of the scheme.

Over recent years Essex highways have been focused on improving our more major roads, county-wide. However we have continued to invest in our critical footways. In 2017/18 we repaired 719 reported individual footway defects around Basildon, and a further 871 in 2018/19. This year we will continue to repair safety-critical footway defects. We have also allocated £8 million to programmed capital footway improvements, with just over £850,000 allocated to Basildon District's area. Last year, we invested just over £700,000 there. Works this year are proposed in Hockley Road, Botelers and Ardleigh, as well as 8 further schemes in the Wickford area.'