
ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING 10 December 2013 Order Paper

Agenda Items

11(a) Written Questions (standing order 16.12.3)

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

'Would the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation please give me his commitment that the County Council will not seek to reduce the travel periods for pensioners with bus passes when it enters into talks over the 2014 /15 English National Travel Scheme?

Pensioners with bus passes across Essex greatly value having the opportunity to travel from 9am to midnight, Monday to Friday, and all day at weekends and many would be very concerned and worried if the starting time was changed from 9am to 9.30am.'

2. By Councillor D Kendall of the Leader of the Council

'Would the Leader of the Council please tell me how much Essex County Council has spent on Consultants and Interim staff over the last three financial years, and for this financial year up to the end of October 2013?

Would he please provide a breakdown for each heading for each year?'

3. By Councillor K Gibbs of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

'Blocked Drains

The residents in Eastwood Road, Rayleigh are at risk of flooding from surface water and sewage due to the drains in their road being blocked. Enquiries to the engineers report that the drains have not been cleared for some considerable time and due to the blockage

cannot be pressure cleaned.

- Can the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation advise when the drains in Eastwood Road were last cleared and is there a schedule in place for this work to be carried out?
- Can the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation advise if this is an issue that affects the rest of County where flooding has been prominent?

4. **By Councillor G Helm of the Leader of the Council**

'Bulgarian And Romanian Migration To Essex

In April this year a study by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) signalled that Britain is woefully unprepared for the ending of Bulgarian and Romanian migration restrictions at the end of this year.

Will the Leader of the Council agree to set up a cross-party committee to evaluate the impact and find the funding to mitigate disruption likely to be caused to our schools, health services, housing stock and green spaces by the expected influx of Romanians and Bulgarians in January next year?

Background:

Kent County Council Report

The impact of Bulgarian and Romanian migrants into the UK from January could cost public services in Kent an additional £3m a year, a confidential report has found.

It concludes the impact would be an estimated £3,120,000 per year, after deducting the additional council tax new arrivals could contribute. At the same time, the arrival of migrants is expected to create pressure on schools in some areas, with extra 390 primary-aged children estimated as needing places at county schools.

Likely Numbers

Campaigners and many Conservative MPs fear that the relaxation in the rules will see up to 50,000 migrants moving to Britain from Bulgaria and Romania every year. The pressure group Migration Watch UK, which has a good record in forecasting migration, is estimating 70,000 people a year from those countries could now travel to the UK in search of work or benefits.

Housing Problems

Eric Pickles, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, said that migrants from the two countries “will cause problems”. He warned that the expanding migrant population will put increased pressure on both the private and social housing sectors.

In England, a Bulgarian, Romanian or Croatian will be eligible for a housing allocation, homelessness assistance and housing benefits. But there is a limit to what is available and rough living or even squatting, may become a problem in Essex as it is in London.

Schools

The report stated that any influx, which will be made much worse by the worsening economic situation in Italy and Spain, could put a strain on schools.

Health Service

Dr Paul Roblin, a GP who practices in Botley, near Oxford said ‘GPs are expected to practice with limited healthcare funding and if we are using that money for treating visitors, the taxpayer loses out.’ With casualty departments across the NHS in UK reporting that they will not be able to cope with existing numbers of patients this winter, the extra burden on them from this new migration could prove the tipping point.’

5. By Councillor N Le Gresley of the Cabinet Member for Adults Social Care

‘Review Of Adult Social Care Services

Would the Cabinet Member for Adults Social Care urgently review the provision of adult care services within the County and upgrade any contingency plans for potential failures, due to the insolvency of providers that may cause disruptions to elderly residents of care homes or even cause homes to close?

Would he also be prepared to report back to Council after such review to confirm that the adult care services provided on behalf of Essex County Council are fit for purpose?

Background:

Britain’s biggest private care home owners have combined debts of nearly £5bn. An investigation by Corporate Watch has established that three of the top-10 companies, which own around 800 homes, have been rated as risky by leading credit agencies.

Southern Cross, which went bankrupt in July 2011, was not the first company to fail- but it was by the far the biggest and highlighted how

little financial scrutiny there is of companies paid huge amounts of public money to look after the country's most vulnerable.

Most leading care home owners have highly complex structures and loan arrangements making it difficult for local authorities to pierce the corporate veil and properly assess underlying risks. Scrutiny of five of the biggest care home providers show a further layer of complexity because they are owned by parent companies based in secretive offshore tax havens. Buy-outs, bond issues, refinancing and inter-company loans contribute to the complex and sometimes risky financial arrangements of some private investors and companies involved in caring for Britain's most vulnerable - making it difficult for councils to keep track.

The present government has yet to introduce any regulation to force care home providers to be more transparent about their finances – despite promises made in the wake of the Southern Cross collapse.

A recent report from the Care Quality Commission, which was reported on 7th October this year, has condemned **Broomfield Grange** in Chelmsford after inspectors made their second visit in the space of four months.

This home is run by the **European Care Group**, a company registered in the British Virgin Islands, where accounts are not required to be made public.

It is not just a case of the poor care provided by many of these homes; it is the worry being caused to elderly residents when they fail. Age UK states *“the impact of a home closing can be devastating with the shock of losing familiar faces and surroundings likely to have a dramatic impact on people's lives”*.

So if we must outsource these essential services and our responsibilities to elderly Essex citizens to the private sector, we need good governance, regular reviews and effective financial checks and balances. Given that there are 30 care homes in Essex that have been red lined by adult social care officers, I suggest that a review is needed to confirm that the adult care services provided on behalf of Essex County Council are fit for purpose.'

6. By Councillor I Henderson of the Cabinet Member for Highways

and Transportation

'Given that the Local Transport Act 2008 provides enhanced powers for local authorities in England and Wales to influence the standard of local bus services in their areas, could the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation provide a statement on what he believes are the benefits of Quality Contracts for bus passengers throughout Essex?'

7. By Councillor M Danvers of the Cabinet Member for Adults Social Care

'In light of the recent national concern over the exploitation of care workers, would the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care agree to consider the following when commissioning care for the elderly and vulnerable people from private care companies:

Namely that in acknowledging their professionalism, all care workers are:

1. Ensured of a proper hourly paid contract and not one of zero hours.
2. That all care workers are paid a living wage and not a minimum wage.
3. That outreach care workers are paid for all their work including travel between clients'

8. By Councillor K Bobbin of the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

'In light of the recent consultation on the future of the Youth Service, could the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning ensure that the hard to reach and often underprivileged young people in areas such as Basildon, Tendring and Harlow which have some of the highest needs in the County for Youth Services, are fully supported by dedicated ECC staff such as Young Carers and Targeted Youth Advisors?'

9. By Councillor K Clempner of the Cabinet Member for Families and Children

'Could the Cabinet Member for Families and Children provide a statement on what steps, since 2009, have been taken to promote the use of respite care at Maples, Harlow and Lavender House, Colchester?'

10. By Councillor J Abbott of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

'Highways Panels - Performance Monitoring:

There is concern about the delivery performance on local improvement schemes recommended by the Highways Panels. Of all the LHP schemes recommended to the Cabinet Member in 2012/13, and which he approved in that year, what percentage have actually been delivered to date, (1) across the county and (2) by each LHP area ?'

11. By Councillor J Abbott of the Cabinet Member for Families and Children

'Children's Centres - Cost benefit analysis of cuts versus social and health impacts:

Has any work been done by the administration on cost benefit analysis of the longer term impacts of cutting Children's Centre provision as proposed in the recent consultation ? In Witham Northern division for example one centre is proposed to be closed and the other 2 to have greatly reduced hours. Has the administration considered that the health and social costs of cutting this vital support to families could exceed the short term budget "savings"?'

12. By Councillor M Mackrory of the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

'I understand the Council does not maintain a central register of school staff, with criminal convictions but relies on individual schools to keep their own records. In the light of recent national high profile cases would the cabinet member consider it prudent to compile such a register for public inspection?'