

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

9 December 2014

Answers to Written Questions (standing order 16.12.1)

Agenda Item

11(a)

1. **By Councillor J Whitehouse of the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Scheme Delivery**

‘How many schools in Essex are located on winter gritting routes, how many are not, and will the Council ensure that all Essex schools are accessible on days when gritting is required?’

Reply

Schools and School bus routes present a challenge both physically and practically to the winter gritting service. Access to schools can be problematic as they are often located off residential streets that are at risk from on street parking or do not have the space for gritting vehicles to operate within. However, only 46 schools in Essex are more than 250m from a Precautionary Salting Route.

In terms of school bus routes there are estimated to be some 600 school services within the county, and there is no obligation on the operators to notify the Council of the routes and they are free to adjust routes as they see fit.

2. **By Councillor J Whitehouse of the Cabinet Member for Libraries, Communities and Planning**

‘The following 0845 numbers are listed on the council’s ‘Contact Us’ webpage (www.essex.gov.uk/Pages/Contact-us.aspx). These are expensive for many residents who may not have 0845 numbers included in their call packages, especially if calling from mobiles.

For each service listed would you please provide the alternative geographic or 0345 number that members of the public can call?

<i>Service</i>	<i>0845 number</i>	<i>Local call rate alternative</i>
Protection for Children and Adults	0845 606 1212	
Highways	0845 603 7631	
Adult Community Learning	0845 603 7635	
Births ceremonies and deaths	0845 603 7632	
<u>Environmental Issues</u> <i>including country parks</i>	0845 603 7624	
<u>Education and schools</u>	0845 603 2200	
Libraries	0845 603 7628	
<u>Recycling and Waste:</u>	0845 603 7625	
<u>Social Care</u> (adults) <i>including blue badges</i>	0845 603 7630	
Social Care (children)	0845 603 7627	
Trading Standards (business)	0845 603 7626	
Trading Standards (public)	0845 404 0506	

Reply

'In 2005, when ECC set up their contact centre in Essex House and took the decision to use 0845 numbers, most people had a BT landline and 0845 numbers were charged at a lo-call rate (6p per minute). Since this time the telephone industry as gone through a host of changes which has led to greater choice and flexibility in tariffs however most do not include 0845 numbers as part of their standard deals.

Additionally more and more people are using mobile phones and moving away from traditional landlines to make their call which, again, means they are paying higher tariffs to make calls to 0845 numbers.

We are aware of these developments and are currently looking at moving all main telephone numbers to 03 calls, which are all charged at lo-call rates, as part of our Digital Channels programme of transformation.

We are going to manage the change over the next year taking into account demand patterns.

We do not use geographic numbers as these do not give us the

flexibility to plan for Business Continuity Incidents or to have flexible working, which is essential as part of our need to always be available for the public. There is a geographic number that people can use whilst this transition is taking place (01245 430430).'

3. By Councillor A Erskine of the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Infrastructure, Waste and Recycling

'Would the Cabinet Member assure members that a workable and safe route for waste transfer vehicles travelling from Colchester and Tendring's waste transfer site on the Harwich bound side of the A120, (towards Courtauld Road) has been communicated to the drivers before Colchester and Tendring's Waste and Recycling Transfer Centre goes live.'

Reply

While it is not an illegal traffic movement, I do not expect vehicles of this size to be making such a manoeuvre on the A120. When the site was being developed and discussions took place with the contractor, Veolia, the clear expectation of ECC was that vehicles heading to Courtauld Road would do so via the Frating roundabout. Veolia equally assumed their sub-contractors would do this as this was a quick and safe route.

The use of the right turn crossover at Hares Green or other points along the A120 for waste transfer station vehicles is completely unacceptable and this was communicated to the operator of the facility as soon as this issue was brought to my attention by Cllr Mick Page at Tendring District Council. I have received assurances that this manoeuvre, which was undertaken on a few occasions by a sub-contractor utilising the site, will cease with immediate effect and all waste transfer station vehicles exiting the site towards Colchester will do so via the accepted route only.

I assure Cllr Erskine that we will be monitoring this situation to ensure full compliance with the use of the accepted routes.

4. By Councillor C Pond of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

'What have been the savings, in energy, carbon, and cash, resulting from the Street Lighting Central Management System giving greater flexibility in trimming.'

Reply

I am very much obliged to Cllr Pond for his question. As part of the installation of the central management system (CMS) 57 base stations were installed across the County. The sites were chosen to ensure best signal coverage and were located on tall columns on high ground. Each base station has an accurate light meter measuring light levels and can control up to 5000 lights.

Before the Central management system was installed each individual lighting column would have had its own photocell measuring the local lighting levels. The traditional use of the term "trimming" is where you would use photocells with different factory-set light level thresholds for on/off switching; values can be chosen so that the light comes on slightly later at dusk and off slightly earlier at dawn (remembering that discharge lighting takes a little while to warm up to reach full luminance).

The deployment of the CMS has created what we can now term as "natural trimming" which has taken place across the County in that lights are coming on or going off at slightly different times than their local environment dictates because they are controlled by the base station. Furthermore, with CMS any light level threshold can be chosen (and potential dimming arrangements with the advent of LED are infinite). This will not only produce the potential for additional savings to more swiftly justify the introduction of LED but also enable us to consciously manage lighting levels in different environments and with different intensity of lighting devices.

5. By Councillor M Fisher of the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Scheme Delivery

'When will the street signs be put in place to direct visitors to Firstsite Gallery in Colchester?'

Reply

Highways would not provide signs to the Firstsite Gallery as there is no parking at the venue. There is the possibility of providing signposting to the nearest car park from which drivers can then walk to the venue following pedestrian signs provided by Colchester BC

6. By Councillor Theresa Higgins of the Cabinet Member for Libraries, Communities and Planning

'I understand that there are ongoing talks between Mersea Outdoors and local landowners to provide a boating lake. How are these progressing and will it be resolved before the area is reclaimed by the sea as part of the coastal protection strategy?'

Reply

Due to commercial sensitivity of the situation the Cabinet Member will give a verbal response

7. By Councillor J Deakin of the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Scheme Delivery

'I refer to the new school which is due to open in September 2015 in Maltese Road, on the old Heywood site.

Can I have assurances:

1. That the lights will be phased at Parkway and Park Avenue so that vehicles have an opportunity to exit Maltese Road?
2. That a safe refuge will be in place to assist pupils and their families to cross safely across Rainsford Road?

This has been requested at the Local Highways Panel, but no firm assurance has been given and the November meeting has been deferred until January 2015. I understand that the scheme has been commissioned as 'design only' this financial year

Reply

Due to the number of side rounds and volume of traffic experienced in the area it is not feasible to phase the existing signals at both Parkway and at Park Avenue in order to create gaps in the flow at Maltese Road.

The pedestrian refuge island on Rainsford Road is funded by Section 106 monies and contractors are working towards the pedestrian refuge being installed in the Summer of 2015 in advance of the school opening.

8. By Councillor J Deakin of the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

'Is the Cabinet Member content that sufficient detail is provided by schools on how the Pupil Premium is spent?'

Reply

I welcome the coalition's policy to introduce the pupil premium entitlement into schools across the country to support schools to raise aspiration and outcomes for the most disadvantaged pupils.

Closing the gap for the disadvantaged is a key priority within the commissioning strategy for 'People have aspirations and achieve their ambitions through education, training and lifelong learning'

The pupil premium grant in Essex for this financial year is £45m which adds significant value to schools across Essex and in particular those that take a high proportion of pupils eligible for Free School Meals and Children in Care.

Schools who receive the pupil premium grant are required to publish on their websites how they spend their pupil premium grant allocation and the impact it has had on raising outcomes for those eligible pupils.

Each school in Essex has a link Standards and Excellence Commissioner who will as part of their termly visits to schools specifically review the outcomes for pupils eligible for pupil premium and check the quality of information held on the schools' websites.

Ofsted also review the use and impact of pupil premium grant when they inspect schools and my officers also review the feedback from Ofsted.

Where we have concerns in individual schools, or where Ofsted recommend this, we will undertake a full Pupil Premium Review of the school. Schools can also request their own pupil premium health check.

2014 pupil level outcomes have recently been released and my officers are reviewing the performance of disadvantaged pupils compared to their non- disadvantaged peers as we speak. As part of our quality assurance work this will be followed up with schools as

part of their visit schedule with their link commissioner.

In terms of the use of the pupil premium grant for Children in Care, this is allocated directly to the Head of the Virtual School. Schools need to submit a Personal Education Plan for approval to the Head of the Virtual School to release the pupil premium allocation to the school.

I am very pleased that since 2011 the gap in outcomes for pupils eligible for Free School Meals at Key Stage 2 has reduced from 20% in 2011 to 12% in 2014 and at Key Stage 4 has reduced from 31% to 26%. We are aware that more work needs to be done in many schools in Essex to close further the gap and have completed an action plan for implementation in the spring term.

9. By Councillor D Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Scheme Delivery

‘Beacon Lights at Pedestrian Crossings;

- How many Beacon Lights have been installed at Pedestrian Crossings throughout Essex and where are they located?
- Have all the pedestrian crossings where the Beacon Lights have been installed met the County Council’s rigid criteria?
- Will the Cabinet Member review the criteria to enable more of these lights to be installed and in doing so help improve pedestrian safety?’

Reply

1. Every pedestrian crossing in Essex is designed to the current designs standards and specification given by the Department for Transport. This includes the use of “belisha” beacons at all Zebra crossing in accordance with those standards.

There are other types of beacons available that have a halo of LED lights around the beacon.

There are six sets of halo beacons located at the following sites:

- Market Road, Wickford
- Ongar Road, Brentwood (near Sandpit Lane)
- Wood St, Chelmsford
- Baddow Rd, Chelmsford (near Meadgate Ave)

- Spa Rd, Hockley
 - Highwoods Approach, Colchester
2. The criteria for halo beacons was introduced in September 2013, however, the majority of sites listed above did meet the collision reduction criteria at the time installed. The rationale for the criteria was to facilitate the use of the halo beacon at sites where there were identified issues and to prevent drivers from becoming complacent by overuse.
 3. As you are aware there are a number of criteria that need to be met before halo beacons can be installed:
 - Single site – four personal injury collisions (PICs) in five years within a 50m radius
 - Loss of control – three PICs (with loss of control identified as a contributory factor) in three years with a 250m radius

Having considered this information I am not minded to amend the existing criteria as it would contravene national standards and best practice.

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

‘Part Night Time Lighting Crime Figures

In the interest of openness and transparency, do you believe that Essex Police should publish monthly crime statistics for crimes committed during the hours of 12.00 midnight to 05.00 a.m. in all the Borough, District and City Councils across Essex?

This information would ensure that residents have a clear understanding of the level and types of crimes being committed in their areas during the hours of part night time lighting.’

Reply

In principle, Yes - although it is not quite as simple as that.

11. By Councillor M Mackrory of the Leader of the Council

‘The Leader of the Council is quite rightly seeking the support of Essex second tier local authorities to secure maximum devolution of powers to Essex from central government.

By what means does he propose to involve residents, county members and those second tier authorities in this process and in formulating any proposal?’

Reply

Thank you for your question. I continue to meet Essex District, City and Borough leaders to work together on the content and context for devolution of powers to Essex for central government. The next such meeting will take place on Thursday 11 December. Additionally I co-signed a letter alongside “second tier local authority” leaders in Essex that was sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer before the Autumn Statement. I have been interviewed in print and broadcast media about the powers Essex needs and intend to develop that debate across the county in coming months.

12. By Councillor S Robinson of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

‘What steps will the Cabinet Member take to improve the ability of Local Highways Panels to deliver their agreed projects? Will he consider allowing unspent money in LHPs to be used to buy in additional staff capacity in order to deliver schemes?’

Reply

To continue to urge them to determine their list of projects for the next financial year before the end of this financial year and to recognise that many projects require an evaluation/scheme design before they can be implemented i.e. there is a two stage process. No - we will not allow underspends to buy in staff capacity as that is not the issue and it would be a wrong use of a capital allocation anyway.

13. By Councillor S Robinson of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

‘Will the Cabinet Member agree to meet with the county members from the City of Chelmsford to discuss current and future congestion problems?’

Reply

Yes, of course. But bearing in mind that the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group chairs the Locality Board would it not have been easier to have asked him to progress the matter rather than wait until

full Council to ask me.

14. By Councillor N LeGresley of the Cabinet Member for Libraries, Communities and Planning

‘Given the very significant cost to Essex County Council of dealing with surface water flooding and homes incursions, due to both injudicious building on flood plains and overburdened drainage systems, what criteria are used by Essex County Council (for example the Environment Agency’s Catchment Flood Management Plans) in determining their support for or objection to various district council’s development strategies?’

Reply

District, Borough and City Councils as the Local Planning Authorities (LPA) are required to prepare the evidence to inform and support their Local Plan and the sites put forward for development. This evidence needs to include an up to date Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). The Environment Agency are the main agency engaged with the LPA on flood and water issues, and advise on policy and site development options.

Essex County Council is the main infrastructure authority and a key consultee in accordance with the Duty to Cooperate requirements.

ECC as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) when responding to Local Plan consultations will take into account the technical evidence (SFRA) and flood and water management, and planning obligation policies contained within the Local Plan. Where the evidence is outdated or flood and water and planning obligation policies needs to be strengthened, this will be made clear. In addition, in formulating the LLFA response to a Local Plan the following criteria will be used to help shape the County Councils response to site specific proposals:

- Evidence contained with the relevant Surface Water Management Plan;
- The County Council’s draft Sustainable Drainage Guidance (2014);
- The draft National Sustainable Drainage Guidance.

15. By Councillor A Bayley of the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Infrastructure, Waste and Recycling

'We are reminded regularly by the administration of the success and achievements of Essex County Council, in particular the roll out of Superfast Broadband across the County.

Can the Member for Economic Growth, Infrastructure, Waste and Recycling please explain, especially as the internet is the retailer's most damaging opponent, how the roll out of Superfast Broadband is benefitting the local shop keeper in the shrinking high street? Also what measures are being put in place to support the small shop keeper to fend off the effects of the internet, as the promotion of the internet is actively diminishing high street custom?'

Reply

I'm not quite sure what Cllr Bayley is implying by his question – If the member is suggesting that we cancel the Superfast Essex Broadband programme, it is far too valuable to Essex residents and businesses for us to ever consider this. I encourage our local retailers to capitalise on opportunities presented by the internet, enabling them to trade, not just locally, but across Essex, the UK and even the world.

The Invest Essex team provide a variety of support to businesses of all sizes and our district partners provide a range of bespoke programmes to support high street retailers. Through the Low Carbon Business Programme, retailers in a number of our districts can have a website developed free of charge to improve their online presence and are provided with access to training in how to use the various social media channels to market their business.

I make no secret of the importance of the Superfast Essex programme which supports our local businesses and I simply do not accept Cllr Bayley's premise that it is doing anything but helping to boost the local economy.

16. By Councillor K Smith of the Leader of the Council

‘Would the Leader of the Council consider the introduction of English History Week to coincide with Saint George's Day, with a view to promote and educate pupils of the great deeds and history of England and her people?’

Reply

As Leader of Essex County Council my powers do not extend to introducing an English History Week across the country, but I support anything that helps Essex residents find out about their history. On that note, the Essex Records Office does sterling work in making Essex past accessible to people across the county and indeed from abroad. I have asked officers to explore an Essex History Week to run next year.

17. By Councillor M Danvers of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

‘It was reported at the recent Essex Police and Crime panel that night time crime had recently started to increase after years of falling and the percentage of residents feeling safe in their local area at night plummeting to 48% from 64%. Would the portfolio holder link these figures to the turning off of our street lighting or if not what other reasons would he advance?’

Reply

There are fluctuations in trends in crime for all sorts of reasons from time to time. It would be too simplistic to attribute any such increase to the Part Night Lighting scheme. There is no evidence that the scheme has caused any increase in crime levels. Public perceptions about feeling safe are also be influenced by many factors

18. By Councillor M Danvers of the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

‘Would the portfolio holder state his position on the suggestion that local authorities should take back control of failing academies that

wish to return to local authority control?’

Reply

I am in favour of any school that is not currently good or outstanding, as judged by Ofsted at its last inspection, being challenged and supported in the quest to become at least ‘good’. I am proud of our record as a local authority in assisting the improvement of many schools in Essex; and that we have formally challenged schools meeting the criteria for the LA issuing a formal warning notice, using powers available following the Education and Inspections Act, 2006.

We have an excellent relationship with schools in Essex that have become academies – whether through sponsorship by an appropriate trust or conversion to a ‘stand-alone’ academy. I agree that, until the appointment of our regional commissioner, there were not sufficient powers to challenge poor performance by academies outside the reserve powers held by the secretary of state for education.

However, since our regional commissioner (Dr. Tim Coulson) took up his appointment, I am pleased to say that there is now strong support and challenge. We have, moreover, a strong working relationship with Dr. Coulson, who, as members here will know, is passionate about improving standards in Essex schools. I meet with him, and his DfE colleagues, every term, and my officers liaise with him frequently to discuss the challenge that is required to academy schools where the most recent Ofsted outcome is less than good; where standards are poor; where progress is lacking; and / or when the gap in performance between children entitled to the ‘pupil premium’ and all others is wide.

Therefore, I am not in favour, as long as the current arrangements apply, of this local authority ‘taking back control’ of failing academies.

19. By Councillor I Henderson of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

‘Could the portfolio holder clarify why Essex County Council has not applied for Government funding, available through DECC, to pay for LED lighting projects in Essex?’

Reply

We are proceeding with a pilot scheme this financial year to help evaluate the viability of LED street lights. We did consider funding it via the Green Investment Bank and/or the PWLB. Both of these options would have involved external borrowing and it is easier and more effective for Essex CC to fund the cost of the pilot itself.

20. By Councillor I Henderson of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

‘Could the portfolio holder confirm whether there is a formal facility now in place for authorities, such as the fire service, to ask for street lights to be switched back on at night if there is a particular emergency? Could he confirm if the Central Management System is able to carry out this facility?’

Reply

There always has been. You received written confirmation to this effect on 8 October last - and yes - the CMS can and does.

21. By Councillor K Bobbin of the Leader of the Council

‘In light of recent recommendations by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission to become a living wage country to help prevent Britain from becoming 'permanently divided', would the Leader consider promoting the living wage at the pre-procurement stage through the Social Value Act 2012 with potential contractors?’

Reply

I have no plans at present to introduce extra demands on contractors, but we are always looking to increase benefits to the whole of the county of our procurement activity. I consider that we meet our obligations under the Social Value Act and would draw members’ attention as an example our success in securing 48% of our procurement spend inside the county and our requirement that contractors deliver apprenticeships to support young people into jobs and sustainable careers.

22. By Councillor J Young of the Leader of the Council

'Following the decision on the appointment of Councillor Walters to Essex Cares as a non-executive director, could the Leader confirm that the allowance will be declared in the members register of interests and as the one share holder? Will he ask Essex Cares to reveal the detail of directors pay in the annual accounts?'

Reply

Thank you for your question. We can confirm that the allowance paid to Cllr Walters as a non-executive director of Essex Cars Ltd will be declared in the members register. We further confirm that Essex Cares Ltd will publish the details of directors pay in the annual accounts

23. By Councillor J Young of the Cabinet Member for Adults Social Care, Public Health and Wellbeing

'There are many people in Essex that receive monies from the Independent Living Fund (ILF) to top up their Local Authority care funding package. The ILF closes in June 2015 when ILF monies will be transferred to ECC in July 2015. The recipients are worried that so far no guarantee has been given that this funding will be passed on.

Prior to the closure of ILF, all recipients will have been reviewed by an ILF Assessor accompanied by the ILF representative for ECC. Following these ILF assessments, reports have been sent with recommendations that there should be continuance of the current ILF award.

A loss of this funding would have dire consequences to the health and well-being of the severely disabled people concerned.

Will ECC guarantee that the funding present recipients receive will be passed on to those recipients in its entirety from July 2015, as this will be at no cost to ECC?'

Reply

The Independent living fund (ILF) will cease in June 2015, there will

be a transfer of funding to Essex to meet these costs. The budget assumptions for 2015/16 and beyond have been made assuming that there will be no detriment to service users in Essex, either financially or in delivery of services. Council officers are working closely with the ILF fund to ensure a smooth transfer of responsibilities and funding.

24. By Councillor K Smith of the Leader of the Council

'Can the Leader of the Council, on behalf of elected members, write a letter to the European Union explaining the Council's disappointment by punishing Britain with a levy of £1.7 billion?

The levy was slapped upon Britain as a punishment for ending Labour's long standing policy of tax and spend which almost brought Britain to its knees. This present Government has pursued a policy of attempting to reign in the growth of the national deficit. These tough measures have induced growth back into the UK economy. For the EU to tax the recovery of the UK economy is deeply wrong and demonstrates why the EU should drop this £1.7 billion tax grab.

It should also be noted in this letter from the Leader, that the EU accounts have never been signed off in two decades. On that basis, on what moral authority enables the EU to punish the taxpayer of Britain to reward economic failure in countries like Socialist controlled France.'

Reply

The Deputy Leader and I raised this issue personally with the Prime Minister at the end of October and I am heartened by the strong response we received, which is further evidenced by actions and comments from the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary since then.