
ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

14 July 2015

Answers to Written Questions (standing order 16.12.1)

Agenda Item 12 (a)

1. By Councillor G Butland of the Cabinet Member for Adults and Children

'Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards Assessments (DoLS)

(i) How many requests for a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards Assessment under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 have there been in Essex in (a) 2013, (b) 2014 and (c) 2015 to date?

(ii) What has been the impact on the County Council, in terms of resources needed (both human and financial), of responding to requests for DoLS Assessments since the Supreme Court judgment of 19 March 2014 in the case of P v Cheshire West and Chester Council?

(iii) Has the County Council had any discussions with the NHS and/or Essex Police about the impact on their services of the requirement that all deaths of people subject to a DoLS order must be investigated by the coroner, whether the death was from natural causes or not?

(iv) Has the County Council been able to meet, on all occasions, the requirement for DoLS assessments to be carried out within 21 days?

(v) Has the County Council made, or does it intend to make, any representations to Government about the operation of the DoLS assessment procedures?'

Reply

- (i) 'In 2013/14 there were 2,557 referrals and in 2014/15 there were 4,148 referrals for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard (DoLS) received by Essex County Council from care homes and hospitals.'

- (ii) Since 1 April 2015, the impact of the Supreme Court Judgement has seen the number of DoLS applications rise to 4,697 per annum (based on current levels of daily referral rates). As with other authorities, Essex County Council's ability to undertake assessments is restricted by the availability of qualified Best Interest Assessors (BIAs). Essex County Council were awarded a DoLS Grant of £630,000 which is being used to increase the number of BIA assessors in Essex.
- (iii) Essex County Council have commenced work with the NHS, specifically GPs, who report that they are frustrated with the inflexibility of the current legislation and the impact of reporting all residents under DoLS orders who have died to the coroner for further action. GPs are also concerned about the emotional impact on families and carers due to the delays in the issuing of the death certificate and funeral arrangements. This work is ongoing. In relation to the police, there does not appear to be an impact as the police are only involved in cases of death that are suspicious or causes of death unknown.
- (iv) In relation to our ability to meet the requirement for DoLS assessments within 21 days we have not been able to meet this requirement for all of our assessments. To manage any delays we now have in place a priority-based listing tool, assurance that everyone who submits a request for a DoLS assessment receives an email notification acknowledging receipt and cases that become urgent are considered on a case by case basis by a senior assessor and given priority as needed.
- (v) The review of the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards is being accelerated. The Law Commission will be publishing a report and draft bill by the end of 2016, instead of 2017 which was originally scheduled. The County Council is in the process of compiling a response to the Law Commission.'

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

'The former health secretary, Andy Burnham, has recently visited Essex claiming his 'fears' for the NHS. Would the Leader agree with me that he owes the people of Basildon and Essex a sincere and unreserved apology for this bogus and dishonest claim?'

Reply

'I thank the Councillor for his question, but I caution him not to hold his breath for an apology. He took three years to say sorry for Mid-

Staffs.'

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

'At the south-westerly borders of my Division with Thurrock, Thurrock Council has agreed to build 50 large houses with up to four bedrooms on greenbelt land. The nearest schools and public services are within my Division. Cllr. Mrs. Sue Little of Orsett Ward has been leading the campaign against this now successful planning application. Cllr. Little is now working on an appeal against this application. Would the Leader meet with me and Cllr. Little to discuss this situation and the implications for Essex County Council?'

Reply

'I thank Councillor Smith for his question.

The planning application Councillor Smith refers to is located in Thurrock and we fully respect the sovereignty of Thurrock Council.

Given Essex County Council has no jurisdiction over the application, it would therefore not be appropriate to comment on the merits of the application or Thurrock's decision, which is correctly a matter for Thurrock Council and Thurrock Council alone.

I would, however, like to give assurance to Councillor Smith that we always take the necessary measures to plan for infrastructure requirements, such as increased schools places. This is why, for example, we have invested in 20,000 more primary schools places over the course of the next five years.'

4. By Councillor D Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Adults and Children

'With more and more young people across Essex having to deal with Mental Health issues such as depression and anxiety, would the Cabinet Member please clarify the following points in relation to the support Essex County Council is providing on this very important issue:

1. How much has Essex County Council spent during each of the last three financial years on Mental Health support for our young people?
2. How much is Essex County Council proposing to spend during this current financial year on Mental Health support for our young people?

3. What specific new resources is the County Council prepared to allocate to deal with the growing problem of depression amongst young people that is seeing some having to wait up to two years for treatment?
4. Why aren't the Mental Health issues affecting all age groups across Essex being given far more focus and priority by Essex County Council?

Reply

1. 'Children's mental health and well-being is one of the priorities for Essex County Council. Every year for the last three years we have invested £2.3 million in our children and adolescent mental health services.
2. This financial year, spend on children and adolescent mental health services has increased to £2.5 million.

In addition, there is approximately £1.7 million investment in services that contribute to the support of children and young people with an emotional wellbeing and mental health need, such as Early Help Family Innovation Fund and Family Support.

There is also funding within other services such as children with disabilities, fostering and adoption and children in residential care, which is spent directly on emotional health and wellbeing.

3. Essex County Council, along with seven clinical commissioning groups, Southend Council and Thurrock Council have jointly re-commissioned integrated targeted and specialist mental health services for children and young people. From 1 November 2015 the new service will deliver the most effective treatment at the earliest opportunity. The new providers, North East London Foundation Trust, will be expected to ensure 95% of referrals are in treatment within 18 weeks.
4. In line with the national report 'Child in Mind' that was published by the Children and Young People's Mental Health Taskforce in May 2015, we want to make sure that children, young people and parents in Essex get the right help and support at the right time – and receive prompt treatment. That is why we have invested in the integration with health, social care and clinical partners across Essex and why we have re-commissioned this vital service so that we can meet children's

needs at an earlier stage and prevent the breakdown of family relationships.'

5. By Councillor D Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

'Following the withdrawal of the Connexions Careers advice service to Essex Schools, would the Cabinet Member please outline what measures have been put in place by Essex County Council to ensure that all schools continue to offer the best possible careers advice to our young people. Would the Cabinet Member please ensure that the following points are included in the answer:

1. What checks are being made by ECC staff on the quality and standard of careers being given in each secondary school across Essex, and how often are these checks being made?
2. How are each of these schools being measured and assessed on the careers advice they are giving their students?
3. Who should parents and young people contact at Essex County Council if they are concerned about the quality and the standard of careers advice being given at their school?'

Reply

- '1 The Education Act 2011 removed the statutory responsibility for the provision of access to Careers Guidance from local authorities and gave it to schools, academies and colleges. Schools are responsible for providing independent impartial Careers Guidance for pupils from Year 8 to Year 13. Local Authorities have a duty to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education or training. The County Council does this in a number of ways. This includes:
- making available to all young people aged 13-19 and to those up to age 25 with special education requirements support that will encourage, enable or assist them to participate in education or training.
 - To support schools, academies and colleges in their endeavours The County Council promotes and manages the Recognition of Quality Award (RoQA), a nationally validated award that enables and supports schools or colleges to deliver a high quality Careers Education and Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) programme.
 - It is a voluntary award, although recent Statutory Guidance issued by the Government in March 2015 encourages schools

to attain a nationally-validated Quality in Careers Award.

- In Essex 56 schools and colleges have achieved or are progressing the award.
- Schools reaccredit every 3 years and an annual audit will be introduced from October to ensure schools maintain high standards during the 3 years.
- The assessment process is undertaken by Career Professionals or Teachers with a background in careers.
- Our aim is to engage an additional 9 schools by the end of the financial year, taking the number of schools engaging with RoQA up to 64.
- Through robust data sharing policies with schools and colleges NEET and Destinations data are shared with education establishments. This data supports school's OFSTED Inspection and evaluation processes within their CEIAG Programme.

2. Schools and colleges are now required to report on their Student Destination data, which is published annually by the Department for Education.

The OFSTED inspection framework has recently been enhanced to include a number of references to CEIAG. Schools are monitored on:

- the extent to which the school has developed and implemented a strategy for ensuring that all pupils in years 8 to 13 receive high quality, impartial and effective careers guidance prior to starting post -16 courses and about choices following completion of their post 16 student programme;
- the impact of this guidance in helping young people to make informed choices about their next steps;
- the extent to which students are supported to choose the most appropriate courses, taking into account retention and success rates, as well as destination and progression information.

3. Contact:

Paula Hornett – Lead Commissioner Post 16 Engagement
Paula.hornett@essex.gov.uk or call 03330130936

Or

Tracy Eve – IAG Manager
iag@essex.gov.uk or call 03330130935'

6. By Councillor S Robinson of the Leader of the Council

‘Will the continued reduction in staff employed directly by Essex County Council lead to a saving in the costs of senior management since they have fewer staff to manage?’

Will this be taken into account when recruiting the new Chief Executive?’

Reply

‘I thank the member for his important question, but regrettably must disagree with his premise.

Firstly, a reduction of staff does not necessarily mean a reduction in workload – in fact, as he is no doubt aware, we have had to embark on our programme of transformation to meet not only our financial challenges, but also our aspirations to ensure our residents get the best possible service, and this takes senior management time and expertise to deliver.

Secondly, as the Member knows, we are now a commissioning council. This means that some of our services are provided by an in-house team, whilst others are provided under contracts with the private sector, the third sector, or other public sector organisations.

The responsibilities relating to this local authority, however, remain irrespective of the mode of delivery, and in fact, are increasing. For example, we have seen the transfer of public health last year, and this year we have seen the start of the additional responsibilities arising from the Care Act. With devolution on the horizon, this is only likely to increase further.

What matters, as I am sure Councillor Robinson will agree, is that we get the best outcomes for the residents of Essex.

I give my assurance to him that will continue, and that the next Chief Executive will play a vital role in ensuring this remains the case.’

7. By Councillor N Le Gresley of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

‘It frequently takes several and, in some cases, many years for S106 money, provided by developers to mitigate against undue impact on communities, to be utilised by Essex County Council. There have

been cases where the money is not used and has to be given back to developers when time limits run out.

In one particular case in Wickford, Bridge Road in Shotgate, work has been outstanding for well over 5 years and proposed work is only now being implemented.

Would the Cabinet Member agree to investigate the process of how S106 money is used across the County with a view to improving and speeding up the mechanism?

Would he also agree to specifically investigate the Bridge Road instance mentioned above so as to explain how it took from 2006/7, when the relevant development had been completed, till 2015 to commence the work?’

Reply

‘We have already examined this generic issue and have decided that the Local Highways Panels (LHPs) are the best forum for regularly reviewing the status and use of S106 monies as the terms of the S106 agreements are ultimately approved by the local District Councils rather than the County Council and are often prescriptive in how and when monies may be used. It is open therefore to the Basildon LHP to review the specific case to which he refers.’

8. By Councillor N Le Gresley of the Cabinet Member for Transformation and Corporate and Traded Services

‘In March of this year I was asked a question by individual letters from 14 pupils of Hilltop Junior School in Wickford that I have been unable to answer through conventional Council means.

Does Essex County Council have a Fair Trade and FSC (Forestry Stewardship Council) policy relevant to its procurement practices?

If so, could you explain, or direct me to where I can find out, how this is operated by the Council?

If not, would the Council consider adopting such a policy?’

Reply

‘Thank you for your question and I am sorry to hear that you have not been able to get a response through other means.

'Essex County Council takes sustainability very seriously and although it does not have a particular Fair Trade or FSC (Forestry Stewardship Council) policy relevant to its procurement practices, in line with the Social Value Act requirements and our own procurement procedures, it ensure that it considers thoroughly all environmental and social aspects of relevance to the goods or services being sourced. The Council has also been successful in achieving its Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) professional accreditation for its procurement practices, which includes its approach to sustainable sourcing.

Additionally Essex County Council, in partnership with MITIE, our provider of Property & Facilities Management, recently won the 'Public Sector Sustainability Award' for its innovative approach to furniture recycling and re-use.'

9. By Councillor M Ellis of the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Infrastructure, Waste and Recycling

'Will the Cabinet Member confirm his support for the motion passed by Basildon council 16/4 (item G) and commit to an undertaking with Basildon Council to;

- A review of waste facilities in conjunction with Basildon Council to assess the collective detrimental effects on the Borough of Basildon,
- Agree remedial actions and arrangements to be taken,
- To develop specific protocols between The County Council and Basildon Council to be followed in relation to any future waste facilities located within Basildon Borough.'

Reply

'Essex County Council (ECC) as waste disposal authority is responsible for Tovi Eco Park and also provides a RCHW at Pitsea on a site leased from Basildon Borough Council. Although ECC is aware of other recycling and waste facilities in Basildon, these are controlled by planning and other regulations.

As waste planning authority, ECC has a duty to ensure that there is a Waste Plan in place. The authority is currently out to consultation on its preferred approach to planning for and management of the entire waste sector. This consultation runs to the end of July and is the appropriate opportunity for Basildon Council and other district colleagues to influence future site allocations for the wider waste strategy in Essex.

When developing plans in any area, discussions take place with the

relevant local authority. Extensive consultation took place during the planning process for Tovi Eco park and conditions attached took into account local representations including diversion of waste from Pitsea landfill site.

ECC as waste disposal authority has no plans to develop any facility in Basildon Borough beyond those agreed in the original planning indicative scheme for Waste Management Facilities at Courtauld Road. I therefore do not agree with Basildon Borough Council's motion.'

10. By Councillor B Aspinell for the Cabinet Member for Finance

'I asked a question during the Budget debate at the February 2015 Full Council meeting:

"What initiatives has Essex County Council put in place to raise income?"

You undertook to investigate the matter and come back to me with details; to date I have not received this information. Are you now in a position to respond please?'

Reply

'I apologise for any misunderstanding as to the nature of feedback to the previous question.

It is critical that The County Council continues to find ways of increasing revenue as this reduces pressure on costs and helps us maintain our proud record on Council Tax. We have therefore led and provided funding for joint initiatives with District Councils to maximise Council Tax collection and to attack fraud.

Our traded revenues strategy is currently under review to assess the scale and feasibility of opportunities.

Alongside our capital investment programme, we have an ongoing programme of asset sales where it is clear that properties are no longer required.

To optimise revenue, where appropriate, we have implemented a fees and charges strategy, approved by Cabinet in January, which provides a standard framework within which to review fees and charges annually. We are also looking to take full advantage of external funding sources, e.g. EU funding 2014-2020, to support the

delivery of The County Council's outcomes.'

11. By Councillor T Higgins of the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Schemes Delivery

'Metal barriers have appeared on East Bridge, Colchester. This is in a conservation area and there are concerns that it will be there indefinitely.

- Why was I, as the local Member, not informed?
- When will works be carried out to fix the bridge?
- If there is a problem with the structure of the bridge, why has a weight limit not been imposed?'

Reply

(Response by the Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation on behalf of Councillor Johnson)

'Essex Highways endeavours to notify local Members well in advance of all works to the Highway. However this is not always possible, as in this case, where barriers were implemented as an emergency measure, while a programme of repair works is developed.

With East Bridge in Colchester, the carriageway is sound and therefore there is no requirement to implement a weight restriction. A recent inspection has highlighted, however, that the footways on either side are supported by steelwork which is badly corroding. Therefore the barriers have been placed as a safety measure to prevent vehicles mounting the footway and overloading it. The barriers have been placed on the footways but still provide a minimum of 1.2m width and for the most part a 1.5m width.

Obviously, such emergency measures are not aesthetically pleasing but are vital to ensure the safety of all road users. When we start the preliminary design of any future permanent scheme we will consult with the Colchester Borough Council Planning Department as the bridge is in a conservation area and, in advance of that, you will be notified as local Division Member.'

12. By Councillor T Higgins of the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Schemes Delivery

‘Through the Local Highways Panel, I requested a 20mph speed limit to be placed in Roach Vale in my Division. All the paperwork appears to be done, but as yet the signs are not in place. It is over two years ago when the process was started.’

Reply

(Response by the Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation on behalf of Councillor Johnson)

‘Two objections were received following the statutory consultation to introduce a 20 mph limit along Roach Vale, Orwell Close, Blackwater Avenue and Deben Road. I reviewed the objections and decided that the scheme should go ahead. This decision was published on 8th July and is subject to call in until 13th July. If no call in is received the works should start by the beginning of August and are planned to be finished by 11th September.’

13. By Councillor B Aspinell of the Cabinet Member for Adults and Children

‘You are already aware that one of my residents (who has been a longstanding Blue Badge holder) recently had a request for a Blue Badge renewal declined despite recommendations from a Hospital Consultant and a GP.’

Why is it appropriate that an ECC Occupational Therapist / Physiotherapist is considered to be more qualified to assess disability and that recommendations from his specialists are ignored?’

Reply

‘It is the Department for Transport’s view that the definition of an independent mobility assessor contained in the regulations precludes the use of both the applicant's GP and anyone else who has been involved in the applicant's ongoing care and treatment in determining an applicant's eligibility. The use of an independently qualified professional, specifically trained in the assessment of mobility, is recommended by the Department for Transport guidelines as they are

considered to be fairer and more objective.

It is therefore important that local authorities use assessors who hold appropriate professional qualifications and who are not open to bias because of a personal or commercial connection to the applicant.

From 1 April 2012 legislation dictates the process for assessing a person's mobility difficulties requires an assessment by a suitably qualified person. Essex County Council's mobility assessment procedure is designed and delivered by fully qualified physiotherapists and occupational therapists, with an understanding of the Blue Badge eligibility criteria. Great care is taken to follow the Department for Transport's core principles when conducting assessments.

All applicants are given the opportunity to provide supporting medical evidence at the time of their assessment. The provision of medical evidence at an assessment is not mandatory. It is used as a means of verifying information the applicant provides.

Although there is no legal requirement for local authorities to have an appeals procedure in place. Essex County Council does have an appeals process. To appeal the applicant will need to request another assessment of their application, within six months of the original assessment. This can be done through the Essex County Council website. The new assessment will be carried out by a different individual from that who completed the original assessment.'

14. By Councillor J Abbott of the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Schemes Delivery

'Will the Cabinet Member undertake to conduct a full review of the notification and planning arrangements for road closures associated with ECC highways works?

On multiple occasions in Witham Northern division over the last 2 years there has been inadequate or plainly incorrect information issued by ECC which has led to concern and inconvenience for residents, schools and local businesses, including disruption to bus services that elderly residents in particular rely on. These instances have included: failure to ensure that the roadworks ahead list sent to County Members includes all the relevant closures in the notice period; failure to plan ahead for alternative bus links when a bus route is affected; failure to issue letters to all residents directly affected by a closure; advanced notice signs put up on the highway with conflicting or wrong dates for closures; incorrect diversion routes around closures.'

Reply

(Response by the Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation on behalf of Councillor Johnson)

'Essex Highways have only recently concluded a review of the notification and planning arrangements for road closures as part of its commitment to continuous improvement. The review identified several areas for improvement including the "roadworks ahead" list and how we ensure effective communication with, for example, bus operators.

There are standard processes in place to facilitate road works notification to affected residents and to establish diversions where necessary. We do recognise, however, that on occasion these can falter especially where we are delivering such a large works programme.

Similarly, certain types of work such as surface dressing and road markings are weather dependent and subject to short notice change.

We will do our best to avoid inadequate or erroneous information in future.'

15. By Councillor J Abbott of the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Schemes Delivery

'What standards are applied to the condition of pedestrian (zebra) crossings that trigger repainting? I have been asking since last year for the 2 crossings near the New Rickstones Academy Witham (and adjacent schools) to be repainted. The crossing in Conrad Road in particular, that was specifically constructed for the Academy development, has now faded to a point such that the markings are almost invisible to drivers approaching the crossing.'

Reply

(Response by the Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation on behalf of Councillor Johnson)

'Road markings are inspected in accordance with the published Highways Maintenance Strategy available on the County Council's website.

The point at which a road marking becomes a defect is when 30% of

its extent becomes faded or worn. Once this trigger has been reached the highways inspector will risk assess the defect which gives it the priority for repair/recovery. Currently PR1 roads are inspected monthly, PR2 roads three monthly and local roads once a year.

While some markings on local roads will not be refreshed at all, Zebra crossings, wherever they are located, are particularly important and as we are investing heavily this year in markings' refreshment I confidently expect the crossings to which he refers will be addressed in the near future.'

16. By Councillor J Whitehouse of the Cabinet Member for Transformation and Corporate & Traded Services

'Please provide details of costs incurred relating to the former Epping Junior School and Centrepont sites in St John's Road Epping since the land was vacated by Epping Primary School including:

- (a) Security
- (b) Non-domestic rates
- (c) Legal and other professional fees
- (d) Other costs?'

Reply

'Thank you for your question.

Following the publication of statutory notices, Epping Infant School and Epping Junior School closed on 31 August 2008 and amalgamated to form Epping Primary School which opened on 1 September 2008.

At the time, the Infant School was occupying premises on Coronation Hill and the Junior School premises on St. John's Road.

Essex County Council undertook a capital project to provide new purpose-built premises on the former Infant School site on Coronation Hill. The premises were completed in 2010 and Epping Primary School relocated and started operating from its new site on 1 April 2010 leaving the St. John's Road site vacant. Since that time the costs incurred by the County Council have been approximately £692k.'

17. By Councillor I Henderson of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Healthy Living

'In light of Government's immediate and short-sighted intention to remove £200m from local authority Public Health budgets, could the portfolio holder confirm how much is estimated to be cut from ECC's Public Health grant and what the impacts will be on the Council's Public Health interventions designed to address key health needs and inequalities?'

Reply

'The recent announcement by the Government to remove £200 million from the Public Health Budget amounts to a reduction of approximately 7.4% of our own public health budget. This is likely to mean savings of around £3.6 million. The exact figure cannot be confirmed until the Government concludes its own consultation in the autumn.

We are currently in the process of reviewing our budgets and spend across all of public health for this year and will be in a position to confirm our plans shortly. Officers are working hard to identify a reduction in spend that will have minimal impact for the people of Essex. Our aim is to protect our existing services as much as possible and to minimise any impact, particularly in relation to health inequalities, and always keeping our focus on improving outcomes for the people of Essex.

Public health is a vital tool in our armoury. Since moving over to Essex County Council, Public Health has made great strides in providing an equitable service to the people of Essex, ensuring consistent quality in smoking cessation services, over-achieving on targets in health checks and gaining national recognition for the work done by the drug and alcohol teams.'

18. By Councillor J Young of the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Infrastructure, Waste and Recycling

‘Could the portfolio holder provide the total number of apprenticeships completed in Essex last year and how many of those apprenticeships became full-time jobs after completion?’

Reply

‘For the last full academic year for which there are statistics, 2013/14, 5930 apprentices in Essex successfully achieved their qualifications. This is a success rate of 66.6% for Essex residents, compared with 68.9% nationally.

The success rate for those undertaking their apprenticeship with help through the Essex Apprenticeship Programme is 78%.

Statistical information for those sustaining full-time jobs following the successful completion of an apprenticeship is not collected by Essex County Council or the Skills Funding Agency.’

19. By Councillor J Young of the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

‘Families from 23 areas in Essex have now come forward as being disproportionately affected by the Home to School transport policy. For families who will now face significant travel costs to transport their children to school, would the portfolio holder provide a firm commitment to release documentation held by the Council relating to how this policy was created?’

Reply

‘I have to say I am somewhat surprised by Councillor Young’s question, given the level of communication there has been with her on this subject. I understand that a comprehensive suite of documents were recently provided by a senior officer, evidencing the extensive and far reaching consultation that took place and referring to the process by which the Council democratically adopted the new policy arrangements. That information is similarly available to anyone who seeks it.

Furthermore, the minutes of the two scrutiny meetings that took place, along with the Cabinet report are all publically available on the Council’s website and Councillor Young should be well aware of this. I

am happy to confirm that documents relating to the policy change and the process which brought it about have been disclosed and, in that sense, I believe the question asked is seeking to make a point that has no basis either in relation to information provided to her or to parents throughout the County.

In regard to the policy, I am clear that it creates the fair and equitable assessment criteria for all Essex residents that was a paramount consideration in making the change. The previous policy was far more generous in its provisions for some areas of the county, as opposed to others, and that was unfair, particularly in the context of a service that is countywide and paid for by all Essex taxpayers. Parents across Essex should have a legitimate expectation that their Council will provide school transport in a fair and consistent way that does not provide an unfair advantage to some residents over others, whilst fulfilling the statutory responsibilities placed upon the Council.

I do not accept the premise of Councillor Young's question.'

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

'Given the rise in pupil numbers at primary level, would the portfolio holder consider further the finances of schools committed to taking on extra children and to partly fund these expansions when promised?'

Reply

'Thank you for your question concerning further consideration of the finances of schools committed to taking on extra children and partly funding these expansions when promised.

As you may know as a Council we have created 3,000 additional primary school places across the county ahead of the 2015/16 academic year. We are also planning to spend about £164.5 million over the next four years creating new school places across Essex.

This is a substantial sum of money but it is needed to meet the very great challenge we face in providing sufficient additional school places. We must of course use the resources we have available to us in the best way possible to provide best value for money for the citizens of Essex.

When we consider expanding a school or building a new one to meet an increased need for school places we follow guidance from the

Department for Education which sets out the appropriate size and type of accommodation that schools should have. Build projects ensure that appropriate new accommodation is provided to allow schools to deliver the curriculum and to cater for the increased numbers of pupils. We apply the guidance across all of our build projects to ensure fairness and consistency and we benchmark spending on projects to make sure that we are achieving value for money.

In addition to the physical expansion of the buildings we also provide funding for schools which they can use to purchase furniture and equipment for the new accommodation. In addition we support schools financially to allow them to employ more staff as appropriate to cater for the increase in pupil numbers. The levels of funding provided from our Growth Fund have been considered and agreed by the Schools' Forum and are fair and consistent across the county. I therefore do not consider that we need to review the levels of support available for expanding schools at present.

Schools revenue funding is funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant and once delegated to schools it is the decision of the headteacher and governing body how it is spent. The Authority would need to seek the agreement of the Schools Forum, a representative body of headteachers and school governors, to be able to charge schools with a contribution to expansions.'