
Essex County Council

8 December 2020

Order Paper

Agenda item 4

Public Questions

The following question will be asked by a member of the public registered to speak in accordance with Standing Order 16.12.8.

Question 1: from Mr Lee Scott, a resident of Chigwell. He asks:

‘Can the Cabinet Member please tell me how priority for pot hole repairs is decided and can I thank him on behalf of residents for the recent repair to the dangerous large pot hole at junction of Forest Lane and Chigwell High Road Chigwell Essex.’

Agenda item 13

Written Questions

1. By Councillor Mitchell of the Cabinet Member for Customer, Corporate, Culture and Communities

‘As a Royal Navy Veteran myself, I’ve recently been made aware of the Veterans Railcard scheme.

As a Climate Action Commissioner, I’m very keen to encourage more sustainable transport options for all, especially for those who have stepped up to serve their Country in times of conflict.

I would therefore ask if the Cabinet Member could share details with all Members so they can also support this honourable initiative throughout their Divisions?’

2. By Councillor Young of the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care

‘Given that suicide rates in Tendring and Colchester appear to be higher than other districts, please can you let me know the levels of spending on mental health services by this authority every year during the past ten years and whether additional resources are going to be made available to target Colchester and Tendring and other areas with a high number to try to improve things?’

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

'Could I ask the portfolio holder for an update on the Review of the Essex Speed Strategy mentioned at last Full Council meeting please. How is the review going for 20mph Policy please, and will the LHP be consulted in the next few months?'

4. By Councillor Young of the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care

'One of my constituents has raised the important issue of malnutrition of the elderly. She has urged us to review the council's spending on food for older and disabled people in the Wivenhoe area and in the rest of Essex, and in particular to ensure that funding for meals on wheels services is made available.

Across the country, numerous community groups have started providing meal delivery services for those in need during the initial lockdown. But to be sustainable, these groups need financial backing as well as support to integrate with adult social care so that they can access regular and appropriate referrals.

My constituent has requested that Essex County Council takes the following action;

- protects or reintroduces and enhances a local meals on wheels service,
- promotes a 'more than meal' approach where services include welfare checks, links to other support, and a lifeline of regular contact and
- champions innovative and strategic approaches that recognise the long-term benefits and cost-savings of meals on wheels for older people, for communities, and for the public purse.

Please can I request that an urgent review is conducted focusing on the existing arrangements and addressing these specific points.'

5. By Councillor Reid of the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

'Two-thirds of schools have students who are self-isolating. Government statistics reveal that almost two in three secondary schools in England had at least one student self-isolating as a result of potential contact with Covid-19 last week. Nearly two-thirds of secondaries are sending pupils home and we have a chaotic system rota system by default.

Schools need to give the latitude to move to a planned system. Teacher absence also mean many schools face closures. The impacts of loss of schooling over the pandemic is going to have an enormous impact on those students who are taking exams this year.

Can we as a County Council put pressure on the Government to decide what form

of attainment is going to be used in England (Scotland and Wales students already know what they will be assessed on) so that students can feel more confident about their expectations and teachers know what they are going to base the assessments on.'

6. By Councillor Reid of the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

'Home schooling numbers are up by 38%. A survey of 151 councils by the Association of the Director of Children's Services has found that the number of home-schooled children in England has risen by 38% year-on-year from 54,656 on 1 October 2019 to 75,668 on the same date this year.

Councils have reported that fears around Covid-19 were the top reason given by parents for home-schooling their children with many parents saying that they would send their children back to school once they feel it is safe to do so.

The ADCS "want to be able to support these families to make an informed choice and are equipped to offer a good and broad education" but cautioned that without a statutory register it is impossible to know every child or young person who is being electively home educated.

We know the impacts of the pandemic will be far reaching for all of us and especially for our young children. We realise this also will come with safe-guarding issues. Over this period, we feared an invisible crisis and that abuse and other issues were going unnoticed behind closed doors and it has been reported that since the first lockdown has ended, we have seen a rise in referrals to Children's Social Care.

Can we put pressure on the Government to revisit, at the earliest convenience, the response to a 2019 Department of Education consultation on setting up a register of children and young people who are not educated in school?'

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

'Will the Cabinet Member commit to reviewing the parameters and methodology for Essex speed surveys, in order to bring in lower speed limits and traffic calming measures based on safety?'

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

'Could I ask the portfolio holder to confirm the extent of ongoing works to resolve the flooding of Haven Road, Colchester at high tide?'

9. By Councillor Durham of the Cabinet Member for Customer, Corporate, Culture and Communities

‘Can I ask the Cabinet Member to confirm that library membership is open to all Essex children free of charge and that Essex County Council will continue to offer the Book Start programme throughout the county.’

10. By Councillor Harris of the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

‘Local school, Thomas Lord Audley has reported the good news that more students than ever are cycling to school. It does create an issue for them though, as their existing storage facility for 60 bikes is insufficient. They’ve also said that they have limited money to match-fund anything that external funders such as ECC might contribute, claiming the money needs to be focused on the education of disadvantaged students.

A new cycle shelter is needed. They range in value from about £9,000 up to £21,000, both without VAT.

Are there any funding streams that the portfolio holder is aware of, other than the Local Highways Panel, which could contribute to this cost? Is there anyone else you would recommend asking about funding or could Essex County Council portfolio holders provide assistance?’

11. By Councillor Scordis of the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care

‘Can the portfolio holder provide me with an update on the local test and trace scheme please? Specifically, how effective is it? And what could be improved about the system moving forward?’

12. By Councillor Mackrory of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

‘Can the Cabinet Member explain the process for determining the order of repair for the ‘50 Worst pothole’ procedure within a Division? The question arises after potholes were repaired in one road in my Division on one day but another group in an adjacent road were repaired a week later and others mid-way between are still waiting as are others elsewhere in Springfield?’

13. By Councillor Mackrory of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'Can the Cabinet Member ensure that highways works contractors remove their signage once the works are complete? For example in Epping High Street two road works signs have been propped up against a speed camera sign for two years and at the southern end of Main Road, Great Leighs a large 'Road closed ahead' sign has been prominently displayed for well over a year. Apart from being unsightly this leads to drivers doubting the relevance of current warning signage.'

14. By Councillor Baker of the Cabinet Member for Children and Families

'The Chief Executive of East Anglian Children's Hospice (EACH) has publicly stated that the hospice is in need of additional funding if it is to continue to provide the high quality health care for the children and young people of East Anglia who have life-limiting conditions or who require end-of-life care.'

I understand that the National Health Service (NHS) currently provides 17 percent of the necessary funding to the hospice and that the remaining 83 percent of the funding comes from voluntary giving. Due to the current pandemic, the voluntary giving has reduced drastically, and this vital service provided by the hospice for the children of East Anglia, which includes Essex, is asking the NHS to increase its funding.

My question to the Cabinet Member is:

Will Essex County Council, on behalf of the children, young people and families of Essex, write to the Secretary of State responsible for the National Health Service requesting that the NHS review its financial support for East Anglian Children's Hospice (EACH) in order to compensate for the reduced funding it is currently receiving from voluntary giving because of the pandemic, in order to maintain its vital service of health care and support for those children and families in Essex requiring it.'

15. By Councillor Deakin of the Cabinet Member for Children and Families

'Does this council have any concerns over the procedures to enable the Half Term Grants to be issued quickly?'

Were appropriate checks on the details of the applications thoroughly checked and verified?'

I do understand the necessity for speed and I'm sure the grants were welcomed by the successful charities. Many have posted photos on social media showing families eating or volunteers delivering bags of food. These tell a good story but it's not evidence.'

With another funding stream now open, what checks are in place to ensure all the funding is actually spent on purchasing and providing of supplies for those families most in need?

Does this council have assurances from EALC that the successful charities will be required to provide evidence, such as invoices, on how their grants were spent?

16. By Councillor Deakin of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'In Chelmsford we have a number of underpasses which link communities and key areas such as the city centre, railway station, bus station, schools and several industrial areas.

Every time there is a heavy downpour the underpasses flood and force people to have to cross some very busy roads, including Parkway, to continue their journeys.

Will the Cabinet Member expedite the clearing and cleaning of the drainage systems and associated gullies for these underpasses as the safety of our residents is paramount?'

17. By Councillor Abbott of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure?

'The recent closures of the A12 by Highways England for roadworks led to significant disruption, several incidents of damage to ECC highways infrastructure (streetlights, a bridge, highway signs and verges) and damage to private property - all caused by HGVs diverting through villages including Rivenhall. The police, ECC Highways and UKPN all had to be called out several times.

Whilst the roadworks were necessary, surely the disruption and damage caused by HGVs was avoidable if better planning had been put in place?

Is ECC satisfied with the arrangements made by Highways England for the diversions - and what lessons can be learned for the future?'

18. By Councillor Henderson of the Cabinet Member for Children and Families

'I am sure the Portfolio Holder for Children and Families is aware of Tendring District Councils recently published 2020-25 Housing Strategy. The publication refers to Government welfare reforms in recent years and highlights how they have impacted on the lives of children and families living within the Tendring District.

The publication states that 'There have also been a number of welfare reforms in recent years that have impacted on the housing market and the lives of residents in the district.'

Tendring has suffered disproportionality from benefit cuts, the spare room subsidy, the introduction of universal credit, the freezing of the local housing allowance and the reduction of Council Tax Benefits. Consequently, it has increased deprivation and has a high prevalence of mental health disorders in children, which is not surprising given the high levels of child poverty and deprivation in the district. Mental health disorders in children have an impact on educational attainment and Tendring generally ranks poorly compared to the rest of Essex in terms of educational attainment.

Can I ask the Portfolio Holder, having now been made aware of the hard evidence highlighting how recent welfare reforms are having a serious, lasting impact on the lives of children and families living within this county, does she still stand by her publicly made statement that: "These are promising times and it is great to see the Conservatives tackling the issues that really matter; cutting benefits...?"