
ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING 11 October 2011

Answers to Questions (Standing Order 17.11.3)

Agenda Item 12b)

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1. By Councillor Gerard McEwen of the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Waste and Recycling.

'The proposal to cease operating the Civic Amenity Site in High Ongar has provoked a storm of protest as demonstrated by the petition presented to the Chairman this morning with well over 3,000 signatures.

The calculations used to justify closure make no allowance for the loss of amenity to this large rural area (of something over 70 square miles) which is served by the site. The next nearest CAS in Brentwood is 6 miles away but it will mean a round trip of up to 25 miles for many of the users coming from the surrounding villages. This would also create additional serious traffic problems on the extremely busy A128 road.

A reduction in hours and days of operation as proposed for the other sites would be a far more acceptable option.

Whilst accepting the need for you to find maximum budget savings from your portfolio, I ask that the intended proposal - to close this site altogether before the year end - should be reviewed, to allow time for alternative solutions to be evaluated.

Following the meeting with Chairmen and Clerks of affected Parishes which you attended with the Head of Waste Management, a possibility has arisen which could result in a form of 'partnership contract'. This might even extend beyond the operation in High Ongar, resulting in further savings for the County Council.

May I extend to you an invitation to meet for discussions with interested parties, with a view to maintaining this valuable amenity?'

Reply

The review of the Recycling Centre for Household Waste (RCHW) provision has been predicated on the reduction in usage of these facilities over the past few years as a result of increased kerbside waste and recycling service provision by District and Borough councils, which in turn has been facilitated by direct County Council funding.

Since 2006/07 the amount of household waste being taken to the RCHW by residents has fallen by over 9%. In the case of the High Ongar site the reduction has been almost 21%. This fall in usage has meant that the current service provision no longer represents value for money.

In reviewing the RCHW service provision I have paid close attention to ensuring that the changes proposed in conjunction with other services provided do not significantly compromise the opportunity for householders to recycle or dispose of their waste.

Although I accept that current users of the High Ongar site will experience inconvenience as a result of having to travel further to access an RCHW site, the investment made by the County Council and the local district and borough councils in kerbside collections means that the need and frequency of such visits is now much reduced, as much of this material can be collected from the kerbside. Recent analysis undertaken earlier this year at the High Ongar site has indicated that usage of the site could be reduced even further as the existing kerbside collection services could handle almost 50% (by weight) of the household waste taken to this site.

Current users of the site have a number of alternative sites available and the road networks surrounding all of the alternative facilities within the High Ongar catchment area are of a sufficient standard to deal with any additional traffic resulting from the closure of this facility.

Although the review did look at options for reducing the operating days of the High Ongar site the declining usage of the site which is expected to continue combined with the available capacity at the larger neighbouring sites provided an opportunity to reduce overall service costs and improve value for money, it is for this reason I am proposing this change

In response to the recent meeting with local parishes, and the potential for a community led operation at the site, I will ensure all necessary resources are made available to explore this option with yourself, the local parish councils and the local district and borough councils. To this end a meeting is currently being sought with the interested party to further explore this potential opportunity.

2. By Councillor Mike Mackrory of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation.

'In a recent press release, reference was made that the £5.3m of DfT funding for pothole repairs "has now been allocated".

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that these funds will be allocated solely for pothole repairs, of which there are many thousands outstanding?'

Reply

The terms of the DfT funding grant stated that the money must be spent by the end of September 2011 and that highway maintenance should be prioritised to maximise **longer term value for money**, and that the funding must complement rather than displace the wider highways budgets.

The type and distribution of winter damage across the County varied, depending on the material type of the roads, their age and their locality. Defects included joint damage, edge deterioration, drainage problems, pot holes and more extensive surface deterioration. It may also be noted that the grant letter from the DfT makes reference to 'other road damage' in terms of winter weather damage, not just 'pot-holes'.

We tailored the nature of our response according to the type of damage as well as the opportunities to optimise the availability of contractor resources. At the heart of our approach, however, was the desire to achieve longer term value for money, as per the term of the grant. 'Seek and fix' gangs were employed to tackle a proliferation of pot holes, but we also carried out more extensive resurfacing where this was a better means of addressing high numbers of defects. Approximately 22,000 minor repairs, such as pot-hole repairs, were carried out. Approximately 108,000 square metres of additional patching and resurfacing works was also carried out, which accounted for approximately 13,000 other defects.

The DfT funding was combined with our Council pledge of over £4M 'to restore the network to its pre winter 2010/2011 condition'. Around half the Council pledge was spent by the end of September, and the Council funded work will be ongoing to the end of the financial year. To the end of September, the Council funding had accounted for approximately 9,500 minor repairs, such as pot-hole repairs, plus approximately 17,000 square metres of additional patching which has accounted for approximately 4,250 other defects.

It may be noted that our value for money approach to longer term repairs, in keeping with the terms of the DfT grant, has strengthened the asset which will reduce the number of defects, such as pot-holes which are likely to occur during the winter months ahead. This has only been possible through combining the Council pledge funding of £4M with the DfT grant. For more detail please refer to the 2010/2011 brief note published on the Essex County Council website:
<http://www.essex.gov.uk/Business-Partners/Partners/Travel-and-Highways/Highways/Pages/Default.aspx>

3. By Councillor Mike Mackrory of the Cabinet Member for Procurement, Property & Major Projects.

With the Magistrates Courts vacating Shire Hall in April 2012, what proposals does the Cabinet Member have for the future use of this fine historic building?’

Reply

As part of the Council’s Property Transformation programme, options are currently being developed to ensure that the long term future of this historic building is secured. It is worth noting that the key principles of County Council ownership, value for money and public space will underpin any option. The options will also take into account a wide range of views from interested parties such as Visioning Chelmsford and Chelmsford Borough Council, including their plans for Tindal Square and the wider town centre. It is anticipated that the option development will be completed early in the New Year when a decision on how to proceed will then be made.