

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

TUESDAY 15 DECEMBER 2009

**QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED UNDER THE PROVISIONS
OF STANDING ORDER 10.1**

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT

(1) MRS CAROL COLEMAN (ASHFORD) TO ASK:

A car manufacturer has recently announced that by the end of 2012, it will be marketing a range of electric zero-emission vehicles. They say, "The impact of human activity on global warming is a reality none of us can overlook. Only a major technological shift such as the development on a massive scale of zero-emission vehicles will enable us to reduce greenhouse gas emissions." They intend to bring all their expertise and resources to bear to develop a range of electric cars that will be reliable, practical, safe, efficient and affordable for everyone.

The Conservative Green Paper "The Low Carbon Economy, Security, Stability, and Green Growth" states "Amongst the most important and exciting technological developments of this Green Paper is the move towards electric vehicles as the norm. Given the important part electric cars look set to play in reducing emissions from driving, we need to do more to encourage uptake of these vehicles. There is no realistic prospect of developing a mass-market for electric vehicles in the UK unless, and until, there is a national network of recharging points enabling drivers to operate electric vehicles across any chosen distance without fear of running out of energy."

Does the Cabinet Member for Transport support that view, and what will this County Council do to ensure that Surrey has a network of recharging points?

As part of the desire of this Council to become "world class", will this Council have recharging points at Surrey County Council premises, and as part of its street asset, in the same way that street lights are?

Reply:

Zero emission and low emission vehicles are important ways to tackle some of the transport problems that we face. They can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve local air quality and reduce noise pollution. The county council is keeping abreast of the developments in this field, including the role that we might play in providing recharging points. Further details of our involvement are currently being developed and will be included in the Surrey Transport Plan, which will be published in 2010.

Whilst the technology is being developed, it is too early to say where the recharging points will be needed or what system will become standard. Current battery technology requires several hours of charging, which suggests that recharging points might be needed in people's homes, for overnight charging, or in places where people work, where cars could be recharged over a period of several hours. If battery technology improves, it may be possible for charging to take place in a matter of minutes, which might lead to recharging points in fuel stations or shop car parks. It is also possible that a refuelling network might be needed for hydrogen-fuelled vehicles, if these prove to be commercially viable and popular.

Given the uncertainties over which technology will emerge and the extent to which the private sector may provide some or all of the infrastructure needed, the county council cannot yet make definitive plans about its role in providing charging points. We will do all that we reasonably can to promote the use of sustainable fuels, and we will adapt to the changing circumstances as new technologies emerge.

Electric vehicles are not the only answer to our transport problems. They are not entirely green as much of the UK's electricity is produced by power stations run on fossil fuels. Electric cars will also not solve problems of congestion and unreliability. The promotion of alternative fuels is therefore part of a wider strategy to keep Surrey moving, but to do it in a sustainable way.

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

(2) MS MARISA HEATH (ENGLEFIELD GREEN) TO ASK:

Would the Cabinet Member for Children and Families please outline to Members the statutory duties and obligations placed upon us in our roles as Corporate Parents?

Reply:

Statutory duties

The council, as a whole, has a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of any child it is looking after including by providing accommodation and maintenance for such children, and the promotion of each child's educational achievement. Government guidance in 2003 ("If this were my child.") indicated:

"once a child is in care, all Members and officers of the Council as their corporate parents need to be concerned about that child as if they were their own. This concern should encompass their education, health and welfare, what they do in their leisure time and holidays, how they celebrate their culture and how they receive praise and encouragement for their achievements."

The Children Act 2004 sets out a legal obligation for local authorities to appoint a lead member for Children's Services, who has specific responsibilities for

looked after children as set out in statutory guidance. This states that whilst all Members have a shared responsibility for corporate parenting, the Lead Member has the lead political role in ensuring that children looked after by the local authority have their interests protected, their opportunities maximised, their educational achievement enhanced, their voices heard and care services shaped to meet their needs.

Obligations

There are suggestions in the guidance as to how other elected members might be encouraged to take active responsibility for corporate parenting by, for example, meeting organisations that act for children and young people, or meeting a representative group of looked after children to listen to any concerns and act upon these, attending awards ceremonies, and by visiting children and children's homes.

When Frank Dobson MP introduced the term "corporate parenting" when he was the responsible Secretary of State in 1998, he said that a looked after child has a right to expect that members of the authority are looking out for him and will protect him from harm. Therefore, given that the central importance of the local authority's role in caring for looked after children and supporting them to reach their potential, all councillors should take an informed interest in how the council supports this very vulnerable group.

Good practice guidance (Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice; Di Hart and Alison Walker, National Children's Bureau 2008) suggests that all councillors should ask themselves:

- Am I taking responsibility for promoting the welfare of looked after children in all my work for the council – and in my other capacities?
- Do I understand why children need to be looked after and the legal and policy framework that governs this?
- What are the governance arrangements within my council for corporate parenting and are they effective?
- Do I know about the profile and needs of the children looked after by my council?
- Are we providing the best care possible to our looked after children and care-leavers? Would it be good enough for my child?
- Do I know how well my council is doing in comparison with other councils and government indicators?
- Is there an action plan to address any shortcomings in the service and to constantly improve the outcomes for looked after children?

In order to deliver its corporate parenting responsibilities, the local authority has in place a Corporate Parenting Board, which is responsible for leading and setting the strategic direction for services for looked after children. The Children in Care Council has a pivotal role in ensuring that children and young people's participation and views are represented within the work of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Accurate Management information, to include qualitative and quantitative data, and plans, strategies, and protocols are produced by the Children, Schools and Families Directorate and key partners to inform the work of the Corporate Parenting Board.

A Corporate Parenting Operational Group is responsible for the implementation and delivery of services arising from the priorities set by the Corporate Parenting Board.

More information is available on the following webpages:

<http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00686-2009>

<http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=ITWMC&>

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND LEARNING

(3) MR VICTOR AGARWAL (STANWELL AND STANWELL MOOR) TO ASK:

In the view of the likely closure of Brooklands College (Ashford campus) is the Cabinet Member for Children and Learning able to provide full details of post-16 education and training in Spelthorne and how this compares to neighbouring boroughs?

Reply:

Looking at provision on a borough-by-borough basis is perhaps not the most helpful approach, as it is not uncommon for young people in post-16 education to travel across borough and county borders to attend the Further Education provider of their choice. For instance, 35% of young people aged 16-18, attending Surrey Sixth Form and FE Colleges in Surrey, travel into Surrey from outside the County, whilst 28% travel out of Surrey to other areas. Using Guildford to illustrate this propensity to travel, there is capacity for around 4,670 learners in Further Education in the borough, compared to a population of around 2,870 young people aged 16-18. Clearly this means a significant number of young people travel into Guildford Borough for their education, whilst in some other boroughs this trend is reversed. It is therefore perhaps more appropriate to look at the number of young people who are NEET (not in employment, education or training) and NET (not in education or training) in a given borough.

Connexions data for October 2009 shows that Spelthorne at 6.3% (145) has the highest proportion of young people aged 16-18 who are NEET of all the Surrey boroughs. It is closely followed by Reigate and Banstead at 6.2% (196) NEET, whilst Surrey Heath has 6.0% (96).

Spelthorne is also a priority in terms of NET, with 210 NET young people, the highest actual number of all Surrey boroughs. Guildford is next with 201 and then Reigate and Banstead with 191 NET young people (Connexions – June 2009).

With these figures in mind, the threat of closure to Brooklands College's Ashford Campus is obviously a particular concern. A recent press statement issued by the college suggested that it was planning to close its Ashford campus and also cease its A2 provision. This would have directly affected some 450 young people who are currently studying all or part of their courses at the Ashford campus, as well as over 200 learners at the main Weybridge campus who would have been unable to complete their A2 courses at the college. Following the resignation of the College Principal and the appointment of an interim team, however, these decisions have been rescinded. The team has been tasked with developing a financial recovery plan for the college and is therefore taking the opportunity to look again at the full range of options available i.e. provision at the Ashford site and A Level provision remains under review, but is now being considered as part of the full provision at Brooklands.

However, the plans to develop the Ashford site would have created education and training opportunities for around 1,000 young people each year, so this is still a significant setback for the local area. I am continuing to challenge national Government in relation to the capital allocation process and the impact of the lost £96 million capital, the associated £11 million expenses incurred by the College and the grim position for the College and current and future learners. Alongside this challenge, the county council is working with the Chairman of Governors at Brooklands College, Margaret Hicks, the Interim Team and the Learning and Skills Council to develop the Recovery Plan, which is expected to be completed by March 2010.

CHAIRMAN OF HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(4) MR JONATHAN LORD (CRANLEIGH & EWHURST) TO ASK:

In view of the forecasted deteriorating position of NHS finances in Surrey, could the Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Committee give reassurance that the Committee will be alert to the effect that lack of resources could have on health services to Surrey residents, and that the Committee will not hesitate to use its statutory powers to relay any concerns to relevant health and social services bodies and to central government?

Reply:

I would like to thank Mr Lord for raising this critically important matter at this time and at full council. As a Member of the Surrey Health Scrutiny Committee, he will already be aware from my verbal report given at the meeting of the Committee on 19 November 2009, about my own personal concerns relating to the deteriorating financial position in respect to NHS Surrey. These concerns were based on information gained from both my attendance at the NHS Surrey

Board meeting on 3 November and my attendance of the Perfect Storm event on 6 November in Woking.

An officer and I also attended the last NHS Surrey Board meeting on Tuesday 1 December. Unfortunately, I must confirm to council that the Board meeting did nothing to relieve my concerns on this matter.

The role and responsibilities of the Surrey Health Scrutiny Committee are clearly set out in our Terms of Reference and the Department of Health '*Changing for the Better*' guidance was developed in order to provide clear guidance for patients, the public and NHS staff on the processes underpinning changes to NHS services. The NHS must ensure that changes to local services are:

- based on sound clinical evidence;
- made in the best interests of patients; and
- made as part of ongoing dialogue with local stakeholders about services in the area.

I can assure Mr Lord that we will be working closely with the Surrey Local Involvement Network and will respond rapidly and with due diligence on any evidence that we receive relating to NHS changes which do not adhere to that guidance.

CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY

(5) MRS ANGELA FRASER DL (BANSTEAD EAST) TO ASK:

Who gave permission to underwrite any shortfall of funding for an application to Ofcom by Spin FM for a full term community radio licence to the value of £100,000. This is merely to get the Youth Station Spin FM on the air.

Written in Spin FM's application to Ofcom is the commitment to underwrite the unlimited running costs of this station for the first year. Does this potential £200,000 come from the Youth Service budget? If not, where does it come from?

Is the Cabinet Member aware that the participators in Spin FM come mostly from areas outside Surrey rather than being Surrey youth?

If my information is correct, who sanctioned this use of taxpayer's money from the hard pressed Youth Service Budget, if indeed, that is where it would come from?

Reply:

In relation to the application to Ofcom for a community radio licence, there is no "short fall". The bid refers to existing resources that have already been paid for by the Council and established staffing.

The 'potential' liability referred to in the question is not real; the £200,000 of resource is existing resource not new, therefore there is no cash or other risk to SCC. This resource is an in-kind nominal value assigned to existing resource for the purpose of an application to Ofcom.

The participants of *Spin FM*, which is based in Merstham, include young people from bordering authorities however 80% are Surrey residents.

The application was only submitted after the deadline as a learning experience for young people as part of a youth work project. Therefore, no authority to spend council money was ever required.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT

(6) MR PETER LAMBELL (REIGATE CENTRAL) TO ASK:

The Cabinet Member for Transport has stated that "Surrey residents have asked the County Council to review the subsidised bus service as they are concerned about the level of empty buses travelling around Surrey."

- (a) Exactly how many residents have expressed concern about the level of empty buses travelling around Surrey?
- (b) How many of those have asked for a review of Surrey bus services for that reason?
- (c) Will there be any formal consultation with the relevant local committees regarding the proposed changes to the bus services before any final decisions are taken?

Reply:

Whilst door stepping and engaging at a local level with local residents, the funding and performance of local buses services was raised on a number of occasions. This was raised with myself and also with the Leader of the Council. Some residents expressed the need for this Council to look at the value of subsidising buses with taxpayers' money to a level that exceeds £11million each year. Indeed, this amount is forecast to rise by another £1million unless something is done. This is why officers were directed to look at this important issue and to develop options for a more financially sustainable network of bus services across Surrey. The outcome of this work is now being consulted upon before a decision on the preferred way forward is taken.

The team implementing the review is engaged in consultation with a range of stakeholders, inclusive of local committees.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

(7) MRS HAZEL WATSON (DORKING HILLS) TO ASK:

Can the local committees be given decision-making powers in relation to the allocation of the Highways budget for their respective Borough or District to enable each local committee and its local County Councillors to better respond to their local residents instead of the current position whereby the Highways budget for the East Area is decided centrally?

Reply:

No.

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES:

(8) MRS DIANA SMITH (KNAPHILL) TO ASK:

What is the current position with regard to the respite care facility for children at Ruth House, Woking? Are all four residential units now in full use?

Reply:

Currently Ruth House is fully open for the students from Freemantles School to enable them to access the "Residential Learning Programme" (RLP), across all four units.

Since April 2009 there have been 42 students who have been able to make use of this facility.

The verbal indication from the recent School Ofsted Inspection is that there will be positive comments and observations made about the partnership working between the two services.

The Ofsted Inspection of Ruth House was very complimentary with comments such as:

"...the home has a commendable approach to healthy eating and meal preparation."

"the provision of helping children to achieve well and enjoy what they do is outstanding"

"staff speak highly of the support and training offered, and records demonstrate this"

"sound auditing systems are in place"

"the home continues to provide a good service to children and young people, and the individualised care is commendable."

In respect of social care, there are currently 3 units fully open and the fourth unit is planned to open on 8 January 2010.

There are currently 56 young people who access Ruth House for short breaks, via social care.

We have already taken booking for all 4 units up to April 2010 and there are a total of 91 young people now receiving a service via RLP or Social Care. (although the figures are 42 and 56 = 98, some young people access Ruth House from both routes)

We have a rolling programme for staff recruitment and currently have 44 out of a staff team total of 66 in post, which from a starting base of 0, in less than 18 months is quite impressive.

We have also started a Parents Forum to assist, support and listen to parents whose children access Ruth House.

CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE

(9) MRS FIONA WHITE (GUILDFORD WEST) TO ASK:

I was very uneasy when I heard the news reports that Surrey was rated amongst the lowest achieving authorities in the country in the Care Quality Commission report released on 3 December 2009. I checked back over a number of previous reports, starting with the CSCI report issued in December 2004. Some of the same issues in that report continue to be raised as concerns, although on that occasion the judgment was that Surrey County Council was serving most people well with an excellent capacity for improvement. By 2006, the assessment had fallen to "Serving Most People Well" but with the capacity to improve being "Uncertain". We all know that Adult Services only achieved a 1 star rating in the 2007 CSCI Inspection. This year the rating for many of the outcomes is still only "Adequate" and many of the shortcomings are those which were identified in earlier reports. In fact, in the South East Region, Surrey is the only authority of 19, which has been given such a low assessment.

In view of the fact that on each of the previous occasions a plan was agreed to improve the levels of service and the Executive Member at the time promised a better outcome next time and none of the reports since 2004 has achieved the standards in that report, what guarantee will the Cabinet Member give that we will not be faced with such a low rating when the service is next assessed?

Reply:

The recent APA judgment was for 2008/09, which covered the period of the inspection and subsequent performance push. CQC (formally CSCI) changed the way it judged councils by dropping both the star rating and the 'capacity to improve' judgement. The bar was also raised for achieving 'good' and 'excellent'. The judgement is not unexpected and matches the overall 'adequate' self-assessment rating the council submitted in May 2009. It would have been unrealistic for the service to judge its performance improvement as rising to 'good' in such a short period of time as the service had just appointed a new Strategic Director and senior management team who recognised that there was much work to be done.

In the full APA report, CQC acknowledge the work the service has since done to address this judgement and have made comment that there is early evidence that the new Strategic Director and leadership team has taken effective action to introduce the required changes to ensure better outcomes for people. The service is reviewing its current practice and has a clear vision about what needs to be done and how it is going to be achieved. Of particular note by CQC was the positive response of the service during the 2008 inspection and the following performance improvement work undertaken. In addition, the growth and development of non-residential intermediate care and direct payments have been recognised to show a promising picture of good momentum.

A focussed programme of action with clear deliverables and timescales has been agreed, which is designed to produce further performance improvements for 2009/10. In conjunction, the Directorate Strategy and Business Plan have been drafted and the senior management team are writing Service Delivery Plans to embed the objectives, to be agreed in February 2010.

The council and key partners recognise that more needs to be done to achieve greater and wider benefits for local people. The service is working with Government Office South East and the Department of Health (SE) to agree a package of support to make improvements and ensure we provide the best and most efficient services. The Directorate is committed to building on good practice and making real changes to improve outcomes.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT

(10) MR DAVID WOOD (EPSOM & EWELL NORTH EAST) TO ASK:

Could The Cabinet Member for Transport please tell me why the vehicle activated signs in Cheam Road, Ewell and Cheam Road, Cheam remain inactive despite numerous requests from local residents for their repair and a resolution by the Epsom and Ewell Local Committee in regarding these type of signs more generally in the Borough of Epsom and Ewell, especially as these two signs were specifically installed to discourage speeding after two tragic road fatalities on this stretch of road.

Reply:

Thank you for your question regarding the two VAS (vehicle activated signs) in Cheam Road and general upkeep of VAS within Surrey.

The VAS in Cheam Road were placed in association with the safety camera, immediately east of the junction with Banstead Road. The camera may be turned to view traffic travelling in either direction along Cheam Road and the VAS are placed in advance on both approaches. When operational, the VAS will be triggered by vehicles exceeding 30 mph and will show an image of the camera together with a reminder of the speed limit.

VAS in advance of safety cameras are not a requirement of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions but have been deployed in Surrey to help mitigate the negative view many motorists have of cameras and the perception they are intended solely for income generation. Advanced vehicle activated signs offer a reminder to drivers of the speed limit and a message that they risk prosecution if they continue to speed as they pass the camera. It is suggested also that the presence of VAS elongates the zone through which the benefits of the safety camera may be apparent although there is no reported evidence available presently to support this supposition, it seems to be the case from observations.

Whilst the VAS have operated intermittently and are not working at this time, the safety camera has provided continuous service and is recognised as the predominant mechanism for reducing traffic speeds. Despite this, there is a desire to return the VAS to working order and opportunities for funding repairs are presently being explored.

Much enthusiasm has been shown for the provision of VAS throughout Surrey in recent years and there are many examples within Epsom and Ewell. Across the county, there are approximately 500 VAS. The benefits VAS provide is the subject of an on-going study but lessons have been learned regarding trigger speeds, positioning, type of message, reliability and maintenance costs. Unlike traditional signs, VAS have a life span which, once expired, requires a capital sum for complete replacement or removal. Many signs have failed and are beyond economical repair whilst others may be repaired but funding shortages have delayed their return to working order. A list of faulty VAS in Epsom and Ewell is currently being prepared and a view will be taken of which are worthy of repair.

Unfortunately, there is no provision in the highways revenue budget specifically for the upkeep of VAS, and therefore, the maintenance is funded from the existing allocation for the maintenance of street furniture. This will be reviewed, however, in the meantime a new shortlist of suppliers has been drawn up and includes only those manufacturers offering a 2-year guarantee (or longer). With this, we hope to ensure greater reliability for future installations at no appreciable increase in cost.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT

(11) MR KEITH TAYLOR (SHERE) TO ASK:

A stretch of the A248 in Chilworth has been partly closed, with “temporary” traffic lights, since December 2008. This reduces the road to a single lane, causing delays and additional costs to many of the thousands of people who use this road every day. By October, local residents had become so incensed about this situation that dozens of them staged a demonstration at the site, resulting in very critical coverage in the local press and on the BBC.

The latest officer update that I have received on this indicates that the Structures Group will complete the required investigation and design work by the end of March 2010. However, local residents are understandably sceptical about this, given that previous committed dates have passed without any work being undertaken and without even me as the local Member being given any warning or explanation.

Would the Cabinet Member for Transport please:

- i) indicate how much the “temporary” traffic lights have cost over the last 12 months,
- ii) give an assurance that this time the Structures Group will actually complete the required investigation and design work before the end of March 2010, and
- iii) give an assurance that provision will be made in the 2010/11 Highways Budget for the work necessary to finally reopen this road.

Reply:

Whilst this project was not in the original Structures Group 2009/10 works programme, we had hoped to progress design works earlier this year but additional costs on A24 Pippbrook, Dorking and emergency repair works to Catteshall Bridge, Godalming meant that there was no available budget.

However, we have now secured funding to undertake the investigatory work this year, and the Structures Group have already taken steps to secure resources via Jacobs, our consultant partner.

At this stage, I cannot guarantee that the works will be undertaken in 2010/11, as the budget has yet to be finalised. However, once the design and investigation is complete we will be in a much better position to take advantage of any available funding.

The temporary traffic signals that are on site to control traffic cost approximately £3,000 per month.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

(12) MR NICHOLAS HARRISON (BANSTEAD WEST) TO ASK:

Would the Leader of the Council comment on the recent sudden departure of the Chief Executive of the Surrey Police Authority?

Reply:

The answer will be given verbally at the meeting.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT

(13) MR EBER KINGTON (EPSOM & EWELL NORTH) TO ASK:

I note in the press release dated 30 November 2009 announcing on the newly signed Street Lighting Contract with Skanska Laing that work on the replacement and refurbishment of lamp columns will begin in March 2010 in Banstead, Guildford and Reigate. Can the Cabinet Member for Transport give me an estimated start date for the work in Epsom and Ewell?

Given that many street lights in Epsom and Ewell are either not being repaired or not being reconnected due to "budgetary restraints" in the run up to the new contract, can he tell me whether these non-functioning lights will continue to be out of action until a new or refurbished lamp is put in place?

Finally, can the Cabinet Member for Transport confirm whether the new contract includes provision for the removal and clearance of both working lamp columns that are no longer needed and of all currently redundant lamp columns, as well as the reinstatement of the surrounding verge or pavement?

Reply:

The new PFI contract will begin operating on 1 March 2010. From that date, Skanska Laing (operating as Surrey Lighting Services) will undertake the street lighting maintenance and will remain responsible for its operation for the next 25 years (2010-35). Skanska Laing will also commence the replacement of the existing streetlights, taking five years to complete the works (2010-15).

Timing of the Epsom & Ewell works

Skanska Laing has developed the programme of works. Their analysis of the assets has led them to devise a three-stream approach in the order shown below:

Area West 1	Area West 2	Area East
Spelthorne	Guildford	Reigate and Banstead
Elmbridge	Waverley	Tandridge
Runnymede	Surrey Heath	Epsom and Ewell
Woking		Mole Valley

Thus in Spelthorne, Guildford and Reigate & Banstead, works will begin in March 2010. It will take over a year to complete the works in each of these districts. Works will commence in Elmbridge, Waverley and Tandridge in year 2 (post-March 2011) and are anticipated to conclude in year 3.

Epsom & Ewell works should commence in the months following March 2012 and conclude during 2013.

Maintenance arrangements

When the new contract begins (1 March 2010) all outstanding maintenance issues will finish, and Skanska will begin scouting and, where they identify a fault or a where fault is reported to them and that fault relates to lighting equipment, it will be repaired in six days. If the fault relates to an electricity supply problem it will be repaired within 30 days. The PFI contract contains strong performance penalties, and if these performance standards are not met, Skanska will be liable to a reduction in payment.

Removal of equipment

The contract does include provision for the removal of old equipment (both hitherto working and non-working) and for the re-instatement of the area surrounding the replacement works.

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN & LEARNING / CORPORATE SERVICES

(14) MR PETER HICKMAN (THE DITTONS) TO ASK:

Surrey County Council had an option on a site in Long Ditton for a school (Windmill Lane). Although the option expired in June 2009 Surrey could have extended the option for a further 3 years for a fee of £1.

Why, given the severe shortage of school places in the Dittons and the need for a new school, was the option allowed to lapse? Many children in Long Ditton are travelling to schools in Surbiton, part of a London Borough.

Reply:

There has been some confusion expressed about the date by which the option period ended but is our understanding that this was 28 September 2008. There was nothing in the Section 106 agreement (which was made between St James and Elmbridge Borough Council and to which the County Council was not a signatory) that allowed for an extension of the option period. At the time, there was little confidence that the council could make a business case to express an interest in the option.

From an educational planning perspective, the site in question was too small to provide a primary school. It could have been deployed as a small infant school, however we would not generally wish to make provision close to the local education area border because we would be likely to address shortfalls on behalf of the adjoining authority as much as our own. There is, of course, cross-over between Surbiton and Long Ditton, given their close proximity. However, Long Ditton Infant School, which is close to the land in question is not full and places are available in this year's Reception class, which suggests that the demand for places is not particularly strong in the Long Ditton part of the 'Dittons' school planning area, which covers Long Ditton, Thames Ditton, Hinchley Wood and the north-east part of Esher.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT

(15) MR WILL FORSTER (WOKING SOUTH) TO ASK:

How much has been spent to hire the services of the two consultants that have assisted in the current Bus Review?

Reply:

Where possible, the bus review has been completed using existing officer resources at no extra cost to the County Council. The contract for external consultants for the bus review has cost £53,343, with an additional support contract, which is expected to cost around £33,000 over the three years. This has provided external expertise and capacity, which were not available in-house. The result of this work is a potential saving to the bus budget of between £3 million and £5 million per annum, subject to decisions made by the County Council following the current consultation exercise.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT

(16) MR TOM PHELPS-PENRY (WALTON) TO ASK:

While being relieved that a compromise has been reached over the replacement of gas pipes in Seven Hill Road, we must recognise that whatever respect residents of Elmbridge may have had for the County has been shaken. Would it not have been preferable for a project of this importance, involving displacement of heavy flows, over unsuitable roads, to be considered by select committee, either Environment and Economy or Transportation?

Can I be assured that this will be the case for future projects of this importance?

Reply:

It is the responsibility of the work promoter, in this case SGN, to consult with all stakeholders before submitting a projected start date.

It is not appropriate for select committees to scrutinise individual schemes, no matter how large or disruptive. All major works are notified to local, county and borough/district members once confirmed planning of a scheme has been submitted so that they are aware of the nature of the work, its duration and impact. Unfortunately, in the case of Seven Hills Road the advanced planning phase was still ongoing when the traffic regulation order was required to be published, and therefore the communication about the scheme was unable to be managed as well as it might have been.

When SGN first disclosed the scheme in 2008, there were to be two projects. One to improve the current network, replacing the old iron pipework with new plastic and making the necessary connections to customers along the road. The other project identified the Intermediate Pressure 355mm diameter pipe along the whole length of the road between a new pressure reducing station on land requiring an easement just to the north east of the Queens Road roundabout and an existing pipe running along the A3 at the very southern end of Seven Hills Road.

The original response by the county council was that the second project could not use this route and that another should be found. SGN did not raise the project again until April this year. This time, SGN started to consider running the two projects together and the county council requested meetings to discuss the pre-planning of the one scheme. Officers have subsequently repeatedly challenged the proposals.

The sensitivity of this project has always been known and the disclosure of details should have been an SGN priority, which I know they now understand. The county council does actively carry out its duties responsibly and seeks the co-operation from all utilities. We are not always in a position to challenge the validity of information supplied by a utility as to the essential aspects of works. New supplies, (gas, water, electricity and telecommunication) do allow more freedom in the directions that may be given to a work promoter but often there is little choice but to accept the first proposal in principle, as a starting point and work with the promoter to find better solutions to minimise the impact.

Both Surrey County Council and Southern Gas Networks have agreed to review their respective processes for major works and the Streetworks Manager will develop a project checklist to improve the management of these projects. These actions will ensure more timely publication of dates and appropriate involvement with stakeholders. If required, the revised processes could be scrutinised by Transportation Select Committee.

Surrey's Traffic Manager and the Streetworks Team manage a vast amount of Utility works every year across the county. Major projects require a greater input from a limited resource but, as stated above, at all times the work promoter is reminded of its duty to consult with all stakeholders before submitting a projected start date.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

(17) MRS LAVINIA SEALY (BISLEY, CHOBHAM AND WEST END)

In discussing and deciding on capital budget for next year and succeeding years, will the Leader ensure that one of his top priorities – the Equality and Diversity policy – is taken into account.

Will this include, for instance, the traveller and gypsy communities, to ensure their equal life chances with other Surrey residents.

Reply:

The 2010/11 budget settlement for Surrey County Council has now been announced and there are no major changes from what we expected. As a floor authority, this means that the funds to support the capital programme are very limited. As a result of this, there is a robust process to prioritise and determine which capital schemes can be funded. All schemes are being ranked against a set of criteria, which include an assessment of the impact of the investment on equalities and diversity. The Cabinet will make recommendations to the County Council on 9 February.

DEPUTY LEADER

(18) MRS DIANA SMITH (KNAPHILL) TO ASK: (2ND question)

The present work on inclusiveness within Surrey County Council is to be welcomed. What enquiries does the Council make and what actions do we require of contractors and other external providers of SCC services to ensure they will meet equivalent standards?

Reply:

The Council's accreditation as a level 3 authority against the Equality Standard and an 'Achieving' authority against the new Equality Framework is a key milestone on the wider journey to address inequalities. It was most pleasing that the peer assessment team acknowledged that procurement practices were strong, as this has been an area of significant improvement.

SCC's procurement procedures have standard questions to all potential providers of services with regards to inclusiveness and diversity. This includes requesting and reviewing policies through the tendering process. Services, along with procurement, are identifying better performance measures for contracts, which can be reviewed throughout the contract period.

Within the last 18 months all suppliers to the Council were contacted and reminded of their legal obligations and Surrey County Council's Policy. Procurement has recently established a Supplier Management Team, who will

be working with key providers to deliver continuous improvement strategies in SCC contracts. The best practice learned with the key providers will be shared with other contract managers within the Council and partner organisations.

The Council is also working more closely with the VCFS (Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector) and other statutory bodies to identify areas of joint working to ensure equivalent standards and best practice are adopted across Surrey agencies and partnerships. Examples would be SCC's External Equalities Advisory Group and the Surrey Diversity and Equality Network (SUDEN) which the Council currently chairs. These groups allow officers to share best practice and work towards consistency as we develop our work on inclusiveness in areas such as the Equality Framework, Single Equality Schemes and providing fair and accessible services.

There is a range of partnership work to develop a better understanding of Surrey's communities, including the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment with NHS Surrey, a data observatory, and data sharing protocols. This has resulted in targeted work to address inequality such as the Priority Places initiative in Merstham, Stanwell, Westborough, and Sheerwater & Maybury. This is being led by the Surrey Strategic Partnership, and is ensuring that there is also an area-based dimension to partnership work around inclusiveness.

The Council is very aware of the need to use a range of levers - statutory, contractual, and partnership – to ensure that services received by Surrey's people are as fair and accessible as possible.

DEPUTY LEADER

(19) MR JONATHAN LORD (CRANLEIGH & EWHURST) TO ASK: (2nd question)

Would the Deputy Leader care to comment on the results of the recent Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)?

Reply:

The Audit Commission's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) provides an area-wide view of how all the partners in the Surrey Strategic Partnership work together for the benefit of Surrey people. It is made up of two parts:

- an Organisational Assessment of Surrey County Council; and
- an Area Assessment of how all the public bodies in Surrey work together, with voluntary organisations and local business partners to improve life in the county.

Generally, the findings of the CAA for Surrey show a positive and improving picture overall.

The Organisational Assessment of the Council demonstrates we have made improvements in key areas. These include Children's Services, roads, helping

vulnerable adults live independently and boosting recycling. The Assessment gives us reassurance that fundamental weaknesses are being addressed and recognises that we are clarifying our vision and strengthening the leadership and sense of direction for the Council. That said, the overall assessment that the Council is 'performing adequately' is not something for us to be satisfied with given our ambition to be world class.

A separate assessment has judged Surrey's Fire and Rescue Service as performing well and providing adequate value for money. It provides further evidence of how we have engaged with and built a good understanding of our communities in Surrey.

The Area Assessment highlights strong partnership working between the public sector and local businesses and community, faith and voluntary groups as part of the Surrey Strategic Partnership. This positive picture is reflected in Surrey people's higher than average satisfaction with the area in which they live (84% compared to 81% nationally).

There are many challenges ahead if we are to enhance the well-being of our communities and help people and businesses thrive. The CAA has not identified any 'red flags' (significant problems) for Surrey. However it does not include any "green flags" either (exceptional practice). This is something for us to consider in the context of our ambition to be world class and we will be looking to our colleagues within the Surrey Strategic Partnership to take up the challenge with us.

2009 has been a challenging year for Surrey County Council and I believe the Council has started the process of improvement, but that there is still much more to be done. We will continue to pursue an improvement agenda based upon:

- strong leadership;
- delivering exceptional performance and value for money; and
- meeting the needs of Surrey residents.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT

(20) MR EBER KINGTON (EPSOM & EWELL NORTH) TO ASK: (2nd question)

I note that the newly drafted Winter Maintenance Policy as it relates to the location of salt bins will serve only to penalise residents living in urban residential streets where the County's gritting regime does not run.

Allocating salt bins only to roads with a steep hill, extreme bend, high gradient, high crossing point for residents or high volumes of traffic, ignores the many urban areas where getting in and out of an estate during road freezing or snow is very much a matter of self help.

Does the Cabinet Member for Transport understand that without a visit from a gritting lorry it is possible to be isolated in severe weather in the town as well as in the country and will he therefore review the criteria suggested in the new Winter Maintenance Policy for the replacement of existing salt bins and the allocation of new ones?

Reply:

The review of the salt bins identified that the policy was open to interpretation, which has led to an inconsistent approach on where salt bins are placed, with a number of locations being driven by public demand.

The approach has led to a steady increase in the number of salt bins that Surrey County Council maintains. An audit records 1,347 salt bins on the network and with the large numbers of salt bins unfortunately we struggle to keep them filled, especially during severe weather.

To ensure that we have a balanced regime, a criteria has been developed to provide salt bins where they are most needed and as you have rightly indicated are targeted at:

- Difficult road junctions;
- Slopes;
- Acute bends;
- Concentration of pedestrian commuter use; and
- To assist with service for those in isolated rural communities off the primary and secondary precautionary treated routes.

It should also be pointed out that currently there is no legal duty to provide salt bins. Surrey County Council nevertheless recognises that it can assist the local community in areas not on the priority routes.

Whilst the provision of a salt bin can contribute towards the safety within an immediate area, this has to be balanced against the overall risk and service delivery. When comparing hand and mechanical salting operations, an equivalent amount of salt can be spread 35 times further through mechanical spreading.

I am sure that you will agree that the latter is the more important within the budget and resources that we have available.

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

TUESDAY 15 DECEMBER 2009

**QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED UNDER THE PROVISIONS
OF STANDING ORDER 10.13**

REPRESENTATIVE OF THE POLICE AUTHORITY

(1) MR STEVE RENSHAW (HASLEMERE) TO ASK:

Could Mark Rowley comment as to if he was accurately quoted in saying that he intended to close all Police Stations in Waverley and if so:

- (i) why was there no statement as to how services in Waverley would be provided in future;
- (ii) a pre-briefing for Members (embargoed as necessary) to enable them to answer enquiries from a concerned public;
- (iii) if, as reported, the Police Plans for Surrey were leaked why, more than three weeks later, has there been no statement either in public, or to the relevant Members, as to how Police Services in Waverley will be provided in future?

Reply:

Mr Renshaw refers to recent press coverage of the Force's proposals for an Operational Policing Review, which will see a reduction in senior officer posts, changes to the way the Force is structured, a rationalisation of the estate and ultimately, the creation of up to 200 extra officers on the front line. Certain elements of the proposals, which remain in their very early stages, have been leaked to the press and the resulting stories have in some cases been based on speculation.

I can confirm that the Chief Constable was not accurately quoted in saying that he intended to close all police stations in Waverley. As part of the Operational Policing Review, the Force has been exploring the possibility of locating policing teams in local authority buildings and more accessible places such as libraries or shopping centres. This would replace some of the older and more expensive police buildings with easier ways for the public to engage with the police and enable the ensuing savings to be targeted at the front line. No decisions on which police stations would close have been made and the Chief Constable has made clear that no buildings will close until an alternative, better provision is in place within an area.

The Chief Constable shared his early plans with the Authority and also with senior stakeholders on 26 November, including the Leader and Chief Executive of Surrey County Council. He received their, in principle, support for his ideas.

At its meeting on 10 December, the Police Authority heard further details of the Force's seven-point plan for change. In light of the Authority's discussions, support has been given to the principle of the changes proposed. This means that more detailed planning and implementation will now begin, along with a public consultation around how people would like to access police services in the future. The plans still remain at an extremely early stage in their development and it is anticipated that the programme of change will take several years to bring about. Any detailed arrangements for a particular borough will, of course, be subject to wider consultation with the public and key stakeholders.