

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**TUESDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2004**

**QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED UNDER THE PROVISIONS  
OF STANDING ORDER 9.1**

**LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

**DR ANDREW POVEY (WAVERLEY EAST) TO ASK:**

Does the Leader of the Council agree with me that it is inappropriate for any senior officer to remove (or instruct others to remove) mail from Members' mail racks?

**Reply:**

Generally yes, although this will depend on the circumstances in each case.

**CHAIRMAN OF PERSONNEL & APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE**

**DR ANDREW POVEY (WAVERLEY EAST) TO ASK:**

Why is there no report in the Green Book relating to the recent meeting of the Personnel and Appointments Committee?

Are all decision making committees, groups etc. required to report to the full County Council?

**Reply:**

There has been no meeting of the Personnel and Appointments Committee since the previous Green Book was published.

No, the decision of a Committee or member panel considering information subject to the Data Protection Act, for example schools' admission appeals or staff appeals cannot be reported to full Council.

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**DAVID TIMMS (DORKING SOUTH) TO ASK:**

More than a year ago now, following an inspection, this Council's social services for children were judged to be serving only some children well, although the prospects for improvement were described as promising. Exactly the same judgement has now been made in a recent inspection. Is the portfolio holder satisfied with this

apparent standstill in the low quality of support the Council provides for its most vulnerable residents?

**Reply:**

I would draw the attention of Mr Timms to the report made to the Executive on 28 September reviewing the Medium Term Strategy for the Children's Service. The Service has made significant improvements across a range of areas over the last 12 months, a few examples of progress are:

- Social work vacancies reduced from 35% to 10%.
- 100% of Child Protection and Care Reviews held on time.
- Target for recruitment of foster carers exceeded by 72%.
- Employment, Training and Education rate for Care Leavers now placed in Band 5 i.e. the top performance band.
- Health outcomes for Looked After Children improved from 52% to 70%.

In addition the Service has continued to deliver high quality service and performance in Adoption and Permanency and in placement stability. It has also implemented new services to support children and families. The CSCI judgements reflect a complex decision-making system where progress against key indicators has to be aligned into very broad judgement categories. The CSCI letter received after our Annual Review Meeting in August comments upon the progress and consolidation of achievements made by the Service.

The judgement does not reflect a 'stand still' in improvement and it most certainly does not imply low quality services, as a visit to one of our front line teams, family centres or children's homes would illustrate. I find these latter comments unacceptable. I feel sure that Mr Timms did not wish to imply an insult to the hundreds of staff who have worked with dedication and skill to ensure that the many thousands of children and families who use our services are well supported.

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**DAVID TIMMS (DORKING SOUTH) TO ASK:**

According to press reports, a company called Global Education Management Systems (GEMS) has announced its intention of taking over 3Es, the private company with which Surrey County Council entered into a partnership to run two of Surrey's secondary schools. What information does the portfolio holder have about GEMS and its suitability to be a partner in running our schools?

## **Reply:**

### **Surrey County Council statement: GEMS ACQUIRES 3Es**

Surrey County Council has been approached by Global Education Management Systems Ltd (GEMS) with the intention of GEMS acquiring the school regeneration and multimedia functions of 3Es.

This would include the two private-public partnerships with 3Es to regenerate two state comprehensive schools in Surrey, Kings College for the Arts and Technology in Guildford (2000) and Kings International in Camberley (2001).

The key elements of this arrangement comprise the formation of a new company, 3E GEMS Ltd, which would hold the contracts for the partnerships. The present company would be GEMS Ltd which has offered to provide parent company guarantees etc. GEMS has also proposed to establish a charitable trust “replicating the 3E trust” and that “such a fund would provide a way to channel funds to deserving educational causes”.

A brochure describing GEMS education activities in more detail has been made available in the Members’ room.

The Council’s consent is required for any transfer and the full facts are now being established to inform whether consent should be granted. The Council has sought and received some information concerning GEMS and the proposed new arrangements as outlined above. However, the Council has not yet received comprehensive responses to all concerns – when all the required information has been received and assessed, the Executive will consider whether consent should be given to the proposed new arrangements.

## **EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **JOE BULLOCK (GUILDFORD WEST) TO ASK:**

Given the possible sale of 3Es to GEMS, a Dubai-based, profit making company, does the Executive Member agree that:

- (a) Surrey County Council schools should not be run for commercial or shareholder gain;
- (b) The Children and Young People Select Committee, local Members, and appropriate governors, teachers, parents and communities will be consulted before any decision is made as to the possible transfer of the existing Surrey County Council contracts with 3Es to a commercial buyer; and

- (c) Kings College, Guildford could become a Surrey Community secondary school if 3Es no longer wish to discharge the remainder of their contractual obligations with the County Council?

**Reply:**

- (a) The response to the question from County Councillor David Timms has set out the current position in relation to the approach from GEMS and 3Es concerning the proposed novation of contracts with 3Es to 3E Gem Ltd. The contracts do not involve the direct running of the schools in either case. Any decision concerning a proposed partnership would be based on securing best value including the usual financial and technical assessment of the proposed partner.
- (b) The facts regarding the proposed novation are still being established. When all the relevant facts have been determined then the subsequent stages in the process, including consultation, will be determined.
- (c) 3Es have given no indication that they would no longer wish to discharge the remainder of their contractual obligation with the County Council. However, any school governing body has the right to seek a change to its legal status. There is a prescribed consultation and legal process associated with this, which would need to be followed if this route was pursued.

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ASSET MANAGEMENT**

**ROSEMARY SCOTT (ASHFORD EAST) TO ASK:**

When will final decisions be taken on the office project and the relocation of County Hall?

**Reply:**

The formal decision making process will be as follows:

- 18/1/2005 Executive will receive a report from officers containing a recommendation as to whether to enter into a long term contract which includes the relocation of County Hall
- 25/1/2005 The Executive will refer the matter to the County Council to obtain all Members' views prior to making a decision.
- 1/2/2005 The Executive will make a decision in the light of the Council debate. (Any decision to enter into a contract will be conditional on a satisfactory outcome of the public inquiry into the land exchange on the proposed site for the new County Hall. This is expected to be achieved before the end of March 2005).

Members are requested to note that a seminar on the Office Project will be held on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2005 to enable Members to receive information prior to the commencement of the formal decision making process described above.

## **EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ASSET MANAGEMENT**

### **TERRY DICKS (ADDLESTONE) TO ASK:**

- (a) What is the annual subsidy paid by the Council to support the County Hall canteen?
- (b) What is the annual subsidy paid by the Council to support the Members' mess?
- (c) Since both officers and Members are paid salaries by the Council why is it thought necessary to subsidise their meals?

### **Reply:**

- a) The annual subsidy paid to support the County Hall canteen in 2004/05 is £157,300
- (b) The annual subsidy paid to support the Members' mess is £22,600
- (c) Members are not technically paid salaries. They receive allowances. Lunch in the County Mess is charged at a rate of £7.25 per Member in line with the approved lunch allowance. The numbers of Members taking lunch in the Mess has fallen in recent years and, at the last count, the average was 8 meals per day. With such low numbers the present arrangements in the Mess are not economic. It is open to the Council to review the arrangements in the Mess as part of the Policy and Productivity Review.

The practice of subsidising staff catering provision is long-standing and may in the past have been considered to provide a competitive edge for the Council in recruiting and retaining staff in Kingston. However, it is not an integral part of the Council's reward policy, nor of its recruitment and retention strategy. As with the arrangements for the County Mess, therefore, it is open to the Council to review this as part of the Policy and Productivity Review.

## **EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES**

### **TERRY DICKS (ADDLESTONE) TO ASK:**

- a) Is the Council still legally bound to provide free access to the internet for young people and adults in the County?
- (b) What is annual cost of providing this free service?
- (c) How many people made use of this free service?
- (d) What is the potential take up of these free facilities?
- (e) Why are we not charging users for providing this service?

### **Reply:**

The People's Network is a national programme to provide free public access to ICT and the internet in public libraries across the UK. In Surrey, over £800,000 was received from the National Lottery in order to set up this facility, and a condition of the funding was that access would be free for the duration of the project (i.e. until 2003). This access to technology is now regarded as a core part of the library service offer, especially since many information services are available solely electronically, and the e-government targets encourage this.

- a) On the completion of the Peoples' Network programme, the County Council is no longer legally bound to offer free internet access. There was, however a clear expectation that councils would continue to offer free access, and the overwhelming majority have done so.
- b) In the limited time available (little more than one working day) it has not proved possible to ascertain the cost of providing this service, as it is an integral part of the ICT provision in libraries for which a unitary payment is made to an external contractor. Officers are working with the contractor and will supply a written answer to this part of the question as soon as possible.
- c) The available Internet hours are 881,150. An estimate of the number of individuals making use of this service is 42,500 - again more detailed information will be made available.
- d) Take up is approximately 70%.
- e) A review of all fees and charges is being undertaken as part of the Policy and Productivity review, and the option of charging for internet access will be considered at the appropriate time. The reasons why no charge is currently made are:

- i) there was a clear expectation that free access would continue as a consequence of the Lottery Fund investment in the Peoples' Network, and the overwhelming majority of authorities have maintained this policy
- ii) there is local and national evidence that free ICT and internet access has been the major factor in increasing visits to libraries in recent years. The small number of authorities that have introduced charging have seen usage of this service fall by up to 50%
- iii) the library service has subscribed to a number of on-line reference sources to replace printed materials, saving shelf space, staff time and money. This policy is only effective if access to these resources is easily available
- iv) our ICT contractor is developing a product that will make booking terminals and charging for access easier than at present, and it would be desirable that if charging were to be introduced, it should be introduced when a suitable product is available.

## **EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ASSET MANAGEMENT**

### **MRS ANGELA FRASER DL (BANSTEAD EAST) TO ASK:**

Is the Executive Member aware that staff are now being asked to pay for car parking spaces at County Hall? Who took this decision, were any Members consulted, and how much is this contributing to the £2m savings required in the current financial year?

### **Reply:**

I am aware that staff are now charged if they wish to park in the central courtyard of County Hall. Parking continues to be free on the Milner Road side of County Hall and in the Bittoms car park. The cost is £200 for a full year (£100 for October 2004 to March 2005) and will raise £7,500 towards the £2m savings for the current year rising to £15,000 next year. The charge was agreed by the Strategy Team as a contribution towards the savings target agreed by the County Council at the Budget meeting.

## **EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PEOPLE FIRST**

### **TERRY DICKS (ADDLESTONE) TO ASK:**

- (a) What was the Council's training budget for 2003/04 and what was the actual spend?
- (b) What is the Council's training budget for 2004/5 and what has been spent so far this year?
- (c) How is the training budget allocated between departments and what part does the Executive Director for Customer and Staff Relations play in these allocations. What role has she in determining the relevance and value of individual departmental training decisions?
- (d) When was the last full audit carried out on all the Council's training activities and what recommendations, if any, were made?

### **Reply:**

- (a) the figures are in £000  
the training budget was £3853.8  
the actual spend was £3,797.7
- (b) Again the figures are in £000  
The training budget is £4,546.3 and the actual spend to date is £ 2,394.8

Training expenditure can be spread over a range of subjective codes, including staff costs. For consistency and comparative purposes [enabling a cost search for all other services], it is necessary to limit the response to the '1800' range of subjective codes (direct training expenditure) and therefore associated costs to training, such as administration and evaluation will not be captured.



The full breakdown by Directorates are

Directorate	2003/04 Budget £000	2003/04 Actual £000	2004/05 Budget £000	2004/05 Actual £000
Adults and Community Care	1,448.1	1,448.1	1,869.2	1,108.2
Children & Young People	847.1	802.5	1,242.6	473.6
Sustainable Development	368.4	344.5	351.7	168.4
Chief Executive	459.4	421.0	515.2	189.7
Members	36.0	18.7	76.4	10.6
Performance & Resources	257.0	417.9	203.9	230.5
Customer & Staff Relations	370.3	289.9	287.3	129.9
Magistrates' Courts	67.5	55.1	0.0	83.9
	<u>3,853.8</u>	<u>3,797.7</u>	<u>4,546.3</u>	<u>2,394.8</u>

- (c) All services are allocated a budget, it is then up to the service managers to allocate this across expenditure headings. The budgets for training is a 'roll-forward' on an historical allocation. As part of service planning directorates will consider their training needs and the corporate teams will prepare developmental courses to offer teams throughout the Council, at a charge. Corporate programmes such as Impact 3 are primarily funded by the corporate budgets & based on business benefits however there are generally poor links between corporate strategic direction and the training/development of SCC workforce. Whilst there is a range of comprehensive courses available to services that complement our appraisal and personal development programme [Step-Ahead] and training available for C21B the Executive Director does not have overall authority on specifying and developing the appropriate managerial skills required by the Council to maximise its business focus. Nor does the Director provide the single source of training and development activity and resources. Both of these responsibilities are devolved to services and managers. However there is a suggestion through the PPR process for an approach to setting up a county-wide commissioned lead on training and development plans, as part of Workforce Plannings, for all services. There is also a single solution for training and events administration is being piloted across as part of C21B, due to go-live in July 2005 within the Shared Service Centre.

(d) The most current audit of training was that carried in the Best Value Review of Training & Development in Autumn 2001 and recommendations went to the Executive in February 2002. All recommendations have been implemented as far as possible. These included:

- Executive Director Customer & Staff Relations to take a strategic approach to training and development. A number of programmes have been introduced and are receiving positive feedback. Through better understanding of service needs we can amend the programmes as required. This does not mean we can direct budgets to these courses.
- Identify a champion in providing leadership and development - this is the HR Learning & Development Team
- Develop a centre of excellence - there are several examples of centres of excellence including HR - for example ICT, Community Service College and Adults Social Care training
- To gain best value through county procurement for preferred training venues and providers - system support to this is being piloted through SAP for both administration and procurement but still early days. A single point of administration will help tremendously.
- Evaluate effective strategies – this can only be actioned where training is provided through the CSR directorate eg. Impact 3 and L&D courses. Training evaluation of external courses and programmes paid or by services would be carried out by those involved.
- Set up a member consultation group supported by senior officers to develop an action plan for Members - in place with Head of Member Services.

In general terms the devolution of responsibility to provide training to Services is as for any other budget head, and as such has led to there not really being a 'system' in place for us to audit that reconciles local spend to any central requirement(s). The issues appear to be geared around value for money rather than financial control, and as such has not risen as a 'risk' in audit terms as it is not consider a matter of high priority. The next steps could be to provide a single co-ordinated approach to training activities and resources allowing the public services to retain planning, decision making and resourcing. The co-ordinated approach of training provision would allow for monitoring and review of resources, priorities, delivery plans and effectiveness.

## **EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ADULTS & COMMUNITY CARE**

### **DIANA SMITH (WOKING WEST) TO ASK:**

In the context of the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act, effective from 1/4/05:

- (a) How will Surrey meet its duty to ensure that all carers know they are entitled to an assessment of their needs?
- (b) How will the duty to consider a carer's outside interest (work, study or leisure) be met for carers where assessments have already been carried out?
- (c) What organisational arrangements are in place to allow information about any additional unmet need to be used in planning future services?

### **Reply:**

Surrey County Council already does a great deal of work to keep carers at the centre of all that we do, but we are always keen to build on this and the extra duties imposed by the Act will help us to do so. For example, carers are routinely offered an assessment, support, services and in particular, regular monitoring of their situation.

Surrey County Council has also recently been shortlisted for a prestigious Beacon Council award for supporting carers.

Beacon status is awarded to a small group of councils who demonstrate excellent practice in one of the key categories identified each year. These Beacon councils then received a Government grant to share their knowledge and expertise with other authorities through a 12-month programme of seminars, workshops and other learning events.

The County Council's case for Beacon status is based on its network of partnerships with the Surrey-based charity, Action for Carers, and 10 other local carers' strategy groups. The Council has invested an extra £1.1 million a year to support this network, above the grants available nationally. They all have agreed action plans, and manage a comprehensive set of carer support schemes across the county.

Among the success achieved so far are: boosting employment opportunities and equal rights for carers; developing a Surrey carers' website that receives 30,000 visits a month; promoting back care advice for carers so they don't injure themselves when assisting someone or using equipment, such as hoists; and innovative approaches to the use of Direct Payments and Carers Break Vouchers to provide flexible breaks for carers.

There is also specialist support for young carers, training and a range of other initiatives, including the Partnership with Parents service in the Council's Children's Service. This is aimed at parents and carers of children with special educational needs or disabilities, and provides information and support to about 7,000 parents and carers. A further 11,000 people visit its website.

- (a) The County Council will meet this duty in a number of ways:-

Firstly, leaflets explaining carers' existing and new rights are being produced for Adult and Community Care and Children's Services and for the Single Assessment process for older people. All staff dealing with any enquiries about social care services must provide a leaflet to any carer involved in the case. These leaflets will be widely available in GP surgeries, Libraries, Contact Centre, Help Shops etc.

Secondly, a series of information packs for carers are being distributed (currently in despatch) and these are available online or in paper form.

Information about the Act is also available on the Surrey website for carers, **[www.carersnet.org.uk](http://www.carersnet.org.uk)**.

It is also intended to include an article in Surrey Matters and use the Surrey press to get the message to carers who are not in touch with our Social Care Services.

- (b) The procedures in both Adult and Children's Services are being reviewed to ensure that the assessment processes for adult carers of adults and parent carers of disabled children and young carers are all compliant with the Act.

Carers' organisations will be consulted about the proposed changes before these are implemented and a training programme undertaken to support effective implementation. The County Council is likely to receive an estimated £1 million additional funding for 2005/2006 through the National Carers Grant to support the implementation of the Act. Plans being developed through our joint Carers Strategy Groups for implementation of the Act include increased use of Direct Payments (in both Adult and Children's Services) to provide support to carers in relation to their work, study or leisure needs. It is understood that the Commission for Social Care Inspection will monitor our use of these funds in 2005/6.

Adult and Community Care Services have also been successful in obtaining a further £320,000 European (ESF) money over the next two years for the nationally acclaimed Action for Carers and Employment Project. This will enhance our ability to respond to our new duties in helping carers to juggle work and caring responsibilities.

- (c) The Action for Carers and Employment (ACE) Partnership (locally co-ordinated by SCC) will undertake a detailed monitoring exercise of implementation of the Act. This will be overseen by Sheffield Hallam University (who are ACE National Partners -- and funded by European money).

Action for Carers are also regular attendees at the Adults & Community Care Select Committee, which is a very good forum for discussing progress, should the Committee wish to do so.

Further information on Carers available from John Bangs, Carers Development Officer, 020 8541 9675

## **EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

### **MAGGIE MARTIN (THE DITTONS) TO ASK:**

I understand that the Council may be obliged to repay some £17m to the Government because of shortcomings in the Waste Contract.

- (a) What contingency plans have been put in place to fund this, should the need arise?
- (b) If the money has to be re-paid will this result in cuts to frontline services?
- (c) If so, where will cuts be made?

### **Reply:**

The Council has explained to DEFRA, the government department responsible for waste management, the delay in providing waste management facilities under the waste PFI contract. This has arisen because of delays in achieving planning permissions and not from shortcomings in the Waste Contract. There is no current indication that a repayment will be required, although the Council is acting responsibly to minimise this risk.

During this year, the response agreed by the Executive on the 20th January 2004, and subsequently the County Council, to recommendations of the external auditor in their annual management letter, have been actively pursued.

As a matter of prudent housekeeping, it was sensible to put aside some £17m of unapplied capital receipts in this years budget in case payment was required. This position will be reviewed when setting budgets for the coming year.