

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

TUESDAY 12 JUNE 2012

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

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

(1) MR MEL FEW (FOXHILLS AND VIRGINIA WATER) TO ASK:

With the Surrey County Council's active support on cycling will the Cabinet Member outline his programme for ensuring that all existing cycle paths are regularly maintained and clear of road debris and his programme for adding to the existing cycle path network throughout the County?

Reply:

The entire public maintainable highway benefits from regular safety inspections. The frequency of these inspections depends on the category of the road (for example, under the current policy a principal road is inspected quarterly whereas an unclassified cul-de-sac is once per annum). Cycle paths are included in these inspections and will be maintained appropriately. Street cleansing is the responsibility of the district or borough council for the area.

Most new cycle paths are promoted by the local committees. At this time, the two main supplements to these local initiatives are minor improvements from large scale development and those falling under the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, which is reported and approved by the Local Committee. There is no overarching central county programme. If specific details are required, the best person to contact would be the Local Committee Chairman for the area in question and Highway Officers.

CHAIRMAN OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE AND THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

(2) MR JOHN BUTCHER (COBHAM) TO ASK:

- (a) Why has there been no report to the Council of the meeting of the Standards Committee on 17 February 2012, that considered proposals for the Council's future Standards regime, required by the Localism Act 2011, and why have no such proposals yet been put to the Council; and
- (b) Why was the meeting of that Committee, that was listed to take place on 18 May 2012, cancelled, and why was that cancellation not properly advised before that date to the public and to all Members of the Council?

Reply:

- (a) Mr Butcher may recall that, at the Council Meeting held on 20 March 2012, I commended the work of the Standards Committee but highlighted the importance of elected Members giving serious consideration to the current opportunity for us to take a much more flexible approach to promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct. In particular, I said that I wanted the Council to ensure it adopts a new code of conduct that is both clear and relevant. I therefore proposed that a working group be set up and that the Monitoring Officer be asked to contact Group Leaders for nominations to this working group. That working group has been chaired by the Vice Chairman of the Council and members of it have been active in consulting their political colleagues. The whole group has met twice since 20 March and intend to finalise proposals later this week. The proposals of the working group will be presented to Council on 17 July.
- (b) That meeting of the Standards Committee was cancelled by its Chairman since there were no items of business that required consideration. The meeting was cancelled before the statutory deadline and no notice of meeting or agenda was published. Members of the Committee were duly notified of the cancellation. I understand that the Committee Manager has already explained to you that the meeting unfortunately remained listed on the Council's website.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

(3) MR TIM HALL (LEATHERHEAD AND FETCHAM EAST) TO ASK:

As BIFFA, a major waste contractor in Surrey is in the national media as being in serious financial difficulties and possibly will in the worst case scenario have failed its banking covenants by the end of June, could the Cabinet Member tell the Council what contingency planning had been undertaken by the Surrey Waste Partnership including the County Council in support of Surrey Businesses and Municipal Waste Collection Authorities such as Mole Valley District Council to make sure waste collection is maintained throughout the rest of the year with the minimum disruption. Also, what budget support might be needed both by the Waste Collection and Waste Disposal Authorities in Surrey for such an eventuality?

Reply:

Officers from the County Council have spoken to the relevant Waste Collection Authorities about this issue and the Surrey Waste Partnership has looked into the matter. Those authorities that use Biffa to deliver their municipal waste collection services are in active dialogue with their contractor and have received assurances that there is no current threat to the ongoing delivery of this service.

Discussions at the Surrey Waste Partnership have included how collection authorities could best support each other in the event that this situation changes.

I would not wish to comment on the details of the current press speculation regarding Biffa's financial situation. I am, however, continuing to work with district and borough councils to ensure that this matter remains under review.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

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

The October 2011 meeting of the County Council was your first as Leader. You used an answer to one written question from me to announce the ditching of your predecessor's ill conceived on-street parking charging plans with a one word answer "Yes".

In a forthright answer to a second question from me on the plans to replace professional library staff you stated *"without a change of strategic approach to how we deliver these libraries in these communities, these libraries will consistently find their cost-effectiveness under scrutiny and be at risk of withdrawal"*. You have consistently said that the Community Partnered Libraries plans are Surrey's alternative to closing libraries. The report by you, as Deputy Leader, and the then Cabinet Member for Community Services and the 2012 Games on the Public Value Review of Surrey Library Service to the Cabinet on 1 February made it very clear that the purpose of the Community Partnered Libraries plan was to save money, and that the saving would amount to £200,000 per annum.

The Cabinet Member for Community Services and the 2012 Games stated in a written response to me at the Cabinet meeting on 29 May 2012, *"There are no expected financial savings in 2012 – 2013 in the Library Service as a result of Community Partnered Libraries proposals and there are no expected annual savings as a result of the Community Partnered Libraries proposals."*

The whole purpose of the plans to run libraries with volunteers is no longer valid.

Will you now drop your ill-conceived plans by answering me again with a simple "Yes"?

Reply:

No. The Library PVR recommended that the County Council maintain a core strategic network of libraries run by the authority and advocated the message of local community empowerment as a means of delivery to allow the Surrey network of 52 libraries to be maintained. The Community Partnership model remains the strategic choice for securing the future of these ten libraries which

are at the margins of sustainability. We await the outcome of the consultation which we will bring to Cabinet with a full report in July.

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES / CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH

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

Papers came to the Children and Families Committee and the Adult Social Care Committee on 7 March and 18 May 2012 respectively, highlighting the likely negative impact on 'thousands rather than hundreds' of Surrey families of Welfare Reforms.

At the Children and Families Committee meeting it was agreed that as well as 'partnership working being key to supporting families through the changes', it was 'important that front line staff were fully up to date with the changes so that they could provide advice and guidance to the people they work with.' (Extract from the minutes of meeting 7 March 2012).

According to my contemporary notes, Surrey Officers from both Children's and Adults services said:

'Benefits maximisation should be at the heart of all we do as with the equalities act ... [there] needs to be some sort of strategic overlay that brings it home to staff at the front line'

'A lot of people who are experts this week will not be experts next week as the changes move in.'

'[frontline teams] need accurate support ... identifying entitlement and then prising it out of the Department for Work and Pensions.'

It was said that from 19 April, families affected by the new 'benefits cap' would begin to receive letters about reductions in their benefits, directing them to their local authorities. It was also said that as many people entitled to Disability Living Allowance as possible should be encouraged to take it up now, since the introduction of Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in 2013 will immediately involve narrower criteria being applied for new applicants.

The formal papers for 7 March said 'significant numbers of disabled young people reach the age of 19 having lost thousands of pounds in unclaimed benefits, and this group is particularly vulnerable to proposals in the Welfare Reform Bill.'

In the light of this:

- (1) Have the changes to the 'benefits cap' notified to families in Surrey yet had an impact on Surrey County Council?
- (2) What measures are currently in place to:

- (a) re-skill Surrey's front line staff to face the 'perfect storm' of the introduction of PIP, loss of the Social Fund, and other Welfare Reform changes in 2013?
- (b) maximise the number of Surrey's more vulnerable residents receiving the benefits to which they are currently entitled, especially through practical help in filling in the necessary forms?

Reply:

- (1) There is no immediate impact on Surrey County Council of the overall 'benefit cap'. The cap comes into effect in April 2013 along with the majority of the reforms to the Welfare Benefits system.
- (2a) Officers are in discussions with the Department of Work and Pensions on how our staff can be supported through the changes. In addition, plans are being drawn up to raise awareness of the changes and to provide training to front-line staff from the autumn onwards. At this stage the detailed regulations of the various reforms are not in the public domain. However, as soon as we have the level of detail available to brief staff, we will ensure staff receive information on the changes through briefing sessions, training courses and other media.
- (2b) Funding of independent welfare benefit advice has increased in 2012/13 and will increase further from April 2013 under proposals being developed by Adults Social Care to support the residents of Surrey through the welfare reforms.

Acknowledging that there is this "perfect storm" brewing, we have implemented the following:

- (1) A contract with Surrey Disabled People's Partnership for two full time Welfare Benefits Advisers was agreed on 1 April 2012 for 1 year; this is for all people requiring welfare advice including children and their parents; value of this contract is £66,415.
- (2) Surrey Welfare Rights Unit is currently funded by the Chief Executive's Office; however as they are not a front line provider of welfare advice (they support organisations that deliver those services e.g. Citizen's Advice Bureaux) they do not fit with the current Infrastructure changes for Voluntary Community and Faith organisations and will be commissioned through Adult Social Care as at 1 April 2013.
- (3) A project group was formed with our first meeting in March and on Thursday 31 May 2012 the second meeting was held with staff and external partners who are involved in the delivery of Welfare Benefits Advice.

The recommendations from this meeting are:

- To meet with the Adult Leadership Team and agree a budget for Welfare Benefits Advice from 1 April 2013.
- We have established the outcomes this grant/Service Level Agreement will achieve but will go out to co-design and co-production as to how these are best delivered with an emphasis on innovative ways this can be achieved.
- Proposals from interested groups will be submitted by December 2012 on a competitive basis with the aim of delivery for 1 April 2013.

For Children's Services, in relation to staff training and support for families regarding Welfare Reforms, the following actions have been put in place:

- Updates and briefings about the welfare reforms have been prepared and circulated within Children's services.
- Update information for parents has been provided through the Short Breaks newsletter which has wide circulation to families of disabled children, not just those known to Social Care.
- Specialist training on benefits is being commissioned for staff, including leaving care personal advisors, to ensure up to date information is available for service users.
- National organisations such as Council for Disabled Children have also been circulating information for parents of disabled children. Parents networks / Family Voice have links for distribution and promotion of this information.

In the last few months Age UK, Surrey have introduced a pilot project of 1 full time Welfare Benefits Adviser who has been able to assist people to claim £100,000 in benefits in the first 6 weeks of work. This underlines the importance that is given by our partner organisations and the Council to supporting people as they struggle to claim and understand Welfare Benefits.

While it is important that our front line staff have an understanding of Welfare Benefits there is significant evidence from the people of Surrey that they are reluctant to seek advice from Government and quasi-government organisations such as the Department of Works and Pensions and the Council. People prefer to approach voluntary organisations like Age UK who have a trusted national brand where they feel safe in disclosing their financial situation and asking for advice that they feel is impartial.

CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH

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

The Cabinet Member will recall the recent discussion at the Adult Social Care Select Committee meeting about the implication of welfare benefit changes on

Surrey residents and the concern expressed by all Members. He will also recall that Members stressed how important it is that expert advice should be available to all people who need to apply for welfare benefit payments. In the light of the discussion would he confirm that he will protect all Surrey County Council grants to voluntary organisations that provide advice and support on welfare benefit issues to ensure that those who apply for benefits receive the maximum amounts to which they are entitled?

Reply:

Please refer to the response given to question (5).

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT:

(7) MR NICK HARRISON (BANSTEAD WEST) TO ASK:

Across areas of Surrey where the Olympic cycle races are taking place this summer, a number of the roads have had extensive repairs and resurfacing work carried out in recent months.

Can I have a full list of roads where highways resurfacing and repairs work have been carried out in preparation for the Olympic cycle races?

Can I have details of the costs for each of the repairs and resurfacing?

Can I have information on whether the work is being paid for by Surrey County Council or the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG)?

Reply:

Surrey Highways has invested £2.3m in preparing the Surrey Highway Network for the Olympic cycle route, delivering 24 major road schemes, with £640,000 contributed towards overall costs from central Government grants. The remaining funds were delivered using SCC budget expenditure, however the majority of roads used as part of the Olympic route, were already planned to be replaced over the next 36 months.

There are 24 routes which have had work done on them, 14 were in the top 100 to be completed within 36 months and 10 were outside the list and were brought forward. Therefore, as a result of being awarded the Olympic Cycle route, Surrey highways accelerated this investment and delivered all schemes within a 12 month period in time for the cycle event. This ensured the route is fit for purpose and to the high standards set by the Olympics Authority.

Set against net expenditure in advance of the programme, the expenditure by Surrey of £1.66 million must be set against over £800 million worth of business being brought into Surrey by this event, plus the international profile that will be

achieved over the three days cycling in Surrey, is incalculable. We will be celebrating Surrey, its countryside, its people!

(A full list of schemes and individual costs is attached at the end of this document.)

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

(8) MRS HAZEL WATSON (DORKING HILLS) TO ASK: (2nd question)

The “Year End Financial Position” presented to Cabinet on 29 May 2012 shows the level of Surrey County Council’s total earmarked reserves had increased from £66.7 million on 1 April 2011 to £92.9 million on 31 March 2012, an increase of £26.2 million or 39%.

Given that there are approximately 500,000 households in Surrey this equates to an extra £52.40 that every household in Surrey could be spending in Surrey supporting Surrey businesses being put into the County Council’s coffers at a time of an excessive Surrey Council Tax increase of virtually 3%.

How do you justify to Surrey residents that £52.40 of their Council Tax increase is just being banked by you and how do you justify to Surrey businesses the loss of £26.2 million from the Surrey economy at this time of financial hardship for so many?

Reply:

This administration has taken a forward-looking and multi-year approach to the financial management of the County Council. This ensures that savings in response to the reduction in central government funding are found in a managed way and are not a short-term, panic measure, and that the call on our local taxpayers over the medium term is kept to a minimum.

The Council holds ear-marked reserves for a reason and the improvement in these reserves is a part of the council’s medium term strategy. This will ensure that this administration continues to deliver high quality services to our residents whilst making the necessary savings. Nearly £10m of this increase is in fact already a part of the Medium Term Financial Plan approved in February 2012 and is being used to support the 2012/13 budget. This has ensured that savings can be introduced in a managed way and the council does not have to make unnecessary and short term cuts in services.

A further £14m has been set aside for future investment in services – either to produce future savings, or to generate income. This investment will mitigate the need for excessive rises in council tax in future years and bolster the economy of Surrey, which is so necessary for the prosperity of the whole nation. The Council cannot and will not manage its finances on a short term, yearly cycle. Surrey residents deserve more than that. The Council will look forward

and plan for the future to continue to provide high quality services to its residents.

It is important that Members do understand the longer term pressures on the Council's finance and how we are managing those. An important part of this is the use of earmarked reserves. I organised finance training for all Members last year, and if Group Leaders feel their Members would like to take part in additional training, I would be pleased to ask the Chief Finance Officer to organise this.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

(9) MRS HAZEL WATSON (DORKING HILLS) TO ASK: (3rd question)

The "Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity", issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government on 31 March 2011 and laid before both Houses of Parliament states:

"it is acceptable for local authorities to publicise the work done by individual members of the authority, and to present the views of those individuals on local issues. This might be appropriate, for example, when one councillor has been the "face" of a particular campaign."

See

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1878324.pdf>

The County Council's Member Officer Protocol states "*Press releases will include the contact details of the local Member where the release relates to a specific local area, in order to allow the local Member to be contacted directly by the press for comment regarding the issue.*"

Will the Leader agree with me that:

- (1) It is the role of Press Office to promote the whole work of the Council, including where appropriate and in a non party political way the work of Members as representatives of their divisions?
- (2) That, when appropriate, local Members should be quoted within the guidelines laid before Parliament, on issues that are specific to their divisions?
- (3) That local Members should always have their contact details included on press releases that are specific to their division even when it is not appropriate to quote the Member in the press release?

Reply:

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group will be aware that the Media Relations Team does promote the work of the Council in a non party political way. On occasions they will quote a Member where they are leading a particular piece of work and I am confident that they are acting within the Code of Recommended Practice.

The Media Relations Team has sought to include contacts for local Members on relevant press releases but to avoid any confusion about when this should happen, they are now including a link to all Members' contacts on all press releases. The link is also on the Council's digital press office.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT**(10) MRS HAZEL WATSON (DORKING HILLS) TO ASK:
(4th question)**

On 27 March 2012, the Cabinet Member for Transport and the Environment decided to discontinue the nomination by Councillors of the three worst roads in each of their divisions. Following this decision, how and when can councillors have an input into the prioritisation of major maintenance schemes on behalf of their local residents?

Reply:

I would refer the Member for Dorking Hills to papers (on our website) considered by Cabinet on the 27 March 2012 from the Environment and Transport Select Committee, Maintenance Prioritisation Working Group. These papers explain the reasons why the councillor nominated three worst roads has been discontinued and details of a major new capital programme, Project Horizon, which is being developed at this time. The intention of the project is that by working with suppliers on a strategic programme, we can negotiate a 15% financial saving and look to treat the 1000 worst roads within a five year window. This will be a substantial investment by the County Council for the benefit of our residents.

Rather than removing the ability for local Members to exert influence, this year the funds directly under the control of the local committees (and consequently the local Members) have substantially increased. There is a total of £2m capital maintenance, £2m capital minor improvement and £3.15m revenue. This money is so local committees can use their local knowledge and tackle real issues that are of concern to their residents. The Leader has been quite clear, while the sums have been allocated on the above basis, if the Local Committee wishes to use all of their capital allowance for maintenance (or minor improvements) then this is their decision. I would encourage Mrs Watson to work with her colleagues on the Local Committee to ensure the additional funding is used for maximum benefit.

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

TUESDAY 12 JUNE 2012

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

REPRESENTATIVE OF THE POLICE AUTHORITY

(1) MR JOHN BUTCHER (COBHAM) TO ASK:

Can the Authority explain why:

- (1) At the meeting of this Council on 8 May 2012, it did not provide an answer in public to my question, that had been submitted for such answer at that meeting, about a press report alleging that there would be a substantially lower level of normal policing in areas such as Surrey, in the period before, during and after the 2012 Olympic Games, given that:
- (2) When I asked the identical question, at the meeting of that Authority on 17 May 2012, the Chief Constable of Surrey replied that a full answer to it was being provided on the Surrey Police website and there has so appeared an answer which, whilst not full, did address several aspects of that question?

Reply:

As the Chief Constable has previously explained, her response to certain aspects of Mr Butcher's questions to Council concerning Surrey Police's preparedness and resilience for the Olympics contained information which remains operationally sensitive. In order that Mr Butcher and indeed all Members of the County Council could be informed and reassured of Surrey Police's Olympic plans, the Chief Constable attended Council on 8 May 2012 to personally brief members. In addition, she provided a confidential briefing paper, available to all Members.

At the Surrey Police Authority meeting on 17 May 2012, the Chief Constable was clear in response to Mr Butcher's questions that as much information as possible would be placed in the public domain. She provided a response at the Authority meeting and subsequently put this information onto the Surrey Police website. The Chief Constable reiterated that elements of Surrey Police's Olympic plans (e.g. deployment of officers), if shared in public, could compromise the events.

Members will wish to note that Mrs Hicks has circulated the website information to all County Councillors, and the confidential briefing that answers Mr Butcher's original questions remains available to all Members.