

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

TUESDAY 17 JULY 2012

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

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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

The issue of children running away from care has been hitting the national headlines recently.

Disturbing figures on the numbers of runaway children in Police estimates, the report in June by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults, the recent Rochdale case of sexual exploitation of children and the accelerated "Briefing for the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Education, on the emerging findings of the Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups, with a special focus on children in care" published earlier this month have all heightened the focus on the need to ensure these children are protected.

- How many children are known or estimated to have run away from care in Surrey in each of the past three years for which figures are available?
- How many Surrey children have been placed in care "out of authority" in each of the past 3 years for which figures are available?
- How many children placed by Surrey in out of authority placements are known or estimated to have run away from care in each of the past three years for which figures are available?
- What actions is the Cabinet Member taking to urgently address the issues raised in these reports and in response to the Rochdale case?

Reply:

How many children are known or estimated to have run away from care in Surrey in each of the past three years for which figures are available?

- 2009/10 42, 9 of whom were unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- 2010/11 23, 5 of whom were unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- 2011/12 28, 7 of whom were unaccompanied asylum seeking children

How many Surrey children have been placed in care "out of authority" in each of the past 3 years for which figures are available?

Due to the active numbers of children who are looked after during the year, we use end of reporting year snapshots to assess the numbers of Looked After Children who are in the different types of placements. This is following the lead

of the government and the following are the end of year figures submitted to the government through the statutory returns.

Number of children in non-surrey provision* at 31 March in each reporting year (number in children's homes and % in brackets):

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
293 (32 - 11%)	247 (33 - 13%)	273 (33 - 12%)

The percentage of all LAC in non-surrey provision

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
37%	33%	34%

*excludes children placed for adoption, missing and placed with parents.

How many children placed by Surrey in out of authority placements are known or estimated to have run away from care in each of the past three years for which figures are available?

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
20	19	13

I have met with senior officers in the Directorate and been reassured that systems are in place to monitor young people in care outside the county. There is a dedicated team which review and monitor all out of county residential provision and ensure that it meets appropriate standards. They regularly review Ofsted inspection reports and take action if necessary. Visits to view homes are conducted as appropriate and all children placed at homes are visited regularly by their allocated Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer. There are systems established with the police to specifically monitor children who go missing from care and may be at risk of child sexual exploitation. These include two multi-agency groups hosted by Surrey Police for children who go missing and those at risk of child sexual exploitation.

When a child goes missing for more than six hours, the home will immediately notify the Police – the Police will not take a report before this time has elapsed. A list of common places the young person runs to will also be given to the Police. They will check these and return a child if they are found, or if there is no immediate danger will notify the home who will arrange for a staff member to collect them. All the children are found and returned to the children's home. In the event that a child absconds frequently, then intervention meetings are held and chaired by Team Managers or Area Heads of service to agree a plan of action to reduce the risk of absconding. Furthermore, the young person will have a meeting with a social worker or independent person on their return to discuss the reasons why they absconded.

In addition, the Missing Children Sub-group has just agreed a scheme with the Youth Support Service to provide workers who can keep in touch with young people that have absconded.

From the beginning of April 2012 to the end of June 2012, 28 children went missing for less than 24 hours, some of these on more than one occasion. These instances and children are monitored regularly at the monthly Placement Strategy meeting including Area Heads and the Head of Countywide Services to monitor concerns and further actions as necessary.

Long-term Missing

There are currently 12 young people missing long-term from our care. Of these, two are young people whose whereabouts are known – one aged 16 and one aged 17 – who are refusing to remain in their planned placements but instead have returned to live with family members.

Nine young people who are missing are unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Of these 5 went missing within two days of presenting themselves as asylum seeking to Surrey and being accommodated as a Looked after Child. Another three were in care for periods from three weeks to five months before absconding. One young person has been Looked After for two years but has been missing for most of this time. On 2 occasions he has been located but has always absconded again. He is believed to be in the West Midlands.

All young people who are recorded as unaccompanied asylum seeking and who are listed as missing remain as open cases on our client record system. Regular liaison takes place with the Police to update on any further information about them.

One young person, aged 14 years has been regularly missing from our care where he has been missing with support from his family. His whereabouts are now known and longer term plans for his safe care are being developed.

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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

In last year's review of in-house short breaks services for children with disabilities, it was proposed that following the closure of Squirrel Lodge, services could be provided by local external providers such as White Lodge, Cherry Trees and The Beeches, with Applewood as a possible alternative.

It has now been announced that The Beeches will be closed from the end of 2012. Parents are being offered alternative provision at Applewood.

It is claimed that there is insufficient demand for respite care, and that the facility is therefore under-utilised.

Parents and teachers of children at nearby Brooklands School and other special schools in Surrey are struggling to understand how this can be. Many parents have had their requests for respite care refused and have given up in frustration; those that have been successful have only been offered places when families have been on the verge of breakdown.

Lots of parents are concerned that specialist centres continue to offer safe levels of care for those children with the most complex disabilities, a safe environment for children on the autistic spectrum and a calm environment for more vulnerable children. It now seems that Applewood is to meet the needs of the whole spectrum of disabled children, which parents are very sceptical about.

- How are parents informed about the possibility of respite care, and how many requests are received? How many are accepted and how many rejected?
- How will Applewood cope with the increased demand that the closure of The Beeches will create?
- Does Applewood have the expertise to meet the needs of the whole spectrum of disabled children, and the ability to provide the 'emergency' care offered by The Beeches at very short notice?
- What other arrangements are being made for the continuation of respite care for those previously catered for by The Beeches?
- Is this decision a "fait accompli" or will the Council consider working further with the NHS to see if any solutions can be found to keep the facility open?

Reply:

It is correct that NHS Surrey have taken the decision to de-commission the Beeches service provided by Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. This decision was taken following a recent review which showed that this service was not being used to full capacity. Services for disabled children and young people have changed considerably in recent years and recent commissioning has focused on the development of community based provision such as play, youth and leisure schemes. These changes have been in response to consultations with parents who have told us how much they value this type of service. Although we recognise that there will always be a need for residential provision such as Beeches and Applewood, it makes sense to ensure that that these resources are being used to maximum efficiency and are targeted appropriately. Applewood, as a relatively new service, has capacity to provide support to all the children and young people currently using Beeches. It therefore seemed good sense to combine the two services for the east of the county and make best use of Applewood's purpose built facilities.

The Council's Short Breaks Team is working with a number of voluntary sector providers and special schools across the county to deliver a range of after school clubs, extended school days, holiday activities and domiciliary support to meet the differing needs of disabled children and young people. These developments have been supported through significant additional investment from Aiming High and Early Intervention Grants. Over 2,000 Surrey disabled

children and young people are now accessing short breaks. The Short Breaks team would be happy to commence discussions with staff and parents at Brooklands School to consider ideas as to how they may wish to see similar partnership initiatives being developed in the future.

In response to the specific questions that have been asked, please see below:

As part of the Assessment and Care Planning process, discussions take place about respite care options with all families receiving a service from the Children with Disabilities Team. This includes information about the range of community based services and Direct Payments. This enables each child and young person to have an individual care plan that is tailored to their needs.

Applewood has already begun planning for the transfer of children from Beeches. Applewood staff have met with the Manager of the Children with Disabilities Team and will be reviewing the care plan for each child. The needs of the children currently using the two services are very similar and we are confident that the Applewood staff have the skills and abilities to manage their care. A careful transition will be planned for each child and young person and Beeches staff will be asked to support this. Training will be provided to staff if there are any areas of care that Applewood cannot currently deliver. Joint work is underway with adult services for young people of transition age to ensure support continues to be available as they move into adult services. Applewood currently offers a similar service to Beeches and where a family requires emergency support will endeavour to provide this care, subject to capacity. In addition, the new Applewood service will be more flexible, offering more choice to a wider range of children and young people with disabilities.

Due to The Beeches planned closure, NHS Surrey agreed in principle to a financial contribution to SCC to ensure that the children and families affected by its closure receive a seamless transfer of care and support in decision making about alternate provision. Parents of children and young people using Beeches have been invited to visit Applewood and 14 parents have so far taken up this opportunity. Parents are also able to consider other short break services such as Cherry Trees or White Lodge or transferring part or all of their child's care package to Direct Payments.

Both NHS Surrey and Surrey County Council believe that the proposal to combine the current Applewood and Beeches services in the east of the county will be a better and more efficient way of making sure children and young people get the care they need. No child or young person will lose their care package as a result of this proposal. The Council and NHS Surrey will continue to work together to ensure support and care is available to children and young people with disabilities.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

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

In March 2010, Surrey County Council signed a 25-year PFI deal with Skanska for them to replace and manage the Council's streetlights. The programme was based on saving at least £12 million over the 25-year contract, with savings starting straight away.

Please could the Cabinet Member confirm what financial savings have resulted since March 2010 across the County including a breakdown by Borough/District in those where all their street lights have been replaced?

Reply:

The introduction of the Street lighting PFI and the Central monitoring system, which allow us to dim our streetlights has enabled Surrey County Council to be one of the first council's in the UK to control the amount of energy used, without needing to simply switch lights off during the night which some councils have opted to do.

The savings are calculated upon two key targets:

- **£2m** energy saving delivered during 2010 – 2015 as part of the 5 year replacement programme itself, when compared to what would have been incurred if we had not dimmed the new lights.
- **£10m** energy saving delivered 2015 - 2025 through an annual saving of £500,000 per annum from 2015, when compared to what would have been incurred if we had not dimmed the new lights.

We have now replaced or refurbished over 45,000 columns (approximately 50% of total stock) and have already saved £760,000 as a result of just under 1 million kilowatt hours less consumption as a result of dimming lights. We are therefore on track to deliver the £12m saving over the life of the contract.

The savings are calculated upon total consumption across the County's inventory of lights and unfortunately due to timescales it has not been possible to break this down by district and borough. However, this information can be provided by officers directly to the Member in the near future. It is also important to note that as 2,000 additional columns are replaced each month, the figures are continually changing.

CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES AND THE 2012 GAMES:

(4) MR COLIN TAYLOR (EPSOM & EWELL SOUTH WEST) TO ASK

In what way do you think that making smaller libraries Community Partnered would make them more sustainable, if this doesn't save any money?

Reply:

Surrey County Council have stated on many occasions that we are committed to the challenge of keeping our libraries open but it is our duty, as the guardian of public expenditure, to get best public value from the library budget.

The Public Value Review of the Library Service 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.

There are net savings to the council budget to be made from the Community Partnered Library initiative - £381,000 per annum - but the County Council's views on what happens to those savings are changing.

Many of the ten libraries identified for Community Partnered Library arrangements have been considered for closure in the past, in some cases more than once, largely due to two criteria - low level and declining use. 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.

The community partnership model is being adopted by library authorities around the country as a strategic solution to secure the future of libraries that are not achieving enough use to continue to be viable in their current form by engaging the local community in their management and development to increase use, and expand their role in the community.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**(5) MRS FIONA WHITE (GUILDFORD WEST) TO ASK:**

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, has attacked expensive communications from councils such as Surrey Matters stating:

“It’s a process of self aggrandisement, self publicity, going on their own particular message. It’s not public service - it’s propaganda.”

Does the Leader agree that spending on such propaganda (to quote the Secretary of State) is inappropriate in the current financial climate and will he set out his plans to massively reduce the £222,000 spending on Surrey Matters with a view to reducing the burden on Surrey Taxpayers?

Reply:

We have a duty to keep residents informed of the services we provide and how council tax is spent. At all times we work within the code of recommended practices on local authority publicity, published by Mr Pickles' Department for Communities and Local Government.

Feedback from residents tells me that people value Surrey Matters not just through the readers survey - 78% said they find the magazine keeps them informed - but also residents I meet out and about who unprompted tell me how helpful they find the magazine.

Surrey Matters currently costs less than 14p per copy and we always ensure we secure the best value for money possible with every edition we produce. To do this, we will continue to develop our low-cost digital media channels such as online, social media and our monthly e-newsletter to increase public understanding and awareness of our services.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

(6) MR STEPHEN COOKSEY (DORKING AND THE HOLMWOODS) TO ASK:

At the County Council meeting held on 12 June 2012 I asked the Leader of the Council why it had now been decided to change the agreed policy that the Vice-Chairman of the Woking and Mole Valley Local Committees would be a District Council nominee in recognition of the work undertaken in developing partnership arrangements. Mole Valley was excluded although the arrangement remained in place for Woking. His answer was 'it was a Conservative Group decision'.

Would he now explain the reasoning behind that decision of the Conservative Group? Was it because the work undertaken in Mole Valley is no longer regarded as worthy of this recognition or is there some other reason for the withdrawal of this arrangement?

Reply:

The response will be given verbally at the meeting.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

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

In the May 2012 Budget Monitoring report, the section for Children and Families listed under growing financial pressures:

- *Growing reliance on expensive agency staff as demand in Children's Services increases, despite a focus on recruitment and retention.*

In the summary of staffing costs for the whole of Surrey County Council it said:

29. The council employ three categories of paid staff. Contracted staff are employed on a permanent or fixed term basis and are paid through the

council's payroll. These staff are contracted to work full time, or part time. Bank staff are contracted to the council and paid through the payroll but have no guaranteed hours. Agency staff are employed through an agency with which the council has a contract. The use of bank and agency staff enables managers to manage short term variations in demand for services or vacancies for contracted staff.

30. A degree of flexibility in the staffing budget is good, as is some staff turnover, which allows new ideas and thinking into the workforce from other organisations. The council aims to incur between 88% and 95% of its staffing costs from contracted staff, depending on the particular Directorate service needs.

31. Table A3 shows the staffing expenditure for the first two months of the year against budget. This is then analysed between the categories of staff.

Table A3 – Staffing costs to end of May 2012.

	Budget £m	Actual £m	Variance %	Variance £m
Contracted		45.0	92%	
Agency		2.3	5%	
Bank		1.4	3%	
Total Staffing Cost	49.2	48.7		-0.5

32. The favourable current variance of £0.5m is due to a combination of vacancies in the process of being filled, vacancies being held unfilled prior to restructures and a more economical mix of staffing grades being employed than budgeted.

33. In setting the budget, the council based the staffing cost estimate on 7,700 full time equivalent (FTE) staff. Table A4 shows that there are 7,171 contracted FTEs in post.

Table A4- full time equivalents in post and vacancies

	FTE
Budget	7,700
Occupied contracted FTE	7,171
“Live” vacancies (ie: actively recruited)	214
Vacancies not occupied by contracted FTEs	315

34. *There are 214 “live” vacancies, which are those being actively recruited. The remaining vacancies are either filled by agency and bank staff on a short term basis or not actively recruited at present.*

Drawing these two sections together shows that:

- i) Despite the overall report claiming that using agency staff “*enables managers to manage short term variations in demand for services or vacancies for contracted staff*”, this is not the case in Children and Families where there is an increasing reliance on agency staff to cope with long term pressures.
- ii) Far too many posts are “not actively recruited”.

Will the Leader conduct a review of Human Resources to ensure the maximum value for money for Surrey residents by reducing the over reliance on Agency Staff and consultants, and to ensure that unfilled posts are either filled, or removed from the establishment?

Reply:

The Council sets the staffing or establishment cost for the organisation based on the staffing costs necessary to deliver services and the Council’s ability to afford those establishment costs. The Cabinet has asked the officers to analyse the way those staffing costs are spent against budget to provide transparency regarding the source of the staffing (contracted staff e.g. permanent and fixed term contracts, bank/casual staff or agency workers). The control point for these is the actual spend compared to the establishment budget. This is what the Cabinet monitors to ensure the County Council stays within its establishment budget.

In an organisation of this scale, complexity and diversity as regards the nature of its services, there needs to be a healthy balance of flexible resource (agency, bank staff etc.) to permanent resource. Overall these represent less than 10% of our establishment costs.

In the case of some occupational groups (e.g. Children’s Social Workers) there has been over recent years a national and, in particular, regional shortage of supply. Costs of agency staff in such occupational groups have therefore risen to ensure we can continue to run essential services. Our teams have worked hard to reduce the level of jobs covered by agency staff in such areas and have staff dedicated to doing this. Current initiatives include ongoing recruitment campaigns, agency to permanent conversion, recruitment events and fairs like Comcare and liaison with Universities and Colleges for the recruitment of newly qualified Social Workers. The Heads of Service concerned and the Head of HR and OD continue to monitor progress here regularly.

CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES AND THE 2012 GAMES

(8) COLIN TAYLOR (EPSOM & EWELL SOUTH WEST) TO ASK: (2nd question)

I understand that there is a Public Lending Rights (PLR) licence which gives authors the right to receive copyright payments for the loans of their books from SCC's libraries, based on lending data collected at libraries.

Will Surrey's proposed Community Partnered Libraries be covered by the PLR Licence?

Reply:

The Public Lending Right (PLR) is the right for authors to receive payment under PLR legislation for the loans of their books by public libraries. Payments are made on an annual basis of loans data collected from a sample of public libraries in the UK. Surrey last participated in the scheme in the period 2008-2011. Over 30 authorities are sampled in any one year and seven of these authorities are changed on an annual basis. Surrey is not a sample authority this year and it is unlikely to be for the next 3 years. Therefore, book issues and renewals at the Community Partnered Libraries will not contribute to or affect the PLR. When Surrey is given the option of becoming a sample authority again in 2015, the data will be taken from all loans generated through the library management system. This will include self-service machines at Community Partnered Libraries unless a decision is made at that point to exclude the Community Partnered Libraries from the dataset.

CHAIRMAN OF THE PLANNING AND REGULATORY COMMITTEE:

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

Following the decision of the Planning and Regulatory Committee last year to refuse the planning application for oil and gas exploration at Bury Hill Wood off Coldharbour Lane in Coldharbour, the applicant Europa Oil and Gas (Holdings) Plc appealed the decision which has resulted in a Public Inquiry which started on 10 July 2012. The County Council has recently decided not to contest the following two reasons for refusal agreed by the Planning and Regulatory Committee last year:

Reason 2 – There is insufficient evidence to demonstrate why the proposed exploratory drilling development cannot be located beyond the boundary of the AONB designation.

Reason 3 – It has not been demonstrated to the satisfaction of the County Planning Authority that the proposed traffic management measures are adequate to protect the character of Coldharbour Lane; where the nature of the traffic activity would have the potential to irreversibly damage the historic banks

and trees and lead to the industrialisation of the character of a quiet rural road; or adequate to protect the amenity of highway users and residents in Knoll Road, Coldharbour Lane and the broader vicinity;

Why was the decision made not to contest these two reasons for refusal and not to provide an expert Highways witness in support of reason for refusal 3?

Reply:

Geological and geotechnical advice evidence submitted in preparation for the Public Inquiry, indicates that drilling from outside the AONB is unlikely to be considered viable commercially, given the significantly greater costs involved. Surrey County Council's Counsel concluded, after a thorough review of all the evidence, and taking advice from Surrey County Council's appointed geotechnical consultant that there was no reasonable case to offer in respect of reason for refusal 2. Given the advice of its appointed experts, it was in the best interests of the Council to confirm to the Planning Inspectorate prior to the Public Inquiry that the the Council did not intend to contest reason for refusal 2.

With regard to reason for refusal 3, it is not the case that the entire reason has been withdrawn. The reason has been modified to exclude the words -

"have the potential to irreversibly damage the historic banks and trees and"

The words were withdrawn because the circumstances at the site have changed as a result of the landowner, the Forestry Commission, felling trees in Coldharbour Lane that had at the time the application was determined by Planning and Regulatory Committee been considered at risk from traffic associated with the site's construction and operation. It is understood that the Forestry Commission removed the trees in their role as landowner as they were perceived to be a risk to other highway users and this had been agreed with the District Council.

The Council's consultants concluded subsequently that the passage of vehicles was highly unlikely to lead to irreversible damage to the historic banks due to the low level of traffic movements on Coldharbour Lane and the protection afforded by the Traffic Management Plan.

The amenity issues the subject of reason for refusal 3 remain part of the County Planning Authority's case at the Planning Inquiry and are addressed by the planning expert witness appointed by the Council.

Clearly it is undesirable to have to withdraw and/or amend reasons for refusal prior to any appeal against refusal of planning permission. In this case expert advice was assessed by Counsel who advised that the County should advise the Planning Inspectorate about the changes to the County's evidence at the earliest opportunity. This was to avoid the Appellant's witnesses needing to attend Inquiry to deal with the County's evidence on these issues, and avoiding the costs that this could attract.