

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

TUESDAY 16 OCTOBER 2012

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

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND LEARNING

**(1) MR VICTOR AGARWAL (STANWELL AND STANWELL MOOR) TO
ASK:**

Will Surrey County Council support any Surrey School indicating it has no wish to become an academy in the way Birmingham City Council has done for its schools?

Reply:

To date 5 Primary Schools, 20 Secondary Schools and 1 Special School in Surrey have converted to Academy status. Surrey County Council continues to work in partnership with these schools and the schools themselves continue to work collegiately with other schools in their areas through local networks and Confederations. A number of these Academies are also teaching schools and work closely with other schools and the Local Authority to deliver and support Graduate teaching programmes. Surrey commissions school improvement support from Babcock 4S to work in partnership with a small number of schools that are experiencing difficulties and require additional support in order to make improvements, on occasion following an inspection by OFSTED.

Officers have regular meetings with representatives from the Department for Education and, on occasions, discuss specific Surrey schools where Academy status is put forward as a suggested option. Each school may wish to consider pursuing Academy status at any time, and some schools have discussed this option and decided not to proceed. Surrey has no plans to force schools into any particular direction and continues to work in partnership by having an open constructive dialogue with all agencies involved.

Although it has not been possible to obtain from Mr. Agarwal details of the particular approach by Birmingham City Council to which he refers, I can confirm that Surrey maintains a very supportive relationship with its families of schools which is welcomed by them, irrespective of whether they have converted to Academies or not.

CHAIRMAN OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

So far in 2012 the following 52 internal audit reports have been presented to the Council's Audit & Governance committee

February

Audit	Opinion	Number of recommendations rated as High Priority
Procurement Compliance Team	Some Improvement Needed	1
TCC PVR	Major Improvement Needed	5
Services for People with Learning Disabilities - PVR	Some Improvement Needed	2
Business Continuity and Declaration of Interests in Surrey Schools	Some Improvement Needed	0
Governor's Financial Knowledge and Skills in Surrey Schools	Some Improvement Needed	0
Rental Income	Major Improvement Needed	5
Utility Payments	Some Improvement Needed	2
Children in Non-maintained/independent SEN provision	n/a	0
SAP Applications and Controls	n/a	0
Data Centre/Operation Controls	Some Improvement Needed	1
eBulk CRB	Some Improvement Needed	0
Disposals and Acquisitions	Some Improvement Needed	0
Traffic Signal Management	Some Improvement Needed	0
Walton Bridge –	Some Improvement	1

Project Management	Needed	
Children's Service – deep dive process	Some Improvement Needed	0
Section 76 – follow up audit	Some Improvement Needed	0

April

Members' Register of Interests	Some Improvement Needed	0
Delivery of PVR Savings	Some Improvement Needed	1
Heritage PVR	Major Improvement Needed	6
Social Care Debt	Some Improvement Needed	0
Pension Administration 2011/12	Effective	0

May

Schools - Benchmarking Information	Some Improvement Needed	0
AIS/SWIFT Systems	Some Improvement Needed	2
Pension Fund Investments	Effective	0
Adult Social Care Commissioning	Some Improvement Needed	0
Direct Payments	Major Improvement Needed	4
Accounts Receivable	Effective	0
Payroll	Effective	0
Capital Expenditure Monitoring	Some Improvement Needed	1
Revenue Budgetary Control	Some Improvement Needed	1
Risk Management	Effective	0
General Ledger	Effective	0

June

Payroll	Effective	0
Academies	Effective	0
VCFS Framework	Some Improvement Needed	0

Agency Staff Contract	Some Improvement Needed	5
Accounts Payable	Effective	0
Highways Contract	Major Improvement Needed	7
SFRS PVR	Some Improvement Needed	0
Treasury Management	Effective	0

September

Arval Fuel Cards	Effective	0
Honoraria Payments in Schools	Unsatisfactory	11
Data Protection Compliance	Some Improvement Needed	0
Surrey Educational Trust	Some Improvement Needed	0
Retiring Head Teachers' Payments	Some Improvement Needed	0

October

Carbon reduction Commitment and Green House Gases Annual report	Some Improvement Needed	0
Integrated Children's System (ICS)	Some Improvement Needed	0
16-19 Education	Effective	0
Data Quality - LAC Health and Dental checks	Major Improvement Needed	3
Surrey Telecare Project Management	Some Improvement Needed	0
Waste Contract Management	Some Improvement Needed	0

Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the reports, and some of the reports clearly fall under its remit. Following a request from Mr Forster and myself, the Highways Contract internal audit report was presented in full to the Environment and Transport Select Committee. However a number of other reports clearly fall under the remit of other select committees.

Please list the Select Committees at which each internal audit report has been presented.

Does the Chairman agree with me that all Select Committees should consider all the full internal audit reports on subjects that fall within their remit?

Reply:

Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a regular Completed Audit Reports agenda item, which provides details of all audit reports issued in the period. In cases where the audit report contains an audit opinion within the category "Some Improvement, Major Improvement Needed or Unsatisfactory" these are referred to the appropriate Select Committee for follow up with their respective directorates.

The detailed audit reports have been included with the relevant Committee agenda papers, or tabled on the day, at the following Select Committee meetings in the period January 2012 – present:

Adult Social Care

17 January 2012 – People with learning disabilities PVR Update

Environment & Transport

19 July 2012 – Highways Management Contract

Children & Families

10 October 2012 – Surrey Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) Annual Report

Internal Audit reports provide independent assurance on the adequacy of internal control and as such are a valuable source of information for Select Committees and I would expect all Internal Audit reports, but especially those with an Unsatisfactory or Major Improvement Needed audit opinion, to be considered by the relevant Select Committee.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

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

At the May 2006 AGM of Council the following motion, amended from a motion proposed by David Goodwin (Liberal Democrat, Guildford South West), was passed unanimously:

'That the Council takes note that,

- (i) research has shown that the chances of being killed as a pedestrian when hit by a vehicle double between 30 and 35 mph;*
- (ii) existing policy of the County Council on road safety has already seen the introduction of many 20 mph zones across the County at the request of*

Local Committees in co-operation with the police since the policy was introduced in the first Local Transport Plan covering the period April 2001 to March 2006 and is also included in the current Draft Local Transport Plan for the period 2006 to 2011 wherein it states on page 85 paragraph 4.118:-

*“A major contributory factor to collisions is excessive vehicle speeds. Where appropriate, we will consider reducing speeds in urban and rural areas through measures such as **20 mph zones**. 16 such schemes have already been introduced in the county and emerging results from some of the earlier schemes indicate that accident figures have been cut by as much as 50%. Lower speed limits in tandem with 'gateway' signing can be an effective combination, particularly in rural locations.”*

- (iii) *calls on the County Council to produce a report on the effectiveness of the introduced 20 mph zones with recommendations for any future development of road safety policy.*

and

- (iv) *calls on the Local Committees of Surrey County Council to extend the implementation of 20mph zones to a greater number of local residential streets as another step towards making roads safe.’*

Since May 2006 there has been further evidence as to the effectiveness of 20mph speed limits:

- a) Among Member States of the EU, the UK has the highest proportion of pedestrian road fatalities, and half of road deaths and serious injuries in Britain occur on roads with 30 mph limits.
- b) Among member states of the EU, the UK has one of the poorest levels of children walking or cycling to school and many parents cite danger from fast traffic as a reason for not allowing their children to travel to school on foot or by bike.
- c) Lowering the normal residential speed limit from 30 mph to 20 mph would make roads safer; in particular a study by the Transport Research Laboratory has found 20 mph limits decrease child pedestrian accidents by 70%.
- d) It has been shown that half of people hit by a car at 30 mph will die and only 10% of people hit by a car at 20 mph will die.
- e) Widespread use of 20 mph limits in certain local areas, such as Portsmouth, Oxford, Lancashire, Brighton & Hove and Bath & North East Somerset has been both popular and made roads safer.
- f) According to the British Social Attitudes Survey 2011, 71% of drivers support 20 mph on residential streets.
- g) Slower speeds result in smaller exhaust emissions, less noise and lighter congestion.
- h) The greater safety of 20 mph is well demonstrated in insurance premiums being less in areas with a significant number of 20 mph limits.

- i) Road injuries are hugely expensive: the Department for Transport estimates that the average cost per seriously injured casualty on the roads is £178,160 and the average cost per fatality is £1,585,510.
- j) The relatively small cost of changing speed limits (e.g. new signage) pays for itself many times over by preventing costly accidents.

In view of all this overwhelming evidence in support of 20mph limits in residential streets:

- A. Has the report called for in (iii) ever been produced?
- B. Where have 20mph zones been introduced across Surrey in local residential streets since May 2006?

Reply:

A report into the effectiveness of 20 mph zones and an inventory of sites in Surrey was updated in August 2007. It can be found in the County Council's website in the speed limit policies and good practice section of the 'Roads and Transport' web pages:

<http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roads-and-transport-policies-plans-and-consultations/roads-and-transport-policies-and-plans/traffic-policy-and-good-practice/speed-limit-policies-and-good-practice/20mph-zones-and-20mph-limits>

Within Surrey, it is for local committees to decide on appropriate speed limits, taking account of local concerns about safety and traffic congestion. Surrey County Council provides local committees with a budget for highway improvements which can be used to implement 20 mph zones or 20 mph speed limits.

Research has shown that lowering vehicle speeds results in lower risk and severity of road casualties, and can reduce barriers to more walking and cycling. The desire for lower speeds to improve road safety has to be balanced against the need for reasonable vehicle journey times for business and leisure.

Reducing a speed limit using signs alone is not always successful in reducing speeds. Supporting traffic calming, which is not always universally popular, may be required. It is for local committees in consultation with their local communities and police to decide upon the measures necessary to encourage lower speeds successfully.

For schemes introduced since this work was completed, local committee decisions to introduce 20 mph speed limit changes have been recorded in accordance with Council protocol and the associated Traffic Regulations Orders have been published and made. Whilst all of this information is a matter of public record there is no county wide list of 20 mph speed limit changes.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

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

Please could the Cabinet Member confirm how much, if any, on-street parking surplus income the county council has received since April 2009?

Please could the Cabinet Member also confirm how the county council has spent its share of any on-street parking surplus income since April 2009?

Reply:

In the financial year 2009/10 there was an operating loss of £370,541 for all on street parking enforcement in Surrey. During the financial year 2010/11 the operating loss was similarly £314,431.

In 2011/12 there was a net county wide surplus of £645,000. The county council's 65% share is £420,000, the remainder being kept by the enforcement authorities. Of this £346,526 was generated within the Guildford area – which has been ringfenced to contribute to the operation of the Park and Ride service. As part of the transition arrangements to the new agency agreements, the county agreed, subject to satisfactory evidence to use its surplus to contribute to underwriting those enforcement authorities who operated at a loss during 2011/12. This will potentially reduce the county council's share to zero.

The income and expenditure for 2011/12 is in the process of being transferred between the respective authorities.

The primary reasons for the turnaround from operating loss to surplus in 2011 is due to the council working with our enforcement partners to seek operational efficiencies as well as revised (and more realistic) charges for residents' parking permits and increased parking charges in some areas.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

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

In order to enable Members to better manage their allocated Community Pride funds, I understand that it is proposed to compile a list for each division showing the cost of each work item and the running total for their division, which would be e-mailed to the Chairman of the relevant local committee.

Presumably each Chairman would then be expected to relay this information to the various members of their local committee.

Can the Cabinet Member please explain why the list cannot be e-mailed directly to all the Members of that local committee, thereby avoiding extra work, possible delays and additional storage of copies in Lotus Notes archives?

Reply:

All Members will be aware that they have a Community Pride allocation of at least £5000. It is expected that Members will liaise with officers to ensure it is used in accordance with local priorities and have knowledge of what they have or have not agreed to.

The Chairmen of the local committees have responsibility to ensure all budgets under the control of the committee are effectively used. Further to discussions with the local committee Chairmen, officers now provide regular updates on committed spend for all of their highway budgets, including the allocations for Community Pride. This has been rolled out as a trial and it is anticipated the format and process may change to suit the needs of the Chairmen. Mr Taylor's comments will be shared with the local committee Chairmen and considered as part of the next review.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

(6) MR EBER KINGTON (EPSOM AND EWELL NORTH) TO ASK:

At the last Council Meeting you used your Conservative Party majority to block a Motion, which would have allowed a debate on the Community Partnership Library policy, on the grounds that the Cabinet would be determining the issue at its forthcoming Cabinet Meeting.

Can you give me any other example of a modern democratic executive which bans debates and prevents elected representatives of the people from speaking in a representative forum on behalf of their electors because the executive is about to take a decision on a policy?

Reply:

It is unfortunate that you were unable to attend Cabinet on 24 July 2012. We listened very carefully to Mrs Mason when she introduced the Motion on your behalf and the Motion was thoroughly debated before any decision was taken. You were of course present at the Select Committee on 16 August 2012 when once again there was a wide reaching and informed debate. Our Standing Orders are designed to enable debate and discussion to take place in the most appropriate forum and that is what happened on this occasion.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

(7) MR STEPHEN COOKSEY (DORKING AND THE HOLMWOODS) TO ASK: (2nd QUESTION)

The Audit and Governance Committee, at its meeting on 3 October 2012, considered and noted a report on dealing with fraud. The paper was presented as a strategy and had been "signed off" by the Chief Executive. However reading the "strategy" document it was clearly actually a policy document.

Given that Members set policy and officers set strategy, does the Leader agree with me that the paper presented to the Audit and Governance Committee should be considered and approved by the Cabinet?

Reply:

The Strategy Against Fraud and Corruption is one of 30 Council policies and processes included in the Code of Corporate Governance which forms part of the Constitution of the Council.

The Code of Corporate Governance identifies the Chief Internal Auditor as the Policy Custodian and requires any significant change to the Strategy Against Fraud and Corruption to be approved by the Audit and Governance Committee although the relevant senior officer may decide if a change is classed as significant.

The Chief Internal Auditor recently reviewed the Strategy Against Fraud and Corruption in response to the Fighting Fraud Locally Strategy published through the National Fraud Authority, and updated it to include a fraud response plan in line with best practice. Following discussion with the Chief Internal Auditor the Chief Executive endorsed the revised strategy in September this year. This revised strategy was then presented to Audit and Governance Committee in October. At that meeting the Chief Internal Auditor agreed to redraft the section on Sanctions and Recovery of Losses in response to Member comments.

I am fully supportive of the efforts of the Internal Audit team in seeking to raise an awareness of the risk of fraud and to develop a strong counter fraud culture across the organisation. As such I plan to include the revised Strategy Against Fraud and Corruption as an item on the Cabinet Forward Plan.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

(8) MRS HAZEL WATSON (DORKING HILLS) TO ASK: (2ND QUESTION)

On 25 September 2012 Members received a *Communicate, Members' update* email containing the following:

Improving Surrey's roads: Get involved, give your views

A series of roadshows asking for residents views on Surrey's worst roads will start in the county this week. Residents will be able to put forward a road for possible inclusion in a proposed new road maintenance programme, designed to renew Surrey roads by resurfacing those in the county in the worst condition. The proposals, which are due to go to Cabinet in January, include a five year programme of major works designed to solve the root causes of problems and complete works as efficiently as possible, therefore improving more roads for less money. Residents are being asked to suggest roads for inclusion so the scheme focuses on those that will make a real difference to communities. Suggested roads will be assessed for inclusion based on condition and value for money.

Events are taking place in each borough between 11am and 4pm on the following dates:

- Elmbridge – Friday 2 November, Heart Shopping Centre, Walton-on-Thames*
- Epsom and Ewell – Sunday 28 October, Market Place, Epsom.*
- Guildford – Friday 26 October, High Street, Guildford.*
- Mole Valley – Friday 19 October, Dorking Halls car park, Reigate Road, Dorking.*
- Reigate and Banstead – Wednesday 17 October, Tunnel Road, by High Street/Church Street, Reigate / Thursday 18 October, Maple Square, London Road, Redhill centre.*
- Runnymede – Friday 5 October, High Street, Egham.*
- Spelthorne – Thursday 27 September, Kempton Park, Sunbury.*
- Surrey Heath – Saturday 27 October, Park Street, Camberley.*
- Tandridge – Saturday 20 October, Morrisons, East Hill, Oxted.*
- Waverley – Saturday 13 October, Crown Court car park, The Burys, Godalming.*
- Woking – Thursday 4 October, Commercial Way, Woking.*

Local committees are also being consulted on the proposals and a briefing event for Members will take place in November.

Does the Cabinet Member agree that conducting one 5 hour event in each of the boroughs/districts at a random location is not the best way of gathering views from Surrey residents and fails to meet the county's own consultation policy?

Does he also agree that processes that fully engage with local Members, borough and district Members, parishes and community groups such as residents associations are far more effective at dealing with the county's highways maintenance issues in an equitable way than this random selection of what seem to be more publicity stunts than proper consultation exercises?

Reply:

Surrey County Council recognises how important and vital the condition of the highway road network is to our local communities and commuters. That is why, to ensure that the roads we repair in the next five years tackle the areas in the greatest need, we have launched one of the largest highway consultation exercises in the country.

It is hoped that the consultation exercise will reach the largest possible audience and help develop the best possible highway maintenance programme.

To that end the process has been divided into five distinct stages:

1. Over the last six months a full engineering assessment, using the latest scanning and radar equipment, has been undertaken on the council's road network to determine from a road condition perspective which roads are in the greatest need.
2. A "Highways Road Show" has been launched and is targeted at the council's largest population areas. The road show will enable residents to discuss the planned programme and put forward suggestions to repair roads in their area based upon local need.
3. Residents can also email their suggestions for the roads they feel are most in need of repair to improveyourroad@surreycc.gov.uk.
4. A dedicated team has been created to visit local highway forums and residents associations to enable active stakeholders to put forward their suggestions. If councillors have any suggestions for forums to attend they are welcome to email proposed dates to improveyourroad@surreycc.gov.uk.
5. The full list of identified roads, based upon engineering advice and residents' suggestions, will be emailed to all county councillors in early November. At the November Informal Committee, councillors will then have an opportunity to debate the proposed scheme list and identify key priorities and concerns for their division.

The outcome of the five stage process above will then be collated and assessed by senior engineers before being submitted to the County Council's Cabinet to determine the scope and scale of the five year road maintenance programme.

The approved five year programme will then be submitted early in the new year to the formal local committees to enable them to understand how the road maintenance programme can support local priorities. A further series of road shows will also be undertaken to ensure the programme is communicated as widely as possible.

It is unfortunate that due to resource and time constraints the Highway Road Shows are not able to attend every local community, however, hopefully the county councillor will welcome the steps the authority has taken to be more transparent in the development of its road maintenance programme and support the highway service in engaging with as many residents as possible.

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND LEARNING

(9) MR COLIN TAYLOR (EPSOM & EWELL SOUTH WEST) TO ASK: (2nd QUESTION)

The Department for Education (DfE) have issued guidance dated 1 October 2012 on "Baseline designs for schools".

These baseline designs are for Priority Schools Building Programme PFI projects and are not currently DfE requirements for other schools.

To what extent, and from what date, will Surrey expect its future schemes for new and extended schools to comply with this guidance?

Reply:

The baseline designs that have been issued by the DfE relate to the Priority Schools Building Programme, in which Surrey County Council does not have any projects.

It is understood that this is the DfE's response to the Government initiative to build schools for less cost and the designs have been specifically produced in response to one of the recommendations of the 2011 Review of Education Capital led by Sebastian James, to which the county contributed.

The baseline designs produced by the DfE illustrate how primary and secondary schools could be built more quickly, efficiently and sustainably and these principles have already been adopted and incorporated into Surrey's template designs and the current school building projects being developed.

It is worth noting that Surrey is also looking at specification and procurement creating common supply chains and aggregation to secure additional reductions in capital costs. This is all part of the 'Cluster' approach with neighbouring authorities to increase buying power and maximise efficiencies.

The aim is to ensure that there is no significant impact on teaching and learning or the quality of space, whilst recognising the tight financial times and the urgent requirement for additional schools basic need places.

The practice of monitoring the DfE/EFA website and other agencies where new information has been recently published will be continued to ensure that Surrey is in line with current policy.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

(10) MR EBER KINGTON (EPSOM AND EWELL NORTH) TO ASK: (2nd QUESTION)

At the Cabinet Meeting of 24 July 2012 several members of the public asked questions about the Cabinet's Community Partnership Library in order that:

- They might better understand the rationale for the policy
- The responses might inform the Cabinet decision making process

However, the relevant Cabinet Members refused to answer the questions on the basis that the Cabinet was about to make its decision. Strangely, however, the questioners were offered the opportunity to ask a supplementary question based on an answer they were never given.

- (1) Does the Leader of the Council have any words to describe this unique form of democratic engagement with the public?
- (2) To clarify this position, will he issue a public statement informing residents that the Cabinet is not willing to answer any public questions at a Cabinet meeting which relate to a decision item on the Cabinet agenda?

Reply:

I can only assume that you have not read the questions to Cabinet, which were of course from SLAM activists. You do not say how you know what their intentions were in asking them. It becomes apparent when you do read the questions that they were designed for the purposes of rhetoric and as such did not have answers until the Cabinet had reached a decision on the item. When a decision had been made each of the questioners received a comprehensive answer.

The Cabinet will continue to encourage the public to have their say on the matters that interest them. As I have said above, the questions all received comprehensive answers, once answers were available. What no Cabinet or Committee can do is to answer a question that asks "What decision are you about to take?" when Members will need to listen to different points of view and debate before they reach that decision.

CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY

(11) MRS HAZEL WATSON (DORKING HILLS) TO ASK: (3RD QUESTION)

The county council is providing funding for one year to various voluntary sector organisations to carry out projects under the Local Prevention Framework to reduce the number of young people who are NEET(not in education employment or training). Can the length of funding for one year be reviewed to take into account the practicalities of voluntary sector organisations establishing projects, recruiting and retaining staff for one year and in view of the Surrey Compact which recommends funding for voluntary sector organisations for three years?

Reply:

We recognise the pressures that many voluntary sector organisations are under and the need for longer term funding arrangements where possible. Services for Young People are committed to the Surrey Compact and values the relationships it has with voluntary sector partners. As part of the Transformation Project in Services for Young People, a range of commissions were designed and some were let for 3 years, for example Centre Based Youth Work, much of which is now delivered by the voluntary sector. The Local Prevention Framework was designed to be more flexible and respond to annual changes in local need. Likewise, the Youth Small Grants programme is another example where flexibility to meet local need has been built into the process, which works over shorter time frames, often much less than a year. A scaled approach has been taken which balances security of funding with the flexibility and agility to respond to the changing local need of young people.

Over the first six months of operation Local Prevention Framework providers have taken time to establish projects, recruit staff and build up momentum. The initial groundwork is now bearing fruit and I am pleased to say that collectively our providers have already engaged 40% of the target group of young people in local preventative activity which is designed to prevent them from falling out of education, employment or training and to prevent them from offending. We expect that by the end of the first year providers will have engaged in preventative projects with over 1,300 young people, who were identified as at risk of becoming NEET or offending.

We do also recognise that greater continuity of delivery and longer term funding arrangements could have benefits for the work with young people through the Local Prevention Framework and we will explore options with local committees ahead of the next commissioning cycle.

CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES AND THE 2012 GAMES

(12) MR COLIN TAYLOR (EPSOM & EWELL SOUTH WEST) TO ASK: (3RD QUESTION)

The rules for the issue of "Blue Badge" parking permits for disabled people have been tightened up compared to the previous system, presumably to reduce misuse. It seems that the legislation allows Local Authorities some freedom to vary the details. How much discretion does the council have over how the rules are applied in Surrey?

In particular, a basic rule is that the disability has to be permanent. Is there any way in which the council could issue a permit to a person who currently has to use a wheel chair due to a war wound, injury or birth defect, even though the medical treatment they are receiving might eventually lead to them being able to walk?

Reply:

The Department for Transport's guidelines state that a Blue Badge should be issued where a person's "condition is permanent and causes inability, or very considerable difficulty, to walk". Surrey County Council does have discretion and Blue Badges are sometimes issued where a condition may not be permanent. For example, Blue Badges are sometimes issued to severely injured servicemen at Headley Court who are unable to walk but are undergoing medical treatment and are likely to recover. Blue Badges are not issued to people who have a more temporary incapacity such as a broken leg. Applications are reassessed every three years so if someone's condition changed this would be taken into account.

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND LEARNING

(13) MRS HAZEL WATSON (DORKING HILLS) TO ASK: (4TH QUESTION)

The Cabinet report at item 12 of the Council agenda reports a finding of maladministration by the county council in relation to a child's education. It was found that the SEN Service, Children's Services and the Education Welfare Service failed to work together appropriately. In view of this, what action has been taken to improve communications and co-operation between these different services to the county council to ensure that a similar complaint does not take place in relation to any other Surrey child?

Reply:

The newly appointed Area Education Officers in each of the four quadrants of the county now meet monthly with the Area Heads of Children's Services to review individual cases and ensure that the Education Welfare Service, SEN

Service and Children's Service communicate effectively and will work closely together in future. Youth Support and Early Years Area Managers are also required to attend these meetings. There are now clearly agreed terms of reference with joint processes and thresholds to ensure more efficient models of working.

With regard to SEN and Education Welfare, the new area models are providing opportunities for developing multi-agency working within teams. Area Senior Management meetings now involve all services in the Area Education Teams at early key points, and monthly 'stuck cases' meetings have also been established at which operational officers come together to discuss cases where individual services have not been able to make the progress they need to. Area teams are also starting to work with Head Teachers to develop improved ways of working and provide a more efficient service to meet pupil needs.

Whilst I cannot guarantee that a similar complaint will not take place in relation to any other Surrey child, nevertheless the changes I have outlined above within Education Welfare, SEN and Children's Services should ensure that every child's needs are reviewed and managed within clear processes and that every effort is being made to avoid this happening again.