

CABINET – 26 APRIL 2022**PROCEDURAL MATTERS****Item 4(b): Public Questions****Question (1): Malcolm Robertson**

At the last meeting of Cabinet, I asked whether Surrey County Council would phase out incineration of its municipal waste. I received a reply, which is a matter of public record - you will see it in the Minutes. There were however a number of inaccuracies, which need to be addressed, particularly as the new Waste Plan will be drawn up using information such as that:

I was told if the plant were in breach of its emission limits, then 'it could and would be shut down by the Environment Agency'. However, I can find no record of any incinerator burning municipal solid waste being permanently shut down by that organisation.

The County proclaimed, 'Waste minimisation, reuse and recycling will remain the preferred approach before waste is sent for incineration...'. Unfortunately this neglects to mention that a few years ago the County's contractor withdrew the facility to recycle hard plastics, apparently because there was no money in it. However other companies in Surrey do accept hard plastic waste. Additionally, many major stores are now encouraging the recycling of soft plastics and plastic film. But the County is not involved in this scheme either. Inaction speaks louder than words.

The public was always led to believe the 'eco park' at Shepperton would be 'green'. We now learn that the Anaerobic Digester plant uses a back-up boiler fuelled by gasoil. It also flares off to atmosphere the excess gas the digester produces. Environmentally friendly designs do not use climate changing fossil fuel like gasoil, nor do they waste valuable digester gas by destroying it in a gas flare.

Nor was a reply made about the eco park's colossal use of fossil fuel, although over a third of a million litres of gasoil were used by the Anaerobic Digester's back up boiler, and to incinerate just under one sixth of the incinerator's capacity.

Do you wish to comment for the record?

Reply:

With regard to your first point on the role of the Environment Agency, I can confirm that the Environment Agency does have and does use powers to suspend an Environmental Permit for the operation of any plant that is in breach of its emissions limits and ultimately to revoke the permit for the operation. Modern thermal treatment plants are carefully designed and operated to ensure that emissions are within the required limits and therefore any intervention by the Environment Agency is likely to be required infrequently.

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We work very closely with our contractor SUEZ, to find recycling markets for new materials. The reason why we had to cease recycling of hard plastics from our community recycling centres, was not one of cost. It was simply that we could find no market for the sort of mixed hard plastics that we collect. However we continue to look for new outlets for this material and we will divert it to a recycling outlet should one become available. In respect of plastic film, our officers are in constant dialogue with the large companies that deal with the majority of Surrey's kerbside collected recyclables and they all say that they have struggled to find sustainable outlets for soft plastics and film. More often than not, the only outlet for these materials is to send them to an energy from waste plant where value can be recovered in the form of energy. We are currently working with the Surrey Environment Partnership to try and establish what proportion of the plastic film collected by supermarkets is recycled and where the material is sent to for recycling.

Surrey residents already recycle 55% of their waste, which makes us one of the top performing counties in respect of recycling rates; however, we know that a lot more could be achieved simply by encouraging residents to more fully utilise their existing kerbside collection systems. To this end, we are working with the Surrey Environment Partnership to deliver education and engagement campaigns to improve both the quantity and quality of recycling collected.

Like all anaerobic digestion plants, the plant at Shepperton has a flare which is only used for safety purposes if the gas engines are out of service through planned or unplanned shutdown. In normal operation, the gas engines are more than capable of managing all of the gas generated by the plant.

Gas oil is used both to fire a back-up boiler for pasteurising digestate, in the event the gas engines are off, or as a start-up fuel to raise the temperature of the gasification process before the introduction of any waste. This is something that is common to other energy from waste plants. The use of gas oil will be monitored through ongoing performance reporting.

Natalie Bramhall
Cabinet Member for Property and Waste
26 April 2022

Question (2): Paul Kennedy

I have met a significant number of residents over the last few weeks whose children have not been offered a school place for September, because Surrey County Council either cannot or will not provide a suitable funding package to meet their special education, health and care needs.

Many of these families are taking proceedings against Surrey County Council over this failure, which they are likely to win, incurring further wasted costs for council taxpayers.

In view of the recent announcement of a £100 million Government bailout of Surrey County Council's SEND provision, can the administration provide any indication of

when those families currently left in this limbo can expect to be offered a school place for their children?

Reply:

There are over 12,000 children in Surrey with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and the vast majority of these children are accessing education. Fewer than 25 children currently do not have provision in place and we are working closely with the families and providers to put suitable provision in place for them.

There are times when we are unable to meet parental preference for a school placement. This may be due to the setting being unsuitable for the age, ability, aptitude or special educational needs (“SEN”) of the child or young person; or the attendance of the child or young person would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education for others; or the attendance of the child or young person would be incompatible with the efficient use of resources. These are all reasons why parental preference cannot be met set out in the current Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) code of practice: 0-25.

There are also times when we would like to place a child or young people in a specialist maintained provision but there are not places available. For this reason, there has been an investment in the expansion of specialist school places with £139m committed since 2019. This has delivered 440 additional specialist places in the last three years and is on track to deliver another 290 specialist places for September 2022 with more to follow in subsequent years.

1,476 pupils with an ECHP went through the statutory school age key stage transfer process this year. The local authority must name a school, or type of provision by 15 February of the academic year preceding their school transfer. Of these 1,476 pupils, by 15 February 2022, 1299 had an offer at a named school for a September 2022 start and 177 pupils had a type of provision named. This number has now reduced to 136 pupils, as the additional places created by the capital programme are becoming available.

We recognise that, for these children and families waiting for a placement decision, this is a worrying time. We are working closely with them to confirm places in good time for September 2022 as further specialist places become available.

Finally, the outcome of the recent “Safety Valve” negotiations is that the Department for Education will contribute a further £100m towards SCC’s High Needs Block budget over the next 5 years. This funding is conditional on the delivery of Surrey’s existing strategy and improvement plans, including the provision of additional specialist school places, and has to be used to reduce the financial deficit.

Denise Turner-Stewart
Cabinet Member for Education and Learning
26 April 2022

Question (3): Elizabeth Daly

It is great news that Surrey County Council is at last introducing safer speed limits in rural South-West Surrey. Since highways functions are no longer delegated to Local Committees, can the Cabinet Member please explain why Surrey County Council is not giving similar priority to the clearly inappropriate speed limits in the Bookham area, including in particular:

- a. Dorking and Polesden Roads, where the speed limit is still 60mph despite increasing shared use by walkers, cyclists and horse riders;
- b. Chapel Lane, where there is no change from 60mph indicated for a winding steeply descending single track country road;
- c. The lack of 20mph speed limits around Bookham schools, near the village centre and in residential roads used as ratruns such as East Street, which I was told at the Mole Valley Local Committee in January was one of many that are suitable for a 20mph speed limit?

Reply:

Speed limits are the maximum permitted speed a vehicle may travel on a road, if conditions permit. There are many country lanes across the whole of England which are subject to a 60mph limit; however, this does not mean it is always reasonable or safe to drive at that speed, and drivers are accountable for their actions.

Divisional members can promote speed limit reductions using a proportion of the budget that is available to them, if this is a priority for their area. Any change in speed limit would need to conform with the County Council's "Setting Local Speed Limits" policy. Speed limit changes may also be introduced as part of Integrated Transport Schemes or through other countywide initiatives.

If a Divisional Member wishes to consider a speed limit change, this can be progressed by Officers subject to sufficient funding available. For example, East Street has been identified as a local priority and it is proposed to reduce the speed limit to 20mph this financial year, subject to consultation.

In support of delivering lower speeds, Surrey Police are providing £100,000 from the Drive SMART Road Safety Partnership to review and implement lower speed limits on rural roads in the south of Surrey. This is being implemented on a proactive, strategic and area-wide basis. The first phase of this project covers an area bounded by the A24 in the east, the A25 in the north, the county boundary in the south and a line roughly between Cranleigh and Shere in the west. The additional £3m of Council funding to tackle speed and road safety Surrey wide offers an opportunity to extend this work even further.

Matt Furniss
Cabinet Member for Transport and Infrastructure
26 April 2022