

MEETING OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL

TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER 2024

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

**MATT FURNISS, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH**

1. MARK SUGDEN (HINCHLEY WOOD, CLAYGATE AND OXSHOTT) TO ASK:

The proposal to complete initial weed spray treatment in March/April next year and to utilise Road Ranger gangs and grass contractors to pull weeds in high growth areas is to be welcomed, particularly by both Claygate Parish Council and Claygate residents.

Could the Cabinet Member:

- a) Clarify exactly how many weed sprays are planned to be undertaken across Surrey in 2025 and specifically in Elmbridge?
- b) What information related to its weed spraying plans, if any, is provided by Surrey County Council to the relevant borough/district Councils so that they have the opportunity to plan their road sweeping, within the optimum time interval, to maximise the effectiveness of the weed spraying but to prevent weed regrowth reducing the effectiveness of the subsequent road sweeping?

RESPONSE:

I am pleased to hear that the approach for next year has been welcomed.

In response to your specific questions:

- a) One weed spray treatment will be completed across the county in early spring (March/April). It is likely that a second treatment will be carried out around June/July - however, the decision on this will be based on growing conditions at the time.
- b) I will ask the officers to share our weed spray programmes with all Members, and Districts and Boroughs once they are confirmed.

MATT FURNISS, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

2. TIM HALL (LEATHERHEAD AND FETCHAM EAST) TO ASK:

Can the Cabinet Member update the Council on the Impact of the £2 Capped Bus Fares in Surrey.

Do we know how much the number of journeys have increased by route during the duration of the scheme?

RESPONSE:

I would like to thank Councillor Hall for his question, and for his ongoing support for public transport in Surrey.

In England, the £2 National Bus Fare Cap has been very well used. The Department for Transport report that over 90% of all bus trips made have used the £2 fare cap since it was introduced.

In Surrey, last year we saw growth in bus use with over 26 million journeys made; up from just over 24 million the year before. We will report our full year passenger numbers to Government next May, and we are confident that we will exceed last year's total.

Part of our passenger growth can be attributed to the £2 fare cap, noting that, on average, 75% of bus trips in Surrey were made using fare cap. However, the scheme is not mandatory, and not all Surrey bus operators opted to take part for their own commercial reasons.

Speaking to operators who did opt in, we know that many passengers have been using the £2 fare cap in Surrey. Some of these passengers will be new bus users, whilst others will be existing users that have used the bus more often. Operators also reported a drop in the number of period tickets sold, for example, weekly and monthly tickets, in favour of the £2 fare cap.

Operators outside of the £2 fare cap have also seen passenger numbers grow, so there are more factors positively influencing bus use than just the £2 fare cap.

Underpinning patronage growth in Surrey is our close partnership working with bus operators, which has seen significant joint investment in zero emissions buses. Alongside this, the Council's has made substantial investments in local bus services, our expanding Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) network, the LINK discount card for young people, plus the application of Bus Service Improvement Funding from Government to make bus services even better.

Last month Government announced that the National Bus Fare Cap would be extended to December 2025. Disappointingly, from 1 January the Government is increasing the cost from £2 to £3.

The £2 single fare was a very simple message for passengers, and, in many cases, a cost of £4 for a return journey using the cap would be cheaper than the standard return fare.

Now the fare cap is increasing to £3 we want passengers to always get the best price. This is because some regular single bus fares are already less than £3, and some return fares are less than £6. The new £3 fare cap will not always be the cheapest option, and for regular bus users daily, weekly or monthly tickets may be better value. We are therefore working with bus operators on a campaign to help passengers find information on the best fare for them.

Finally, young people aged 20 and under with a Surrey LINK card will travel for £1.50 under the new £3 fare cap, or travel at half the standard adult fare.

MATT FURNISS, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

3. ROBERT EVANS OBE (STANWELL AND STANWELL MOOR) TO ASK:

Will the Council review the system for disabled bays outside people's homes?

At present, a person seeking to have the lines repainted has to re-apply from scratch.

RESPONSE:

Disabled parking bays are marked areas on the road that provide on-street parking for [blue badge](#) holders. We install them in residential streets to help blue badge holders park close to their homes.

The bays are generally advisory markings only and so no enforcement can take place if people park there without a blue badge. However, most motorists appreciate the purpose of the bays and leave them clear for the people who need them.

The bays are larger than the average vehicle to allow any blue badge holder to use them. The long length of the bay allows for access to the rear part of a vehicle.

We install the bays on request and free of charge for residents who have a blue badge, no off-street parking availability and own a vehicle.

As part of the application process, we ask residents to provide proof of their blue badge and vehicle ownership (V5C). This is usually in the form of a scan or picture of these documents which can be uploaded via our website. As part of the assessment process, we evaluate the most suitable location and inform/consult nearby residents about the new bay.

When complete the disabled bay can remain in place until it is no longer needed. If the bay markings become faded after several years or more, then we do ask the applicant (usually the same person that requested the bay in the first place, but not always) to complete a fresh application and provide evidence that they still have a

blue badge and own a vehicle. It is not an onerous process and the evidence can be easily uploaded via the application form on our web pages. When received, we add the parking bay refresh to our next available works order.

In this way we can keep track of disabled bay usage and help ensure they are placed where needed.

CLARE CURRAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

4. CATHERINE POWELL (FARNHAM NORTH) TO ASK:

Through Case Law, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has advised that when a meeting discusses an individual the data generated is not the property of the attendees there speaking in a professional capacity, but of the individual being discussed, in this case the child, regardless of where those individuals are from.

At the last Council meeting, in a response to one of my supplementary questions, Cllr Curran advised that the information from Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) panels is held in a database. Given that under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) parents / carers have a right to see personal data held on their child, please can you advise:

- a) If the MDT panel database referred to by Cllr Curran during the last Council meeting is a third-party database or an SCC database?
- b) To whom parents / carers will need to submit a Freedom of Information (Fol) request or subject access request (SAR) to access the data in this database on their child from the panel?
- c) Whether this database records:
 - i. Who was present at the MDT panel;
 - ii. What information was shared with the MDT panel;
 - iii. The approximate time allowed for discussion of the case;
 - iv. The decision and the reasons for the decision?

RESPONSE:

Thank you for the follow up question.

The County Council has a duty to comply with the right of access provided by the General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018). These laws provide individuals with the legal right to request access to their personal data held by organisations, often referred to as a "subject access request" (SAR). We welcome parents, carers and young people ability to exercise their right to request a copy of information that relates to them under a SAR.

The legislation is also there to protect the data held by the Council and we follow the Information Commissioner's Office guidance in respect of disclosures particularly in relation to provisions for handling requests involving health, education, or social work records. This involves identifying what information is held and then considering factors including whether a duty of confidence or any associated exemptions apply to the information.

This is always done on a case-by-case basis, and individuals have the right to contact the Regulator (ICO) if they are unhappy with the outcome of a request.

- a) This is a SCC database.
- b) The Council is open and transparent and welcomes [Freedom of Information](#) and [Subject Access](#) requests. The Council's webpages have links to our online request forms and provides information on alternative ways of making requests including by email, in writing or verbally (for Subject Access requests only).
- c)
 - i) No.
 - ii) No.
 - iii) No.
 - iv) Yes - the decision is recorded on the system as either: "*yes to assess/issue*" or "*no to assess-/issue*" alongside the reason for the decision for example, the local authority recognises that the child or young person may have or has special educational needs. Further detail is not recorded; however, parents are also provided with the decision in writing by letter and offered the opportunity to discuss the outcome further. The "ways forward" letter advises of next steps if they wish:
 - to talk about the decision via a telephone call with Council staff.
 - gain advice from SENDIAS (SEND Information and Advice Surrey)
 - consider mediation; or
 - challenge the decision through the Tribunal system.

Parents can also make a SAR request as explained above. They are also able to use the complaints process if they are unhappy with the service (e.g. timeliness or communication) they have received during the EHCNA process.

NATALIE BRAMHALL, CABINET MEMBER FOR PROPERTY, WASTE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

5. HAZEL WATSON (DORKING HILLS) TO ASK:

Which County Council owned properties are currently vacant, how long has each property been vacant and what revenue expenditure (e.g rates, utility bills and security costs) was incurred in relation to each property in the financial year 2023/24?

RESPONSE:

Surrey County Council currently holds 94 vacant properties of which the total revenue costs for financial year (FY) 2023/24 is £744,000.

- 60 sites are in the pipeline to dispose during 2024/25 and 2025/26. This follows a surplus to operational requirements declaration. Revenue costs are £241,000 in FY 2023/24.
- 19 sites are currently held for strategic use in Capital Projects i.e. Adult Social Care (14) and they incur the majority of revenue costs of £461,000 in FY 2023/24.
- 15 sites are held for Service Use Review i.e. Adult Learning, Highways and Education. Only four properties in this group incurred revenue costs of £42,000 in FY 2023/24.

Land & Property are currently reviewing each site to confirm operational needs with services where sites are held over twelve months. This is due to escalating holding costs i.e. security, utility charges and general maintenance expenses.

CLARE CURRAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

6. LANCE SPENCER (GOLDSWORTH EAST AND HORSELL VILLAGE) TO ASK:

- a) How many EHCP and EHCNA cases went to the Panel in 2024, and how does that compare to the same time periods in the last four years?
- b) Of those that went to the Panel, how many cases were decided in favour of the parents in 2024 and for the previous four years?
- c) Where the parents were not successful in persuading the Panel, how many of those then were referred to mediation in 2024 and in the previous four years?
- d) The SEND Code of Practice 2015, Paragraph 11.38, point 4 states: “the local authority and health commissioner representative(s) should be sufficiently senior and have the authority to be able to make decisions during the mediation session”.

How many of the mediation sessions in 2024 had a sufficiently senior SCC officer present, and how does that compare to the previous four years?

RESPONSE:

- a) Due to the local authority moving from a previous data management system two years ago, we only have the data in this format for the last two full years. We have included 2022 data where available:

	Request to assess decisions: The total number of cases that were considered following an application for a needs assessment	Request to Issue decisions: the total number of cases that were reviewed following the 20-week assessment process
2022	2,531	Data not recorded on EHM
2023	2,912	2,014
2024 (to date)	2,560	2,472

- b) The decisions made in the panels are based on the legal tests, rather than in favour of parents or schools.

The legal test to be met for a yes to assess decision is:

- a. The child or young person has, or may have, special educational needs (SEN), and
- b. It may be necessary for special educational provision to be made for the child or young person through an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP).

The legal test to be met for a yes to issue decision is:

- a. Does the child or young person have, or may have, SEN?
- b. Is it necessary for special educational provision to be made for them through an EHCP?

	Yes to assess: The total number of cases where, following an application for a needs assessment, the local authority agreed to undertake an assessment	Yes to Issue: the total number of cases where, following a needs assessment, the local authority agreed to issue and EHCP	Total number of new EHCPs issued*
2022	2,172	Data not recorded on EHM	Data not recorded on EHM
2023	1,932	1,836	2,821
2024 (to date)	1,518	2,126	2,859

**this number takes into account the recovery work hence the number of EHCPs issued exceeds the number of requests.*

- c) As stated above, panel decisions are guided by specific legal tests, ensuring decisions are impartial and based solely on statutory criteria rather than by persuasion or lobbying by parents or schools.

Legal test for agreeing to assess:

- a. The child or young person has, or may have, special educational needs (SEN), and
- b. It may be necessary for special educational provision to be made for the child or young person through an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP).

Legal test for agreeing to issue an EHCP:

- a. Does the child or young person have, or may have, SEN?
- b. Is it necessary for special educational provision to be made for them through an EHCP?

Decisions are made objectively to ensure they meet these legal thresholds, prioritising the child or young person's needs.

Some special educational needs (SEN) can and should be addressed without requiring a statutory plan, through the local authority's *ordinarily available provision* and schools' duty to make reasonable adjustments. This ensures that children and young people can access appropriate support without needing an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP).

Whenever the local authority decides not to:

1. Conduct an EHCP needs assessment.
2. Issue an EHCP after completing a needs assessment.
3. Agree with families on the content of an EHCP (Sections B, F, or I).
4. Agree with the outcome of an Annual Review.
5. Maintain an existing EHCP.

Families are informed of this decision, and of their immediate right to formal mediation or to challenge the decision through a Tribunal.

It is up to families whether to pursue mediation. Many families accept the local authority's decision.

Formal mediation data (prior to tribunal)

Under the SEND code of practice in every case, the Local authority is required to offer formal mediation to parents prior to a tribunal hearing. Parents are not required to take up this offer.

Not all parents who progress to a tribunal have undergone formal mediation. Many parents refuse this, especially when advised by a legal representative.

In 2023 and 2024 (to date), the number of mediations for refusals to assess and refusal to issue EHCPs were:

- **2023:** 344 (refusals to assess), 48 (refusals to issue).

- **2024:** 286 (refusals to assess), 43 (refusals to issue, subject to increase).

Informal Mediation: The Early Resolution Pilot - MADRO Service

The local authority has been piloting the Mediation and Dispute Resolution Service (MADRO) to resolve conflicts once a Tribunal application has been received. Of the 241 cases handled so far:

- 53% have been resolved.
- 5% were referred back to the tribunal team.
- The rest remain ongoing, with efforts focused on resolution.

This trial aims to reduce tribunal cases by encouraging mutual agreement early in the process.

- d) Our mediations are always attended by staff at Senior Case Manager level or above. These staff have the authority to make decisions about returning cases to the panel. As our decisions are made following a multi-agency review, this is the appropriate response to a mediation request to re-consider the application. We are confident that the staff attending are suitable.

NATALIE BRAMHALL, CABINET MEMBER FOR PROPERTY, WASTE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

7. STEPHEN COOKSEY (DORKING SOUTH AND THE HOLMWOODS) TO ASK:

Would the Cabinet Member please confirm the future plans for the former Further Education Building in Dene Street, Dorking. The building was planned to be converted into residential accommodation for care leavers in what was promoted as a significant and necessary initiative. Work has been undertaken on the exterior of the building but so far as the proposed conversion is now concerned, I have been informed that 'the future use of the building is being carefully considered to ensure the best usage of this council asset.'

Would the Cabinet Member indicate why the original plan has been put on hold; when that decision was taken; whether the provision of accommodation for care leavers remains a Council priority and what alternative options are being considered? Given that the building has been empty for many years, can a timetable for a final decision on its use be provided?

RESPONSE:

The plans to convert the former Adult Education site in Dene Street, Dorking into residential accommodation for care leavers were put on hold due to the high development costs compared to other options for a new provision (circa £3 million to deliver four places). A decision regarding the future use of the site is imminent and will follow testing of requirements across all services, however if no service use can be identified, the property will be put forward for a 'declared surplus' decision and taken forward for disposal.

The drainage and façade works at the site were outlined as a planning condition associated with the adjoining new children's home which is near practical completion.

The provision of Care Leaver accommodation is a priority for Surrey County Council under the Group Living for Care Leavers Programme which aims to deliver 24 Care Leaver beds for approximately £5 million (The conversion of the former Adult Education Centre is not included in the Care Leavers programme).

NATALIE BRAMHALL, CABINET MEMBER FOR PROPERTY, WASTE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

8. LIZ TOWNSEND (CRANLEIGH & EWHURST) TO ASK:

Longfield House in Cranleigh is a former Surrey County Council care home and has now remained vacant since 2015. I am aware that there were constraints about the Council's ability to re-use this asset due to its condition and asbestos being present. During this period the Council has promoted this site for different uses, including for Extra Care housing and as an allocated residential site in Cranleigh Neighbourhood Plan at one stage. However, these proposals were both with-drawn.

The site is in an increasingly dilapidated state and there are reports of vermin and concerns about safety, as well as the general uncertainty regarding the future use of this site in a residential area.

Can the Cabinet Member please provide some assurance to my residents that details of the usage of this site will be published over the next couple of months and a proposed timeline for the planning application and, if successful, subsequent development work?

RESPONSE:

The current plans are confidential, and the team can update Councillor Townsend separately if required.

Although the site has been vacant for an extended period, it remains under consideration for alternative operational use. A viable business case is currently being developed, and it is anticipated to reach Cabinet in the new year. Following a formal decision, the details and indicative timescale will be shared with local councillors.

If this is not approved, a decision will be taken quickly as part of the Land & Property review of increased holding costs, security, and the Health & Safety risks at vacant sites.

In terms of Health & Safety at the site, an officer inspects every 24 days or sooner if an issue is raised. Attempts have been made to gain access to the site and officers have attended on these occasions.

The building is boarded with sheet steel, and everything considered to be 'reasonably practicable' is in place including reports of vermin fully investigated.

MATT FURNISS, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

9. STEVEN MCCORMICK (EPSOM TOWN & DOWNS) TO ASK:

At the October 2024 Council meeting, the Council unanimously agreed to the following commitments in relation to pavement parking of food delivery motorised cycles:

'In light of the factors listed above, this Council calls upon the Cabinet to commit to:

- I. Write to delivery companies (Uber Eats, Deliveroo, Just Eat, etc.) to highlight the issue of motorcycle delivery parking on pavements and issues caused by riding on and across pavements. To request information from these companies on the training and guidance given to their riders and for them to provide information on their policies for dealing with evidenced poor rider behaviour involving the highway or pavement.*
- II. To request a round table meeting with all delivery companies and Surrey Police to discuss best practice guidelines for delivery riders in Surrey.*
- III. Work with Surrey Police, as the enforcement authority, to tackle key areas where this issue occurs and educate the drivers on their driving behaviour where appropriate.'*

Will the Cabinet Member state what:

- a) Actions have so far been taken;
- b) Meetings held; and
- c) Progress made in taking forward the three action points listed above?

RESPONSE:

The shift in consumer habits, with an increase in takeaway deliveries, presents a complex issue that affects many, if not most, towns across the country. Our parking enforcement contractor, NSL, is aware of the situation in Surrey, but their ability to impact motorcycle delivery behaviour is limited. In most locations, either loading is permitted, or drivers move on as soon as an Enforcement Officer is seen (in comparison with most parking enforcement where vehicles are often left empty, motorcycle delivery drivers remain with the vehicle).

We are currently gathering information and exploring best practices from other areas in the UK to determine if any solutions have been successful elsewhere. Before the Christmas break, we will be writing to the delivery companies with the aim of facilitating a discussion in the early part of the New Year. Most large delivery companies have a driver/rider code of conduct, and we will seek to ensure that these

companies uphold their drivers' behaviour in line with, at the very least, the standards outlined in their published commitments.

Contact has been made with the Police, as they will likely be aware of problem sites and any associated antisocial behaviour. We will seek the Police's support for a roundtable discussion.

Additionally, we intend to invite representatives from Districts and Boroughs to attend, as they are the local planning authorities and will also be able to positively contribute to any discussions and commitments.

Further updates will be provided in the New Year.

MATT FURNISS, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

10. CATHERINE BAART (EARLSWOOD AND REIGATE SOUTH) TO ASK:

The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) for Surrey have been noted as providing prioritised investments in specific "cycle (and walking) motorways" across Surrey.

What is planned to enable cyclists to safely reach these main routes to travel between residential areas, town centres and employment centres? When will this plan be published?

RESPONSE:

Local Street Improvement (LSI) zones that are adjacent to, and complement, the LCWIP priority corridors will create a safer local cycling experience. These LSIs will allow cyclists to travel from residential areas, town centres and employment centres to the strategic cycling corridors identified in the LCWIP.

Currently, six pilot LSI zones - Egham, Chertsey, Walton, Sunbury, Maybury, and Farncombe - are being developed as a foundation for a broader programme for future years.

Following monitoring and evaluation of these pilot LSI zones, additional zones will be considered, with priorities set across the county based on funding bids submitted to the Department for Transport, with the potential to draw in other funding as it emerges.

MATT FURNISS, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

11. JONATHAN ESSEX (REDHILL EAST) TO ASK:

The latest Bus Service Improvement Plan includes funds to improve Redhill and Guildford bus stations. Redhill bus station was improved with investment in what was

then referred to as a temporary bus station improvement back in 2009. Now it is common for 5 or 6 buses to be in the current 4-bay bus stop at the same time.

Please can you confirm the timeline for investing in a bigger and better bus station for Redhill, potentially remodelling this area to create a rail-bus interchange that better connects East Surrey with public transport?

RESPONSE:

The funding awarded to the Council by the Department for Transport through the latest Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) allocation is most welcome. It will be invested to further improve our bus network and our bus infrastructure.

The improvement work at Redhill Bus Station completed in 2009 significantly enhanced the passenger waiting environment and addressed safety issues at the time, noting that the bus station design was delivered on the previous constrained footprint.

It is encouraging that the number of buses travelling to and from Redhill Bus Station has increased over the last 10 to 15 years, stimulated by significant Council investment. It is also recognised that the four-bay bus station is unable to accommodate all services, meaning that alternative bus stop arrangements need to be identified. The recent BSIP award will enable the Council to move this forward, along with the potential for capacity improvements. Options could include making more use of the nearby town centre bus stops and investigating opportunities to increase bus stops and/or bus stands within the bus station curtilage or in the immediate vicinity. This initiative will be progressed during 2025/26.

The proximity of the bus station to the railway station is a great advantage for public transport users in Redhill, whilst improved active travel facilities support increased use of both these modes. There are no plans at this stage to remodel the area or to develop a bus-rail interchange.

It should be noted that Redhill Bus Station sits on land under the control of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, whilst Network Rail and the Department for Transport are responsible for Redhill railway station.

CLARE CURRAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

**12. ROBERT EVANS OBE (STANWELL AND STANWELL MOOR) TO ASK:
(2nd Question)**

How many Surrey young people are currently classed as Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)?

Can these figures be given by borough or district?

RESPONSE:

There are currently 379 Surrey resident young people aged 16-18 (national curriculum years 12 and 13) identified as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in Surrey. A breakdown by borough is provided below alongside wider contextual figures for those whose activity is not yet known.

Borough	NEET		Activity Not Known		Total Cohort
	No.	% of total cohort	No.	% of total cohort	
Elmbridge	32	1.1%	296	10.0%	2966
Epsom and Ewell	28	1.4%	167	8.6%	1949
Guildford	44	1.4%	227	7.4%	3068
Mole Valley	20	1.0%	210	10.9%	1930
Reigate and Banstead	45	1.2%	341	9.4%	3614
Runnymede	28	1.6%	183	10.3%	1769
Spelthorne	45	1.9%	374	15.7%	2385
Surrey Heath	29	1.4%	154	7.3%	2112
Tandridge	32	1.7%	211	11.2%	1891
Waverley	42	1.5%	213	7.4%	2861
Woking	34	1.3%	199	7.7%	2577
Total	379	1.4%	2575	9.5%	27122

Work to reconfirm destinations of all those for academic year 2024/25 remains ongoing.

MARISA HEATH, CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

13. CATHERINE POWELL (FARNHAM NORTH) TO ASK: (2nd Question)

In October 2023, I raised concerns about the Council's current policy of minimum intervention with regards to tree safety in residential areas.

At the time the Cabinet Member advised that earlier in 2023 a new Tree Risk Management Policy had been agreed:

“The Tree Risk Policy and Plan defines Surrey County Council’s proactive approach to managing trees and the associated benefits and risks. It applies to trees under The Council’s ownership and management. It also refers to those trees which are not in council ownership or management but could pose a safety risk to people or property in locations that are owned or managed by the Council.”

Biodiversity, nature recovery and resident wellbeing as well as health and safety to people and property will be taken into consideration when managing Surrey’s trees. Where possible trees will not be felled where other access can feasibly be reduced or restricted to reduce risk and allow felling to occur naturally.”

I completely understand the support valuing trees for biodiversity and nature recovery. At the time I raised concerns that whilst I appreciated that the SCC tree inspection programme uses qualified arborists to assess the safety of trees growing on the highway and Surrey's land, climate change is having an impact, and this is increasing risk particularly in residential areas.

Much of my division is significantly impacted by surface water flooding risks due to relatively large elevation changes in a small area.

There has also been significant infill development between villages, with streams being diverted or culverted and natural surface water flood plains being built on.

Residents in one 1960s development about halfway down the hill, where streams were partly diverted and culverted, have been raising concerns about trees in the verges for some time. Residents were advised that a particular group of four trees was inspected in August and again there was a decision to take no action.

On 1 December one of those trees fell. Fortunately, it fell on the road rather than the pavement or a home and no-one was injured. A team came out swiftly and cleared the road, for which I am very grateful.

However, the residents, understandably, still have concerns about the other three trees; one has exposed roots, due in part to surface water runoff, and the other two are effectively sitting on the outlet of one of the many natural springs in my division, which means that their roots are increasingly sitting in water.

- a) Please can you advise whether the SCC Climate Change Adaption Strategy is reviewing the impact of increased surface water flooding and increased prevalence of natural springs (in areas with the appropriate geology) on trees?
- b) Please can you also advise whether there will be an increased level of inspection and intervention in areas where there is clearly an increased risk, or if we will remain reactive?

RESPONSE:

As part of the implementation of the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, Surrey ADAPT, a number of risk assessments will be undertaken by services to enable them to understand any resulting impacts on delivery. This includes those mentioned above. Appropriate adaptive actions that need to be undertaken will be identified and services supported to make any changes needed.

Any impacts and action needed will be identified when the review is completed next year.

CLARE CURRAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

**14. HAZEL WATSON (DORKING HILLS) TO ASK:
(2nd Question)**

What actions are the Council taking to ensure that it is not fined again by the Ombudsman for failings in the provision of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) education to Surrey children and young people?

RESPONSE:

Compensation awarded by the Ombudsman for failings in the provision of SEND services for Surrey children and young people frequently relates to provision or periods of education missed due to delays in the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process. Now that timeliness has improved, it has already led to a reduction in complaints at Stage 1 and is also starting to be reflected in a reduction of upheld decisions by the Ombudsman.

The remaining Ombudsman decisions which relate to missed education arise because a child is not in school or is missing elements of their EHCP provision.

It is the Local Authority's duty to ensure that EHCP provision is in place, this duty is usually met by placing a child or young person in a school which then delivers the provision. The Annual Review process enables the Local Authority to review the package of support a school is providing and the Local Authority will work with the school to address any missing elements. This might include securing the provision of therapies or helping the school to secure alternative provision where an element of the EHCP cannot be provided.

Compensation may be awarded in cases where a child is not receiving any education provision due to a delay in securing an appropriate placement. This typically arises as a result of a lack of specialist places available at the time. Where this is the case, the Local Authority will always ensure education is provided, often through alternative provision while a placement is being sought. The need for increased specialist placements is well understood and there is an extensive programme in place to build and expand places. As of academic year 2024/25, Surrey's state-maintained specialist education estate has been increased by 35% from around 3,320 places in 2019 - when the capital programmes started - to around 4,500 places now. Around 260 new permanent school places were created for September 2024, and a further 170 permanent additional places will be available for academic year 2025/26.

MARISA HEATH, CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

15. LANCE SPENCER (GOLDSWORTH EAST AND HORSELL VILLAGE) TO

ASK:

(2nd Question)

The budget changes for 2025/26 are likely to reduce the team associated with Surrey County Council's Greener Futures activity by 30%. In addition, the capital budgets for solar projects have been removed.

Is it realistic that Surrey County Council will be able to achieve the 2030 and 2050 Net Zero targets with such a large resource reduction?

RESPONSE:

The efficiencies offered up from Greener Futures have predominantly come from the Climate Change team as other teams in the service are mostly funded through grants, capital schemes or recharging. The savings are being achieved through the loss of four technical specialists and a cut in non-staffing budgets. The roles relate to the 2050 net zero targets with a focus on: net zero planning (in partnerships with districts and boroughs), development of infrastructure that supports net zero (e.g. future highways and place infrastructure, solar) and finance mechanisms for net zero.

While some of this work can be continued in partnership with other organisations, such as the South East Net Zero Hub. The loss of these roles could possibly result in less action in these areas which relate to the 2050 target, as well as potentially reducing the opportunity to future proof new infrastructure development in the county.

Officers are starting to develop the next five-year Climate Change delivery plan for 2030 and 2050, which will be brought to the select committee next summer and Cabinet thereafter. This will set out the priorities which the service can deliver with the resources that are available, and also identify where there may be gaps in delivery that is needed to achieve the targets and any action that can be taken to address the gap. It is unlikely that either target will be achieved without significantly more renewable energy infrastructure, currently predominantly solar. The amount of renewable energy generation needed and the type will be identified as part of this process.

NATALIE BRAMHALL, CABINET MEMBER FOR PROPERTY, WASTE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

16. STEPHEN COOKSEY (DORKING SOUTH AND THE HOLMWOODS) TO ASK:

(2nd Question)

When the County Council vacated County Hall in Kingston it left behind hundreds of paintings, pieces of furniture and artefacts, many of which have historical and heritage significance to the county.

Would the Cabinet Member please indicate what processes have been adopted to either retain or dispose of these assets?

RESPONSE:

Following the exit of County Hall, the artifacts have been stored in appropriate facilities with a full inventory created.

The inventory was shared with Services and the History Centre, and any key items of historical and heritage significance will be placed there and in The Lodge at Woodhatch Place.

The remaining items were assessed by Crown auctioneers and will be auctioned with the proceeds to Surrey County Council (SCC).

For items not deemed appropriate for auction (by Crown) and with minimal value (mainly of brown furniture) will be offered to Members and staff via a bidding system. The suggestion is to share the proceeds across the SCC sponsored charities. (Communication expected w/c 16 December 2024).

Example of valuable items placements:

- The portrait of James Chuter Ede is on extended loan to the Ashcombe School, Dorking, where James Chuter Ede had connections. It is installed in the library and Councillor McCormick is due to visit the school.
- Cabinets for silverware and furniture are in the installation process at The Lodge at Woodhatch Place.
- Items requested by the Surrey History Centre and Registration Service are due to be placed.
- The work house table (no provenance) will be placed in the Woodhatch Place staff restaurant with the historic details displayed.

MATT FURNISS, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

**17. LIZ TOWNSEND (CRANLEIGH & EWHURST) TO ASK:
(2nd Question)**

As you will be aware, the EM3 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was progressing a significant project aimed at enhancing digital connectivity in our region, including the connection of Basingstoke to Guildford with a gigabit-capable fibre network. This project was allocated £4.5 million in government funding, with the goal of saving or creating over 4,250 jobs in the digital and creative sectors. It was also set to dramatically improve connectivity, positioning our area as a leading "Gigabit Town & Rural" region.

In my role on the LEP steering group, I helped secure an agreement for the fibre spine to extend to Farnham and Godalming, with a further optional spur connection to Cranleigh. However, with Surrey County Council assuming the functions of the LEP in April 2024, the project was abandoned. It was noted that private companies

are already rolling out fibre connectivity across the county, and it was deemed that the need for this public-sector intervention had diminished.

That said, many rural areas across my division of Cranleigh and Ewhurst still feel left behind in terms of digital connectivity. This is having a significant negative impact on local businesses, residents, and visitors. Part of the original EM3 LEP project also focused on exploring ways to use publicly owned assets, such as streetlights, to support 5G and other wireless technologies. Installing devices on existing infrastructure was seen as a potential way to accelerate the roll-out of 5G in underserved areas.

Given these ongoing concerns and opportunities, I would be grateful if you could provide an update on the following:

- a) Measures being taken by Surrey County Council to improve digital connectivity in the Cranleigh and Ewhurst division;
- b) Deployment of the £4.5 million LEP funding, or any other digital connectivity funding awarded to either the LEP or Surrey, and how it is being used to support improved digital infrastructure in the area;
- c) Consideration of alternative approaches to ensure that rural areas, including those in my division, are not left behind in the digital infrastructure rollout, particularly with regard to 5G and wireless technologies?

Your response on these matters would be greatly appreciated, to ensure that my division and the wider Surrey region has the digital infrastructure it needs to thrive in the future.

RESPONSE:

- a) Fixed digital Infrastructure coverage in Surrey has improved very significantly in the years since the EM3 Spine was first proposed. The Government's ambitions are for 85% of the UK to have gigabit-capable (DocSIS 3.1 or full fibre) 1000Mbps+ speeds by 2025 and 99% by 2030. Currently, gigabit coverage in Surrey stands at 85.04%.

Comparison of current coverage in Surrey B&Ds (ThinkBroadband)	Coverage of 30Mbps or more	Coverage of 30Mbps or more	Coverage of gigabit (FTTP or DOCSIS 3.1)	Coverage of gigabit (FTTP or DOCSIS 3.1)	Coverage of full fibre (FTTP or FTTH)	Coverage of full fibre (FTTP or FTTH)	Unable to access 10Mbps (Legal USO)	Unable to access 10Mbps (Legal USO)
Data date	Nov-20	Dec-24	Nov-20	Dec-24	Nov-20	Dec-24	Nov-20	Dec-24
UK	96.50%	98.21%	35.40%	85.67%	18.20%	72.73%	1.41%	0.71%
England	97.10%	98.41%	34.60%	86.49%	17.20%	72.79%	0.99%	0.54%
SURREY	98.00%	98.70%	16.40%	85.04%	14.70%	64.74%	0.44%	0.28%
Elmbridge	99.50%	99.47%	6.90%	87.31%	4.20%	61.25%	0.05%	0.05%
Epsom & Ewell	99.90%	99.95%	84.20%	97.66%	68.30%	91.36%	0.03%	0.03%
Guildford	97.80%	98.75%	3.50%	83.96%	4.60%	59.54%	0.46%	0.23%

Mole Valley	96.40%	98.71%	12.80%	78.48%	12.80%	46.06%	0.88%	0.46%
Reigate & Banstead	98.40%	98.81%	24.00%	88.73%	23.10%	70.66%	0.30%	0.28%
Runnymede	98.00%	99.03%	4.30%	88.77%	4.30%	73.73%	0.19%	0.09%
Spelthorne	99.20%	99.47%	30.40%	92.86%	30.40%	80.94%	0.15%	0.10%
Surrey Heath	99.20%	99.43%	8.60%	88.39%	8.60%	56.33%	0.20%	0.09%
Tandridge	95.40%	96.33%	15.90%	71.83%	12.70%	51.78%	1.07%	0.88%
Waverley	95.90%	97.42%	7.90%	69.72%	7.90%	65.32%	1.03%	0.67%
Woking	98.80%	99.32%	2.90%	91.49%	2.90%	57.28%	0.44%	0.14%

3 December 2024 – Think Broadband – Virgin Media O2 (VMO2)’s DocSIS 3.1 is already gigabit capable. VMO2 is currently overlaying its whole network with full fibre and once completed, the full fibre percentage and gigabit percentages will be the same.

In September 2024, Ofcom published its third edition of the Connected Nations: Planned Deployment Report. This predicted that gigabit-capable coverage is on course to cover 97-98% of UK premises by 2027. Areas such as Surrey where there are more rural areas will be a bit lower but average gigabit coverage in each of the eleven Districts and Boroughs by May 2027 is predicted to be between 92.4 and 99.9%. It must be stressed that this is a forecast and the percentages could change.

Most full fibre deployment in Surrey has and will continue to be rolled out by commercial network operators including Openreach, Virgin Media O2 and some smaller providers.

In the Ewhurst and Cranleigh division, about half of the homes and businesses can already access full fibre on the Box Broadband (now CommunityFibre) or Openreach networks. Openreach will continue to upgrade homes in the Division to full fibre as part of their commercial plans up until around 2027/2028.

For homes and businesses across the UK, including those in Surrey that are either not included in commercial plans, have been removed from commercial plans or are not considered commercially viable, the Government has set up the £5 Billion Project Gigabit Programme to connect as many of these premises to faster speeds as possible using public subsidy in the form of procurement or vouchers.

The Government recently awarded the Project Gigabit Cross Regional Framework Agreement which includes several call-offs to Openreach. Some eligible homes and businesses in Surrey are included in the first Call-off and are likely to be connected sometime in 2025. At the same time, the Gigabit Voucher Scheme, which is currently paused, is likely to re-open to some areas in Surrey. Eligible residents and businesses in communities will be able to engage with a supplier and access up to £4,500 in voucher funding per premises towards the costs of full fibre.

It should be noted, though that even with these funding streams, there will still be a few homes and businesses where neither commercial nor Government subsidy will connect them to gigabit speeds due usually due to very high cost. In these cases, the Government is currently considering alternatives such as 4G, 5G or satellite.

- b) Since April 2024, former Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) functions have been transferred to upper tier local authorities. Whilst the former LEP operating in West Surrey (EM3 LEP) was planning to make an investment in a gigabit - capable fibre network between Basingstoke and Guildford, this project did not progress, and the funding was not committed by the LEP to investment in digital infrastructure. The £4.5 million funding has been included in the balance of LEP legacy growth funds to be distributed between Surrey County Council and Hampshire County Council as part of the LEP transition arrangements.

A Growth and Innovation Fund framework is being established to reallocate the former LEP growth funds. In parallel, work is underway on an updated Economic Strategy to help establish the current economic growth priorities for Surrey, and to inform the Growth and Innovation Fund Framework. Both the refreshed Economic Strategy and the Growth and Innovation Fund framework will be considered by SCC Cabinet in February 2025.

- c) A non-exclusive open access agreement has been signed between SCC and Freshwave (a neutral host) to enable the installation and operation of 4G and 5G small cells on an agreed list of SCC street furniture assets. In line with the regulations set out in the Electronic Communications Code (ECC), the agreement with Freshwave is non-exclusive and SCC are still permitted to work with other Mobile Network Operators or neutral hosts who express an interest in installing small or macro cells on SCC assets or infrastructure. Freshwave have highlighted that a mobile network operator has an interest in deploying some small cells on streetlighting infrastructure in Guildford in 2025 and BT have registered interest in piloting some small cells in the north of Surrey. We continue to highlight the connectivity issues with more rural areas of Surrey, but currently the mobile network operators are more interested in the more commercial areas of the county.

MATT FURNISS, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

18. STEVEN MCCORMICK (EPSOM TOWN & DOWNS) TO ASK: (2nd Question)

Pavement parking is an ongoing issue in various towns and places in Surrey relates to delivery company riders mounting the pavement, parking inconsiderately / illegally and causing disruption and safety issues by riding on and across pavements.

Where these issues exist, and evidence is available, what options are available that this Council can action in relation to all options including enforcement to address these serious problems?

RESPONSE:

The increasing popularity of food delivery services (such as Uber and Deliveroo) is creating difficulties in many town centres where delivery bikes congregate on pavements and other areas waiting to dispatch incoming orders. The delivery riders often use e-bikes or mopeds.

In many town centres there are quite extensive waiting and loading restrictions in place and these attempt to strike a balance between keeping traffic (particularly buses) moving through the town centre whilst allowing reasonable access for deliveries and parking for local shops and businesses.

Outside of London, pavement parking in itself is not an offence, however waiting restrictions (single and double yellow lines) apply to the pavements as well as the road so our Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) can move on or issue a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) to mopeds that are parked on the road or pavement where these restrictions are in place.

However, it is permitted to load/unload on waiting restrictions and so our CEOs must give a reasonable amount of time (5 minutes is national standard) to check that loading is not taking place.

In short this means that in most cases the delivery bike drivers will move off when they see a CEO approaching and return when they have gone.

Delivery bikes can be a nuisance but also perform a useful function for many residents and businesses. We should aim to manage them on the highway but enforcement is not the entire solution and we have very limited powers against unregistered e-bikes etc.

Options to improve the situation will often be area specific, i.e. in locations where there is ample parking near restaurants and takeaways there is less of a problem.

Other solutions could include:

- Finding an area where delivery bikes can wait, perhaps a parking bay or under-used pavement area.
- A variety of parking and loading restrictions can be introduced, however these generally apply to all and some may restrict legitimate access for other businesses.
- More provision for delivery bikes at the planning stages of proposed retail/food outlets and within high street development and enhancement schemes.
- Consideration of measures to formally prevent cycling or riding in pedestrianised areas.

- Town centre management teams could work with local businesses and local councils to manage locations where delivery bikes can wait safely. This combined with continued enforcement could reduce pavement parking.
- Street furniture/planting can be introduced to physically prevent access to pavement areas (although introduction of these measures would also need to consider accessibility requirements for pedestrians and mobility scooters etc).
- Appropriate parking and loading restrictions with enforcement by the council(s) and police as required.

MARISA HEATH, CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

**19. CATHERINE BAART (EARLSWOOD AND REIGATE SOUTH) TO ASK:
(2nd Question)**

Surrey's non-recyclable household waste is diverted from landfill to incineration, including at the so-called EcoPark in Shepperton.

What are the annual estimated carbon emissions from incineration of Surrey's waste? Are the carbon emissions from incineration of Surrey's domestic (as well as commercial, industrial and construction waste) included in our net zero targets? If not, whose net zero target are they covered by?

RESPONSE:

We estimate that 70,000 tonnes of CO₂eq will arise from the disposal of residual waste generated by Surrey residents and a small amount of commercial waste collected by the districts and boroughs. This is not an emission that is included within the scope of Surrey County Council's own emissions. It will be included within the reporting of the operators of the disposal facilities.

We do not have any information on emissions from commercial or industrial waste generated from other sources within Surrey. As with our municipal waste, the emissions will be reported at the point of disposal.

CLARE CURRAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

**20. JONATHAN ESSEX (REDHILL EAST) TO ASK:
(2nd Question)**

Please can you confirm the number of post-16 SEND places for education of young people now and how many new post-16 places are planned to be delivered as part of Surrey County Council's investment in increasing SEND places for young people currently, or in the forthcoming capital programme?

RESPONSE:

Further information about post-16 provision in Surrey, which young people with different types and severity of additional needs and disabilities attend is set out in Surrey County Council's [School Organisation Plan 2024-2034](#) and Surrey Additional Needs and Disabilities Partnership [Post-16 Education and Training Local Offer](#).

As of academic year 2024/25, Surrey's existing maintained specialist education estate has a capacity of 375 places for students with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) aged 16-19 years who require specialist educational provision.

The remaining committed construction schemes deliverable under the Council's SEND Capital Programme approved by the Cabinet on 25 June 2024 will provide around 100 additional post-16 places in Surrey.

Three planned new special free schools in Surrey deliverable under the Department for Education's central route Special Free Schools Programme would create a further 56 post-16 places. However these new schools are subject to ministerial value for money considerations announced by the Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson on 22 October 2024 and their future is currently uncertain.

MARISA HEATH, CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

21. CATHERINE POWELL (FARNHAM NORTH) TO ASK: (3rd Question)

The impacts of climate change are already being felt in Surrey with an increase in high-impact rainfall days. This not only increases the likelihood of river flooding but also of surface water flooding and groundwater flooding.

The extent of flood plains associated with water courses breaking their banks is relatively well understood and a lot can be seen from satellite images and aerial photography.

However, surface water flooding and ground water flooding are much more difficult to predict, and satellite images and aerial photography is much less helpful.

Large parts of my division of Farnham North are identified by the Environment Agency as being at risk of flooding from surface water. The highest risk category they have is 1 in 30 years. However, some of these areas, including key roads and walking and cycling routes, are now flooded and impassible multiple times a year, particularly Lower Weybourne Lane and Monkton Lane. For some reason the last records in Surrey County Council's Geographic Information System (GIS) are for 2020.

There are also a significant number of culverts in my division and more and more sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) associated with new developments built on what were the surface water flood plains. Only one of the culverts appears to be documented in SCC's GIS, and I am regularly asked for support in getting that cleared.

I have created a map of where I believe the culverts are, but the system appears to be completely reactive, and issues are only investigated when flooding occurs. One of the culverts is under a critical junction (Farnborough Road, Upper Hale Road, Hale Road) in my division and based on the size of the pipe in the headwall must be 1m in diameter. Despite requests for information on when it was last inspected no information has been shared, although a site visit to the headwall revealed water flowing.

There also seems to be no system for adding SuDS into the SCC GIS system. This is particularly important where their functionality is linked to maintenance.

Please can you advise whether the SCC Climate Change Adaption Strategy is / can address:

- a) Recording all flood incidents (including type) in the SCC GIS system, with an annual review of new areas of concern;
- b) Capturing the location and condition of all culverts (including those on private land) as they form part of the flood resilience;
- c) Capturing the location and condition of all ditches that impact on publicly accessible areas;
- d) Capturing details of existing and new SuDS in SCC GIS system and ensuring that owners are responsible for providing evidence of annual maintenance?

RESPONSE:

Much of the information mentioned above is already collected as part of Surrey County Council's role as Lead Local Flood Authority and a number of improvements are already ongoing. However, it is recognised that there are still some gaps and not all data collected is mapped on GIS.

The Adaptation Strategy Risk Assessment process will review what is currently in place and what more is needed as a result of the impacts of climate change we are now seeing in Surrey. This will include reviewing the data mentioned above and identifying any improvements, including what more needs to be mapped on GIS and the resources needed to make the changes.

Any impacts and action needed will be identified when the review is completed next year.

DAVID LEWIS, CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND RESOURCES

**22. STEVEN MCCORMICK (EPSOM TOWN & DOWNS) TO ASK:
(3rd Question)**

Regarding Unit4 Payroll business as usual (BAU) production issues, in the last week I have had several residents contact me expressing concern and frustration with the

Unit4 Payroll system of this council. These residents are teachers or teaching assistants in schools and have shared information on MySurrey/Unit4 Payroll system issues and system downtime, lack of access and general system downtime and unreliability. The latest issue appears to relate to a fix that was introduced into the live production system (so the system being used by users, rather than a test environment) that caused a system outage that led to the payroll system being unavailable.

Given the creation of the Stabilisation Board in September 2024 to provide governance and structure to deal with ongoing fixes and issues can I ask the following:

- a) What was the fix recently implemented to Unit4 Payroll that caused the system outage?
- b) Was this tested in a test environment before being implemented in the live production system?
- c) Can the governance decision from the Stabilisation Board around the testing and stage gate approval for this fix to be implemented be made available to all Members for review?

RESPONSE:

- a) A mandatory global system update for Unit 4, required to bring Surrey County Council in line with the latest supported version was undertaken during the weekend of 23 and 24 November 2024. This activity was not discretionary nor was it scheduled to provide a specific fix; it was part of the on-going system lifecycle management. The upgrade resulted in instability being experienced from the system. These were not identified as potential risk issues for the upgrade and the resolutions rested with the supplier to resolve given the system architecture of Unit 4 and the Council's ability to rectify identified issues being outside of its control. However, as a precautionary measure to ensure data integrity was not compromised, end user access was not restored until the morning of 26 November.
- b) Yes, the core platform and integrations were tested prior to the change being made by the IT&D support team and business functions. The testing did not identify the instability issue in advance, as the issues encountered were focused around the stability and operations of the system that is under the responsibility of Unit 4. It was the host of the infrastructure the system operates from where the instability was being experienced.
- c) This is an operational matter.

A lessons learnt from the upgrade will also be reported back to the board, as well as raising issues on the response from Unit4 support during and following the upgrade. An update on the MySurrey stabilisation programme is planned in early 2025 to the Audit and Governance Committee, and the upgrade will be included. This committee is a public meeting and is open for all Members to attend.

CLARE CURRAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

**23. CATHERINE BAART (EARLSWOOD AND REIGATE SOUTH) TO ASK:
(3rd Question)**

Why are the methods for establishing distance to schools different for the Council's school admissions policy and its Home to School Transport policy?

For some residents with two schools nearby, measurement of distance at application gives one school as the nearest school but the system used for Home to School Transport policy gives the other school as the nearest school. Do you think the information provided to parents at admissions about nearest schools is sufficiently clear?

RESPONSE:

For admissions, the vast majority of schools in Surrey do **not** prioritise applicants for whom the school is their nearest school. Priority is generally assessed based on the straight-line distance between the child's home address and the school. That said, it is the decision of each admission authority to set the school's admission criteria and how home to school distance will be measured. Surrey is only the admission authority for community and voluntary controlled schools.

Straight line distance is a transparent and objective measurement that can be consistently applied for admissions.

However, as it is not normally relevant for **admissions** which school is nearest, it should not matter if the nearest school for **home to school transport** is a different school, and this will indeed be the case for many applicants.

Surrey's Home to School Travel Assistance policy sets out that the nearest school is measured according to road route, to comply with the Department for Education (DfE) transport guidance.

The Council's webpages ([Frequently asked questions for under 16 travel assistance to school - Surrey County Council](#)) include an FAQ for families which details how home to school distances are calculated.

For an applicant to be considered for travel assistance to a school that is not their nearest **by road route**, they will normally be required to demonstrate that they have applied for and been refused a place at any schools that are nearer by road route. The nearest school **by straight line** is not of relevance for travel assistance eligibility and is only relevant for a tiny minority of schools for admissions purposes.

The School Admissions webpages publish that each school has admissions criteria which set out how they allocate places and advises applicants to read the criteria for their preferred schools before applying, to consider how likely their child will be offered a place. These admissions criteria are published by Surrey on the public

website, and own admission authority schools will also publish them on their own websites. In this way, parents can access this information before applying.

MATT FURNISS, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

**24. JONATHAN ESSEX (REDHILL EAST) TO ASK:
(3rd Question)**

Please can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the engagement with the government and rail companies on how and when plans for electrification of the North Downs line will be progressed?

RESPONSE:

The Council has been liaising very closely with Great Western Railway and Network Rail on proposals for the North Downs Line, a line that is a Council priority for enhancement. I have met with the rail industry partners leading this work as we continue to discuss several potential improvement projects.

Earlier this month Great Western Railway and Network Rail jointly published the 'Traction Decarbonisation Strategy for the North Downs Line'. This strategy considers the optimal traction decarbonisation solution, and the opportunity provided by the need to replace the current diesel trains in the 2030s, which should ensure new rolling stock is fit for the future by addressing future service ambitions, improving reliability, and offering a better passenger experience.

In summary, the rail industry concludes that battery electric trains are an operationally viable option for the North Downs Line. They could deliver very high value for money, subject to confirming infrastructure requirements. Conversely, full electrification infill of the line is unlikely to offer value for money or be affordable in the medium-term. Nor would it be a strategic priority.

Interim solutions such as diesel-electric trains have a weaker case than battery electric, but they could deliver value for money and reduce carbon emissions.

The Traction Decarbonisation Strategy for the North Downs Line therefore gives the direction of travel and will inform long-term planning.

This Council will continue to work closely with both Great Western Railway and Network Rail to take this work forward, including making the case for investment to Government. A North Downs Line focused business case will likely consider the proposals at a route specific level, something the Council will collaborate on from both a technical and economic standpoint.

The Traction Decarbonisation Strategy for the North Downs can be found via the following web link, which will be made available to all Members:

[North Downs Line Traction Decarbonisation Strategy \(2024\).pdf](#)

MATT FURNISS, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

**25. CATHERINE BAART (EARLSWOOD AND REIGATE SOUTH) TO ASK:
(4th Question)**

The recent Surrey Highways e-newsletter says, "As well as ensuring walkways are clearer, significantly cutting back hedges will encourage healthier growth by Spring, supporting wildlife to thrive in the hedgerows." What guidance is given to Council contractors about hedge cutting to achieve the needs of Highways while at the same time recognising the value of hedges as wildlife habitats?

How does such guidance compare to that of Natural England, which addresses timing, height of cut in relation to previous cuts, frequency of cutting, shaping and the importance of basal growth? Is any Quality Assurance by the County Council carried out following hedge cutting?

RESPONSE:

The County Council takes the importance of hedges to wildlife very seriously. There is always a balance to be struck between the benefits a large hedge may provide and the inconvenience it may cause to residents and other users of the highway. If a hedge does not obstruct the use of a footway or carriageway, it is unlikely that we will take any action, and it will be left undisturbed.

Our contractors are required to comply with all legal obligations, including the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Wild Birds Directive and this is formally stipulated in the contract specification.

Officers regularly communicate with our contractors to discuss the most appropriate and sensitive methods for undertaking specific works. In line with Natural England's guidance, we generally avoid cutting hedges between March and August. If cutting is necessary during this period, inspections will be conducted, and if any nesting birds are found, work will be postponed.

There are many kilometres of hedges that form part of the public highway in Surrey. It is not possible to cut them all on an annual basis, and as such, a staged approach allows for hedges to regrow across the county.

I will request that Highway officers continue to engage with their colleagues and experts in our Countryside teams and work with our contractors to achieve the best possible outcomes.

NATALIE BRAMHALL, CABINET MEMBER FOR PROPERTY, WASTE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

**26. JONATHAN ESSEX (REDHILL EAST) TO ASK:
(4th Question)**

Please can you provide an update on the refurbishment and repair of Redhill library, including addressing the presence of reinforced aerated autoclave concrete (RAAC), how the presence of RAAC is being addressed, the current forecast cost of these works and when this work will be completed?

RESPONSE:

The refurbishment and repairs at Redhill library are currently progressing with the enabling phase of the RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) works underway.

Remedial works identified in the 2024 structural surveys are included.

The completion of the RAAC works is targeted for late Spring 2025 with estimated forecast costs of £850,000.

A temporary Library provision, on flexible lease terms, has been provided within the local Belfry shopping centre.