

MEETING OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL**TUESDAY 9 JULY 2024****QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED UNDER THE PROVISIONS
OF STANDING ORDER 10.1****MATT FURNISS, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH****1. JOANNE SEXTON (ASHFORD) TO ASK:**

For the second year in a row the quality of verge cutting in Spelthorne by Surrey County Council's contractor is unacceptable. I have received too many complaints about late and uneven cuts, areas that have been missed, and grass cuttings being blown over cars and driveways.

I note that the contractor in Spelthorne has been replaced and the contract awarded to Ringway. Can the Cabinet Member advise me of the following:

- a) Including the recent change in Spelthorne, how many of SCC's original verge maintenance contracts have been or are in the process of being re-tendered?
- b) What quality assurance monitoring is undertaken by Surrey Highways on an on-going basis to ensure poor quality work is identified early?
- c) Does SCC's work specification for contractors include penalties for poor quality work? If so, how often has Surrey Highways activated those penalties in the past year?
- d) Does SCC's work specification for contractors include any reference to expectations around the clearing of grass cuttings with a blower?
- e) Will the Cabinet review the information published on SCC's website "**Grass cutting programme in Surrey 2024 to 2025**" which currently only lists the scheduled cut due date, adding a further column to be used to advise residents when there are known delays to the verge cutting schedule?
- f) Can the Cabinet Member give an assurance that this regular catch-up on poor work and consequent need to apologise to residents will soon be a thing of the past.

RESPONSE:

It is accepted that problems have been experienced in parts of Spelthorne. With the substantial reduction in the planned number of cuts compared to when Spelthorne Borough Council acted as our agent, this change will undoubtedly be noticed by

some residents. Equally it is probable that some residents will welcome the reduction in disruption and carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions that cutting less offers. The contractor used in Spelthorne in 2023 was replaced for 2024. The contractor for 2024 has not been replaced, but due to some of the operational difficulties being experienced, is being supplemented by an additional resource from our term maintenance contractor, Ringway.

In answer to your specific points:

- a) A procurement exercise was undertaken earlier this year for provision across all district and borough areas in Surrey. Officers are working through the returned options and the outcome will be shared with Members in due course.
- b) There is a dedicated team that undertake sample audits. However, due to the scale of the highway it is impossible for them to inspect everything. Therefore, all Highway officers who are out and about (Highway Customer Officers & Highways Maintenance Officers) have been asked to highlight any issues they are aware of to the grass cutting team. The reality is that some residents expect a higher level of service than that which we provide and upon investigation not all complaints are substantive. But it is accepted that some are of merit.
- c) There is a specification for grass cutting. If a contractor consistently fails they will be removed from the contract and/or have areas to cut reduced (they are paid per sq metre cut). This needs to be balanced against making the contracts desirable and cost effective. There are not multiple contractors in the market capable of undertaking this work for fair rates.
- d) Yes, footways should be blown and carriageways where it is safe to do so (not on busy roads). In the main it is blown back well, but again some residents expectations maybe higher than we may be able to accommodate.
- e) Officers will look at options to improve the published programme information as requested.
- f) Officers and Members are working hard to resolve issues and provide a reliable and reasonable level of service. Changes were made to the service following last year's experience and it is obviously disappointing that there have been further issues in Spelthorne this year despite those changes. We will continue to seek to improve the service however I do think it is important to note that even with six cuts per annum, highways verges will never be maintained to the same level as some residents might treat their private gardens and this is something that we all need to understand and continue to communicate to residents as required.

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

2. BERNIE MUIR (EPSOM WEST) TO ASK:

How many children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are placed in specialist maintained schools outside Surrey and why?

Are there also children who are not resident in Surrey who are placed in Surrey specialist maintained schools and why? Do we know how many?

RESPONSE:

On the January 2024 census date, 313 Surrey children with EHCPs were placed in Other Local Authority (OLA) maintained specialist schools including academies (155 in local authority maintained and 158 in academies).

On the January 2024 census date, we had 247 OLA pupils in Surrey special schools (of which 114 were in maintained and the remainder in academies) and 23 in Special Educational Needs (SEN) centres (3 maintained and 20 academies). In line with the SEN Code of Practice 2014, parents have the right to request a specific school, including one in another local authority (though the decision will be based on the child's needs and the school's ability to meet their SEND needs). Other factors, such as distance to the setting or a tribunal decision, means that OLA children can be placed within SCC maintained/academy settings, if for example the school is on the county border where the school may only be a mile from the home.

The process followed for Surrey Special Schools for OLAs is that consultations are sent via email to the Surrey SEND Admissions team by:

- National Curriculum Year (NCY) 7: 31 October the year before start date
- NCY 3 and NCY 12: 30 November the year before start date
- NCY R: 17 December the year before start date

As applications are received from OLAs, the SEND Admissions Team sends the child's paperwork to the school and asks them for a formal response to confirm if they could meet needs. This is to assist the Local Authority with sufficiency planning and to determine whether a place can be allocated in line with parental preference if possible. Specialist placement decisions are then made in line with our published process. Places will be allocated to Surrey pupils first based on and in order of the below criteria:

1. SEN needs
2. Looked After Children/Previously Looked After Children
3. A sibling attends the school
4. Distance

SEND Admissions informs the OLA of the outcome of the allocation process in time to finalise the amended plan by 15 February for NCY R, 3 and 7 and 31 March for NCY 12. However, the majority of those OLA placed in Surrey schools are as a result of distance to the school or a successful appeal to the Tribunal Service which does not take residency into consideration in making its decisions.

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

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

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 states that early help is not an individual service, but a system of support delivered by local authorities and their partners.

This first priority of the Early Help strategy (2024/27) highlights the need to strengthen local partnerships to support children and their families in Surrey.

Under the new commissioned model how are the Family Centres supporting the new local forums / boards to realise the ambitions of the Strategy?

How are the current interventions for families within the newly commissioned Family Centre approach supporting the improvements identified within last years Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) which was focused upon Early Help?

How many families are currently being supported by Family Centres and how is this monitored?

RESPONSE:

The Family Centres in Surrey support families to find solutions to the parenting and relationship challenges they face and to grow in confidence to manage future difficulties. They provide one-to-one and group support, collaborating with local partners where the family needs are having a significant impact on the health, development, or wellbeing of the child/children. The centres work closely with health, community groups, education, wider partners and commissioned services, to ensure that families receive joined up support from key agencies.

During the first quarter of the new contract (April to June 2024) the 11 Family Centres in Surrey supported 1,282 families. The impact for families is measured as per the national Supporting Families Outcomes Framework. The contracts are monitored through a robust performance management framework on a quarterly basis. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion form a core part of the new monitoring process ensuring family centres are accessible to all families requiring targeted support.

Family Centres are supporting the ambition of the Early Help Strategy 2024 – 2027 to strengthen local partnerships. Having one lead provider for every district and borough supports the Council's approach to working collaboratively in local towns and villages, prioritising neighbourhoods where there is the greatest need, whilst being accessible to all who require support. Each Family Centre is exploring how they will engage in established local networks and they will create specific partnership forums for early help if there is an identified need. This enables the teams to avoid duplication for partners and to work in partnership with the Team

Around the Community (TAC) networks, ensuring the needs of children and families are prioritised.

An important feature of these forums will be to collate local data and intelligence on the needs of families, the impact of services, and the outcomes for families. The data and outcomes will be shared with the Early Help Strategic Board and Surrey Safeguarding Children's Partnership Executive for oversight and scrutiny which was an area for development as highlighted in the JTAI.

The local forums will also enable practitioners to share data and expertise and work together collaboratively in local communities to support families, creating Teams Around the Family that can best meet their needs. This enables the Family Centres to be responsive in their work and to procure local services that provide specialist interventions to families, which is a benefit of the new contract. Sharing data effectively with partners was highlighted as an area for development in the JTAI and these new approaches will help to ensure that families receive the right support at the right time, according to their needs.

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

4. HELYN CLACK (DORKING RURAL) TO ASK:

- a) The Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) Stakeholder Reference Group was set up by the Leader to get feedback on the EHCP timeliness recovery plan from a wide range of stakeholders. I was asked to join this group after the work I did last year for the Leader talking to stakeholders around the county about their perception of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) service delivery by this Council. At the last meeting of the group, we had an update on the progress against plan.

Can the Cabinet Member update the Council on the recovery plan; outline performance and timeliness during May and projections for the rest of the year for both EHCPs and Annual Reviews; state how many children are now waiting for an Educational Psychologist (EP) assessment and for an EHCP to be finalised; and set out what is being done to support children in mainstream schools and what additional support will be in place in schools in the coming academic year?

- b) Schools and providers told the (EHCP) Stakeholder Reference Group, that there are delays in receiving payments from the Council for children with existing and new EHCPs and this has an impact on their cashflow and staffing.

Can the Cabinet Member advise the Council of improved processes that have been put in place to ensure payments are made promptly?

RESPONSE:

- a) Our recovery plan has been successful in meeting the target of issuing 60% of plans within 20 weeks in the last week of May, as we issued 74% of plans on time at the end of May leading to a cumulative total of 53% of plans issued on time in May. This has been sustained in June, with 61% of plans issued on time.

As of the end of June, there were 56 children waiting for an EHCP to be finalised where this is now outside the 20-week timescale, and 27 children waiting for EP advice which is overdue.

We anticipate that our timeliness will remain over the target level of 60% in July and August as these overdue plans and assessments are finalised and will rise above 70% during the autumn term. We continue to strive towards 100% timeliness but recognise that there are occasions where we need to delay issuing an EHCP to ensure we have the most up to date advice from partner agencies or we have a child who has moved into the county with a delayed assessment underway.

We have increased the completion of the annual review process from 25% in July 2023 to 55% in June 2024. The process involves reviewing and actioning recommendations arising from the annual review meeting convened by the school or setting. This improvement reflects work to ensure that annual reviews that had been completed but had not been accurately recorded, were placed in the data system, as well as ensuring that incomplete annual reviews have been completed. Over 3,700 reviews have been finalised through this work.

However, this progress with annual reviews has not been at the level originally modelled, often due to the complexity of the casework for incomplete annual reviews. Action has been undertaken to extend the work of the recovery team and our revised projection is that this performance will increase to above 75% by the end of the calendar year. For our vulnerable children, currently 76% of Annual Reviews are up-to-date, with our aim to ensure that all vulnerable children and young people have an up-to-date annual review by the end of the calendar year.

We are strengthening our early intervention and support offer to schools, in part through additional investment to consolidate the Learners' Single Point of Access (L-SPA) and our 'Team around the School' initiative. We are further increasing the number of teachers in our Specialist Teachers of Inclusive Practice (STIPS) team. STIPS offer support and advice to mainstream schools and settings. We are reviewing the 'Ordinarily Available Provision' guidance along with schools and developing a co-produced inclusion strategy. We are focusing on the transition points between early years and primary school and primary and secondary school to help prepare children and young people for the next phase of their education through the Aspire programme so that they can make smooth and successful transitions. We have put in extra capacity to support school placements at risk of disruption. We are setting up a network of Nurture Hubs and whole system initiatives, including school training and

development to support schools to make adjustments for those children with additional needs and disabilities whether subject to an EHCP or SEN support.

- b) The SEN corporate finance team is working to deliver the Leaders promise at the meeting to make all outstanding payments to schools by the end of July and to ensure that process changes are made within the SEND and finance teams to ensure that this situation does not reoccur.

We will make two additional payments in July with one made mid-month and one at the end of the month to support particularly Academies in their cash flow and year end accounts.

The SEN data team are producing a summary file of all the new or revised payments that are outstanding, to upload to our school schedules and include in two payment runs. The report produced will mean that these updates can be made easily without going through all the individual forms.

A second file detailing all the school transition data has also been produced to ensure this is processed at an earlier time than would normally be the case. The final piece that will be needed will be to identify any payments that have been dormant in the system and not paid. Again, the team are looking to produce a report to support identifying these cases that have not got a costed provision identified so we are able to then go through and individually reconcile to School Workbooks.

As soon as the actions above have taken place, the SEN corporate finance team will notify schools that known payments have been made. If payments are still identified to be outstanding, these can be highlighted for the team to process urgently.

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

5. CATHERINE POWELL (FARNHAM NORTH) TO ASK:

In July 2023, this Council agreed a motion to support increased walking and cycling in Surrey. It read:

‘Therefore, this Council calls upon the Cabinet, following the review of the work of the task and finish groups by the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee, to:

- I. Review and update the Surrey Highway Hierarchy Definition to align with the sustainable travel hierarchy in LTP4 and to support a higher priority grading on routes for local walking and cycling journeys, particularly to areas of high employment, schools, hospitals, and leisure facilities. This work should be included within the review that the Cabinet Member for Highways and Community Resilience has committed to.*
- II. Develop and fund a proactive maintenance approach to vegetation impacting on walking and cycling routes. This approach should prioritise areas of high*

employment (including town centres), schools, hospitals, and leisure facilities to ensure that these routes are consistently safe, enjoyable, easy, and convenient to use to promote them as an alternative to private vehicle use, whilst continuing to promote biodiversity.

III. Ensure that the approach to highway inspection is extended from surveying highway defects to inspections of issues that impact on all road users (not just vehicles), for example encroaching vegetation, left-behind signs, debris on pavements and cycleways and blocked drains.

IV. Use the knowledge of Members, local organisations and cycling and walking groups to enable the relevant officer team to create local walking and cycling maps for schools, businesses, health, and leisure facilities etc. to use within their own plans and strategies. These maps should proactively encourage sustainable travel across the county using tools such as Surrey Interactive Map.'

Please can the Cabinet Member advise what progress has been made on each of these reviews?

RESPONSE:

Resolution I: The data analysis work required to determine proposed updates to the footway hierarchy is progressing and is expected to be completed in August 2024. Changes to the hierarchy policy are expected to be recommended to Cabinet by the end of 2024, along with recommendations for an improved cycle infrastructure hierarchy based on the new cycle inventory dataset and aligned with the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs).

Resolution II: Much of the vegetation adjacent to the highway comes from private property or land. We have processes in place to both advise these private owners of their responsibilities and if required undertake enforcement action.

Every year the County Council clears much vegetation to ensure primary routes can be kept passable, but this does not mean completely clear of all vegetation. With over 3,000 miles of highway, this is a considerable task and priorities are focused on where the impact has most impact, such as key walking and cycle routes.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth wrote to all Members on the 20 June 2024, highlighting the additional investment that has been committed to responding to vegetation requests across the county. His emails explain how Members can report any sites that are causing them specific concern.

Resolution III: Safety Inspections carried out by Highway Safety Inspectors are regular focused inspections where any immediate risks are identified and are subsequently rectified within a limited time period of either two hours, five working days or twenty working days depending on the Inspectors' assessment of severity and risk which takes account of considerations such as the location and volume of use. This service ensures that our Highway Safety Inspection resources are deployed to the highest risk locations and situations, however, other methods are employed to deal with less immediate risks with longer timescales for resolutions.

Issues with regards to encroaching vegetation, left-behind signs, debris on pavements and cycleways and blocked drains would generally be highlighted to the highway service by reports from the public and would be assessed by Highway Customer Officers who may report issues such as this as “maintenance issues” which are passed on to our maintenance teams to carry out routine maintenance.

However, we have reminded our inspectors to consider the risk that issues such as those highlighted may pose, particularly to vulnerable users of pavements, such as wheelchair users or those with push chairs etc and to request maintenance works where needed, or to raise as an immediate risk for a quicker response where they consider such a risk to be very serious or life threatening.

Resolution IV: The programme to develop LCWIPs across the county is designed to provide a strategic network of high quality, safe cycle and walking routes to encourage more people to travel by bike and on foot for suitable journeys, switching mode from the car. Early engagement with Members, local organisations and cycling and walking groups helps inform the early LCWIP plan development and prioritisation of routes within each local area. The network routes and schemes that are developed through the LCWIP process are produced using a range of data and other inputs including locations of schools, businesses, health facilities and other key trip attractor sites within each local area that have potential to support the demand for increased active travel. Schemes from the LCWIP plans are being captured for inclusion within the Surrey GIS interactive mapping.

Further to this, the council has produced a collection of [self-guided walking route guides](#) to support people to discover the county on foot, including a selection of [easier walks](#) which may appeal to people who find it difficult to walk long distances, have young children in pushchairs or perhaps use a wheelchair. Interactive walking guides have also been produced for several routes in the [Surrey Hills National Landscape](#) that take people from A to B.

In the past twelve months the council has also undertaken a countywide audit to develop a detailed inventory of the facilities that make up the cycle network. Data gathered from the audit is being processed and it is envisaged that it will inform the future development of new digital and paper route-planning resources for those who wish to travel by bicycle.

In addition to the above, we are just about to embark on a Surrey walking initiative aimed at discovering the enablers and barriers to walking of specific groups of residents in Surrey. By understanding the specific needs and obstacles faced by different cohorts within Surrey, the project will enable the targeted development of measures to support a greater choice in sustainable travel options. This initiative is still at the scoping stage however it may be anticipated that developing existing or new mapping information, such as that described above, will also be identified as an appropriate intervention and progressed as resources permit.

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

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

Would the Cabinet Member advise as to whether the service has achieved the timeliness targets for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs) and Annual Reviews set out in the Strategic Improvement Plan?

(60% of EHCNA's issued in May 2024 are completed within 20-weeks. All outstanding out of time EHCNAs are completed. All vulnerable groups of children with an EHCP are reviewed on time. 75% of all Annual Reviews are completed on time).

If not, please provide the latest performance figures and revised timeframe for achieving these targets.

RESPONSE:

Our recovery plan has been successful in meeting the target of issuing 60% of plans within 20 weeks in the last week of May, as we issued 74% of plans on time at the end of May leading to a cumulative of 53% of plans issued on time in May. This has been sustained in June, with 61% of plans issued on time.

We anticipate that our timeliness will remain over the target level of 60% in July and August as these overdue plans and assessments are finalised and will rise above 70% during the autumn term. We continue to strive towards 100% timeliness but recognise that there are exceptional occasions where we need to delay issuing an EHCP to ensure we have the most up to date advice from partner agencies or we have a child who has moved into the county with a delayed assessment underway. We have increased the completion of Annual Reviews from 25% in July 2023 to 55% in June 2024. This improvement reflects work to ensure that Annual Reviews that had been completed but had not been accurately recorded, were placed in the data system, as well as ensuring that incomplete Annual Reviews have been completed. Over 3,700 reviews have been finalised through this work.

However, progression of Annual Reviews has not been at the level originally modelled, often due to the complexity of the casework for incomplete Annual Reviews. Action has been undertaken to extend the work of the recovery team and our revised projection is that this performance will increase to above 75% by the end of the calendar year. For our vulnerable children, currently 76% of Annual Reviews are up-to-date, with our aim to ensure that all vulnerable children and young people have an up-to-date Annual Review by the end of the calendar year.

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

7. EBER KINGTON (EWELL COURT, AURIOL & CUDDINGTON) TO ASK:

For over a year, food delivery motorcycles have been parking on the pedestrian footway along one side of High Street Epsom, driving over the pavement and passed pedestrians using the footway, and forming a line of up to twenty vehicles. More recently motorcyclists have also taken to riding on to the footway on the opposite side of the High street using it as a parking place.

Despite the presence and actions of Community Enforcement Officers the problem has not been resolved and is getting worse and, whilst I am given many reasons why specific actions cannot be taken, I have received no indication that Surrey Highways can or will stop this illegal and dangerous parking which is jeopardising the safety of residents and is to the detriment of the shopping experience in Epsom.

- a) Does the Cabinet Member agree that this situation cannot be allowed to continue?
- b) Will the Cabinet Member, as a priority, commit to taking the lead to find and, if required, fund a solution which can be replicated around the County where appropriate?
- c) Will he also take up my offer of a site visit with Highway officers, the Divisional Member and me to view the problem?

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 the case of Epsom High Street, there are already quite onerous waiting and loading restrictions in place (double yellow lines, bus stop clearways and peak time loading restrictions along the entire length of the High Street). These have been put in place to strike a balance between keeping traffic and buses moving through the town centre whilst allowing reasonable access for deliveries to local businesses.

The 'no waiting at any time' restrictions (double yellow lines) apply to the pavements as well as the road in most cases, so our Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) can move on or issue a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) to mopeds with a Vehicle Registration Number (VRN) that are parked on the road or pavement where these restrictions are in place.

Between 1 January and 30 June this year, Epsom High Street has been patrolled a total of 922 times, with 159 PCNs being issued.

However, in most cases the bike delivery drivers will move off when they see a CEO approaching and often the delivery vehicles being used are e-bikes that do not have

a VRN. Our CEOs do not have powers to move on or enforce against these 'vehicles'.

We have looked at the implications of using traffic enforcement cameras in Epsom town centre however there are limited applications for these. In terms of enforcing parking restrictions traffic cameras can only be used for:

- Red routes – no stopping or loading as this restriction creates a clearway.
- Bus stop clearways – only applies to the road not the pavements.
- School Zigzags – not applicable in this area.

As you will be aware a red route has been ruled out previously for reasons of cost and potential impact on the town centre area and businesses.

To respond to your questions:

- a) 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 e-bikes.
- b) There is unlikely to be a single solution to these problems around the county however considerations in developing solutions could include:
 - More provision for delivery bikes at the planning stages for proposed retail/food outlets and within high street development and enhancement schemes.
 - Town centre management teams should work with local businesses and local councils to manage locations where delivery bikes can wait safely.
 - 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.
- c) As I understand it, the delivery bike problem in Epsom High Street has existed for over five years and it is unfortunate that, despite the current and previous efforts by Surrey Highways and other relevant stakeholders, there is not yet considered to be a satisfactory local resolution. I would be happy to meet with relevant stakeholders, to discuss the considerations above and look for potential solutions at this location if any can be agreed upon.

DAVID LEWIS (COBHAM), CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND RESOURCES

8. NICK DARBY (THE DITTONS) TO ASK:

- a) i) Please could the Cabinet Member confirm who is responsible for determining pothole damage claims?
 - ii) What input does Surrey County Council have in relation to the decision in each case?
- b) Who is ultimately responsible for meeting the cost of successful pothole claims?

RESPONSE:

- a) i) Surrey County Council's liability claims handling function (the 'claims hub') is a shared service between Surrey County Council, East Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council within the Orbis Partnership agreement.
 - ii) The claims hub has direct access to Surrey County Council's highway systems and liaise directly with highway colleagues to facilitate the decision-making process for pothole related claims received. The claim handling function reports into the Corporate Finance Team; pothole claims data is regularly shared with senior management in both the Highways and Finance services.
- b) Successful pothole claims are funded from Surrey County Council's highway transportation claims budget. Alternatively, in circumstance where claims are referred to the Council's highway contractor, Ringway, it is the contractor who is responsible for funding compensation payments.

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

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

What arrangements are in place to prevent the utility companies from digging up pavements or roads that have been recently resurfaced at huge expense?

RESPONSE:

When we are planning major resurfacing works on roads or pavements, legislation enables us to issue a notice, known as a Section 58, to restrict utility companies digging them up and reinstating them for a timescale of typically two years, but up to five years for more structural works. However, emergency works, and new customer connections are excluded from this period of restriction.

It is part of the planning process for resurfacing or reconstruction schemes for us to apply for Section 58 restrictions. In accordance with the legislation, we cannot apply this restriction to all of our works, and activities such as surface dressing or schemes with a very short lead in time would not be covered, however, a significant number of roads in Surrey have this restriction in place. The mapping application [Causeway one.network](#) shows all roads which have a Section 58 restriction should Members wish to view them. To use this system, a Member would need to log in, click map layers (the three lines to the left of the search box), select operational information and restrictions S58s and S85s. This will show the roads where restrictions are in force or have been applied for on schemes we are due to carry out.

More information about utility companies and their works can be found on our website; [Frequently asked questions about utility companies and their road works - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#).

With regards to Hadrian Way in Stanwell, a Section 58 restriction is in place following the footway reconstruction works. Some works have been carried out by BT after the footway reconstruction works; however these were to provide a new connection and were therefore exempt from the restriction.

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

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

Can details be provided to all divisional Members on a regular basis on the Section 106 money that is available in their areas and what it is available for along with any expiry date on the funds?

RESPONSE:

Unfortunately, the existing (current) IT software system (MIDAS) is unable to provide this function, following the internal audit review it has been noted that the current MIDAS system is not fit for purpose and is over a decade old. An action plan is in place to address the internal audit findings and to improve our reporting processes. As a direct result of these findings, we are in the process of developing a new reporting system called 'Surrey Infrastructure Agreement Monitoring System' (SIAMS). Design and build of this new system is underway with pilot testing of areas due to commence in the next couple of weeks. Once the new system is tried, tested and adopted it will be able to provide this level of reporting.

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

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

A Labour government clearly states it intends to impose VAT, virtually immediately, on independent school fees.

Could the Cabinet Member update Members:

- a) Firstly, on whether the school places planning team is receiving contacts from concerned parents on this matter?
- b) Secondly, if the team is assessing and modelling the implications including any associated costs on potential increased demand for non-independent school places across Surrey?

RESPONSE:

- a) The Education Place Planning Team has not directly received any correspondence from parents regarding the proposals to charge VAT for independent schools but have been made aware of queries made to the School Admissions Team and to individual members.
- b) The council has a statutory duty to offer a place to every Surrey child that requires one, but that place may not necessarily be at a preferred school. It is a challenge to make a specific comment on the possible impact of a policy until such time as the details of that policy and the future date of implementation are known. The team has done some initial work to try to estimate the number of places that may be needed and where they will be needed and if there are any children attending independent schools out of Surrey. Once there is clarity around the intent and the implementation of the policy, Education Place Planning officers will do more detailed work with all schools, including the Independent Schools Network, to model potential scenarios.

NATALIE BRAMHALL, CABINET MEMBER FOR PROPERTY, WASTE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

**12. TIM HALL (LEATHERHEAD AND FETCHAM EAST) TO ASK:
(2nd Question)**

Could the Cabinet Member update the Council on progress in dealing with the fly tipping around the Salvation Place, Young Street, Leatherhead:

- a) Please could a timescale be provided for the removal of the existing fly tipping?
- b) Why has it taken well over a year to get action? It is three months since the Executive Director came on a site visit with the Local Member and Cabinet Member for Environment.
- c) What measures are officers proposing to stop its recurrence?

RESPONSE:

- a) An initial cost estimate for the removal of the fly tipping work was sought. However, due to the work required, it was necessary to obtain two comparative quotes which are urgently being progressed by Macro, Surrey County Council's Facilities Management services provider. We estimate that the works will be undertaken over the summer period and will take 4-6 weeks to complete.

- b) There have been a few reasons for the delay in getting this work completed. Facilities Management, including the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) team (who would have responsibility for these works), have recently undergone a significant service transformation and this work was impacted by these changes. Secondly as forementioned, we are awaiting two further quotes for the works as required to adhere to the Council's procurement procedures.
- c) Moving forward, the Council's enforcement officers will collaborate with Mole Valley District Council, Surrey Fire & Rescue Service, Surrey Police, and the waste management team to identify and take appropriate actions against individuals found or suspected to be involved in any further fly tipping or fire setting. In addition, GRT and Macro will work together to obtain cost estimates for the installation of additional CCTV coverage if deemed both appropriate and cost effective.

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

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

When new National Regulations came into force in July 2022 to allow councils outside of London to enforce moving traffic offences outside of London, Surrey County Council made a successful application for the new powers in that year.

Please can the Cabinet Member advise:

- a) How many fines for breaches of heavy goods vehicle (HGV) bans SCC has issued since assuming these powers and how many of these are from the new mobile camera?
- b) How many roads in Surrey had the appropriate camera signage in place to allow fines to be issued as of the end of May 2024?
- c) Given that the maximum fine that SCC can issue is £70, what lobbying has the Council undertaken to increase this level to something that is more likely to be an effective deterrent, particularly given that only warning letters can be issued for the first six months, which means that there are operating costs with no revenue?

RESPONSE:

By way of background to the question, the approximate timeline for our work to begin moving traffic enforcement and HGV Watch is as follows:

- The new national regulations allowing councils outside of London to enforce moving traffic offences came into effect in July 2022.
- Surrey County Council made a successful application and was one of the first councils to obtain the new powers in that year. We also set up a countywide HGV Watch Scheme that could feed back information about potential HGV activity and be used to guide camera activity.

- The HGV Watch scheme now has 12 active sites where volunteers report HGV contraventions to our Enforcement Team who then send warning letters to the HGV operators identified.
- The Council also procured and awarded a parking and traffic enforcement contract by April 2023 allowing us to put the new powers into practice. This is a new area of work and needs to be managed carefully to understand whether the income from fines will cover the operational costs. (i.e. there is very little revenue from fines when warning notices are being issued at all new sites for the first six months and compliance is likely to improve over time reducing the prospect of income from fines).
- We have started trialing (since 17 June) a camera car to enforce an HGV restriction in Upper Hale, Farnham where the local HGV watch team, through surveys and reporting, identified the need for enforcement to improve compliance with an HGV restriction.

In response to the specific points:

- a) We are required to issue warning letters to vehicles contravening new restrictions for the first six months and the camera vehicle has only been in use since 17 June. Penalty Charge Notices can be issued to repeat offenders when they have received a warning letter; however, none have been issued so far.
- b) It is good practice to install 'Traffic Enforcement Camera' warning signs where enforcement is being carried out and these were in place at the four sites in Surrey where cameras were operating in May. When new locations are identified that could require camera enforcement (perhaps through the HGV Watch process) we will follow Department for Transport (DfT) guidelines and carry out a six-week consultation about the proposal. Sites that meet the criteria for camera enforcement will have 'Traffic Enforcement Camera' signs placed on the approaches as needed.
- c) The DfT have only recently extended traffic enforcement powers to councils outside of London so there has been little time to review whether the level of penalty charge (£70, or £35 if paid in 21 days) is a sufficient deterrent. This will need additional data collected over time to see the impact of enforcement on compliance levels. We have responded to a recent DfT survey to suggest that the penalty charge notice (PCN) level for parking enforcement, in particular, has not changed for over fifteen years and has lost its deterrent effect in some cases.

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

**14. EBER KINGTON (EWELL COURT, AURIOL & CUDDINGTON) TO ASK:
(2nd Question)**

Several local authorities, including the London Borough of Sutton, currently offer monthly payments to childminders. In addition, SCC's own consultation statistics

show that 95% of childminders favour monthly payments, and the 2024 Early Years Provider Survey showed that 47% of the respondents reported the current payment schedule to be a barrier.

Currently, the public messaging from SCC on monthly payments is not encouraging, with emphasis placed on what suits Group Providers. However, given that there will be a huge expansion of early years entitlement in the coming years which will require more places to be made available, it is important from a recruitment and retention perspective that childminders and potential new childminders are not put off by a failure of this Council to make a public commitment to introducing monthly payments as part of the new arrangements.

Will the Cabinet Member therefore make a public commitment at the July Council meeting that monthly payments will be part of SCC plans in the coming months for the Early Years expansion?

RESPONSE:

All providers in Surrey have the same payment options available to them, including childminders. Providers can receive an estimate payment at the start of each term which is 60% of the full term's funding for all children in their care up front. They then receive the remaining 40% plus any adjustments by the half term meaning that the full amount for the term is paid in advance. In between this, we also make a payment every month for any new children who have joined.

We have been hearing from some childminders that they would prefer monthly payments in equal instalments, and this is something we have consulted on via surveys and consultation events. 176 childminders responded to an in-person consultation, of whom 95% were in favour of monthly payments, this equates to 17% of registered childminders in Surrey, and 10% of all early years providers. Our provider survey was responded to by 312 providers with 47% reporting payment schedules to be a barrier, whilst 51% did not feel that the current payment schedule impacted their ability to offer the funded early education entitlements. The Department for Education have also recently run a consultation on payment schedules, and we are awaiting publication of these results.

What has been clear from the consultation so far is that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution, due to the wide variety and volume of early years providers across Surrey. There are currently 1,605 providers in comparison to neighbouring authorities such as Sutton who last reported a total of 316. Therefore, any change to payment schedules will need to be thoroughly planned and resourced, as well as providing an element of choice to meet providers' needs.

We are currently in the process of moving to a new software system for funded early education payments from September 2024 and are committed to working with the system provider and other larger local authorities to confirm a timeframe for delivery of the option of monthly payments.

The Early Years Commissioning Team also remain keen to continue to hear from childminders regarding their individual circumstances and have a wide range of

support we can offer in terms of budgeting and financial management should they wish to access this. They can contact us at eycommissioningteam@surreycc.gov.uk.

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

**15. NICK DARBY (THE DITTONS) TO ASK:
(2nd Question)**

- a) Please could the Cabinet Member confirm the overall budget for the current financial year for the cost of refreshing road markings?
- b) Please could the Cabinet Member confirm the amount incurred to date for the current financial year split by Division?
- c) How do Surrey County Council decide the priority for refresh of individual markings?
- d) Is there are map or list showing all markings to be refreshed – please could this be provided if so?

RESPONSE:

- a) Following the review into road markings last year by the Task & Finish group, the budget for general refresh of road markings has been increased to £1.9m this year. This is in addition to roads that will be remarked as part of our major maintenance or surface dressing programmes. On 3 July 2024, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways sent a detailed summary of the current activity to all Members.
- b) The road marking refresh is underway and the delivery to date position is constantly changing. Practically therefore it is not possible to break this down into a detailed spend to date per division. Markings also cross multiple divisions and it would be a complex and time-consuming task to provide such information. The budget outturn will be reported as usual at the end of the financial year.
- c) The programme of works that is being progressed has been prioritised by two key factors – busy roads that have been subject to the longest duration since they were last refreshed and survey data from our Asset Team. In addition to this, and subject to available resources, we will also target locations that are highlighted to us that are in genuine need.
- d) We do not have maps available to share however the priority list of works is included in the email sent by the Deputy Cabinet Member. Officers would be pleased to answer any further questions you may have, following consideration of this information.

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

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

Does the Council have statistics for the number of schools in Surrey which have to close as they are used for polling stations?

RESPONSE:

20 Surrey schools were used as polling stations for the General Election on 4 July 2024. There are over 500 polling stations across the eleven districts and boroughs, so this equates to approximately 3% of the polling venues used. Polling stations are selected by district and borough councils.

Legislation states that publicly funded schools, including academies and free schools, may be used as polling stations, free of charge.

Wherever possible, district and borough election teams look to avoid using schools as polling stations but in some areas, the use of school buildings cannot be avoided, due to a lack of suitable alternative accessible buildings.

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

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

In Epsom & Ewell area and in my division, Phase 14 single and double yellow lines were ordered in May 2023 are still to be completed.

Can the Cabinet Member please provide an update on the reasons for the delays and a route to completion of these works for Phase 14 along with assurance that Phase 15 works ordered in May this year will be completed in a timely manner?

RESPONSE:

A number of operational issues have unfortunately caused delays to the delivery of the lining programme over the last year. Although efforts were made to address the situation, for a lot of last year, we continued to experience wetter than average weather, which compounded the issue.

We have continued to increase delivery this year and put further measures in place, including the provision of extra resources by our contractor. These additional lining gangs are making good progress at completing outstanding works. The Parking Project Team has been working with the contractor to identify and prioritise the oldest jobs, one of which was the lining for the Epsom and Ewell parking review (Phase 14), which is targeted for completion in early July.

Whilst the additional resources are helping to work through the backlog, lining is still taking place for newer jobs and work has already started on the 2023 parking review (Phase 15), and so, weather permitting, we expect it to be completed this year.

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

**18. MARK SUGDEN (HINCHLEY WOOD, CLAYGATE AND OXSHOTT) TO ASK:
(2nd Question)**

The residents of Heathside, Medina Avenue and Harefield in Hinchley Wood have been requesting that their road surface (concrete base with thin asphalt top) be repaired, since the day I was elected.

Access to their properties is via an entrance to Heathside off the A309 Kingston by-pass.

The entrance is also heavily used by non-resident vehicles heading from the Scilly Isles towards Hook undertaking short cut U-turns off the A309 Kingston by-pass, placing significant stress on both the road surface and damaging kerbs.

Over the last two years many tens of reports have been made by residents seeking action to repair the road.

Could the Cabinet Member advise when these multiple requests for action will be acted upon?

RESPONSE:

The Highways Team are aware of the concerns about this road and are working hard to find a solution that can be progressed in timescales that are achievable and give a satisfactory outcome.

The road is of concrete construction and has a thin overlay of micro asphalt. Whilst we understand that there are issues with the road, the engineering assessment is that the road condition is not at a point where urgent resurfacing is required. We are however seeking to carry out maintenance work at a future date. It is currently being considered for a specialist concrete road maintenance treatment which involves fine milling the surface and undertaking acrylic repairs to seal the surface. This will provide longevity of the original concrete slab construction. This is specialist work, and we are not able to confirm that the solution is suitable for this location until the Contractor has reviewed it which will happen at the end of the summer. If the treatment is deemed suitable the scheme will be added to the provisional programme. If the fine milling treatment is not deemed to be suitable at this location, then further treatment options will be considered and a revised timescale for the works will be communicated.

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

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

Please can the Cabinet Member advise the following:

- a) How many children in Surrey Children's Homes are currently:
 - i. Attending a mainstream school;
 - ii. Attending specialist SEND schools;
 - iii. Out of School and have instead been allocated Alternative Provision?
- b) With regards to children in Surrey Children's Homes who are receiving Alternative Provision please can you advise:
 - i. The average number of hours per week being received;
 - ii. The total cost for 2023 / 2024?
- c) Whether consideration has been given to SCC using the skills that exist with residential home staff, many of whom have a background in education, to provide in-house Alternative Provision away from the Children's homes. Could this same provision also be used to support those children living with Foster Carers in Surrey?

RESPONSE:

- a)
 - i) 10 in a mainstream school;
 - ii) 8 in specialist SEND schools;
 - iii) 6 out of school or not attending school and allocated Alternative Provision.
- b)
 - i) Average number of hours per week = 9.
 - ii) Total cost for 2023/2024 for all AP received during the year for those 6 children = £109,159.
- c) Children Services and Education have recently begun joint conversations on the development of Alternative Provision (AP) for children and young people who are on the edge of care and where there is a risk that their care arrangement may breakdown due to the lack of full-time education. It is acknowledged that AP needs to be out of the home for the well-being of all concerned, including both the young person and the care setting. The recent conversations regarding the development of a flexible model of AP for children in care or on the edge of care are at an early stage and have been supported by the Virtual School.

It will be important to include the staff working in care homes as they have a wealth of experience and knowledge about the complex needs of the children they care for. These and future discussions are and will be helpful as we need to be clear what support this group of children need - and therefore what is meant by AP in this context - and to develop a thematic approach to address educational, therapeutic or vocational needs. We are also mindful of [Department for Education statutory guidance](#) requirements around the education of looked after children.

The Council has recently completed the development of an AP Gateway which is intended to ensure the provision of consistent high-quality AP for our children. Any developments agreed would need to meet those high standards. The availability, involvement and suitability of existing staff and carers is an opportunity to extend the provision and improve outcomes for our vulnerable children. The proposal to work jointly with education is an exciting opportunity to develop a flexible and integrated approach that supports our children to leave the care of the council with the skills that they need for the future.

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

20. EBER KINGTON (EWELL COURT, AURIOL & CUDDINGTON) TO ASK: (3rd Question)

It has been reported that there were 8,888 teachers working at state-funded schools in Surrey in November, down from 8,986 the year before – a drop of 98 teachers.

- a) Given the severe issues with recruiting and retaining teachers nationwide does the Cabinet Member believe that this Council has a role in supporting Surrey schools in recruiting and retaining teachers?
- b) If so, will the Cabinet Member provide some detail on the measures being taken or planned by SCC itself to recruit and retain staff in Surrey's state schools and the timeframes attached to those measures?

RESPONSE:

- a) As identified in the question, teacher recruitment and retention are not challenges only being faced by schools in Surrey. Data release (Department for Education, 2023) shows that 39,930 teachers left teaching for reasons other than retirement in the last recorded academic year (2021/22). This represents 8.8% of the workforce and is the highest number since records began in 2010.

Multiple studies have shown unequivocally that good quality teaching leads to better learning outcomes across all ability groups. Recruiting, preparing, and retaining good teachers, support staff and leaders is key to ensuring that all Surrey children and young people have access to a high-quality education experience and secure strong outcomes.

Whilst many factors impacting recruitment and retention of teachers and support staff are outside the direct influence of Surrey County Council, such as central government policy, and although Surrey County Council recognises the autonomy granted to Head Teachers and Governing Bodies, even more so in Academies, there is a residual role for the Council around teacher, support staff and leader recruitment and retention.

As the champion for all children and young people, it is vital for this Council to work as a key partner and leader within the education system to ensure all actions are taken to support settings, schools and colleges recruit and retain high quality support staff, teachers, and leaders on behalf of all children, young people and their families.

- b) Surrey County Council has worked with key partners such as the Schools Alliance for Excellence (SAfE). Early Years settings and school phase leads, Post 16 education providers, health partners, the Department for Education and local diocese to develop the Lifetime of Learning Strategy. In addition to this, the Surrey Education Partnership has been created and will provide overall strategic direction and keep an overview of the Lifetime of Learning Strategy 2024 – 2030. This strategy acknowledges the impact of high-quality staff, teachers and leaders as well as the importance of recruiting and retaining these individuals in local schools. It is also clear that there is a need for a system wide partnership approach to addressing this multi-faceted issue. As such, a key priority within the strategy is *“to recruit, retain and grow the best teachers, practitioners and leaders and provide high quality continuing professional development.”* An action plan with clear timelines and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is being developed to underpin this Strategy and can be shared with Members in due course.

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

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

South Western Railway recently ran a ‘Stakeholder Live’ session on 17 June, an engagement session to provide information and was attended by over 90 councillors in the region. When asked what they are doing to increase peak time services and capacity in Epsom and Ewell area and what the timings for these improvements are, no firm answer or timings were given.

Can this Council write to South Western Railway formally asking for details of planned service and capacity improvements in peak times for Surrey?

RESPONSE:

As we emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic, the Department for Transport were pressured by H.M. Treasury to reduce costs in the rail sector. In simple terms, this was because the cost of operating the railway had not changed, yet income from fares had significantly fallen as passenger numbers had reduced, including a big drop in regular peak time commuting. This financial imbalance led to a decision to reduce the number of peak time train services on some lines, essentially to spread a reduced number of passengers across fewer peak train services as new travel patterns started to take shape.

Since that decision was taken, passenger numbers have grown. This means that capacity on some train services is now an issue, although not necessarily on every day of the week.

Whilst this is a challenge to both Government and the train operating companies, it is timely that this is revisited. I will write to South Western Railway requesting more details and would be very happy to share that letter and the response once received.

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

**22. CATHERINE POWELL (FARNHAM NORTH) TO ASK:
(4th Question)**

Please can the Cabinet Member advise the following:

- a) The key lessons learned from the construction of new SCC Children's Homes that opened in 2023, and so far in 2024, and what will be done differently for the homes that are in the current Capital Programme?
- b) The key lessons learned on the staffing, registration and initial welcoming of the first children into the new SCC Children's Homes?
- c) Current staff vacancy rates in SCC Children's Homes?

RESPONSE:

- a) After each project has reached completion, the teams have met to review the lessons learnt. All the design, development and operational feedback from the 2023 new build Children's Homes projects delivered has been used to refine the bespoke specification of the remaining new build homes (in Mole Valley and Elmbridge) ensuring these are tailored to operational service requirements, high quality finish, and as flexible a layout as possible to support the widest array of need. Examples include anti-ligature, anti-barricade, accessible, and thermally efficient building design, including specialist furniture and parts specification to minimise disruption on site for repairs and maintenance activities.
- b) The service and project team have reflected on the mobilisation of the new SCC Children's Homes, from the point of handover to welcoming the children. The Ofsted registration process has provided us with new insight and learning, as some of their processes have changed since the Council had last opened a new residential children's home and are now fully automated. The Ofsted registration process for two homes took 17 weeks from the point of submitting the regulatory application. SCC attempted to use the Ofsted registration fast-track process, however, due to Ofsted's backlog of registrations, this process had no positive impact on the timeline. For the children's home located in the Epsom area, it took 22 weeks from application to registration. The delay in the process impacted on the service's ability to plan for children to move into the home, resulting in the first child having a longer transition than desired. Despite the delay, the child who was due to be

moving into the home had regular contact with the home's staff team and that allowed them to build positive relationships before moving into the home.

As a result of our learning around the registration process exceeding the current Ofsted guidance, we have now factored this into future new children's homes timeline and planning. During this process the Project Manager for the residential service has built a positive relationship with the Ofsted registrations manager, and that will also assist future applications by SCC.

With regards to staff recruitment, as a service we feel the project timescales projected were correct, allowing the home to open and have sufficient staffing for the home to accommodate their first child while recruitment continued. This was confirmed through the Ofsted registration visit as, without sufficient staffing, the home would not have been granted registration. All SCC homes have permanent Registered Managers in post. This reflects very positively on this Council as nationally, the children's homes sector has a 25% vacancy rate of Registered Managers.

As a service we have been contacted by several neighbouring local authorities, who have been seeking advice and guidance on their own children's residential homes development. SCC is known across the sector to be developing and expanding our residential offer and the success and expertise in this area is recognised. We have been able to advise and share our lessons learned from the point of acquisition of a property, through to registration. It is extremely positive for this Council that other local authorities are seeing the progress that we are making with our residential estate capital project for looked after children and care leavers.

- c) Across nine of the eleven operational homes there are a number of vacancies, the highest being for Residential Support Workers. These vacancies are across all homes. The range of vacancies is between 47% and 11%. All other areas have the required number of staff.

Position	No. of vacancies
Residential Support Worker	42
Handyperson	4.5
Housekeeper	2.5

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

**23. EBER KINGTON (EWELL COURT, AURIOL & CUDDINGTON) TO ASK:
(4th Question)**

For the second year running the grass verge cutting across the county has, on a regular basis, been of an unacceptable standard.

Does the Cabinet Member have a coherent strategy, that he can share with Members, to ensure that this does not happen in year three?

RESPONSE:

Since the agency agreements ended with several district and borough councils for grass cutting, the County Council has made a number of significant improvements. For example, a problem experienced last year was the lack of accurate records defining what areas of highway should be cut. This has been corrected and Members will recall that they were invited to comment on any anomalies in their areas last autumn. We have also increased the number of “blue heart” sites where there is local support to not cut verges.

It is acknowledged that the very wet weather in March and April did impact on some of our contractors’ programmes. This combined with the exceptional growth conditions in May and June has meant that in some areas we have struggled to keep up. In response to this however, extra resources have been brought in to assist in getting the programme back on track.

As Members will be aware, we have increased the number of grass cuts from four to six this year, but this is still significantly less than what was previously undertaken by some of the districts and boroughs under the agency agreements. It is worth noting that for these locations the grass will still be longer even when it is cut, and in the short term look more scruffy, than perhaps some residents have been used to. In terms of managing the visual standard of the grass verge cutting, our contractors should blow the grass from the footways and the carriageway (where safe to do so). We have asked all Highway officers to report any issues they see to the team that manages grass cutting and these are then quickly addressed with our contractor.

We will continue to seek to improve the service for future years and are progressing the plans for 2025/26. This includes having recently completed a procurement process which will increase the number of contractors we can use for grass verge cutting in future years. When these plans are finalised for the 2025/26 season, they will be shared with Members.

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