

West Sussex County Council – Written Questions

6 November 2020

1. Written question from Cllr Quinn for reply by the Cabinet Member for Economy and Corporate Resources

Question

The Cabinet Member will no doubt be aware that during August Capita reported a £28.5m loss in its half year results having suffered a 'significant' hit from the COVID-19 crisis, with the firm warning investors that it is unlikely it will generate sustainable cash flow for up to two years; furthermore it has announced that it intends to close around a hundred offices.

I understand there is a Task and Finish Group underway looking at the options for the resources currently outsourced to Capita once the contract ends in 2022.

Can the Cabinet Member tell me whether the current financial position and estate review will have any impact on the plans for the contract and what are the contingency plans, if any, before their contract will end in 2022?

Answer

Capita half-year results were published and shared with the County Council's Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Support Services on 18 August 2020. They highlighted and recognised the challenges faced by Capita in respect of COVID-19 and a reduction in revenue and profits. Capita has informed the County Council of its continued commitment to the contract. Robust contract controls and governance are in place, managed and maintained. These are monitored and reviewed in collaboration with Capita thereby ensuring both parties are as up to date as possible in this fast changing and evolving external environment.

Exit management schedules and plans within the contract for the transfer to the County Council and/or a replacement service provider of services, staff and assets at the end of the contract in September 2022 are reviewed on a regular and timely basis. If the financial position of Capita leads to an earlier exit of the contract, the exit plan in the contract would be utilised.

In relation to estates, Capita utilises the County Council's buildings to accommodate staff delivering services provided under both the Support Services Outsourcing and Information Technology Outsourcing Contracts. It is not anticipated the reduction of Capita's estate will have any impact on contractual performance.

2. Written question from Cllr Atkins for reply by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Question

As a newly appointed local authority governor for Durrington Infant and Junior Federated Schools (for which I express a personal interest).

I have become acutely aware of the emotional strain on teachers having to prepare and give the normal lessons but also having to prepare and give the online lessons to those pupils that are self-isolating. And all whilst in addition to having to cover giving lessons for those colleagues that are themselves self-isolating.

As the situation may be similar for teaching staff across the county, what can therefore be done to assist the emotional wellbeing of the teaching staff and the pupils they teach?

Answer

Staff wellbeing is a key concern for the Council, for governors and also for school leaders. The Council's school effectiveness team is actively discussing staff wellbeing issues in their link adviser visits this term. Guidance has been provided to schools and governors on managing fair workloads for staff. A programme of staff and student wellbeing is planned to be rolled out over the next six months, starting in November, to provide training and support to a dedicated member of staff from each school to support wellbeing and explore strategies to support staff and students. The Council already subscribes to the Employee Assist programme which provides telephone support to employees needing help and counselling. The Council is currently exploring an additional and commercially provided welfare support package for headteachers.

The organisation of schools into learning bubbles has been managed by schools according to their own staffing and pupil needs. Schools are appropriately managing their own staff to ensure that sufficient support and time for planning and preparation is maintained. The number of schools with learning bubbles temporarily isolated is relatively low at this point with most schools running face to face teaching for most children. Some schools have explored redeploying staff to plan online learning and others are actively developing banks of online resources to support staff to reduce additional pressure. Such arrangements are best organised according to each school's needs.

3. Written question from Cllr M Jones for reply by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Question

Can the Cabinet Member please confirm:

- (a) How many pupils being educated in West Sussex were receiving free school meals as of 1 March 2020 (an overall figure and also broken down to Borough and District level, if available);
- (b) How many pupils being educated in West Sussex were receiving free school meals as of 1 October 2020 (an overall figure and also broken down to Borough and District level, if available);
- (c) How many parents of pupils in West Sussex applied for free school meals between 1 May and 1 October 2020 but were advised they were not eligible to receive them (an overall figure and also broken down to Borough and District level, if available). Please also provide figures for the same period in 2019.
- (d) How much it would cost for an alternative school meal for each pupil eligible for free school meals to be provided for each day of the October half-term break

and each day of the Christmas school break to be provided; and

- (e) That the Government has provided the County Council with sufficient funding to meet the cost outlined in (d) above.

Answer

- (a) At the time of the January 2020 schools census there were 11,469 children eligible for a Free School Meal (FSM) in West Sussex, around 10% of the total school roll. A breakdown by district is currently being analysed and will be provided in due course.
- (b) The County Council is still awaiting analysis of October census data. However, we are aware of an additional 6000 FSM applications being processed since January with approximately 3,600 additional children qualifying for FSM. During that period there will also be a number of children who are no longer eligible for FSM as they have left school or their family circumstances may have changed. It is likely that the FSM number in West Sussex is currently around 15,000. Comparing the numbers of children newly qualifying for FSM between 1 April and 30 September in 2019 and 2020 shows that the increase was approximately 850.
- (c) See (b) above.
- (d) Schools are currently funded for provided schools meals during term time through their school budget, which is calculated through an agreed formula as part of the Dedicated Schools Grant. FSM funding is included within the additional needs section within the formula and for 2020/21 is calculated at the rate of £450 per eligible pupil. During term-time it costs £11.75 per week to provide a meal. The national voucher scheme introduced by the Government for children eligible for a FSM, and which also covered the May and summer holiday period, provided vouchers for each week at £15 per eligible child. During the October half term support was provided for families in need including access to food and broader support. Few families took this support up but, in addition to the Community Hubs, charity foodbanks are also available and some schools have local arrangements with local supermarkets to support their children in need.
- (e) Decisions are still awaited regarding any additional funding from central government to support the provision of meals during the Christmas break.

4. Written question from Cllr Kirsty Lord for reply by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Question

Following the decision by the Government not to support the provision of vouchers for children eligible for Free School Meals during half term, and the ongoing lack of clarity around subsequent school holidays including Christmas, could the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills please confirm:

- (a) The number and the percentage of children receiving free school meals by district and by type of school (primary, secondary, SEN, Alternative Provision/

Academies and free schools) in West Sussex in February 2020 and October 2020;

- (b) Provide details of any communications between West Sussex County Council and any or all of West Sussex Members of Parliament (MPs), Department for Education, government ministers and Secretaries of State concerning Free School Meals between March 2020 and today;
- (c) That West Sussex County Council will be fully funding the provision of vouchers for children eligible for free school meals during the Christmas holidays and subsequent school holidays in the absence of any funding by the Government; and
- (d) Join the Liberal Democrat group in thanking all those businesses and individuals who stepped into the breach during half term to ensure West Sussex children did not go hungry when the Government chose not to act?

Answer

- (a) There were 11,469 West Sussex children eligible for a Free School Meal in the January 2020 census which is 10% of the total school roll. A breakdown by district is currently being analysed and will be provided in due course. The County Council are still awaiting analysis of October 2020 census data. However, we are aware of a further 6,000 FSM applications that have been processed since January with approximately 3,600 additional children qualifying for FSM*. During that period there will also be a number of children who are no longer eligible for FSM as they have left school or their family circumstances may have changed. It is likely that the FSM number in West Sussex is currently around 15,000. It is not possible to provide a further breakdown of the data to the level requested.

* Comparing the numbers of children newly qualifying for FSM between 1 April and 30 September in 2019 and 2020 shows that the increase was approximately 850.

- (b) MPs receive a monthly Covid update and this includes updates on several issues including the position on free school meals.
- (c) During the October half term-break access to support for families in need was successfully provided through the Community Hubs. The County Council is considering the most appropriate way of continuing to support our most challenged families to ensure that families in need are able to access that assistance. The Community Hubs are planning on how to ensure support is available over the Christmas break for those families in need to ensure that they are able to access food pending any decision on the provision of Free School Meal vouchers by the Government.
- (d) The Council applauds and thanks everyone including businesses, local charities, the Community Hub workers and all those who tirelessly work to support our families in need through holiday periods and throughout the year.

5. Written question from Cllr Morwen Millson for reply by the Cabinet Member for Fire & Rescue and Communities

In his briefing note on support for families in need on Tuesday, 27 October 2020 the Leader wrote of the distribution of 3,437 urgent food parcels being delivered across the County. Can the Cabinet Member for Fire & Rescue and Communities please tell the Council:

- (a) What exactly is in a parcel;
- (b) How many people and how many meals does a single parcel cover;
- (c) How much does one parcel cost to pack and deliver;
- (d) Can they be adjusted for individual children's tastes, diets or food allergies, or do you get what you are given;
- (e) How many were distributed to families:
 - (i) in total; and
 - (ii) in receipt of Free School Meals during half term?; and
- (f) Were the boxes recently distributed to families part of the original consignment intended for emergencies where shielding and self-isolating people could get them if they had no-one to get food for them, or is the content more geared to families?

Answer

- (a) During the COVID pandemic we have issued a number of food boxes that contained different food types to meet individual need. Our fresh food box which Adams provide contains a selection of various goods including milk, cheeses, fruit, tinned goods e.g. soup, vegetables, baked beans, tuna tins, pasta, crisps, eggs, toilet roll (a full list provided at the end of this response). This food option meets the need of two adults, enough food for a maximum of one week. If the household is larger than two then multiple boxes can be delivered and if there is an ongoing need, the customer will receive a delivery weekly. This food parcel has been supplemented with toiletry items which have been purchased separately by the County Council and are packed and included by Adams.

To supplement the fresh food box, we provide a breakfast box, also provided by Adams, which contains a selection of breakfast goods including milk, cereal, butter, tea bags, bread, fruit (a full list is provided at the end of this response). This food option meets the need of two adults, enough food for a maximum of one week. As referenced above, if the household is larger than two, then multiple boxes can be delivered and, if there is an ongoing need, the customer will receive a delivery weekly.

To support the provision of fresh foods, we provide food with a longer shelf life, provided by Aldi, including a selection of cereal, fruit juices, tinned chopped tomatoes, sauces, rice, pasta, tea/coffee, tuna, soup, biscuits, tinned goods, soap and toothpaste. The content of this food option will meet the need of two adults, enough food for a maximum of one week. If there is an ongoing need,

the customer will receive a delivery of one box per week. These parcels have already been packed and are stored within County Council venues and distributed by Council staff.

To support residents who are unable to cook for themselves, Appetito will provide a two-course meal for lunch and a 'teatime pack' which is a cold dinner. This option has been enriched by the inclusion of the Adams breakfast box, outlined above, as part of the request. Individual meals are delivered each day for three days as standard, the Community Hub will then review, and continue the support for as long as the customer requires.

- (b) Covered in (a) above.
- (c) The cost of each food option are as follows;
 - Adams Standard Food Box: £31.05 increasing to £35 with inclusion of toiletry items sourced under separate contract
 - Adams breakfast: £10.85
 - Aldi same day parcel: £17.57
 - Appetito request: £38.30 this includes £10.85 for Adams breakfast
- (d) To enable us to meet individual children's tastes, diets or food allergies, we are able to make special requests through the Adams options, we can amend the contents of the box or add/remove items if required. In providing support for vulnerable people who were encouraged to Shield during the earlier Lockdown period the Community Hub co-ordinated County Council staff to undertake personalised shopping activity and deliver items to residents to meet their specific dietary requirements (e.g. when nationally delivered food box did not accommodate).
- (e)
 - (i) The Community Hub was stood up quickly to respond to the COVID crisis to initially support the shielding requirement and therefore there are gaps within our data as it was not built into the recording system e.g. how many families received food parcels. The Community Hub now collates household size. To support families and larger households we send out multiple boxes, for example one to two people will get one box, three to four will get two boxes, five to six will get three boxes and so on.
 - (ii) There has been one request for food to support children in receipt of Free School Meals during the October half term, and this was supplied to a family on 29 October.
- (f) The boxes recently distributed to families are part of the contracts and purchase arrangements originally instigated to support those without access to food and essential supplies. This included support for people who were shielding, did not have a support network, were self-isolating and more recently experiencing hardship. The content of these options has not been amended, unless an individual response to special dietary requirements require this.

Adams Food Boxes - Standard box: £31.05

1 x 2L semi-skimmed milk
1 x 200g cheddar block
6 x single mixed apples

- 6 x single banana
- 1 x kg potato
- 1 x kg leeks
- 1 x kg carrot
- 1 x 500g tomato
- 10 x single tea bags (approximately 200)
- 2 x single Spanish onion
- 1 x 500g Just Like Butter
- 1 x kg porridge
- 1 x 400g Heinz baked bean
- 1 x 800g mixed bean
- 2 x vegetable soup Baxters
- 2 x 400g chopped tomato
- 1 x Hills bourbons/digestive
- 2 x 400g tuna
- 1 x medium brown bread
- 1 x 6 medium eggs
- 1 x penne pasta
- 4 x single bags crisps
- 10 x single sugar sticks
- 1 x 4 toilet roll

Breakfast box: £10.85

- 1 x 2L semi-skimmed milk
- 1 x 500g Just Like Butter
- 1 x cereal (Rice Krispies, Cornflakes, Bran Flakes)
- 1 x 20 single tea bags
- 1 x Hills digestive biscuit
- 1 x medium brown bread
- 3 x single banana
- 3 x single mixed apples

6. Written question from Cllr Louise Goldsmith for reply by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

Question

In the earlier part of 2020, Highways England announced investment in the Chemroute, a cycle route between Chichester and Emsworth, promoted and supported by local communities and Parish Councils for the last seven years.

Acknowledgement of this proposal was well received. However, the plans produced by Highways England were disappointing, involving shared pavements for pedestrians and cyclists and there were considerable objections to the scheme design. As a result, the Chichester and District Cycling Forum produced its own report, 'An Engagement Proposal', which has been described 'authoritative' and 'well researched'.

Since the publication of the Chemroute scheme the Government has published the Gear Change document and LTN1/20, the good guidance document and has also announced the set-up of Active Travel England to oversee and encourage cycling improvements. However, the policies in these documents seriously conflict with the scheme Highways England produced.

Could the Cabinet Member provide this Council with a complete assurance that this and any future schemes proposed by Highways England will have incorporated the same principles and, in particular, that they will physically and safely separate cyclists from pedestrians, and both, from volume motor traffic.

Answer

Following the publication of LTN 1/20 in late July, Highways England is reviewing the proposals outlined in the Chemroute Options Appraisal.

LTN1/20 rightly focuses on providing separation but the document allows for shared use under certain circumstances. There are sections of the A259 where the available highway width may make separation difficult to achieve.

Highways England, like any highway authority, will pay due regard to national standards and guidance when producing scheme proposals; currently, they are procuring a design and delivery partner to undertake the review and produce a detailed design, which will be subject to a public consultation exercise in due course. The County Council will respond to the formal consultation.

7. Written question from Cllr Louise Goldsmith for reply by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

Question

Firstly, the Government should be congratulated in producing, in July this year, Gear Change, a bold vision for walking and cycling, together with Local Transport Note 1/20, a new cycling design guide. These documents highlight, in an integrated way, a significant direction for future sustainable travel that would also help tackle climate change, improve the air quality and, in turn, would make a significant contribution to people's health.

The four key themes of the document show a real understanding of the current situation and what needs to be done.

During lockdown many people took up cycling, encouraged by quieter roads - this clearly demonstrates people will cycle when they feel safe. The importance, therefore, of encouraging more people to cycle is to ensure safe cycle routes.

Please could the Cabinet Member confirm:

- (a) His total support of the Gear Change document;
- (b) That he will personally undertake to see that all policies in the documents such as the LTN 1/20, which are associated with Gear Change document, are formally adopted as County Council Highways policies, including updating the County Council's Walking and Cycling Strategy as soon as possible and certainly before the end of the Council's term;
- (c) Would the County Council encourage its partner authorities - District and Borough Councils - to follow the same approach when determining planning applications;
- (d) In a recent communication to Councillors, Grant Shapps, Transport Secretary, wrote: "That is why in the second tranche of funding, those authorities which

have demonstrated genuine plans to consult their local communities and embrace good design principles will receive all of or, in some cases, more funding than their indicative allocations". In the light of this direction provided by the Secretary of State, will the Cabinet Member ensure, by a formal policy, that whenever new cycle routes are proposed the local Cycling Forums become formal consultees from inception; and

- (e) The Gear Change document is looking for 12 'Willing Local Authority Areas' to benefit from 'intensive investment in 'mini Holland Schemes'. Will West Sussex County Council be putting itself forward to be one of the 12 authorities?

Answer

- (a) The vision of the Gear Change document and its objectives are fully supported.
- (b) LTN 1/20 has been in development for some time, which is why this Council developed its own cycling design guide (published in August 2019). The guide referred to existing best practice guidance available at the time (e.g. Sustrans, Greater Manchester, Welsh Government). The guide is available to developers via the website and is referred to in planning consultation. The guide also reminds developers to refer to any new or updated national guidance published after August 2019. The West Sussex Walking and Cycling Strategy is due to be updated in light of LTN 1/20 and the Local Walking & Cycling Infrastructure Plans which are being developed by the County Council, South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), and a number of the district and borough councils. The revised document will be open to consultation before it is adopted.
- (c) The County Council is encouraging the district and borough councils and the SDNPA (as the Local Planning Authorities) to adopt this same approach. The County Council, as the Local Highway Authority, is a statutory consultee in the planning process.
- (d) The Council already consults the cycle forums as a matter of course in respect of schemes and policies.
- (e) The County Council is not taking part in the mini-Holland project because the focus has been on developing Local Walking & Cycling Infrastructure Plans in partnership with the district and borough councils.