

## West Sussex County Council – Written Questions

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**16 July 2021**

**1.** Written question from **Cllr Beccy Cooper** for reply by **the Leader**

### **Question**

The County Council's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in the Reset Plan are largely unambitious and very modest.

- (a) Please explain the general formula for setting these KPIs, and why they are not more aspirational?
- (b) Please comment specifically on why the target on reducing roads requiring maintenance across the county (KPI 18) is only 2% across four years?
- (c) Please comment specifically on why the target to increase waste recycling is only a 4% increase, from 53% to 57%, over four years, when comparator Councils surpassed both these figures a number of years ago?

### **Answer**

- (a) The priorities in Our Council Plan provide us with a framework for the new context we will now need to operate in as we work to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our residents and communities.

Aligning the budget setting process with Our Council Plan will ensure we remain focused on delivering against our agreed outcomes and that the County Council's limited resources are deployed to best effect. The performance indicators set out in the Plan enable the impact of our work to be measured and ensure that the Council remains on track to deliver on commitments.

Members, staff and almost 50 local partners played a key role in the development of the Plan's priorities and outcomes.

- (b) Year-on-year, the road network deteriorates due to the impact of general wear on the road surface from traffic and the effects of high summer temperatures and winter weather, therefore, any target to reduce the number roads requiring maintenance is challenging for many, if not all local authorities.

KPI 18 focuses on the A and B class roads which carry the greatest traffic volumes, including heavy goods vehicles. The KPI measure recognises the economic importance of these roads to keep traffic moving within and through the county.

The County Council's Highways Asset Management Strategy sets out the approach to efficient and effective Highway Infrastructure Asset Management and how the Asset Management Policy will be delivered. The Strategy and Policy, which form part of the Highways Infrastructure Asset Management framework, were approved last year. The [full documents](#) are published on the website.

To achieve a reduction in the roads requiring maintenance requires increased targeted and sustained funding balanced against the needs of all other highway assets such as our footways, bridges, traffic signals and the like. The Council agreed £12m additional capital funding for Highway maintenance in setting the 2021/22 budget. Any greater reduction would require significant increase in resources and result in greater disruption to undertake works on a very busy highway network.

The West Sussex Transport Plan is currently being reviewed to update our strategic approach to investment in, and management of, the transport network.

- (c) As the waste Disposal Authority, the County Council's recycling rate, calculated in accordance with Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) methodology, is highly dependent on the recycling performance of the Waste Collection Authorities (district and borough councils) in the county. The 2020/21 recycling rate for the County Council's Household Waste Recycling Sites is 66.6%. However, for the District and Boroughs the rates are lower.

<b>Percentage of Households Waste sent for recycling, reuse or composting (NI192)</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
Adur District Council	41.1%
Arun District Council	42.3%
Chichester District Council	44.5%
Crawley Borough Council	31.9%
Horsham District Council	53.5%
Mid Sussex District Council	41.7%
Worthing Borough Council	41.5%
West Sussex	53.1%

Where some comparator counties have higher rates, this tends to be associated with separated food waste collections. The County Council has been encouraging our West Sussex Waste Partnership (WSWP) partners to trial separate food waste collection since 2017 and is pleased to be working with Arun District Council on a trial which commenced in May 2021.

Others aspire to trial and/or adopt this service and it is expected the Government will mandate separate food waste collection by 2023/24. DEFRA are undertaking a major consultation around proposals for 'consistency in collection'. In our joint response, WSWP partners supported the proposal for separate food waste collection as quickly as contracts allow.

The KPI of 57% by 2025 is realistic in relation to this aspiration while still ahead of the government-imposed target of 55% by 2025. The further step-change required to meet the 2035 target of 65% will require introduction of food waste and other new recycling streams. The County Council is now working with WSWP partners on the development of new Joint Resources and Waste Strategy for the county which will further encourage co-ordinated working with district and borough councils to meet these challenges and do so well before 2035.

**2. Written question from Cllr Smith for reply by Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue**

**Question**

I understand that before a traveller encampment can be given notice to leave after 24 hours, a welfare check must be carried out on the travellers who are present at an inspection. Could the Cabinet Member please outline:

- (a) What constitutes a welfare check?
- (b) Who would carry out the welfare check?
- (c) Outline what action the County Council might take if there were welfare concerns?

**Answer**

- (a) and (b)

Once a report of an unauthorised encampment is received either online or by phone the County Council's Gypsy & Traveller Service will dispatch a Council representative to visit the site as soon as practically possible to carry out a welfare check. This will usually be the same or following day depending on the time of day for arrival/reporting. Visits are conducted at weekends and on bank holidays.

A welfare check is to establish whether there are exceptional circumstances of the individuals which may need to be taken into account in managing the unauthorised encampment. The check will seek to identify any health, social care, education, or wider issues which may require action or advice or may influence the course of action in response to the encampment. This could cover issues such as pregnancy, hospitalisation of a family member, regular medical treatment needs.

- (c) Assessment will cover any need for social worker or health practitioner assessment or support or assistance from a traveller education officer, or wider assistance in relation to financial welfare, housing, and vehicle issues. These would be attended to if needed.

At present we also enquire whether occupants would like information or access to lateral flow tests and vaccinations, and where appropriate and possible work with public health colleagues to facilitate this.

If no issues are identified, then it may be appropriate for the County Council representative to immediately issue a Notice of Direction to leave the site within 24 hours (in line with good practice for local authorities).

Where capacity allows, travellers on public land in West Sussex can be directed by Sussex Police to the transit site near Chichester which has capacity for nine caravans with a maximum stay of three months.

**3. Written question from Cllr Quinn for reply by Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change**

**Question**

The Prime Minister plans to ban the sale of petrol and diesel cars by 2030-35. The UK's electric vehicle infrastructure has developed significantly in the past five to ten years but in order to deal with the huge cost is this County Council ready? As you are aware, 40% of West Sussex residents homes do not have driveways, so how will they be able to charge their vehicles? At present there are around 3-800 rapid charge points around the country. 69% of electric car users say that not enough charging points are available. Could the Cabinet Member tell me:

- (a) How many new charge points have been installed recently, if any?
- (b) The name of the new contractor who will be installing them and will there be more than one contractor?
- (c) What is the life of batteries and when they run out of power where will they be stored?

**Answer**

- (a) The County Council has not installed any new charge points recently.
- (b) The County Council is currently leading a partnership of six of the seven district and borough councils across the county seeking to procure a single market-based supplier to deliver a charge point network across the county. The tender has been published and members will be informed of the outcome of the procurement.
- (c) The typical life of an EV battery is eight to ten years, shorter in commercial or high mileage users. In terms of responsibility for disposal, electric vehicle propulsion batteries come within the definition of 'industrial batteries' within the Waste Batteries and Accumulators Regulations 2009.

These Regulations require producers (original equipment manufacturers) to take back waste industrial batteries free of charge and within a reasonable time from an end-user when requested by that end-user.

Vehicle manufacturers are therefore the default recipient of the batteries at end of life. This is an immature industry as there are currently very few end-of-life EV batteries, but the value of materials used will drive recycling of the majority of components.

**4. Written question from Cllr Baxter for reply by Cabinet Member for Finance and Property**

**Question**

As the County Council enters an economic recovery stage, can the Cabinet Member please advise:

- (a) What proportion of the overall budget is allocated to supporting local businesses in West Sussex, and;

- (b) Will this reflect an increased direct spend to support the recovery of our local economies?

### **Answer**

The Council's role in supporting local businesses as part of the economic recovery is set out in the Economic Reset approved by the Cabinet in November 2020. The plan was developed to meet business as usual requirements, but in response to the pandemic the following areas of new or additional focus were agreed:

- Crawley, the wider Gatwick Diamond economy and the businesses and people severely impacted by the aviation crisis and current position with Gatwick Airport
- Skills and employment reflecting the significant impact COVID-19 is having on jobs, the self-employed and those seeking to enter the labour market in the county
- The needs of some sectors including the adult social care market, and tourism and the visitor economy
- Progressing work with District and Borough partners to accelerate the adoption and application of digital technology and skills to help address challenges and progress opportunities.

The Council's support to local businesses is reflected in the council's budgets in a number of different areas:

- The economic team - £2m p.a.
- Projects planned in the five-year capital programme
  - Digital Infrastructure - £6.7m
  - Rural Connectivity - £8m
  - Crawley Growth Programme -£21.2m
  - Growth Programme - £5m
  - Worthing Public Realm - £1.4m
  - Burgess Hill Growth Programme - £13.7m

In total the capital projects supporting local businesses is about 10% of the total value of the capital programme. The economic team is about .3% of the revenue budget.

In addition, the Council's social value framework, applied during the Council's procurement process, highlights the importance of added value activities such as job creation and using local suppliers, business can deliver when contracting to deliver services.

There is also a Business Rate Pool fund administered in collaboration with our districts and boroughs that allocates additional funding for projects across West Sussex. Decisions on distribution are agreed by all Leaders and are focussed on economic priorities. The current balance of funds is £7.9m.

Financial help for businesses during the pandemic has been provided by the Government and its support to local government has been administered through our districts and boroughs. The county did receive funding for care homes, and these funds were passed on in accordance with government guidelines. In addition, we arranged for quick payments for our suppliers to assist with cashflow and continued to pay some suppliers who were not able deliver services because of the lockdown such as school transport and school meal providers.

**5. Written question from Cllr Smith for reply by Cabinet Member for Finance and Property**

**Question**

- (a) Can the Cabinet Member advise what support (both practically and financially) has been provided to English language schools in West Sussex since the start of the pandemic by both central government and the County Council?
- (b) Would the Cabinet Member consider providing business rates relief for these businesses that feel they have been forgotten?

**Answer**

- (a) The Government has offered various forms of financial support for businesses during the pandemic. Some schemes are administered through central government and others through local government. At the local government level these schemes were organised through district and borough councils as well as local enterprise partnerships. It is for these bodies to determine the level of support available to English language schools. Our [Economic Reset Plan](#) sets out our approach to supporting businesses. Our lead officers for economy are not aware of any issues raised by English language schools but will explore with district and borough officers at future meetings.
- (b) Business Rates Relief is administered by districts and boroughs. English language schools who have queries regarding reliefs should raise their questions with the relevant district and borough.

**6. Written question from Cllr Sharp for reply by Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

**Question**

This is a newly-elected council, and I am hoping for a new balance in how we, as a council, think about the way we travel. In the past, this Council often seems to have assumed that a 'transport' problem could only be solved with a 'highways' solution. I would therefore like assurance from the Cabinet Member that there will be a stronger focus on the 'transport' side of things, and that from now on the Highways Authority will be doing its utmost to support Active Travel.

In this context, I would be grateful if you could bring clarity to Twitter rumours that we will not be eligible to bid for Tranche 3 of Active Travel funds. Shoreham residents – posting on Twitter – are already assuming these funds are irretrievably lost for the Shoreham Cycle scheme, and they regard this loss as a real blow for those wanting to travel more sustainably and those who do not have access to a car. It is also a blow for tourists. And more generally this is extremely worrying news for all West Sussex residents wherever they live if they want to see more sustainable travel routes being progressed.

While we surely all welcome the new round of consultation on the scheme, which was announced recently, I would like to understand the ramifications of the possible bar on bidding imposed on the County Council by central government.

- (a) When will West Sussex next be able to bid?

- (b) How many other local authorities are affected?
- (c) What lessons can we learn from this? For example, was the Council disqualified for not following Department for Transport (DfT) guidance, which was already in place, or did the rules as set out by the DfT only become clear retrospectively?
- (d) If the former, how will we go about ensuring that we better follow DfT guidance so as not to disqualify ourselves in the future?
- (e) More generally, what is our approach going to be for wider encouragement of active travel? Have we accepted that we need a major change in the way we carry out active travel projects?
- (f) How can we prove to the DfT that we are now following LTN 1/20 guidance more closely and will not be wasting the Government's money?
- (g) How can we demonstrate to the DfT – and to our residents – that this new council has a new outlook and different ways from the old, and will in the future be deserving of funding?

### **Answer**

The Cabinet Member understands that the County Council is one of an undisclosed number of authorities that are barred from bidding into the Active Travel Fund (ATF) 3. A letter has been sent to the Secretary of State asking why this is the case given the County Council believes the grant conditions for the Emergency Active Travel Fund were followed but has yet to receive a response.

- (a) The next opportunity will be ATF4 which is likely to be during the summer of 2022. However, this is contingent on the successful delivery of the schemes associated with the County Council's ATF2 award.
- (b) Not currently known.
- (c) It is not clear why the County Council has been asked to refrain from bidding for ATF3. The letter from the Secretary of State suggests that in removing the Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF) schemes, the County Council did not demonstrate good value for money. This, however, appears to be a retrospective view as in all cases the Council followed guidance and grant conditions for EATF. As stated above, the Secretary of State has been asked for an explanation.
- (d) The County Council follows guidance and grant conditions. In order to best manage DfT and Government's expectations, officers are in close consultation with DfT officers to ensure our actions are understood and agreed. As mentioned above, successful delivery of ATF2 is key to be allowed to bid in the future.
- (e) This is currently being considered as part of the development of the revised West Sussex Transport Plan (WSTP) and an Active Travel Strategy (previously the Walking and Cycling Strategy) together with partnership work with the District and Borough Councils. The Cabinet Member has established Task and Finish Groups to advise on the both the WSTP and the Active Travel Strategy.

- (f) It is not accepted that the County Council has wasted the Government's money. All schemes are/will be assessed for alignment with LTN 1/20 to ensure high quality infrastructure is delivered. In the future, the Government intends to constitute a national body called Active Travel England to assist authorities in delivering their ambitions.
- (g) The County Council has made great progress in developing Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) with the District and Borough Councils and the South Downs National Park Authority. The DfT is well aware of this progress and is very supportive of this approach. The review of the West Sussex Transport Plan and Active Travel Strategy together with the LCWIPs will define the County Council's ambitions and make the case for future funding.

**7. Written question from Cllr Cornell for reply by Cabinet Member for Support Services and Economic Development**

**Question**

Has an assessment been made, or will one be made, of the money (and miles of car travel) saved during the COVID-induced period of virtual meetings, and has any work been undertaken to review which meetings could reasonably continue to be held remotely to ensure we honour this Council's commitment, set out in Our Council Plan 2021-25, of prioritising a 'cross cutting' theme of Climate Change?

**Answer**

There have been both financial and Climate Change benefits due to meetings being held virtually. Since the beginning of April 2020, the County Council has saved around £9,000 a month on member meetings, through reduced member travel, refreshments, and venue hire. Of the monthly savings, around £6,000 a month is saved on travel. This equates to 13,000 miles not travelled and a saving of around four tons CO2 equivalent per month. This equates to around 48 tonnes CO2 saved from April to March 2021 through virtual meetings rather than members travelling to meetings.

In addition, the pandemic has impacted on the way the County Council delivers its services to its customers and how it operates internally. Many service areas have had to adapt to different ways of working to enable the business to continue in an efficient and effective manner.

As per government guidelines, the County Council has asked its employees to work from home where possible. To enable the business to deliver its services, new IT software (including Microsoft Teams), has been rolled out which has enabled virtual business meetings to take place and for staff to stay in touch with their teams.

In total the Council has seen savings of just under £3m from these revised working arrangements with the largest of these being staff mileage and travel £1.248m and utility cost savings from reduced occupancy in buildings £0.897m.