

West Sussex County Council – Written Questions

17 December 2021

1. Written question from **Cllr Smith** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**

Question

Members will of course be aware of the shocking case of the tragic death of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and the concerns raised about possible missed opportunities as a result of lockdown.

Given that the most recent children's services monitoring report by Ofsted stated that only 81.6% of Child Protection cases received statutory visits, how can members be reassured that the 18.4% who were not subject to those visits at the time are now receiving the most appropriate support?

Can the Cabinet Member reassure me that any lessons to be learnt from this tragic case will be taken into account at West Sussex to ensure as far as possible this doesn't happen again?

Answer

This tragic event is receiving a concerted response at both national and West Sussex level. The Department for Education (DfE) has announced an independent national review, and Ofsted will be holding an inquiry into the circumstances of the case. The County Council is committed to adopting into practice any changes needed from learning arising from these investigations. At local level, the West Sussex Principal Social Worker is currently coordinating meetings with frontline practitioners to reflect on the case.

Standards are set for visiting for all children open to social care in West Sussex, depending on need and risk. With children on a Child Protection Plan (CPP), the standard is a visit at least every 10 working days. The 81.6% compliance noted for this indicator means that these children were seen within 10 working days; the remaining 18.4% of children have also been visited, but, due to a variety of circumstances, including non-attendance of the child/family, outside of this timescale. Therefore, children subject to CPP are visited on a regular basis, and a missed visit will always be promptly rescheduled. During the initial pandemic lockdown some risk-assessed visiting was done virtually, but the authority rapidly moved to a standard regime of face-to-face visits for CPP cases, in order to give the greatest possible assurance of the child's wellbeing.

All children subject to a CPP are supported by a Core Group of professionals, including health and schools and the child's parents. This group will respond rapidly to any concerns raised – for instance where there are repeated missed visits due to the child not being at home – and this can lead to a higher level of intervention being deemed necessary. These mechanisms, together with regular management supervision of social workers and their cases, ensure that the County Council has a robust and

timely approach to intervening to safeguard the child where there are any causes for concern.

2. Written question from **Cllr Lord** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills**

Question

Following the announcement of a roll out of Mental Health First Aiders in every school at the Council meeting on 19 March, could the Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills confirm:

- (a) How many trained mental health first aiders there were in West Sussex schools and how many schools had mental health first aiders in March?
- (b) How many trained mental health first aiders there are in West Sussex schools and how many schools have mental health first aiders today?
- (c) If not yet in all schools, when will all schools have at least one trained mental health first aider?

Please provide the breakdown of these numbers for academies and maintained schools.

Answer

- (a) It is not possible to provide this information as schools do not need to report these numbers to the local authority.
- (b) There are 70 school staff signed up to do the next training event. However, it should be noted that staff do not need to undertake training via the local authority and can also access other providers of Youth Mental Health First Aid.
- (c) There is no requirement for schools to undertake this training. Given the current situation that Covid places on provision of sufficient staff cover it can be difficult to encourage them to take time away from school to undertake this training.

3. Written question from **Cllr Sharp** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills**

Question

- (a) Does West Sussex County Council have an accurate figure, or at least an estimate, of the number of 'ghost children' in the county who no longer attend school due to the Covid pandemic?
- (b) Can you confirm whether this has resulted in lower levels of referrals from schools to social care since March 2020?
- (c) Does the County support the [suggestion by Chief Inspector of Ofsted, Ms Amanda Spielman](#), that a register should be set up of children not attending school?

- (d) Does the County have any plans or initiatives to ensure that these 'ghost children' have an opportunity to re-access full time education?

Answer

The term 'ghost children' appears to refer to children who may not be attending school since they reopened to all children, following periods of partial closure throughout the lockdown periods.

During the last two years when schools have been partially closed in lockdown to the majority of children, they remained open to children of key workers, children with Education Health and Care Plans and those deemed vulnerable. Schools remained in close contact with children in these categories and offered places for face-to-face teaching on site. For those families who did not take up the offer, pastoral care continued. The Pupil Entitlement Team worked alongside colleagues in Children's Social Care and those in SEND and Inclusion to ensure a triangulation between these departments, schools, and families with a focus on vulnerable children.

Schools are now fully open and are required to investigate any child's absence from school. For those where a school does not authorise the absence, they will follow protocols regarding the absences and consider referral to the local authority for non-attendance procedures, should this be appropriate. Schools must also refer matters where they are concerned about the welfare of a child to Children's Social Care who will review all contacts within the continuum of need and appropriate and timely action will be taken.

- (a) The local authority has not been made aware of any schools where they are encountering significant numbers of children absent from school since schools re-opened to all children; and non-attendance referrals are being monitored closely.
- (b) Schools are the second highest referral source to the Integrated Front Door with an average of 25% of overall contacts, this equates to an average of 800 contacts a month. There was a drop in the number of referrals when there were lockdown periods. However, since schools returned, there have been consistent numbers of contacts.
- (c) Schools are already aware of children who are absent and are following procedures, as required in these cases.
- (d) As non-attendance referral levels are consistent with pre-pandemic levels, there are no plans to make any alterations to current practice. Schools should continue to adhere to the current protocols in place in relation to absences and in making referrals regarding any concerns about a child's welfare.

4. Written question from Cllr Oxlade for reply by Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue

Question

In October 2012 I raised the prominence of the 'Tell Us Once' (TUO) service operated by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) which enables those recently bereaved to provide details of their loss to one organisation which is then passed that

on to others, thereby minimising the burden at a very difficult time. The County Council subsequently introduced this service for the benefit of West Sussex residents.

I remain a strong advocate for this valuable service and would be grateful if the Cabinet Member could provide details of what % of residents who registered the death of a family member activated the Tell us Once process in 2019 and 2020 and comment on the extent to which use of the scheme is increasing?

Answer

2019 - 75% of those who registered a death within West Sussex, then activated the Tell Us Once Service (TUO).

2020 - 80% of those who registered a death within West Sussex, then activated the TUO service.

The use of the TUO service continues to be much appreciated by those who need to register a death. The uptake has shown a continuous increase with 2016 and 2017 showing 71% and 72% respectively.

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) are also very pleased to see that West Sussex residents are using their website to self-serve. In 2020, 90% of those who used the service completed it via the DWP website rather than telephoning the DWP helpline.

5. Written question from **Cllr Cornell** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change**

Question

The Cabinet Member is currently consulting West Sussex residents on proposals to make permanent the need to pre-book a slot to dispose of household waste at some of the County's Recycling Centres. Residents have until 21 December 2021 to give their views ahead of a final decision being taken by Cabinet in March 2022.

We are told there is no evidence of a rise in fly-tipping linked to this scheme. However there was a 7.16% increase in fly-tipping incidents in West Sussex between April 2019 and March 2020 compared to the previous year. The increase did not include incidences of fly-tipping on private land which is a growing problem in rural areas. Furthermore, some evidence within Crawley suggests there has been a significant increase both in occurrences and resident reports of fly-tipping since the trial began.

Can the Cabinet Member therefore reassure me that:

- (a) A full assessment of incidences and reports of fly-tipping across the county including any on private land for the duration of the trial has or will be undertaken and reported to Councillors ahead of the Cabinet decision along with comparative data for the same period prior to the pandemic; and
- (b) That comparative data regarding the volume and type of items disposed of both during the trial period and prior to the pandemic will also be provided, with a particular focus on recycling rates, along with any credible explanation as to why the volume(s) has decreased if that is indeed the case?

Answer

- (a) A full breakdown of the data so far as recorded by the district and borough councils will be provided as part of the decision report. This will include information on land where fly tipping has taken place including private land. Nationally fly tipping increased by 16% prior to the launch of the booking system at the end of March 2021. The national average sees 20 incidents of fly tipping per 1,000 people. I can confirm that the South East has 13 incidents per 1,000 people.
- (b) Data recorded at sites will be provided where it is available along with the recycling rate.
6. Written question from **Cllr Atkins** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Question

- (a) Now that the six-month trial period for the Jet Patcher Pothole Pro has completed on 30 November 2021, please can you kindly provide statistics of how many potholes were filled in that time compared with the normal number of potholes that would have been filled without Pothole Pro and with a cost comparison between both methods?
- (b) Also, was the result of the trial period a success and if it was a success will the Jet Patcher Pothole Pro be deployed into regular use?

Answer

- (a) The strategy adopted for the application of the Velocity Jet Patcher (JP) was predominantly focused on a proactive approach to the treatment of deteriorating carriageway condition, focusing on areas that will likely become potholes over the next year or so. The approach to utilising the JP is quite different to that employed by a number of conventional two-person gangs, that deliver the reactive service, for the following reasons:
- The JP was predominantly used to treat areas of the carriageway that do not meet the investigatory levels set out in the Highway Inspection Manual i.e. focusing on larger areas and shallower depths than would contractually be able to deliver through the reactive service with a conventional two-person gang.
 - The repairs being undertaken with the JP, especially on those roads which are showing established signs of deterioration, are considered to last longer than a conventional unsawn repair undertaken by a two-person gang.
 - The speed in which the Jet Patcher operates and delivers individual jobs is far quicker and requires limited traffic management, whereas conventional reactive gangs often require setting up and taking down traffic management.

In terms of key headline operational statistics for the JP 6-month trial:

- Working days in operation – 117

- Number of repairs undertaken – 2,107
- Total sqm undertaken – 7,959
- Average jobs per day – 18
- Average sqm complete per day – 68sqm

Financial comparison:

- The JP trial was agreed to be delivered by Balfour Beatty for £500,000, plus Traffic Management costs of £20,000 totalling of £520,000.
 - Although difficult to compare given the output of sqm per day by the JP, it is expected that to deliver the same volume of sqm with conventional 2 person gangs, five gangs would be required at an approximate cost of £800,000 for the same number of days in operation.
- (b) It is felt that the trial was a success. However, one JP for the entire county is not optimal and, from conversations with other Highway Authorities, there are some that are operating multiple JP units, in some cases up to five units. It is also felt that the benefit of a JP will be more noticeable over a longer period of time and the benefits will compound. Discussions are underway with Balfour Beatty regarding the strategy for delivering the reactive service next year and, subject to funding, it is expected that Velocity will be back in the county with at least two JP units.

Note: The JCB Pothole Pro is a separate piece of equipment which undertakes larger structural pothole/patches. A small trial of this equipment was undertaken earlier in the year and it is hoped to use one next year. The main benefits of the Pothole Pro are increasing output of work, meaning larger structural patches can be undertaken and improved health and safety for the gangs. It is also a multi-function unit, which could be used to supplement other work streams delivered through Lot 1, such as road scraping, vegetation cutting, digging/maintenance of grips and ditches.

7. Written question from **Cllr Condie** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Question

Many Burgess Hill residents have complained over the last six months about localised flooding in the town in many cases due to blocked drainage gullies. They are repeatedly informed that their case is priority 2 and will be dealt with at some future unspecified date. None of these cases have to my knowledge been dealt with.

Will the Cabinet Member please:

- (a) Supply the annual amount spent (or budgeted for in the current year) over the last five years on the gulley clearance contract?
- (b) Provide data on the number of West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (WSFRS) call outs for localised flooding over the same period?
- (c) Provide a target date by which all these accumulated priority 2 cases in Burgess Hill will be cleared?

- (d) Assure the Council that pedestrian and cyclist safety resulting from such localised flooding (and subsequent icing during winter) is being monitored?
- (e) Advise if they intend to revise the 2022/23 gully clearance budget to avoid further degradation of the road surface and alleviate these community concerns?

Answer

(a)

Year	Spend
2021/22*	£1.6m*
2020/21	£1.3m
2019/20	£1.0m
2018/19	£1.2m
2017/18	£1.2m

*Forecasted Spend

Note: Spend is revenue and includes cyclical and ad hoc gully cleansing and jetting

- (b) WSFRS – due to an IT issue, WSFRS cannot access this data at the moment. For information, the emergency call outs attended by highways for flooding in Burgess Hill is as follows:

2016 – 5
 2017 – 5
 2018 – 3
 2019 – 5
 2020 – 12
 2021 – 12

- (c) The latest update for Burgess Hill is as follows:

Priority 1s (P1s)

- There is currently one P1 job that has been committed and is due in the New Year

Priority 2s (P2s)

- 15 P2 jobs have been completed in December
- There are five P2 jobs that have been committed and are due for completion in February 2022. Two more P2s have been identified but the work is not yet committed. The local Senior Highway Steward can update the councillor when work is committed and timeframe is known

Priority 3s (P3s)

- Two P3s have been identified but the work is not yet committed.

We are beginning to work through the P2 work. As these reduce, we will be in a position to commit the next two P2 jobs in Burgess Hill. It is unlikely that we will commit to P3 defects at the current time. These should be monitored, as with all outstanding jobs, by the Stewards.

We have recently deployed two additional jettors to deal with the number of jobs in the system.

- (d) The County Council operates a four-year cyclical drainage cleansing programme across the county in order to ensure that drainage systems are working efficiently. In addition to this, officers visit sites with reported drainage issues to ensure what remedial works are required to ensure the system is working to its capacity, and works are prioritised accordingly. In emergency situations that could potentially impact all road users, the Council's reactive contractor will respond to issues of flooding within two hours of receiving notification. They will try to resolve the situation where they can or request the drainage contractor to assist with clearing standing water. Where it is not possible, or there are a significant number of emergencies at one time, the site will be made safe either by barriers around the flooded areas or by erecting warning signs in all directions (significant flooding may result in a road being closed). This will be followed up as soon as possible after the event has passed to ascertain what additional remedial works are required.
- (e) The budget will be set in February and the outcome cannot be pre-empted at this time.

8. Written question from **Cllr Condie** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Question

Over the last six months a number of residents of Burgess Hill have requested new parking controls schemes for the areas they live in (e.g., Norman Road, Lower Church Road, Victoria Industrial Estate). During this time officers have advised that these requests be put on hold until a new West Sussex County Council car parking strategy is announced, but so far, no date has been given for this.

Will the Cabinet Member please:

- (a) Advise when this strategy document will be released so that these long-standing resident requests can be progressed?
- (b) Assure the Council that adequate resources will be made available to deal with the backlog of these car parking cases and provide a target date for completion?

Answer

A revised policy framework and parking management programme to replace the County Council's Road Space Audit Programme and associated decision-making process has been developed.

The framework sets out rules for the consideration, implementation, review and removal of Controlled Parking Zones; how decisions will be made by the County Council on whether particular proposals should be progressed; and incorporates an initial three-year programme for Controlled Parking Zone development.

The framework was scrutinised by a Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee-led Task and Finish Group on 2 November 2021 and will be considered by the Cabinet Member in December. Accordingly, it will be available for all county councillors to view during the call-in period. If/once approved, the new framework and programme will become effective from January 2022.

The report being considered in December outlines in detail how the new parking management programme has been put together and how it is to be resourced. A recruitment process is underway for two new posts within the Parking Strategy Team to help drive this programme forward.

With regard to Burgess Hill, it is currently intended to commence feasibility work in January 2023, although this is subject to the progress of other projects.

9. Written question from **Cllr Lord** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Question

Given the roll out of Light Emitting Diodes (LED) street lighting that is underway and the flexibility this brings, could the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport confirm:

- (a) What the current expected timeline and roll out plan for delivery across the county is?
- (b) How many LED street lights there will be in the county when the programme is complete and what the cost per hour per light will be?
- (c) Whether a new street lighting policy is being considered which could allow for variation in lighting hours and resident involvement in recommending locations for such changes?

Answer

- (a) The changes to the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract are proving complex and therefore the exact start date is difficult to confirm. Negotiations are in the final stages and the suppliers are ready to commence four months after final agreement. We are hopeful that we can achieve approval from all parties early 2022 with a start during quarter two 2022. The delivery will be over four years, starting in Crawley, and moving through the county. This will ensure the most cost-effective maintenance scheduling, reducing travel and the County Council's carbon footprint.
- (b) On completion of the conversion programme there will be approximately 67,600 LED streetlights. There are numerous different types of LED lanterns all of which have a different energy usage. On average the energy usage per lantern is 27 Watts which at the current cost of £0.205 per kWh equates to £0.0055 per hour.
- (c) On completion of the conversion programme, the County Council will have the ability to remotely control the time and brightness of the streetlights. Working with key stakeholders, the plan is to review the part night and all-night streetlight policy to fully utilise this new facility.

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

Question

Nottingham City Council has had a [Workplace Parking Levy](#) since 2012. This has raised more than £64m, which has paid for two additional tramlines, improvements to the railway station and more clipper buses.

Nottingham now has the highest public transport use rates in the whole of Britain, something that has contributed to taking the equivalent of 2.5 million car journeys off its road networks every year. Not only has this resulted in a 33 per cent fall in carbon emissions, but it has also led to more businesses wanting to locate their premises in Nottingham due to its improved environmental credentials. A number of UK cities are considering the introduction of a Workplace Parking Levy (WPL). These include Leicester, Bristol, Reading, Oxford and Birmingham. Scotland had also passed permission for the charges as part of a new Transport Bill in 2019, with authorities in Edinburgh and Glasgow among those considering a WPL trial there. In London, it is hoped that introducing WPLs will contribute to the city's goal of ensuring 80% of journeys are made through walking, cycling or public transport.

- (a) Is the Workplace Parking Levy something that the County Council could look into in order to fund sustainable travel and/or public transport initiatives in the county?
- (b) Can the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport confirm whether district and borough councils could lead on this or whether this should be a West Sussex-led initiative?

Answer

- (a) The Workplace Parking Levy (WPL) is an interesting concept in that it can help to level the cost of city centre parking between shoppers, residents who are typically already charged, and those who have free workplace parking. The main aim of WPL is to help to deal with road traffic congestion and air quality improvements while improving access to sustainable travel alternatives. The impact and relative success of the Nottingham scheme is interesting albeit it is the only scheme in operation nationally.

Work on renewing the West Sussex Transport Plan (WSTP) did not identify a need to introduce WPL for any of our town or city centres nor were any identified by consultees. Typically, it is only large cities that have the appropriate level of employment and associated non-charged for parking, existing public transport infrastructure and lack of opportunity for business to move premises to make WPL schemes a success. One concern being explored elsewhere is that introducing a charge may simply encourage business to move elsewhere. A further concern is the potential impact of the pandemic on business viability should a charge be made. As such, support for scheme deliverability is subject to considerable uncertainty.

That is not to rule out parking demand management as a tool to help manage town centre access. Therefore, the proposed approach to parking in the WSTP is to use the revised Controlled Parking Zone policy which has been considered by the Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee and is

soon to be subject to a Cabinet Member decision. In the meantime, officers will take a keen interest in those larger cities that are currently considering implementing a WPL, alongside the district and borough councils to consider whether this is a solution that may suit West Sussex. Should this lead to a conclusion that a WPL is a suitable solution this may be added to the WSTP through a future review.

- (b) The exact mechanism for introducing a WPL scheme requires further investigation to be fully understood but the Cabinet Member understands that WPLs can only be introduced by Local Traffic Authorities under their various duties enabled by the Transport Act 2000 and the Traffic Management Act 2004. In West Sussex this means West Sussex County Council. It would be expected that each scheme would be developed in conjunction with the district and borough councils. Any scheme needs to be identified as supporting the aims of the WSTP and a full business case and scheme proposal submitted for approval by the Secretary of State.

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