

West Sussex County Council – Written Questions

15 July 2022

1. Written question from **Cllr Condie** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Adults Services**

Question

It would appear that the provision of goods and services at discounted rates to carers has been altered, for example, the withdrawal of reduced swimming charges at the Triangle, Burgess Hill, which is popular with carers.

Could the Cabinet Member for Adult Services, therefore, please advise:

- (a) To what degree has the provision of goods and services to carers under West Sussex County Council discount schemes been devalued?
- (b) What savings have been made by these new discount arrangements and (separately) by bringing the carers' register inhouse?
- (c) What steps are being taken to address the shortfalls from question (a)?
- (d) What budgetary provision is there for these discount arrangements and to what degree are budgets being met?
- (e) Would the Council consider a small budgetary provision to make good any shortfall and/or improve the attractiveness of the discount schemes to our invaluable carers.

Answer

The Triangle in Burgess Hill is in the Carer Discount Card Scheme, launched in February 2020. The scheme was launched in order to:

- Increase carer wellbeing
 - Reduce carer isolation
 - Reduce the financial Impact of caring
 - Increase the physical activity of carers.
- (a) There has been no devaluing of the scheme as a whole. Despite the challenges of the past two years, the number of local businesses on the scheme has grown considerably.

Overall there has been a rise in the number of discounts and 'one off' offers available to carers and young carers.

Currently 149 businesses are registered with our contracted partner Carers Support West Sussex who promote the scheme as well as issue carer discount cards.

In terms of carers accessing the discount card, over 3,100 discount cards were issued in 2021/22.

- (b) No savings have been made in respect of the Carer Discount Card scheme as businesses offer a level of discount at their own discretion which varies from business to business.
- (c) There have been no shortfalls.
- (d) & (e)

There is no budget/payment from the Council to enable discounts but nevertheless local businesses are joining the scheme as it can create new footfall through their door and it is good PR.

Contact will be made with the Triangle directly in the next week or two to check if/why they have changed their offer and we will inform the Councillor of the outcome of that contact.

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

Question

The Government's White Paper: [Reforming our fire & rescue service](#) is out to consultation. In West Sussex, the effect would be to transfer accountability for the Fire & Rescue Service to the PCC (Police & Crime Commissioner). This would represent a reduction in democratic control because PCC elections traditionally attract low interest. This Council has long believed that West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (WSFRS) is best positioned to serve residents as part of the County Council.

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that:

- (a) The White Paper does not currently make provision for the PCC to take over WSFRS due to its status as a combined service;
- (b) He is making representations to our MPs and central government to ensure that current scrutiny arrangements are retained; and
- (c) If any bill comes to Parliament where there is a threat of control of WSFRS being removed from this Council, that he would strongly oppose such a move.

Answer

- (a) The White Paper highlights that "In order to transfer fire governance to an elected official, the boundaries of the fire and rescue service and the police force/combined authority/county council must align.". It also highlights that "in areas where there is more than one fire and rescue service within a police force area (for example, Sussex Police covers the area of both East Sussex and West Sussex fire and rescue services) a transfer of functions is still possible as the PCC can take responsibility for each fire and rescue service that falls within their area. We would not seek to combine services unless there was local appetite to do so.". This makes clear the potential for the PCC to transfer governance from the County Council remains, subject to 'local appetite'. The last time the PCC made a business case regarding transfer of FRS governance

was in July 2017 when ultimately the PCC withdrew this case stating that “a case for change had been made, but that it was not compelling in the context of the complexity of the change and the potential disruption.”. Since then, West Sussex Fire & Rescue has strengthened its position within the County Council with additional investment, scrutiny and governance which has been recognised through independent inspection.

- (b) Yes, the appropriate MP engagement and briefings will include strong representation of the benefits of our current governance arrangements which include current scrutiny.
- (c) Yes, and as the Cabinet Member, I will be advocating for the status quo in our consultation response including aforementioned benefits.

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

Question

Can the Cabinet Member advise what proportion of the County Council’s estate uses:

- (a) Electricity generated by its own solar farms;
- (b) Electricity through a green/renewable energy tariff;
- (c) Gas through a green/renewable energy tariff; and
- (d) Furthermore, can she outline the timetable for a more sustainable energy supply for the corporate estate?

Answer

The County Council’s corporate estate (excluding schools and streetlighting) consumes around 8,600 MWh per year of electricity and generates circa 12,300 MWh per year through its solar farms. There are no direct private wires connecting the major solar assets and corporate buildings. Electricity from the Council’s solar farms is supplied to the grid at a higher price than is paid for the supply. For example, electricity from the Council’s solar farms in March 2022 was sold at £233.68/MWh whereas, in contrast, [LASER Energy Buying Group](#) secured the Council’s wholesale electricity needs at a price of £97.10/MWh.

The Council could ‘sleeve’ the electricity from its solar farms to serve its own demand but the opportunity cost to do this in the financial year 2021/22 would have been £630,000.

It should be noted that everyone who does not have a direct supply of renewable energy is using the UK average carbon intensity regardless of the tariff procured. Given this, the County Council does not currently procure renewable energy tariffs. Electricity is procured on a standard tariff using hedging strategies and the carbon intensity of the Council’s electricity consumption is represented using the UK average carbon intensity (40.3% renewable), less consumption directly supplied through renewable energy.

The option to change procurement approach will, along with measures to encourage further investment in local renewable generation, form part of a wider consideration over the next few months about how the Council will achieve its Net Zero commitment by 2030. This will complement a range of measures including smarter working, heat decarbonisation of its buildings, offsetting of its residual emissions as well as the use of locally generated, renewable energy. This ambition is outlined in the County Council's recently adopted [Energy Strategy](#) (PDF, 3.1MB).

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

Question

The UK has the worst inflation rate in the G7, now nearing 11%. The County Council's 2022/23 budget was based on:

- Price inflation 3.7%
- Pay increases 3%

So, how is the County Council suffering in the cost-of-living crisis? The specific components of this question are as follows:

- (a) How much of the 2022/23 £2.9m contingency has now been spent or allocated?
- (b) What other contingencies are there, where are they and are they being used?
- (c) In terms of real-term value, are spending cuts now being made or planned?

Answer

- (a) Allocations against the contingency have not been formally made as the impacts of inflation continue to be monitored and updated as the position becomes clearer. Pay inflation is subject to national pay award agreements which have not yet concluded. As an indication, every 1% increase in pay above the budgeted 3% equates to roughly £2.5m additional cost for the County Council. For price inflation, budgets are closely monitored to identify inflation pressures and the budget includes additional contingency to manage in-year unforeseen pressures.
- (b) In 2022/23, the Council has a total of £9.2m set aside as a revenue contingency budget. Within this sum, £2.9m has specifically been set aside to deal with inflationary pressures. In addition, a further contingency reserve of £4.969m has been set aside as part of the underspend identified in the 2021/22 end of year financial position. Therefore, a total of £7.869m is available to deal with inflationary pressure in 2022/23. There has been no allocation from the contingency budgets to date.
- (c) The budgets are monitored closely and any inflationary pressure will be supported by the inflationary contingency budgets. If costs cannot be managed within the contingency then other options may be considered.

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

Question

In June 2021 the Council signed a Statement of Common Ground for a potential land swap with a developer promoting a development of 550 new homes in East Grinstead. The potential land swap would provide the developer with an important access into the site, while the Council would gain land and facilities for school sports provision and the opportunity to take forward a project to bring together the Upper and Lower schools of Imberhorne Secondary School together on one site.

- (a) How does the Council intend to value the land that it would be releasing to the developer?
- (b) When and how will the Capital Assets Board (CAB) feasibility Study into the potential land swap be published?
- (c) Will the CAB feasibility Study include a Business Case and costed plan for bringing together the Upper and Lower schools of Imberhorne Secondary School together on one site and what impact would the project have on Capital Strategy 2022/23 to 2026/27?

Answer

- (a) The County Council land area to be released to the developer will be valued having regard to its proposed use as an access for the new development and all relevant factors related to the terms of the proposed land exchange, taking account of the value of the larger area of agricultural land to be transferred to the County Council for educational playing field use, subject to planning permission, and the costs to be incurred by the developer in undertaking significant works to make the agricultural land fit for playing field use. This will include drainage, fencing, pavilion facilities, etc. Independent surveyors and valuers, Lambert Smith Hampton, have been commissioned to undertake the required valuation work and once obtained, their report will provide the basis for a Cabinet Member key decision report seeking to approval for the land exchange transaction. The key decision report is likely to be forthcoming later this year.
- (b) The outcome from the viability study undertaken in 2019 has formed the basis of the land swap in relation to the additional land required to bring the school together onto one site with scope for expansion. Aspects of the study will be provided as an appendix to the decision report. A full feasibility study has not yet been commissioned and this would need to be agreed by CAB. It is anticipated that a full feasibility study, including detailed surveys, would be commissioned once the capital required to relocate the school onto one site has been agreed. In the meantime, the land swap can be taken forward independently.
- (c) It remains the Education Services' intention to explore the opportunities that would allow the school to be brought together on the Imberhorne Lane site and to this end a viability study was undertaken in 2019 indicating the land area requirement and potential capital required to enable this. The proposed land exchange will provide the necessary site area required to bring the school

together on the Imberhorne Lane site and the Education Service will continue to explore funding opportunities as part of the annual capital programme cycle to fund the significant capital investment in the buildings. The service will bring forward a request for full feasibility in due course and once there is capital funding earmarked to bring the school onto one site.

6. Written question from **Cllr Sharp** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Finance and Property**

Question

What social and environmental practices does the Council follow in its procurement practices? Do we require a reduction in carbon emissions and do we encourage local jobs to build more resilient communities?

Does the Council support the adoption of the Real Living Wage in its procurement contracts? Would the Cabinet Member agree to work with local Chambers of Commerce to promote the importance of the Real Living Wage in order to support our residents who work in local businesses?

This would mean that residents are better able to face the recent, considerable cost of living increases.

Answer

The [WSCC Social Value Framework](#) outlines our framework on embedding and realising Social Value through Procurement & Contract. The County Council's Procurement Team works with Directorate Commissioners, Service Leads and Contract Managers across the Council to secure social value by adding outcomes into our contracts that benefit our community, environment and economy. Social value objectives and measures include a full range of options such as climate and carbon reducing targets, social/community action, volunteering, training, apprenticeships, job creation – all supporting outcomes to benefit our local community.

A recent example of the success of social value being generated through applying our Social Value Framework when working with our partners, was that more than [750 computers were allocated to organisations](#) across the county, including residential care homes, day care providers, carer support groups, the library service, youth groups and those which support victims of domestic violence.

Social value benefits are in addition to the service design, specification and requirements that directorates and services define – and are ways that our suppliers can bring even greater value in the way that they fulfil those contracts, not only for local businesses but also for local people by encouraging apprenticeships and local employment in West Sussex. This combines the blend of what is specified as a need, with the additional value that we can secure in how our suppliers fulfil the delivery of our contracts.

To drive specific and greater outcomes for the County Council's Climate Strategy targets in respect of our supply chain, we are working with the sustainability team to consider how climate change considerations can be built into service requirements as a core need. A draft comprehensive plan will be developed for wider consideration later this year.

The Council secures its contracts through full and fair competition with the aim of providing best value for the Council, balancing outcomes and costs. The Council does not have a blanket policy to require Real Living Wage in its contracts but allows specific consideration on a case-by-case basis to meet the service needs. However, in all our procurement Supplier Contracts there is a standard requirement to comply with UK Laws and of course compliance to paying staff the National Living Wage will be covered within that requirement.

The County Council is a member of the Sussex Chamber of Commerce (CoC), and our Economy Team works collaboratively with the CoC on a range of topics to support businesses. The Team is not currently involved in any discussions or work with the CoC in regard to the real living wage.

I am always happy to consider proposals from members but must always balance those requests with my responsibility to try to ensure that, at all times, we get the best value return for the money we spend. Therefore, I always need to balance the ongoing cost implications of any policies we might consider, with the overall impact they will have on providing best value for all of our residents.

7. Written question from **Cllr Cherry** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills**

Question

Though not quite as bad as at the time of the Black Death, the UK is facing one of its largest skills shortages in history.

So, given that West Sussex County Council has budgeted for an expenditure reduction in 2022/23 of £43,000 (-4.9%), how committed is the County Council in addressing this important issue?

Specifically:

- (a) Are robust contracts with training providers in place and, if so, with whom?
- (b) How does training course take-up compare with pre-pandemic levels?
- (c) What is the County Council doing to promote adults' skills training?
- (d) What are the County Council adults' skills investment plans going forward?

Answer

- (a) Adult Community Education (ACE) is delivered by three main providers at present: Aspire, Albion in the Community and Asphaleia. Each provider receives a percentage of the full £3.2m available via the Education Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA).

Multiply is a three-year funded programme directed at improving adult numeracy, to the value of £3,689,038, which is due to commence in the autumn following conclusion of the [process to award grants to organisations for delivery](#).

All providers go through robust allocation and procurement process. All provision is subject to Ofsted inspections.

- (b) Learner numbers have been in a steady decline since prior to the pandemic. Participation trends in England have seen a 25% decline from 2014 to 2018. The pandemic saw a steeper than average decline in learners enrolled with our core provider, Aspire, down almost 40%. This year's figures will be available in the autumn 2022.
 - (c) ACE promotion is the responsibility of our providers, and they have targeted marketing. The Council provides substantial advice and support through our networks and to target key priority areas and learners.
 - (d) A full review of ACE provision is being conducted. Future models are being explored to mitigate risk and ensure targeted support for adult learners across the county, in collaboration with multiple stakeholders from across the Local Authority.
8. Written question from **Cllr Cornell** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills**

Question

The Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee has just this year expressed concern at our inability to access detailed performance data relating to academy schools in the county.

Given the Government's plans, set out in the White Paper 2022: [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#), to ensure all schools are part of a multi-agency academy trust (MAT) by 2030, how will this authority (and others) be able to monitor the educational performance of children in West Sussex after 2030?

Answer

The White Paper does indicate a change in current requirements for data transfer which will allow local authorities access to data held by academies that currently local authorities are not automatically entitled to access. This change and the process through which academies will be required to provide such information will be detailed in due course by the Department for Education. This is intended to help local authorities fulfil their statutory responsibilities.

9. Written question from **Cllr Smith** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills**

Question

How can the County Council support local school staff with their Career Professional Development? This is an area so often cut from very tight school budgets, and even if the identified training is agreed staff attendance on training courses is often difficult. A school can plan to free up staff, but with sickness absence cover needs ever increasing, especially with many new Covid infections/re-infections this can prove very difficult, and agency staff are often not available, so the training may be missed. A recent Worthing school Ofsted inspection found that teaching of SEND was inadequate as staff were not effectively supporting children with additional needs in class due to a lack of training.

How can we as an authority help to support our school staff to access all necessary training to support all of our children, especially those who are most vulnerable, reach their potential?

Answer

Education and Skills provides funded support to those maintained schools with the highest need. Allocated support from our advisory team, and specialists as required, can be to the value of between three and nine days of support. Schools understand this is allocated against categorisation criteria. All schools agreed to their categorisation in autumn 2021.

Our advisers and specialists can be bought in to provide bespoke support which is flexible to the needs of school and demands on staff.

With declining central grants and funding our training and events programme remains chargeable, but offers a low-cost alternative, and confidence of quality assurance and bespoke to the needs of our West Sussex schools. This provision can be online, face-to-face and in school.

Our advisers and specialists also provide forums, briefings, downloadable guidance, and support tools to our maintained schools that are all funded by the County Council.

Our Inclusion Framework and Ordinarily Available Practice publications were launched through funded events, and easily accessible training opportunities for governors, leaders, and practitioners. These drive our work on inclusive practice in schools. We continue to provide support for identified children with SEND, from our specialist advisory teaching teams, which includes strategies and interventions for class teachers to deploy in planning and delivering learning.

This [catalogue](#) shows what the Council has available to schools above that which is funded through the Department for Education and falls into our statutory responsibilities.

10. Written question from **Cllr Smith** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills**

Question

In a recent Worthing school Ofsted report the school was, sadly, deemed to be an inadequate school. The report cited part of the school's failing was attributed to weaknesses in the governing body holding the school leadership to account.

How can we as the responsible education authority help support the governors we have in our schools to carry out their roles most effectively, to make sure we retain those governors we do have working so hard for the school community, and how can we attract more people to this essential community voluntary role?

Answer

In the report referred to, the local authority has worked closely with the governing body and the report recognises that the governors have also displayed 'a drive for improvement'. This is because they have strengthened as a group of governors and have become more strategic. They have done this in part through their own resolve

as well as taking on new, experienced governors but also because local authority officers have provided effective guidance and challenge.

In addition – and this is available to all schools – the Council has a governance team that provides high quality information, resources, guidance and training. This can be found on the [West Sussex Services For Schools website](#).

The Council values and appreciates the work of our governors in West Sussex and takes their recruitment, retention and development very seriously. Through the work of the Senior Education Adviser and the leader of the Governance team, the Council keeps in close contact with governing bodies.