

COUNTY COUNCIL – 18 JULY 2017
WRITTEN QUESTION UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 9.2

Question from Councillor Mike Shellens

This council's Audit Committee has responsibility for "economy, efficiency and effectiveness".

A recent paper suggested that CCC was spending around £4m a year on agency staff. (NB this excludes people such as agency staff in Residential homes)

My question is this:

Typically, agency staff cost more than employees of the council.

Can you please tell us how many agency staff are employed by the council?
What is their total cost over the most recent 3 months for which convenient figures are available?
What is being done to reduce these numbers?

Response from Councillor Steve Count
Chairman of General Purposes Committee

Cambridgeshire County Council like most organisations uses agency workers, and has to rely on the use of agency staff to cover key posts where vacancies or staff sickness arises. At the end of May there were 193 posts occupied by agency workers covering social workers, professional staff and administration support.

Spend over the period March to May was as follows:

	March	April	May
Cambridgeshire Catering Service	£32,622	£5,309	£15,620
Children, Families and Adults	£536,243	£375,048	£483,824
Customer Service Transformation	£4,365	£11,056	£6,295
Economy, Transport and Environment	£37,376	£36,331	£64,298
LGSS	£203,968	£151,969	£218,045
Public Health	£1,818	£1,858	£3,650
Grand Total	£816,391	£581,571	£791,732

In terms of reducing reliance on agency workers, our use of this type of worker is always under scrutiny by senior managers, with our usage in the social work field at around 10% of our workforce which is significantly lower than most other local authorities. The filling of posts by agency is subject to the same scrutiny as recruiting to a post, and an exemption has to be signed off by a Head of Service to confirm that doing so is necessary.

We recognise that due to the nature of the services we provide we will always be reliant on agency workers to some extent, so have focussed our efforts on reducing the actual cost of engaging these types of workers. Following approval by GPC Committee at the end of July 2016 new arrangements with Opus LGSS People Solutions (Opus LGSS) were put in place as planned in January 2017. Opus LGSS is a partnership between Suffolk County Council and LGSS, created to provide a more cost effective solution in engaging temporary workers.

The switch over went smoothly and whilst the new arrangements have only been in place for just six months the anticipated benefits are now starting to be seen. The original proposal identified three primary objectives:

- To have greater influence over the wider issues including the quality and pay of agency workers in specific categories such as social workers as well as to support the overall workforce strategy;
- To provide financial savings by reducing the costs associated with securing agency staff;
- To ensure continuity of supply of agency workers

Of the 193 agency workers used in May, 20 were directly engaged via Opus LGSS which is 10.4% with the original target by January 2018 being 17%. For agency workers engaged directly the cost is lower, and the number of directly engaged agency workers is expected to rise as the year progresses.

The original business case identified modest savings for CCC in the 1st year that were anticipated to increase once the other LGSS partners joined the model in subsequent years, those being Northamptonshire County Council and Milton Keynes Council. The projected saving for year 1 was £65,000 but this is now anticipated to increase to in excess of £100,000 given the early successes that have been realised.

Question from Councillor Ian Manning

Recently the City Deal project re-branded itself to be called "The Greater Cambridge Partnership". How was this decision made and what was the cost? In particular please can we be given a breakdown of the costs involved in this exercise, including both City Deal officer time, County Council officer time and any external costs including production of the video; who suggested the re-brand and at what point and by whom was the decision to go ahead made?

Response from Councillor Ian Bates, Chairman of Economy & Environment Committee

The decision to refresh the City Deal branding was made by members of the Joint Assembly and Executive Board in consensus, and in consultation with senior officers in the partnership. No County Council staff nor resource were used. Given this, it will be more appropriate for this question to be directed and answered at the Joint Assembly or Executive Board later this month.

Question from Councillor Susan van de Ven

Whippet has moved to deregister a large number of its bus services, because they are failing to run profitably. This takes effect September 2nd. Whippet notes that the future of these services will depend largely on what the County Council passenger transport budget is able to support, and also cite Cambridge congestion as a fundamental obstacle to effective running of services through the city. What new thinking does the Chairman of the Economy and Environment Committee propose, to ensure that bus services do not diminish just when a dramatic step change is needed toward high quality public transport for workers, students, apprentices and all people seeking to retain their independent living?

Response from Councillor Ian Bates, Chairman of Economy & Environment Committee

The immediate issue of the deregistration of a number of Whippet services will be discussed at Economy & Environment Committee on 10 August, and officers are currently working on potential alternative solutions. These could include traditional local bus services, but will also consider any alternatives that could be provided by the community transport sector or integration with other existing services. In terms of future development the Greater Cambridge Partnership is working on proposals to reduce congestion in Cambridge, and any support you can give to these proposals would be welcome, although only six of the seventeen services that are being deregistered actually operate into the city. As Chairman of the Total Transport Member Steering Group you will be aware of the current pilot service, East Cambs Connect, and although the trial only commenced a few months ago this may give further options and solutions in the future if it is proven to be successful. Unfortunately, diminishing bus services is a national issue but Cambridgeshire will also explore any opportunities through the new Bus Services Act, which has recently received Royal Assent to help authorities with this issue.

Question from Councillor Ian Manning

Please can highways give a breakdown of the repair bill for footpaths across the County in the last financial year? Please can we know how much of this was due to inappropriate loading (eg of parked vehicles on the footpath)? If there is no data, please can some estimate be made of the same?

Response from Councillor Mathew Shuter, Chairman of Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee

The 16/17 figures for footpath maintenance by area are as follows:

Area	Expenditure
Fenland and East Cambridgeshire	£159,068
South Cambridgeshire	£186,018
Cambridge City	£302,904
Huntingdonshire	£138,558
TOTAL	£786,548

Unfortunately there is no detail on how or why footpaths decline to our intervention level for repair. Without any such data, we are unable to provide an estimate as there is no factual evidence and therefore an estimate would have no value.