

COUNTY COUNCIL – 6 FEBRUARY 2018
WRITTEN QUESTION UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 9.2

1. Question from Councillor Anna Bradnam

In July 2017 China and Hong Kong announced a clampdown on ‘foreign garbage’, that is, they have imposed very tight contamination standards on 24 categories of imported waste, especially paper and plastic. As the UK has exported more than 2.7 million tonnes of waste plastic to China and Hong Kong since 2012, please let us know:

What effect, if any, will the loss of this market have on the County Council’s waste disposal process and budget and, if there will be an effect, what practical changes might this necessitate in the service in future?

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

The vast majority of paper and plastic separated for recycling arise through kerbside collections which are undertaken by the City and District Councils and not the County Council which is the waste disposal authority. The District and City Councils have a contract to separate out dry recyclables and arrange onward recycling. The principal impact of changes to the global market place will therefore be dependent on the specific contractual arrangements those Councils have with their contractor.

Plastic and paper is also collected for recycling at the Household Recycling Centres in Cambridgeshire, which are part of the County Council’s Waste PFI Contract. The contractor is responsible for recycling some plastic and paper separated at the Household Recycling Centres. An additional service for recycling hard plastics has also been added since the contract was let. The arrangement is that the contractor takes on the risk of variations in global prices with an expected income already factored into the contract price for the recyclable materials that were originally specified. For these materials, therefore, there is no impact on the County Council. However, in the case of the hard plastics, the County Council bears the risk of price fluctuations for recycling. With the changes in material being accepted by China, this material has seen an increase in the price of disposal and this is feeding through to the County Council. At present the expected impact is approximately £40k in a full financial year. We are working closely with Amey our contractor to find the most appropriate and cost effective markets and means of disposal of this material to minimise this impact.

2. Question from Councillor Tom Sanderson

The proposed pedestrian crossing in Hartford Road, Huntingdon has been delayed for several months. It’s required to aid users of the Saxongate learning centre cross this busy road safely, many of whom are wheelchair users.

What is the reason for the continued delays and when will the crossing be fully operational?

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

I understand Cllr Sanderson's concerns about getting this crossing completed and on his final point, am pleased to report that the proposed zebra crossing at High St/Hartford Rd, Huntingdon is nearing completion and should be operational in week commencing 12th February.

There are a number of reasons for the delay in completing the scheme but I can assure Cllr Sanderson that throughout that time, the County Council team has been working hard to have it operating as soon as possible.

Although the resurfacing of the road on Saxongate and St Mary's Street, in preparation for the crossing, was completed quickly along with changes to the footway layout, there have been a number of reasons for the time it has taken to complete the crossing.

The impact on the nearby Grade II listed building needed to be considered, following concerns raised by the District Council's conservation team and it required subsequent approval to proceed by the Town Council. The Council's contractor Skanska also had a shortage of design engineers for a period of time that delayed the programme. This has now been rectified. Added to this, there were also delays from the supplier of the new lighting columns and beacons, required for the safe operation of the crossing and UK Power Networks, who own and maintain the electricity cables and lines in this region, did not have resources available to connect them to a power supply when required.

I appreciate how frustrating the delays have been and can assure Cllr Sanderson that we continue to push our suppliers hard to complete work quickly and will ensure that any lessons that can be learnt from this experience will be.

3. Question from Councillor David Jenkins

The budget for Local Infrastructure and Improvement for 2018/19 is £5124 thousand.

Can the Chair of Highways & Community Infrastructure please advise the budgets and outturns for the years 2013/14 to 2017/18 on the same basis?

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

My understanding of the budget that Cllr Jenkins is seeking confirmation on is the revenue budget for Local Infrastructure & Streets and the maintenance of the highway network. The table below shows the budget and spend for each year from 2013/14 through to 2017/18:

Local Infrastructure & Streets	Gross Budget 2018-19 £000s	Fees, Charges & Ring- fenced Grants £000s	Net Budget £000s	Actual expenditure for year	Forecast as at 311218	Expenditure to date as at 311218
2013/14	£6,686	-	£6,686	£7,140		
2014/15	£4,928	-	£4,928	£5,048		
2015/16	£4,237	-	£4,237	£4,418		
2016/17	£3,448	-	£3,448	£3,534		
2017/18	£5,414 (Incl £2,650 investment from Transformation fund)	-	£5,414		£5,463	£4,207
2018/19	£5,377	-£231	£5,146			

4. Question from Councillor Nichola Harrison

Does Cllr Shuter agree with me that the quality of many pothole repairs and other road surfacing works carried out by Skanska under the council's highways contract is unsatisfactory and, if so, what is he doing about it?

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

The quality of workmanship across the highway network is one of the key areas of focus for Cambridgeshire Highways. Last year 38,000 potholes were repaired across the county and the vast majority of these repairs were carried out to a high standard. We work closely with Skanska and the supply chain to ensure that all work is of an acceptable standard and that this standard is applied consistently across Cambridgeshire.

I am aware that there are some instances where standards of work are not as we would expect and I am committed to minimising that. We are working hard with the contractor to ensure that all work is done well and I can ensure you that Skanska is committed to that too. When we become aware of work below the standard we would expect, we investigate it and it will be rectified. For instance last summer, there was a period of high temperature and a number of recently surface dressed roads deteriorated. These were all addressed by Skanska and their supply chain in a timely and efficient manner and at no cost to the authority.

To improve the overall quality of pothole repairs, in conjunction with Skanska, we have also just launched a new version of the Dragon Patcher, which since the start of the year has repaired 1700 potholes. Nicknamed the 'dragon' because it fires out flames to dry out the road surface. It is then cleaned with compressed air and sealed with a stone mix and hot bitumen. This is much quicker and simpler compared to traditional methods. It is much more efficient, as it can repair up to 150 potholes a day, is faster and quieter than traditional methods and ensures a consistently acceptable standard to all repairs.

All of this said, if there are areas of repair that Cllr Harrison or any other Member feels have not been completed correctly, please let the team know and it will be looked into.

5. Question from Councillor Susan van de Ven

Given assurances set out in the Children's Centre consultation response that families should continue to receive the services and support they need, perhaps in an even better way than before, how exactly will provision be made in each area where a current children's centre is to be 're-designated' from 1 April 2018? Please provide specific information for each case.

Response from Councillor Simon Bywater
Chairman of Children and Young People Committee

As we presented in the response document to full council in October we will maintain the current level of expenditure on frontline delivery and we are pleased to confirm that there is no reduction in the numbers of frontline staff delivering services direct to families. As a result of this continued commitment to maintaining the investment in frontline staff, the volume of services available to families will also be protected.

Officers are currently finalising the district based offer to be communicated to families later this month and an update paper will be taken to Children and Young People's committee in March where this restructure and new service offer will be monitored. There are still a number of details to be confirmed over the next couple of coming weeks so we are not in a position to offer exact details at this point as we are keen to communicate the new programme once finalised to families to minimise any confusion in communities.

The new programmes will offer a large amount of continuity with successful activities continuing across all districts. This will be complemented by a range of new activities, designed to meet the changing needs across the county and delivered in locations that take services into communities previously not served by a Children's Centre.

6. Question from Councillor Susan van de Ven

What has been the total cost of preparing options for and carrying out the Children's Centre Services consultation?

Response from Councillor Simon Bywater
Chairman of Children and Young People Committee

The total cost for preparing options for and carrying out a Children's Centre services consultation was £5368. There were no additional staffing costs as this formed part of officers' current roles.

This was made up of costs for the design, printing and distribution of the consultation document and survey of £3831, venue hire for engagement workshops with partners and staff of £1447, and social media countywide advertising of £90.