

COUNTY COUNCIL – 23 JULY 2019

WRITTEN QUESTION UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 9.2

1. Question from Councillor Susan van de Ven

Which Cambridgeshire primary schools are now having to close for a regular day or half-day every week, due to budget constraints? What actions if any has the council undertaken in response, to understand and address the knock-on impacts upon children, staff and families? Is it intended that members should be informed of affected schools in their divisions?

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

Thank you for your question. Schools in Cambridgeshire are under severe financial pressure as a result of increasing cost pressures from pay and pension costs. Funding levels have not changed significantly in recent years, during which time our pupil numbers have grown and we are seeing children accessing schools with greater needs than ever. There are currently 5 schools in the county operating a reduced week from a traditional school day, usually an early afternoon closure on one day a week. All schools in the county meet the minimum required hours pupils have to access education. Only one of these schools has cited budget pressures as a reason to operate a shortened day from traditional school hours. Officers have worked closely with this school on their proposal and have supported the school with communication to parents. Two meetings have been held with parents and a frequently asked questions list has been prepared which includes what offer will be available on the day of early closure. Families who are in receipt of working tax credit or universal credit have had childcare vouchers highlighted to make a claim towards the costs of childcare. During the process, the school has been in close contact with local members and also the MP. The Local Authority will notify members where schools are considering changes to their day. We currently are not aware of any other schools considering this course of action.

2. Question from Councillor Nichola Harrison

Regarding the management of highway verges:

- a) What plans does the council have to adapt its management of highway verges to improve their wildlife value?
- b) To identify the best options, will you ensure the council works with and learns from other councils and expert organisations such Plantlife (road verge campaign <https://plantlife.love-wildflowers.org.uk/roadvergecampaign>) and the county Wildlife Trust?
- c) Will you ask council officers to report progress on this subject to the appropriate council committee, in time for changes to be implemented at the start of the 2020 growing season?

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

- a) The leader of the Council approached officers at the start of July asking officers to see if there is an opportunity for changing our current highway verge management practices. To that end officers are currently exploring and will bring a report to a future Highways & Infrastructure Committee. This report will set out the council's current approach, explain the options available and what these mean in practice, so that committee can take a view and decide whether changes would be beneficial.

- b) Cambridgeshire County Council was praised by Plantlife in 2017 for the proactive work we carry out using GPS for identifying areas of protected road side verges so that they are left to grow and flourish. We are currently waiting for the publication of Plantlife's 'Managing grassland road verges: a best practice guide', which is due out this summer. The guide is being produced in collaboration with national highways agencies, industry, and wildlife organisations and will provide detailed information and technical guidance for highway authorities, their contractors and community groups. Officers are aware of the recent press campaign and in conjunction with our Highway Services provider, Skanska, are working with all groups to identify best practice to improve their wildlife value. The outcome of this work will be fed into the report referred to in point (a).

- c) Council officers are currently working towards this deadline and will bring a report to a future Highways & Infrastructure Committee in time for the start of the 2020 cutting season.