

County Council – 9 November 2021

Written Question under Council Procedure Rule 9.2

1. Question from Councillor Samantha Hoy

At the October meeting of Children and Young People Committee, the Service Director: Education, Jonathan Lewis, confirmed it was his decision for Cambridgeshire County Council not to build the new Wisbech Secondary School which had £38m allocated towards it in the budget. The following question comes in two parts and goes to each and every post holder named individually below.

1. Were you consulted by the Service Director: Education, Jonathan Lewis, before making the final decision to abandon the proposal to self-deliver the new Wisbech Secondary School?
2. If consulted, were you informed that the Department for Education would consider looking for a new site, the delays associated with that decision and that no new timetable was agreed for them to deliver a school.

Cllrs:

Lucy Nethsingha (Liberal Democrat) Leader of the Council

Bryony Goodliffe (Labour) Chair of the Children and Young People Committee

Maria King (Liberal Democrat) Deputy Chair of the Children and Young People Committee

Elisa Meschini (Labour) deputy leader of the Council

Lorna Dupre (Liberal Democrat) Deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats

Richard Howitt (Labour) Deputy leader of the Labour group

Tom Sanderson (Independent) Leader of the Independent group

Response from Councillor Bryony Goodliffe, Chair of Children and Young People Committee

Question 1:

Officers did not decide to abandon delivery but instead stated in a letter on the 18th June that the cost envelope outlined by the DfE was insufficient. The Officer sought assurance that the costs would be met by the DfE. This was covered in the briefing with members in August about the fact the decision on our business case to self-deliver was not yet agreed.

On the 16th July 2021, the following response was received from the DfE –

With thanks for your recent letter regarding the design and delivery of Wisbech Free School, it is unfortunate that we have got to this position and that DfE are unable to offer the level of comfort you require to self-deliver the Free School. We understand your position and appreciate the support we have had received from Cambridgeshire County Council to date, we look forward to working with you to deliver a Free School in Wisbech and will be touch to discuss how we plan to move forward with delivering Wisbech Free School

Question 2:

The DfE decision to look at alternative sites did not come until September, over two months after the Council challenged on the cost basis. At the time of the letter, there was only one site under consideration. We have had further conversations with the DfE who are keen to progress the building for September 2024 and we have asked them to provide an update for members prior to the CYP Committee in November. As outlined in the October CYP Committee meeting, we retain a statutory responsibility for school places and if there is a cancellation of the Free School in Wisbech, we would reassume our programmed for the build of a 4FE secondary school and submit a business case to the Capital Programmed Board for this funding.

2. Question from Councilor Susan van de Ven

Following the Peer Review Recommendation to 'Take action to recalibrate member roles, behaviors and conduct,' please outline meaningful progress achieved thus far?

Response from Councilor Lucy Nethsingha, Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee

Since the Peer Review Recommendation was published in September, work with members on behavior and conduct has progressed as follows:

- We have secured external support through the LGA for member development focused on the role of statutory officers and member behaviour. We have worked with the LGA to design a development workshop led by the [Centre for Scrutiny and Governance](#) and supported by lead political peers from the Peer Review team. The workshop is scheduled for the beginning of December and all members will be invited to attend.
- Where issues are raised relating to the conduct or behaviours of members, they continue to be addressed through the Monitoring Officer and Chief Executive, in accordance with the members code of conduct.
- Service committees have developed training plans to ensure that all members have development appropriate to their committee subject matter to ensure that committee specific roles are well understood.
- The member induction programme and member training seminars are open to all members and are regularly reviewed. This programme is designed to strengthen understanding of the roles and responsibilities of members in key areas of the Council's work.

Member behavior and conduct, as well as strong understanding of member and officer roles, is vital to the Council and we will continue to review and report on progress in this area through the Peer Review Action Plan.

3. Question from Councillor Steve Count

Anglian water has concluded their survey of March, identifying where surface water run-off is connected into the foul only sewer. Picture below. When we see excess rain, as occurred in December 2020 the resultant overwhelming of the system, meant there was some property flooding and included some raw sewage, was seen coming out on the streets of March. From the picture and the sheer volume of connections, it is easy to see that this will be the inevitable outcome until this issue is addressed. Now that Cambridgeshire County Council has this vital information what immediate steps will it take to address this issue and what is the timescale they estimate to resolve this.



Response from Councillor Lorna Dupré, Chair of Environment and Green Investment Committee

We recognise the importance of working closely with Anglian Water to address the issue of surface water connections into the foul system. We understand this has contributed to flooding across parts of the town and we can report the following actions are underway or imminent:

1. Jointly funding (with Anglian Water) a dedicated resource from the National Flood Forum to work on the ground with communities in March. This has been successfully used in other parts of East Anglia and will include developing social media campaigns, door knocking and engaging through Anglian Water's 'Make Rain Happy' campaign. The campaign will include the installation of rain gardens and water butts at the property level to remove water from the foul network. This is scheduled to commence before the end of 2021.
2. Investigating how parts of the highway can be either disconnected from the foul network or have flows reduced e.g. through the use of attenuation storage beneath the highway.
3. Continuing to engage with Fenland District Council on their future high street fund work for March. We will work jointly with Anglian Water and provide support on what measures can be integrated within the proposals to provide flood risk betterment for the town centre.
4. Continuing to work with Anglian Water on an integrated flood model for March to inform future projects within the town. This work has already commenced and where any schemes are identified, we will look to bid for and utilise partnership funding from Anglian Water and the Environment Agency.

4. Question from Councillor Lorna Dupré

In light of the decision of the Government to agree Enhanced Response Area status for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, what can local members do to support the effort to reduce Covid cases, hospitalisations and deaths, and increase vaccination rates?

Response from Councillor Richard Howitt, Chair of Adults and Health Committee

Thank you so much for asking the question and your support is much appreciated.

There are a number of ways that local members can support the effort to reduce Covid cases, hospitalisations and deaths as well as increasing vaccination rates. Here are some suggestions:

- Our communications team will produce a toolkit to support you to get messages out through your channels
- We will be drawing down some resource through the Surge Rapid Response Team to target areas/communities where there is low uptake, member support for this drive would be welcome, we can share the targeted areas with relevant members
- Role modelling the protective behaviours would also be a helpful contribution, such as wearing face coverings and maintaining social distancing

If you have any further suggestions of how local members can help the efforts, please do let us know.