

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Thursday 28 July 2016

1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HANNAFORD

Re: Staff Consultation at St Thomas and Exwick Medical Practices

Is the Director and Portfolio Holder aware that a staff consultation is currently taking place that may result in some redundancies of administration staff at the St Thomas and Exwick medical practices?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

Commissioning and monitoring of GP services is an NHS responsibility and as such it is difficult for the Council to respond. I am happy to put Councillor Hannaford in touch with an appropriate officer in the NEW Devon CCG who will be able to give him more information on this matter.

2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HANNAFORD

Re: Proposed National Cuts to GP surgeries – Financial Pressures

What financial pressures are the medical practices in the West Exe area of Exeter under in the context of the proposed national cuts to GP surgeries?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

Again, as the commissioning and monitoring of GP services is an NHS responsibility, I would direct Councillor Hannaford to my response at Question 1.

3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HANNAFORD

Re: Strategic Planning and GP Services

As the West Exe area of Exeter is still continuing to grow at pace, with thousands of new homes being progressed in and around the area, and hundreds of over fifty five units now fully occupied, what strategic planning and resource allocations are now taking place, to ensure that existing and new residents, have proper access to good, responsive and inclusive GP services?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

Planning for new GP premises is the responsibility of NHS England, working in partnership with the local NHS Clinical Commissioning Group. From a health needs perspective, NHS England and the local Clinical Commissioning Group need to take account of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment in planning health care services for their local populations.

The relevant planning authorities are aware of the need to ensure that developments are sustainable, including the provision of GP premises. This has been included in the planning policy of Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District Council, where the development is located, and it is proposed that GP premises will be delivered within the development at SW Exeter.

4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HOOK
Re: Movement of Radioactive Material

It is reported in the media that intermediate level radioactive material is to be moved from Devonport to Cheshire for long term storage. Is this material to be transported through Devon? If so, how is it to be moved? What guarantees of safety can the County obtain, bearing in mind that leakages have been reported from previous movements of radioactive material across the county?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The Reactor Pressure Vessels (RPVs) containing Intermediate Level radioactive Waste (ILW) arising from the submarines laid up in Devonport will be removed from the submarines for storage at the selected interim storage site of Capenhurst in Cheshire. From this point the RPVs will be transported by road.

The MOD is preparing to initiate Low Level radioactive Waste (LLW) removal on the first submarine in Rosyth in Scotland to demonstrate the process. This will set the processes and procedures and provide valuable experience which will be used on the submarines at Devonport in the future. Firm schedules for the removal of the RPVs from Devonport is not, therefore, yet known.

Local Authorities will be notified when there is an intention to move an RPV and the intended route, as part of the Abnormal Indivisible Loads (AIL) regulations.

The primary legislation relating to the transportation of the RPVs is the Carriage of Dangerous Goods and Use of Transportable Pressure Equipment Regulations (CDG). Security requirements for dangerous goods transport are included in the CDG regulations. As there is no nuclear material in the RPV, no transport escort is needed for radiological security purposes (although an escort vehicle will be required for the transport as a heavy load). The basic level of security arrangements specified within the CDG regulations includes the requirement for all staff to be trained in radiological security, the vehicle driver to carry photographic identity and storage areas to be secure against unauthorised access. The higher level of security arrangements for Dangerous Goods only apply to consignments with approximately 30 times the radioactive content of the RPVs.

The movement of an RPV in its transport container will need to comply with the regulations for Abnormal Indivisible Loads. The use of laden vehicles with a gross mass over the standard weight of 44t, or vehicles greater than the standard maximum vehicle length and width, must be notified to the police and highway and bridge authorities and an escort vehicle must accompany the vehicle carrying the load.

The packaged RPVs will be moved from Devonport under an Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR) Permit from the Environment Agency (EA). The Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator (DNSR) will be required to approve each movement of an RPV. The MOD's submission to the DNSR will include a quality management system.

5. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HOOK
Re: Payments to Farmers

It is reported in the national media that many farmers have still not received their 2015 payments from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). According to a Government statement the RPA have said that all such outstanding payments would be paid by the end of June (6 months late) but last week at least 800 farmers had still not heard when they would receive the payments. This is apparently and understandably causing considerable difficulty for some.

Can Council be told if any Devon farmers are suffering from similar very late payment? If so, can the County Council act for our farming community by suggesting to the RPA that they examine their procedures and rectify the obvious problems, so that a similar disgraceful situation never

happens again? Could Council contact the MPs representing rural constituencies and ask what they are doing to rectify this appalling situation?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

Place Scrutiny Committee through an Agricultural Task Group, are already exploring a wide range of issues relating to the agricultural industry. The scope of this group I believe includes consideration of the role of Government Agencies and support provided to the sector, including the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) and the Basic Payments System (BPS) and therefore any impact of delays on the local economy, and how this could be rectified in the future. We are working with the NFU and are seeing some impact of delays on our farming sector and I will ensure that this Council's concern over late BPS payments for the 2015 period is lodged with local MPs and the RPA.

The facts as we know them in terms of the delays are:

The Basic Payments System (BPS), replaced the Single Payment Scheme (SPS) as the main EU subsidy for farmers, on the 1 Jan 2015. It is administered by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) and there have been well documented problems with administration of the new system, leading to delays in farmers receiving payment.

Farmers apply once a year - normally in May - and payments begin in December. Payments for 2015 are still being processed and having discussed this issue with the NFU, who regularly campaign on behalf of their members on the issues relating to the BPS, I can confirm that the latest situation, relating to 2015 payments, as of the 7th July is as follows:

The RPA have stated that in respect to claims at a national level, the numbers are:

*87,095 claims
85,621 paid in full
1,136 bridging payment issued to date
31 hardship payments made and no top up payments issued*

Therefore, 86,788 claimants or c99.6% have received some form of payment. 307 have not been paid not paid due to probate.

The NFU continue to raise concerns that some farmers have still have not received any monies at all and the RPA have urged these claimants to contact them. The NFU have also raised concerns that those who have had a bridging payment have had little communication since early May, which is not acceptable and an area I shall flag to our MPs.

Delays in payments - NFU have raised concerns over the delay in releasing payments and the impact on the industry – especially where traditionally at this time of year farm income is low, with many building up for harvest and the associated costs of this and the heavy investment in growing crops. The NFU have urged the RPA to speak to HMRC about the situation with July tax bills due later this month. We will add our voice to this issue.

Common land claims – The RPA stated, following questions raised by the NFU, that they had completed all the common land allocations for commoners – that includes Forest of Dartmoor. There have been particular issues with claims for common land, as the new payments system requires work to recognise the particular circumstances and so associated payments, with this type of claim. An IT fix is being applied in the coming weeks to resolve this issue.

6. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HANNAN Re: Social Workers and Parking at County Hall.

At the People's Scrutiny Committee meeting on 16th June a report was submitted from the Children's Standing Overview Committee that included the following statement regarding a visit by its members to the Exeter Social Care Offices at County Hall:

'Car parking is a huge issue for staff at County Hall with considerable time wasted as a result of the difficulties. Social workers need to have a car available for Section 47 visits, yet there are no allocated spaces or access provided. There are duty passes but these do not provide access to the car park once it is full, which it generally is by 9.00am and staff are not allowed to use the visitor's car park. It makes working life even more stressful than it already is. The parking arrangements put off social workers from working for the County Council.'

What is being done about this and, in particular, has any progress been made regarding the possibility of social workers in urgent need of parking at County Hall being given permission to use the cobbled parking area usually reserved for members when this is not otherwise required (e.g. for full council meetings)?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES

The Council highly values its social work staff and recognises the very challenging and sometimes thankless job they do on behalf of the community.

One of the ways we are trying to use the finite space we have to best effect and to protect, as far as it is possible, the needs of social workers is to encourage and incentivise all staff to use technology to work flexibly, such as from home, other Council or partner offices, or local libraries etc., thereby freeing up space for essential users, such as social workers

With the new technology now available to all staff including Skype for Business, and more traditional facilities such as audio conferencing, there are many more opportunities to work away from the office base and still maintain effective and close collaboration with colleagues, service users and partners.

The management and use of the staff car park at County Hall is closely monitored. It is acknowledged that during the late winter/spring the car park was often full in the mornings during Monday to Thursday.

A series of car park management measures is currently being introduced to alleviate the demand on the County Hall car park. Some measures were introduced in the spring, and further measures are being introduced over the summer which when combined together, should improve access during those peak periods.

The Council values all its staff, and recognises the particularly difficult role of social work. Nationally, all Councils have had to find compromises to the challenges of parking and social work. In Devon there have been a number of modifications and improvements to car park access over the last 2 years designed to specifically support the challenging role of social work and, allied to the significant investment in technology demonstrates the Councils commitment in supporting Social work staff with their difficult role.

The measures that have been and are being implemented to address the car park full issues will be closely monitored to ensure there are improvements, which will directly benefit social work staff. Should that not be the case further measures will be considered.

Should there ever be an emergency situation involving child protection, where the car park is full, arrangements would always be made by the car park attendant for access to an appropriate place to park on the campus.

7. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HOOK Re: Mapleton Care Home

Would the Cabinet Member give an update on his aspirations to make Mapleton Care Home in Newton Abbot "the first one of 10 Centres of Excellence in Devon" for dementia care. (Oct '14) Has a new Day Centre yet been established? What community outreach has there been? How do the financial costs compare with those being charged locally by the private sector? What plans does he have for this facility in the immediate future?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

The changes and adaptations to Mapleton to create a 'Centre of Excellence' were completed in 2015. The work was informed by the Sterling university model which provides for people in a more personalised way in smaller units within the building, allowing a life to be lead that is more akin to home life. The university were engaged to oversee the work. This model is very different from the standard model provided in most homes. The same model was used to create the other 'centre of excellence' at Woodland Vale. Both areas were chosen to boost local provision in their areas.

No day centre or outreach work has been established at the site at this time due to budgetary constraints. The Council currently fund the Alzheimer's Society to provide a local community worker to support people and families at home.

Bed cost at Mapleton is approximately £876 a week with private residential sector beds across Devon averaging around £520 per week. Mapleton does accommodate people with complex needs.

There are no current plans to make any changes at Mapleton.

8. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HOOK Re: Care Provision and Potential Changes in Provision

I am contacted by relatives and friends of some of those Newton Abbot residents who are currently in receipt of care provided by DCC, some of this care I understand via the Totnes based charity ROC. There appears to be great concern expressed by these friends and relatives about imminent changes to provision, including massive reduction in the hours of the care workers, with a consequent reduction in the levels of supervision and safe living for residents. As an example, one resident who currently receives 54.5 hours shared care a week is, so I am told, to be reduced to 16 hours shared help in a 1 to 4 situation, and just 3 hours on a 1 to 1 basis per week. Another example quoted to me is of a resident who currently receives 66 hours on a 1 to 3 shared basis and 7 hours on a 1 to 1 basis being reduced to a mere 3 hours a week on 1 to 1.

Can the Cabinet Member state that these examples appear to be accurate? Can he further say how many residents in a) Newton Abbot and b) Devon will be similarly impacted? Can he explain to me and the worried parents how these residents are supposed to live safe and secure lives if/when these cut backs are introduced? Can he say when they are likely to be introduced, having I understand been delayed from earlier this month?

Will he undertake to hold a meeting for worried relatives and friends (and indeed the care workers who are also likely to experience significant changes in their working conditions) in an effort to clarify the situation and try and reduce the stress levels currently being experienced by families throughout Newton Abbot/ Teignbridge and no doubt Devon? If such a meeting is not considered practical, can he at least undertake at the very earliest opportunity to make written contact with all those involved to share the latest information and give assurances that their loved ones will in fact still be safe in Devon County Councils care?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

It is not possible to comment on individual cases in public meetings as there is a responsibility to maintain privacy. Answers to personal case questions will be answered by officers direct to members if the necessary permissions are in place.

There has been no change in the criteria for care packages nor have there been any reductions in the funding which meets the assessed eligibility of people supported.

The review of arrangements with Supported Living providers started in 2015 and is primarily about ensuring that each individuals needs are being met and that each individual is being supported effectively to achieve the appropriate level of independence for that person. To date

over 80 meetings have been held where families and advocates are involved at all stages and a dedicated named social worker is allocated to each property, individuals, families and advocates have their contact details. Appropriate meetings have taken place with families invited.

The review includes areas where shared services are run by providers and the transparency about care services delivered to ensure the Council are only paying for the assessed care needs of individuals. Other costs, for example, rents and service charges are not included. Some clients may see changes to their providers plans if they include shared hours with some element of individual care. All plans ensure the assessed eligible needs, in line with our statutory responsibility, are met.

9. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GREENSLADE
Re: Paving at Mermaid Walk, Barnstaple

The paving at Mermaid Walk Barnstaple is constantly being broken up by the buses which use this as an access to Boutport St. Residents frequently complain to me about people tripping up on the uneven surface. Reports to Highways have not resulted in any remedial work being carried out. Can Councillor Hughes use his good offices to get this short piece of highway made safe for pedestrians?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

The area is regularly inspected for defects and we have an online reporting system for the public to report defects. Any defects that meet the agreed policy criteria are ordered for repair within the policy timescales. This enables the area to be kept safe for use.

When Cabinet agreed the allocation of the Highway Capital Budget in April this year, it set aside a sum for replacement of paved areas so that well used paved areas that cause frequent problems can be replaced with more resilient surfacing. Mermaid Walk will be considered for funding from this budget. The timing of replacement work will depend upon other demands for this type of work and their relative priority, but meanwhile the area will be kept safe as described above.

10. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GREENSLADE
Re: Industry and Brexit Implications

Arising out of the scrutiny work by the Agricultural Task Group it is already evident that Brexit is causing concern to this industry. I am sure that other industries will feel similar.

Would the Leader consider convening a Devon round table to give the opportunity for people to raise their concerns and questions so DCC can lobby Government before Brexit negotiations commence?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

Councillor Hart will reply orally.