

**QUESTIONS TO THE
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

Thursday 7 September 2023

**1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GENT
Re: The Council's Banking Service**

As the Council's own website recommends to people and businesses to choose a bank on the basis of its commitment to decarbonisation, do you agree that the next review of DCC's banking service should take into account the extent to which the bank invests in fossil fuels?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR TWISS

The current contract with Barclays lasts until 2026. When that contract comes to an end and we need to put in place a new banking contract, we will look to factor in consideration of the bank's approach to climate transition. However, that will need to be considered alongside the need to ensure we continue to get value for money and that the Council's requirements for banking services can be met.

Work commissioned by the Council when the current contract was awarded identified that only three banks, Barclays, Lloyds and Nat West, were interested in bidding for new local authority contracts. HSBC also provide banking services to some local authorities but were not interested in bidding for new contracts. The Co-Operative Bank, generally considered as having a high ethical standing, withdrew from the local authority market some years ago. The smaller banks are not geared up to provide banking services to complex local authorities and would be extremely unlikely to bid for the Council's banking contract. Should that position change before 2026, then we can consider the alternatives available at that time, but we would need to be assured that an alternative bank would be able to provide the service required. We cannot take a risk with the Council's banking arrangements.

Between now and 2026, we will certainly engage with Barclays, and urge them to reconsider their position on financing of the fossil fuel industry and in particular the exploration and development of new fields. We can also make them aware that we will take into account the bank's approach to climate transition when we decide upon a new contract in 2026.

For clarity the recommendation on choice of bank referred to in the question is not on the Council's website, but on the Devon Climate Emergency partnership website.

2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CONNETT
Re: Cost-of-living Support

What additional cost-of-living support (if any) is being offered to Devon schools, pupils, and staff?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

Each school receives their own budget allocation and are free to decide how best to use this. Devon maintained schools use the Devon NJC payscales for support staff and follow national teacher's pay and conditions. The local authority does not offer any additional cost of living support to Devon Schools.

3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CONNETT
Re: Impact of COVID on Pupil Attainment

What is being done to track the lasting impact of the covid pandemic on pupil attainment?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

Statutory pupil data is collated by the local authority and an education report detailing the outcome of this is presented to the council in the Autumn Term. We compare our data to regional, statistical and national to better understand the impact of the pandemic beyond Devon. Pupil outcomes have fallen since the pandemic nationally and we have seen the same in Devon.

4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CONNETT
Re: Action to tackle persistent and severe absences

What is being done to tackle persistent and severe absences across the Devon County Council area, particularly in secondary schools?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

From Sept 2023 the way in which we work with school around attendance is changing in line with the DFE's new guidance [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance). In the Autumn term, our attendance improvement officers (AIOs) will meet with every secondary school, every primary school with more than 350 pupils and every school with less than 90% attendance. This meeting will be a strategic planning meeting to discuss what can be done to improve attendance and inclusion in school. Following this meeting, a decision will be made about which DCC officers to engage further in supporting the school and subsequent meetings will be multidisciplinary. We share the Devon attendance data with all school leaders on a weekly basis. Improving attendance has been agreed as our main priority across all our education services for 2023-2024.

**5. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CONNETT
Re: Impact of Unfunded Pay Deals (Schools)**

What is the impact of the government's unfunded pay deal for Devon schools, with a particular view to the tension between balancing school budgets and the need to maintain current levels of support staffing?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

Schools were advised to allow for a 3.5% increase for pay within their budgets for 23/24 and therefore created balanced budgets.

The Government have awarded an additional grant (Teachers Pay Additional Grant (TPAG)) to cover the additional 3% pay award.

At Budget preparation, 11 Local Authority Maintained Schools identified that they would have a deficit by the end of this financial year with a total deficit of just under £1m. (Deficit ranges from £200- £257,000).

**6. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CONNETT
Re: Demand for Free School Meals - Changes**

How has demand for free school meals in Devon schools changed in the past three years?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

Free School meal uptake has increased over the last 3 years. The data below has been taken from census. The Summer 2020 census was withdrawn due to covid-19, so we have gone back to Autumn 2020 for a reference point.

- Autumn 2020 = 14773
- Summer 2023 = 19631

**7. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CONNETT
Re: Meeting Demand for Free School Meals**

What are the current level of demand for free school meals in Devon and are schools in the County able to meet demand?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

Current level of demand is outlined in question 6. Each school, maintained or academy, is free to determine how they provide meals to children in their schools, many schools use external contractors.

Free School Meals (FSM) is a compulsory funding factor within the National Funding Formula to allocate deprivation funding to schools. The department measures eligibility for current FSM using the previous October census (£490 per pupil).

Ever 6 FSM is also a compulsory factor; this funding continues for a further 6 years, even if the child is no longer entitled to receive free school meals. £830 is assigned to each student in reception to year 6; £1,210 is assigned for each of these students in years 7 to 11.

Neither amount goes directly to funding FSM, it is a way of allocating funding from the department to the Local Authority. Individual schools decide how their overall budget allocation is distributed to support the learning of pupils who are entitled to FSM.

8. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CONNETT
Re: Progress on Ide Lane

What progress is being made by Highways with regarding to repairing the low bank and verge on Ide Lane (formerly the C50), close to its junction with Dunsford Road?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

The local team are working with the Council's contractor to identify a scheme that will produce a surplus of topsoil that can be spread to improve the appearance in this location.

9. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY
Re: 2022-3 Quality Accounts

The 2022-3 Quality Accounts of the Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust includes a formal comment by DCC's Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee (HACSC) on those Quality Accounts. When were members of the HACSC supplied with a copy of those Quality Accounts?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR RANDALL JOHNSON

The 2022-3 Quality Accounts of the Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust have not to date been circulated to the wider membership of the Committee. The Scrutiny Officer for the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny worked with the Chair to draft a response to the provider Quality Accounts received to date this year (as has been the longstanding protocol). Prior to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, Task Group style sessions were held with the health providers to discuss their Quality Accounts and wider performance.

The Scrutiny Officer has through the summer been in conversation with the Chair about how best to reinstate those sessions with the providers and is in the process of setting up a meeting later in the Autumn with the Trusts from which a Report will be presented to the Committee.

10. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY
Re: Metcombe Road

When is the Metcombe Rd going to be fully repaired after the floods of the 9th May 2023.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Initial drainage works are currently programmed to start on the 11th of October. These will be immediately followed by resurfacing works. These dates are subject to the weather and resources.

11. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR LEAVER
Re: Pothole repairs

In spring 2023, it is understood, central government allocated Devon County Council £9.4 million for pothole repairs.

- i. Was all of this money allocated for mending potholes, and if not how much was and what were the remaining funds allocated to?
- ii. How much of this money spent on mending potholes in the 2022/23 council year, how much has been spent on mending potholes in the current financial year.
- iii. How much of the £9.4 million has yet to be spent on potholes,
- iv. Have any of the funds have been used to fund expenditure on anything other than potholes? If so, what are the allocations and actual spend.

Please provide the figures both overall for the County Council and by county council division.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Cabinet agreed in March to allocate all of the additional £9.391m of capital funding from the Department for Transport into carriageway improvements to be carried out in the 2023/24 financial year. The intention of the investment is to improve the condition of the carriageway asset and reduce future deterioration. The enhanced capital programme will be delivered across the whole of the financial year. As of the end of August the Service had spent £17.9m and committed a further £26.4m from the total highway structural maintenance budget of £56m. The various capital budgets are managed either centrally or at Neighbourhood level and are allocated based on asset need rather than geographical location. As such, the disaggregation of spend to a divisional level

is not something that is currently monitored. Some of the carriageway improvements being carried out, principally the smaller patches, maybe to remedy existing potholes, however the majority of the investment is being put into larger scale improvements.

12. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON
Re: Active Travel and New Government Department

What applications for funding will be made to the new Government Department for Active Travel or other funding bodies to enable wide implementation of the Active Travel scoping and prioritising of routes currently being investigated by District Councils?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Active Travel England manage the Active Travel Fund, which is a competitive national funding opportunity. There have been 4 tranches of funding and Devon County Council has secured £4.42m capital funding to date. The latest funding announced in May 2023 secured funding for a range of projects including the Tarka Trail, Queen Street (Newton Abbot) and Queen Street (Exeter). No details have yet been provided about future funding opportunities.

We expect future applications needing to align with Devon County Council's strategic active travel priorities as included in the Cycling and Multi-Use Trail Network Strategy, Local Transport Plan, Exeter Transport Strategy and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs). Increasingly, LCWIPs will be expected to guide future active travel investment decisions and District Councils have input to the Exeter, Heart of Teignbridge and Barnstaple with Bideford and Northam LCWIPs. Further LCWIPs are being developed for the Countywide rural trails and growth areas in East Devon and Mid Devon and the County Council is also supporting South Hams District and West Devon Borough Councils with the LCWIP for their District areas. Future applications for funding will not only draw upon these plans but will also need to meet the specific fund criteria, which has varied slightly with each tranche, for instance with a stronger emphasis on walking and inclusion of more rural schemes. Locally supported schemes benefitting from match funding and having land secured to guarantee certainty of delivery within a short timescale will most likely have greatest chance of success in future funding applications.

13. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON
Re: 20's Plenty and Scoring Criteria for Applications

The motion for 20's Plenty default speed limit where people live, work and play has been passed by many Town and Parish Council's across the Country; can this now be added to DCC's criteria for the scoring of applications for 20mph speed limits?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Under the framework for taking forward a 20mph speed limit agreed by Cabinet in December 2021, elected members are first invited to make representations on behalf of their communities. On this basis there is a presumption that the proposal has the support of the respective Parish or Town Council.

In addition, the framework considers whether an active Community Speed Watch. As such, it is difficult to see how the proposal would alter the outcome of the review process.

14. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON Re: Waste Management – Review of Income Opportunities

How often are the income opportunities for a better receipt for materials brought to the Waste Recycling reviewed, rather than simply continue with the current practice where this potentially increasing value of recyclate benefits only third party private companies?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The increase (or decrease) in the value of Recyclate at DCCs Household Waste Recycling Centres is accounted for on an annual basis. The contracts for the operation of these facilities contains a clause whereby increases in the value of Recyclate streams benefits DCC. In the 2022/23 financial year, DCC benefited from a rebate of in excess of £330k derived from this mechanism.

15. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON Re: Highways Management – Consideration of In-House

Is bringing our highways repairs and maintenance back in house being considered, and potential for reduction of costs compared with the current third party commissioned services, as part of the ongoing review of DCC revenue costs and expenditure?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

The County Council has a Term Maintenance Contract (TMC) with Milestone that was awarded to Milestone (previously Skanska) in 2017. This contract was for an initial period of 7 years. In November 2021 Cabinet agreed to extend this contract through to the full term of 10 years and the costs. The Highways and Traffic Management Service continually reviews the blend of work that is delivered by the TMC contractor and benchmarks cost and quality across the sector to ensure value for money is being achieved. With the current TMC ending in less than 4 years time, work has commenced on considering the options for the service post March 2027, this will include consideration of different types of delivery mechanism for the TMC, including in-house.

16. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON

Re: South Devon Freeport

To ensure full transparency and public accountability, at what point will the public, our Council Tax payers, be consulted on the plans and vast public expenditure being borrowed and invested in by Devon County Council for the South Devon Freeport and its associated 45km Customs Free zone which is currently going forward?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

This scheme followed our standard approval processes. It is up to £15m borrowing, matched by government seed capital for road and active travel infrastructure.

The Council's participation in the freeport was approved by cabinet April 2022, to generate jobs and growth in the area.

The borrowing is underpinned by the additional business rates created by stimulating economic growth and attracting new businesses to the region over 25 years, so over time this is expected to be net nil cost to the Council.