

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL
Wednesday, 8 June 2016

1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR OWEN
Re: Pothole Action Fund

Could Councillor Hughes give the allocation figures for Exeter (of funding from the Government's Pothole Action Fund) as compared to the rest of the County and explain how they have been reached.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Central government has allocated additional capital funding across the country using the Pothole Action Fund as it recognises that a key issue for road users has been the large number of potholes on the local road network.

As Members will know, potholes are largely caused by water penetration, high water tables and the freeze/thaw cycles. Potholes can also be an indication of potential underlying structural issues affecting the integrity of a road. This can also be a result of heavy vehicles using the more minor part of the road network where the existing road construction is not adequate. Members will also recall the road condition data presented to Cabinet on 13th April, which showed that Devon's A and B road network is performing relatively well and that most of our road condition problems are on the minor road network, where there is insufficient capital funding from Government to meet all of the planned maintenance needs of the network.

So, the allocation of Devon's pothole funding allocation to each Member's area is based on 50% of the total being shared equally across all electoral divisions, with the remaining 50% allocated based on pothole frequency on the minor road network. This targets the funding on the minor roads where the potholes are generally more prevalent and on the part of the network that receives less of the available capital allocation for planned repairs.

Potential schemes have been identified where there have been pothole clusters in the recent past as pothole clusters are an indication of a structural weakness that could benefit from a more substantial repair.

The reason for a 50% equal share of the allocation is to provide for works overheads (traffic management etc.) associated with doing any work in an area and to ensure all electoral divisions get a basic sum to undertake some priority works in their area. The remaining 50%, based on pothole frequency, follows the agreed asset management principles in tackling the areas of most need with a view to reducing future costs of repeat visits to fix potholes as the areas treated will be more resilient to future pothole formation.

The allocation for Exeter is £139,000. There are full details of the allocation by Electoral Division on the County Council's website.

The Government funding was based on proportion of the national road network that the County has. If this methodology, based purely on road length, had been adopted to allocate the money across Members Divisions then the Exeter area would have received approximately £54,000

2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GREENSLADE
Re: Ashleigh Road School Barnstaple

Is the Cabinet Member for schools aware of the urgent need for investment at Ashleigh Rd School Barnstaple in particular repairs to the school roof which requires on going and costly scaffolding around the building to protect the children from parts of the roof falling off? I further understand that there is a funding issue and thus far the building improvements at the school have not been authorised. Would Cllr McInnes be prepared to visit Ashleigh Rd School with me to see the issues for himself?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR McINNES

Responsibility for the management of the Council's assets, including the schools' and education property portfolio, rests with my Cabinet colleague, Councillor Clatworthy but I am aware of the issue. Having spoken to Councillor Clatworthy, he has intimated that he would be happy to visit the School with Councillor Greenslade, as would I, to enable us see the issues for ourselves.

However, I am advised that the works to the roof and the internal refurbishment of the pupil WC's have been prepared and are about to be sent out to tender. The works are scheduled to be undertaken over the school summer holiday period with the roofing works likely to be completed in the early part of the autumn term. In addition, an ageing Devon Lady classroom is due to be replaced at the school and a formal planning application is being prepared. The target project completion date for this work is the autumn half term and Councillor Clatworthy will be asked to approve the costs for these works shortly, in the normal way.

3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GREENSLADE
Re: EU Referendum

Will the Leader join with me in congratulating the Prime Minister on the robust campaign he is waging to keep the UK in the European Union?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

Cllr Hart will reply orally

4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR VINT
Re: Energy Efficiency

What progress has been made in recent months towards achieving a 25% energy efficiency improvement in this Council's remaining estate, an increase in our income from renewable energy technologies and other objectives set out in this Council's Energy Policy?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

In response to what is a wide ranging question, I have summarised below the position with regard to each of the areas Councillor Vint refers to, namely:

Energy efficiency improvement in the corporate estate

- Resources: the new Corporate Energy Manager is now in post.*
- Property Reviews: building energy performance is considered when decisions are being made about the future of County Council buildings.*
- Energy consumption: the Barnstaple Civic Centre tower block is scheduled for closure in autumn of this year following completion of works at Taw View (new office facility in North Devon); a Building Management System controlling heating, cooling, ventilation and lighting has been installed at Taw View, and a review of Building Management Systems at Strategic Centres has commenced which will include ways to reduce energy consumption and/or lower costs.*
- Funding: the Council has been successful in the first stage of a European Strategic Investment Fund application which could provide it with match funding for piloting*

innovative whole-building retrofit technologies to minimise energy consumption in our office buildings.

Increase in income from renewable energy technologies

- as part of the estates team 'Asset Review' work, the Corporate Energy Manager is currently reviewing County Council assets and market products/services to assess income and saving potential.*
- a 100kW, community-owned solar PV array was commissioned at Great Moor House during February half term.*
- a Renewable Energy Strategy is currently being drafted and will be presented to the Environmental Performance Board (which provides the governance and oversight for the implementation of the Council's Energy Strategy and Policy) in August 2016.*

Other Objectives

Street Lighting : part night street lighting project was completed in the spring of 2016 and Street lighting on arterial routes across Devon is being upgraded to LED technology during the next 2 years: Barnstaple has been completed and work has started in Kingsbridge and Exeter.

Schools: Nine schools have progressed to the Investment Grade Proposal stage of the Re:Fit programme: it is hoped to increase this number to 14 to provide an attractive portfolio to the Re:Fit contractor by November 2016.

Fleet: Four full-electric vehicles have been operating in the Council's fleet since February 2016 (75% grant funding from the Department for Transport as part of a pilot programme).

Commuting: the County Hall Travel Plan has been revised and launched to encourage more staff to change their commuting habits; proposals include a city-wide electric bike rental service to be developed in partnership with Co-Cars and the Great Moor House Travel Plan was introduced in January 2016 which includes the implementation of non-car days and charging on site.

If Councillor Vint wishes to discuss any of these areas in more detail I or the relevant Officers would be happy to talk to him.

5. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR VINT Re: Refugees

In light of concerns that the Government is expecting delays to the admission of unaccompanied child refugees into the UK until the end of the year, has this Council indicated to the Government that it is currently able and willing to welcome, support and accommodate a number of unaccompanied child refugees from Calais and from other refugee camps - and, if it has not yet contacted the Government about this, is it now willing to do so?"

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

The County Council continues to work closely with colleagues across the South West, including the South West Migration Partnership and Home Office to lead and develop an appropriate local response to the dispersal of asylum seekers and resettlement of refugees linking to the wider issues of migration and asylum across the UK. Councils across Devon have committed to resettle Syrian families under the Government's resettlement programme and the County Council is working with them to turn those commitments into the reality of families being safely resettled.

The Council recognises the role it has to play in responding to unaccompanied asylum seeking children and those identified by the Immigration Act as requiring resettlement within the UK. Officers and Members have remained in close contact with Government and key organisations including the LGA on developing an appropriate and sustainable local response. A National Transfer Scheme, has been proposed by Government – as a means of dispersing and

supporting unaccompanied children, but the details of how this would operate are still in the early stages of development.

To ensure the County Council is well placed to lead and respond, DCC will host a meeting of SW Councils on 13 June with a view to developing a model which can be deployed across the South West.

Children who are accepted as unaccompanied asylum seeking children will have looked after status. We are working with our foster carers and independent care providers to ensure we can appropriately meet the needs of this group of vulnerable children. There will be financial implications, and we are working on estimating the extent of these.

**6. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR VINT
Re: Highway Projects**

What steps will this council be taking to ensure, in advance of work proceeding, that the overall costs of small highways projects (individual crossings, junction improvements, cycle paths etc) are reasonable and competitive - and how can they provide reassurance to Town and Parish Councils and local residents that the best value for money is being obtained for such projects in their area - especially those funded locally from s106 money?"

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

The Council is always looking to obtain 'contributions' from developers wherever appropriate. There are two ways this can be done. The first (and the most effective way as far as the Council is concerned) is that the developer simply carries out the 'required' extras' when undertaking the scheme and meets all of the costs regardless of what the final amount is.

Secondly and where s106 contributions are required for off-site related works, the Council seeks a 'contribution' from the developer - based on the estimated cost of any additional highway works needed to mitigate the impact of a development. This 'contribution' is then put toward the overall cost of the scheme, including the 'extra works,' which would be included in its capital programme and for which tenders would then be sought in the usual way.

As to best value, all schemes for any 'extra works' would be designed by the Highways and Capital Development Service and, as is normal, the actual construction would only be undertaken when the necessary tender and procurement process had been completed – either through one of our frameworks contracts or a separate tender exercise – to ensure that the work was awarded to the most economic tenderer.