

Public Document Pack

Public questions (Pages 1 - 6)

This page is intentionally left blank

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 27 March 2024

1) Question from Ms S Davis to Councillor A Dale, Cabinet Member for Education

“With a large deficit budget and a big disparity between funding and real costs, how, as a Primary School with triple the national average of pupils with an EHCP/funding, do we continue to ensure they receive the support they need to make educational progress and keep safe, whilst also ensuring that other pupils are not detrimentally impacted by the large numbers of redundancies we are having to progress with?”

Response:

“Thank you very much, Ms Davis, for your question and thank you also for inviting me to the school yesterday. Can I start by saying that Brampton is absolutely a school to be celebrated for being so inclusive. Walking round yesterday I really got a sense of that. It was absolutely a school where no one is left behind. It was extremely welcoming and I can absolutely understand why it is so popular among parents, particularly those with children with additional needs, and that is why it is so concerning to me as well as it is to you and disappointing that the school is in such a difficult financial situation.

I am absolutely very clear that the school is in a rock and a hard place situation. Those support staff who are affected by the restructure proposals absolutely have my sympathy and I appreciate it is a very difficult and uncertain time for them, but as governors yourself and as the school leadership team I also have sympathy for you in having to make these decisions. It is clearly not a position you want to be in and nor do you feel, quite rightly, that it is a situation of your own making, so during our meeting yesterday you clearly articulated the two key challenges affecting the school. The first being the number of SEN children in school and the impact that has on having to draw on what is called the notional SEN budget, so every school has to contribute the first £6,000 to support the needs of any child with SEN and when those numbers are so much higher than the national average that has a much bigger impact on the school budget. I absolutely understand that and to that extent I have said it before and I will say it again, I think the school is almost a victim of its own success in being so inclusive, that that really is having a detrimental impact on the school's finances.

Then there is a section around insufficient funding from the High Needs Block for those children who are on the EHCPs in terms of that banding of funding as well as the impacts on our timescales and our processes for EHCPs which is sort of exacerbating and making the problem even more acute.

I already articulated yesterday some of the progress we are trying to make on those issues and we are actually also working on the banding models at the

moment as we speak to try and ensure that the funding better reflects the needs of the child.

I offered yesterday, and I will say it again, that we have a meeting as soon as possible in the new term with yourself and other governors and the head teacher, together with myself and senior SEN officers and finance officers so that we can try and work together and try and work through some of these issues and try to resolve them.

I would also just highlight though that the Council similarly is in a rock and a hard place situation. On mainstream school funding we receive significantly less than when compared to other areas like London. London receives almost double the amount per pupil than we do and that cannot ever be described as fair. It clearly puts additional pressure on school budgets, it puts them under additional strain and actually reduces our ability as a local authority to be able to try and generate contingency pots to be able to support schools who are in exceptional circumstances like Brampton, so that is the first thing I would say.

Secondly, with the National Funding Formula the Government are quite strict in asking us to follow the National Funding Formula very closely in the way that we distribute that funding and also the decisions are not totally ours, we do have to operate some of those decisions through Schools Forum as well and obviously consult with the School Forum.

Then on High Needs' funding there are quite significant increases in recent years. The demand is clearly massively outstripping that funding and like many other Authorities we are facing a deficit budget. It is this backdrop that makes decisions around spend in High Needs really challenging and pressurised, but just to try and reassure you to the extent that the Council absolutely isn't taking this lying down, we are playing a very active role in the national lobbying efforts around school funding and SENDs to try and fix these issues.

The Council is a member of the Cross-Party F40 group which I am very privileged to chair and we are campaigning for a review of notional SEN budgets in mainstream schools, quite frankly because I think they are ridiculous and they don't make sense to schools. They really do need to be looked at again. We are campaigning for an additional £4.6bn of SEND revenue funding for fairer funding for both mainstream school and High Needs, for improved SEND training and resources for schools and a greater focus on inclusion as part of the accountability schools so that all schools are doing their bit when it comes to children with SENDs.

We have been very active in recent months as well. We have had regular MPs' briefings. We supported a three hour debate in the House of Commons. We have had meetings with the Ministers and Shadow Ministers as well to articulate the issues as we see them and we have had two MPs' letters supported by numerous MPs written to the Chancellor but it is absolutely

something that we are going to continue to do, particularly in this crucial general election year because we want all the mainstream parties to be focused on resolving this issue which we see as one of the most challenging across the education landscape at the moment.

I hope that to an extent answers the question. I appreciate it is not a direct answer but hopefully we can meet after half-term and be able to have further discussions on it.”

Supplementary question:

“So as a mainstream Primary with a deficit budget we have 317 children on roll. 31% of these children have special educational needs, which is 98 children, and 43% of these children are eligible to receive the pupil premium funding which works out to 133 children. Due to our budget we need to lose 160 teaching hours per week to help balance. How do you suggest that we continue to support all our pupils and safeguard them with reduced staffing levels?”

Response:

“As I have said, I fully understand the situation. It is extremely difficult and you are in an absolutely rock and a hard place situation and regrettably Brampton I think is quite an extreme example, but we are seeing more and more schools in this budget deficit situation and having to make these really difficult redundancies.

I think what I would say is refer you back to the original answer and let’s meet in the early part of the next term, let’s try and work through and see if there is anything else that we can do to try and support. I can’t make any promises because I am not able to do that but let’s talk through it and see if we can find some solutions and find some ways of giving the school some additional support.”

2) Question from Mr A Key to Councillor B Lewis, Leader of the Council

“Can you tell me why the County Council has affiliated itself to an organisation called UK100? This has been done without public consultation or consent and is therefore, in my opinion, unacceptable. The actions you have agreed to undertake in consequence will have a tremendous, detrimental effect upon the lives of Derbyshire people.”

Response:

“Thank you Mr Key, for your question. The Council’s climate change commitments, ambitions, we set those out as a strategy achieving net zero back in 2021-2025. That was approved by the Cabinet in October of that year. The strategy includes a series of actions that will help us get to tackle

the causes and impacts of climate change, very much matched to the Government's ambitions and times, and that sort of mitigates the impacts of climate change right across the county, help us support businesses, residents and to decarbonise the Council as well.

We became a member of UK100 in May of 2022 and the UK100 net zero pledge aligns with the commitments that we made as part of our Climate Change strategy. Now the Council is also a member of the UK100 Countryside Climate Network. This is a subgroup of the UK100 network and focuses on predominantly rural areas. That, I have to say, is chaired by a County Council Leader from a Conservative Authority as well. UK100 is a cross-Party network, however, of democratically elected local leaders from right across the country working together sharing resource/knowledge within its network. As a consequence of that we get packages of training etc which our staff utilise and so on as well as having conversations and collaborations with Government on some of the work that is done there.

There is no obligation on us as a local authority to continue to be a member of that if we don't want to, it doesn't force us into anything, so I am a bit surprised by the tone of the question you have put to us in regard to how you have phrased that, Mr Key, but I would be quite interested to hear of why you think the consequences would be "tremendous" and "detrimental" on Derbyshire people?

Supplementary question:

"There is no science supporting man-made climate change and net zero means literally no life on earth as carbon dioxide is the gas of life so if you don't know that go and look at some science and research it, but the main point is because it is a false agenda people don't understand. They haven't been consulted about it. It is going to have detrimental impacts on the lives of ordinary people and I would put it to you that the real agenda (it is not an East Midlands' Mayor it is a Mayor for Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire because the other local authorities haven't signed up to it) the agenda is to have a global parliament of Mayors managed by the UN to implement Agenda 2030 and the sustainable development goals. So my question is, agreeing to that agenda you are being played like ten stringed instruments because the manipulators and the UN will be using the Mayor and the Cabinet to implement Agenda 2030."

There was no response.

3) Question from Mr D Snaith to Councillor C Cupit, Cabinet Member for Highways Assets and Transport

"As a borough councillor, I often get questions from the public about potholes and other highways matters. I normally point them to Derbyshire County Council and hear nothing more but I was recently contacted by someone who

got no joy after contacting Derbyshire Highways when reporting badly damaged safety barriers. The reply from Derbyshire Highways stated “only works that are determined as being essential to highway safety are being issued at this time.” How can safety barriers be not classed as “essential” and what will it take before the Council takes actions.”

Response:

“Thank you, Mr Snaith for your question and for coming today. I am sorry to hear of the concerns that you have raised. I guess looking at the issue generally when a report is made or an issue such as this occurs a Highways Inspector attends, assesses the prioritisation of the works and any temporary works that may then be needed before the permanent repair is carried out so it is difficult to reply on the specifics of this issue as there aren’t any within your question in terms of location etc, but if you would like to send me more information I can assure you I will personally look into it and take it up for you. You can also contact me or the local County Councillor with any concerns at any time outside of full Council meetings so you don’t have to wait in between obviously, if you have any issues then we can rectify those.”

Supplementary question:

“I certainly welcome the advice to contact my local County Councillor. In actual fact, I did that and received no response. That was a little bit useless and Derbyshire Highways also ignored me and did not reply, so I received no reply back.

My response is a safety barrier is safety. This particular barrier, which I will send the details on, has been struck three times. It is near a school. How can this - I will ask again - how can this not be classified as “essential”? It is a safety barrier, it has to be essential for safety?”

Response:

“Thank you. Again, it is a bit difficult to comment on the specifics not knowing the location. I can completely understand your concerns. I am happy to take it away if you can send me through the details. You have never contacted me that I am aware of and I have double checked. If you send me the details I will happily pick it up and I will come back to you in full and obviously take appropriate action.”

This page is intentionally left blank