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Elected Member questions (Pages 1 - 16)

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ELECTED MEMBER QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 27 March 2024

1) Question from Councillor J Barron to Councillor J Patten, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

“Will the Cabinet Member please update the Council on the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection of Children’s Social Care Services?”

This question was withdrawn.

2) Question from Councillor K Gillott to Councillor S Spencer, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Budget

“Since 2019 the Cabinet has spent approximately £173,000 on improvements to this council chamber including approximately £165,000 on the audio-visual system. Does the Cabinet Member think that sum has been good value for money?”

Response:

“Thank you for the question, Councillor Gillott. The decision to invest in this Council Chamber was taken on the 17 May 2018 to be precise. If you remember, and you were in the Council Chamber in those days, we had 37 units which were fixed units located and fixed to the desks that we sit before; extremely inconvenient if we had a change of representation in the Chamber itself because not only did we have members sharing microphones we had more than two people sharing microphones on occasions which was hardly ideal. It was also incredibly difficult for those with hearing difficulties to use those facilities because they were not wired appropriately into the wiring system within this Chamber and, of course, that system had been in this Chamber for some considerable time, I don’t know how long, but looking at the equipment for some considerable time. We will leave it at that.

Since then we have invested into those 85 moveable units, some of which you see before you today, £169,663.50 to be precise and those 85 units and associated equipment, cameras, speakers, display screens plus associated IT infrastructure (including seven years’ maintenance) has made the facilities in this Chamber and every room of this Council building far more accessible for those with hearing challenges and far more bookable for organisations who choose to use them for the purposes that they choose to do so.

On average this Chamber alone is used approximately two times a week by various organisations to hold their meetings in and they tend to use the IT equipment as well and that is only in this room so, it is not for me to judge whether that is good value for money but I can say from the usage figures of

the Council, which has been provided to me, I would say we are making better use of this building by providing decent IT and communication equipment than we were before. Thank you.”

Supplementary question:

“Can I thank Councillor Spencer for that answer. It has been very helpful and I will look forward to reading the verbatim record of it as well. I agree with everything you say. We need to modernise the system and it works but the system we have today, we have all experienced today, it is a lot of money on an audio visual system. The audio side of it we have had problems with today and I have actually never seen the visual side of it used other than for what we are seeing it for today.

There is certainly no live streaming but my real concern, Councillor Spencer, is when it comes to the voting side of it because the system - how we use it anyway - doesn't display how individual members vote. I think that is wrong because that is our democracy almost taking place in secret. Unless we have a recorded vote or unless you actually ask afterwards as to how people voted nobody in this room knows how I cast my vote for any one of those votes we have had today or even did I vote. We have sat at the back of the Council Chamber today representatives of the press. They can't tell my constituents how the member for Clay Cross South voted and I think that is wrong so, Councillor Spencer, would you agree to take away and see whether that could be rectified because I know some of these systems in particular do allow for individual names to come up when votes are cast and to tell you how those votes are cast, whether they are for, against or abstain?”

Response:

“Well, it will come as no great surprise to Councillor Gillott I am fully aware of the way in which his question has been couched. It may have something to do with his role on another Authority as you might say, but - and I am more than happy for you to use my words because I use them carefully - what I would say to you is this: when using my words in the context that he chooses to use them in another place I hope he does an assessment of the usage of the said building he is using them in because that is the critical element. Has it enhanced the facility? Has it improved the use of it for people particularly with challenging disabilities? Has it improved the environment in which they work, and has it increased? Those are the questions you need to ask to establish value for money.

On the point of webcasting and best use of the IT equipment itself we are currently exploring and enabling greater transparency in our democratic processes by considering live streaming as we speak.

The other issues with regard to the voting system I am not aware whether this system can achieve that. I don't consider myself to be an IT expert, that is something not for me, I believe that is a decision for the Chair of the Council to make, but I will make a note of what you have said and I will ask and try and establish what this system can do and how it can operate, which is what we are doing at the moment with a live streaming process."

3) Question from Councillor E Fordham to Councillor C Cupit, Cabinet Member for Highways, Assets and Transport

"To ask the County Council if it is satisfied if sufficient measures have been taken regards flood prevention in Chesterfield? And to ask if the County is content that the Environment Agency has not acted (as it has previously promised) on the river clearances needed on the Rother, the Hipper, the Holme brook, and Spital brook, for the flooding to be limited in future and for additional deaths and flooding disasters to be avoided?"

Response:

"Thank you Councillor Fordham for your question and for raising this important issue again. I know sadly many residents and communities across the county, but also in Chesterfield, continue to be impacted by the damage caused by Storm Babet in particular last year and continue to feel the after-effects of it.

As you note in the question the Environment Agency is the responsible body for managing the flood risk from the main rivers whereas Riparian Landowners are responsible for maintaining some of the smaller brooks and the surrounding river channels. I know the Council's Flood Team have been working really closely with the Environment Agency to look into all the issues of last year and have been on site jointly with them and with residents several times in Chesterfield.

I understand some clearance works were undertaken on the rivers post-Storm Babet by the Environment Agency and in terms of further works this was something that we discussed at the recent Place Scrutiny meeting and review which focused on flooding and Storm Babet, I think about a month ago now, at which many of the local partners and organisations attended and the works point was discussed with the Environment Agency representatives during that meeting and review. It was quite an extensive, I think it was a three hour Scrutiny meeting.

On a related note I am aware that there have been previous quite large scale flood risk mitigation schemes carried out in Chesterfield in the past, including The Avenue Flood Alleviation Scheme which held 245,000 m³ of water during Babet. I appreciate that wasn't enough for the community last year so we are continuing to work with the Environment Agency on further flood risk mitigation

schemes such as this and we are currently doing this. I am happy to keep you updated on that and discuss it further if that is helpful.

Alongside that in terms of other further actions to provide the best resilience we can against future flood or weather events the Property Flood Resilience Grants for individual properties are still live until August and the section 19 Flood Investigation report into the events of last October is due to be completed by the end of May and will report back to Council and to all councillors, so I hope this reassures Councillor Fordham this is something that we continue to work on with all relevant agencies and landowners to take what action we can.”

Supplementary question:

“I attended the consultation meeting in St Mary’s Gate which the Environment Agency sort of led but there were a lot of County Council staff there. The Environment Agency staff were very, very clear they do not proceed without the County Council’s agreement and the truth is nine years on there has been no progression, nothing has happened.

The lady died. She was the very woman who got the letter saying the work would take place and it still hasn’t happened. The report coming in May, it was promised in December. I really think there is something about the pace at which the Environment Agency is not moving and if we are an equal partner with them, as they say in their defence of why they haven’t proceeded, we really need to just check that we are putting all possible pressure on them to act quickly or even just to act.”

Response:

“Thank you, Councillor Fordham. I completely understand the point you are making in terms of time taken. I think it is absolutely correct that some of these things do take time and we have to make sure we take the right measures as opposed to trying to take steps that may not have the best impact.

I would also just say that I am scheduling to meet with the Head of the Environment Agency, not specifically to discuss Chesterfield but to discuss all flood issues, so I am happy to pick up that point when I do as well.”

4) Question from Councillor E Fordham to Councillor S Spencer, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Budget

“Understanding that the Council is realising its asset value and disposing of properties in order to bridge the funding gaps it faces there have been a number of crisis for community groups losing their venues. What specific work and contingency planning is the Council undertaking with elected

councillors and individual community groups to ensure that the drive to bridge budget gaps is not jeopardising community groups and their very existence?"

Response:

"Thank you, Councillor Fordham, I have a long written answer here which details the laid down protocols and procedures which I find pretty boring to read out and I am sure you will find pretty boring to listen to. I am more than happy to provide you with the detail of the processes we adopt when re-evaluating the usage of assets of the Council but let me just explain to you the processes in summary.

The asset management portfolio of this Authority is approximately 4,500 assets. Many of those assets are no longer being used to their full potential for various reasons, often changes in working practices, as I have already articulated. As a consequence we need to consider whether we are delivering best value for the taxpayers by retaining those assets on the book.

There is one particular line here that I do want to read out to you. "The Council is only allowed to acquire or hold building assets for the purpose of either directly operating our business or delivering our services to the people of Derbyshire or for generating income." That is significant and it is significant in many ways in the way in which we manage that asset portfolio.

Over the last few years the Property Team have done sterling work by carrying out and evaluating the condition of all our assets across the county, their condition as far as renovation requirements; their condition as far as usage; their condition as far as need; of suitability; location; modern facilities; utilities. You name it we have done the lot. We are going through a very, very consistent process of listening firstly to what locally elected members have said because following a decision to either re-purpose or dispose of we firstly consult a local member and that is happening as a matter of course so we can document all those emails that are sent to local members (many of which I don't get a response from I might add, Councillor Fordham) but we can document that. We do that so they can engage in a conversation with other user groups who may use the same buildings out of hours for out of time activity, as many of them are. Each individual case is looked at on its own individual merits.

I encourage members in this Council Chamber to get involved in that, as many members have, and been successful in assisting those groups to find alternative accommodation or come to an arrangement with the Council that fulfils its requirement under best value, but whilst disposing of these assets, if that is the choice, the decision that is made, it has to be done in a transparent way where we obtain best consideration for the taxpayer, in other words the correct price in many ways.

Public auction is the best way of proving best consideration and it clearly identifies to the public it has been done in a fair and transparent fashion. There are other mechanisms that can be used under certain circumstances and they have been which we can clarify but, Councillor Fordham, what I would say to you is please do not mix up the re-purposing of assets that the Council hold and the financial challenges. This makes sense. Any well run Authority has to use its assets to their full potential and by standing empty and being vulnerable to ingress of water, any other form of vandalism, whatever the case may be, is bad use of resources and it is our duty to make sure we use them properly.”

Supplementary question:

“I hear what you say but I would say that there is another layer to it and the frisson of panic that went through the District Association of the Scouts in Chesterfield as buildings were literally sold from under them, to whom they knew not and we have had to find them alternative space, I found myself saying words I am not used to: “Thank goodness for the Church of England having empty halls” because we have been able to relocate them at a price that reflected the previous rent because the new tenant we had sold to refused to countenance having them as an existing tenant.

We are disposing of the Tontine Centre in the centre of Chesterfield. I understand its use may have changed from its purpose but there are community groups seeking to have a dialogue to buy that and are being told to go to auction. Given you have just said public auction is the best way can I just say on this case I am not convinced and ask him to reconsider?”

Response:

“Councillor Fordham, there were I think 13 assets in Chesterfield that were rationalised, maybe 12. It was 12 because it was 13 originally and one was removed. 12 assets in Chesterfield. Many of those assets were not fit for the purpose that they were being used for. I think that would be a reasonable statement to make.

Those buildings now, at that particular time required a significant investment in renovation work and it was decided that the best way to provide decent office accommodation for our staff, to deliver our services, was in a modern building that allowed those elements of the organisation to come together. The new building they will be operating from will have two changing spaces, toilets downstairs. They will be able to communicate better with one another and have modern 21st Century facilities and they are located very locally to the centre of Chesterfield.

All the buildings in question you have mentioned lie within a one mile square radius of one another approximately, without pacing it out. It made sense to take a rational measured approach to it. All the service user groups included in those buildings were given the opportunity to discuss with the Council their requirements and needs and we have gone a long way to try to facilitate. In fact I had a long conversation with Steve Osbaldeston the other day myself, in fact two hours talking about the services, the fantastic services that OzBox deliver across the county as a whole and trying to come up with a solution to the challenges you are facing of finding a permanent home.

Those conversations will continue, I can assure you of that. Through the asset management process that we are going through at this moment in time there will be many more of them to come. The only assurance I can give today is we will do our best to accommodate all those groups or assist those groups to find alternative accommodation.

Ironically the scouting organisation you raise are now making better use of another building that needed more usage of anyway so there is a positive out of this also. I can give you an assurance today that that will continue to be the case and we will have those conversations. I expect local members, or I would urge local members to respond to the email you receive from Property Services when those processes start because some people do not.”

5) Question from Councillor E Fordham to Councillor C Hart, Cabinet Member for Health and Communities

“The issues relating to anti-social behaviour in Chesterfield have yet again bounced up the agenda of the Borough Council and the Police, and the Crime Commissioner - with more exclusion orders and actions underway to move people out of the immediate town centre. The ramifications for nearby residential areas is increasingly acute and negative. Is the County Council assured that the mental health and adult well-being teams are being included early enough in these decisions and actions to enable that meaningful life changing and positive interventions are made, rather than just moving problems out of immediate sight and into residential areas of the town?”

Response:

“This Council is aware that Chesterfield Borough Council has recently reported and action taken to address persistent criminality by a small number of individuals in the town centre by way of Criminal Behaviour Orders. The Council and its partners have shared policies and procedures in respect of antisocial behaviour and these follow an incremental approach. This process includes the designation of Public Space Protection Orders and the issuing of crime prevention warnings and crime prevention notices. That is on completion of a risk assessment with referral to the appropriate support

services including, amongst others, Outreach P3 who deliver safe haven and crisis drop-ins. Also Pathways.

I am not sure whether you know much about Pathways but that is a single point of access hub in Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire. It is available to anyone aged over 18 who is homeless or at risk of homelessness. Anyone approaching them is offered an holistic risk assessment to get them through a plan to hopefully achieve their goals. Their services span from initial engagement relationship building to supporting people in new tenancies. Interventions include drop-ins, appointments, outreach and phone support. Pathways also work in partnership with a large number of agencies and faith based groups.

I know you mentioned the Police and Crime Commissioner. I also know that she gave them a grant for a volunteer and activator/co-ordinator to help them to deliver these services. So apart from Pathways and P3 there is work also with Chesterfield Borough Council's Homelessness Team. If this approach fails to address the antisocial behaviour consideration is given to a CBO, which is a Criminal Behaviour Order, but that is working in conjunction with the police.

It is recognised that rough sleeping is a complex and challenging issue and a preventative approach is required before individuals reach this point. As such a Rough Sleepers' Action Group meeting is held in Chesterfield fortnightly to ensure a multi-agency coordinated response. This includes the NHS; Chesterfield Borough Council and North East, Derbyshire County Council and representatives from the community, voluntary sector and also Housing Associations.

In addition the Council has worked strategically with District and Borough partners to support development to the Derbyshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. Public Health also fund an officer who coordinates discharging the associated action plans. The strategy has four strategic priorities:

1. Making homelessness everyone's responsibility through a system wide approach.
2. Prevent and respond to homelessness to early intervention and personalised solutions.
3. End rough sleeping and repeat homelessness.
4. Develop sustainable, supported and settled housing solutions.

Hopefully you can see how proactive the work is in the Chesterfield area.

Also, on the mental health area that you raised there is some really good work going on to help people, whether in Chesterfield or in other areas of

Derbyshire, to raise even more awareness. You possibly know there is a Mental Health Awareness Week coming up as well, the 13-19 May, but meantime you can always check out, there is a map which is called the 'Let's Chat Map', a bit of a mouthful, but that tells you some of the things that are happening on health issues across Derbyshire. We are also working on making that interactive so you will be able to go on there and there will be information on the Let's Chat benches; the Let's Chat indoor locations; free outdoor physical activity groups; free outdoor mental health groups and opportunities to connect with nature.

There is still a lot of work being done on that but you will be able to then not only see what is being delivered locally and what is there for people to use not just in Chesterfield but right across Derbyshire. Thank you."

Supplementary question:

"I should just say to Carol I am a volunteer for Pathways. I raise money for them and collect sleeping bags, coats and toiletries so that those who they deal with don't have that dilemma of funding choices.

You started off by saying it was in relation to criminal behaviour and that is the bit that scares me. I really think our mental health intervention is the one that comes last as an assessment. When you read out the bullet points of 1, 2, 3, 4, things we could do I didn't hear mental health in the steps that should be taken.

If you stand in Chesterfield Market any morning and you see them, the dealer having been, the security guard turns up to move them it is not a security guard they need it is mental health support and I am really scared that the Borough Council's cleansing of the market centre is not helping these people turn their lives around. I would urge you to get the Mental Health Teams in earlier. Pathways is a proactive approach service it doesn't go out to find you. These people are known by name, by character, they need help. I think our service, the Mental Health Team are the only people who can actually help them rather than move them on and I hope we can push that up the agenda. I hope you will consider doing that."

Response:

!! take on board what you say but there is an awful lot of work going on in mental health. We have a fantastic team. It is difficult to pick up the mental health on the first thing but I can assure you that everyone that is dealt with part of that is mental health. We know it has been a major thing and particularly it has even gone worse since Covid, we know that, so there is a lot of work done in that.

I can assure you that mental health is very seriously taken by us and as I say our teams work very hard. It is very difficult because you realise it is not just Chesterfield it is across Derbyshire we have these problems but I can assure you they do their very best to make sure and the people we deal with and the P3s of this world and the Pathways (it is good to know that you do work with Pathways so you know the good work) you know that there is a lot of good work done on the mental side to help people. Yes, I take on board what you say and we will always keep encouraging our team to do their very best to help.”

6) Question from Councillor K Gillott to Councillor C Cupit, Cabinet Member for Highways, Assets and Transport

“The published Highways Capital Budget for 2024-25 allocates just £354,000 for new road safety schemes in the county. Does the Cabinet Member believe that this sum, sufficient for only 4 new schemes, is the appropriate level of investment to address road safety concerns in the county?”

Response:

“Thank you, Councillor Gillott for your question. I am happy to reassure you that your quoted figure for road safety schemes in the capital programme is not quite correct. The actual total in the capital programme for next year is nearly five times that as there are additional schemes for road safety in the Traffic Management and Signs, Lines and Signals sections. I hope you understand the indicative Capital Programme needs to be looked at as a whole.

In addition to this the Capital Programme investment is also supported by continued work that we are doing following the successful £5.6m grant we received for three Safer Roads projects, the 13 Bends which is now completed and the A5004 and the A5012 which are underway, and that is without getting into the Revenue Budget funded Safety Schemes and Initiatives. I hope that is a reassurance that road safety remains very important to this Council.”

Supplementary question:

“Congratulations to the Cabinet Member for trying to deflect the basic principle behind this but the actual spending when you look through the budget there are criteria for the allocation of different sorts of funding and the allocation purely for road safety measures is a figure I have quoted, unless there is something else that has been published since. What brought this to my attention was the fact that in the last few months alone I have had two sets of constituents approach me following incidents in their communities asking if something could be done. Of course I speak to the relevant officers, as you

would do in all these circumstances, and the reality is you have to be honest with people there isn't the funding there to do it in the way that there was.

The 2024-25 budget is now published. I am told that the 2025-26 capital programme is close to being finalised as well so if you bring a scheme today if you need to get it in the capital programme you are waiting two years with the sort of funding available.

One other comment that has been raised to me, and this is the one I want the Cabinet Member to comment on, is the funding now is so short and the pressure on the maintenance budget for highways and for footways is so great that we are having to make choices and putting either road safety or highway maintenance that is now the choice. Would you agree with that assessment that was put to me?"

Response:

"It is somewhat difficult to answer what was quite a long winded supplementary question, but I think in terms of the two key points that you raise, Councillor Gillott, we always react to changing circumstances on the roads so I don't think it is quite correct to indicate that unless you get a scheme in now it won't be in two years' time. There are instances where we have reacted to that. I know the A632 that we discussed in detail at District as well we made changes there to support police enforcement or in the process of making them despite them not being on the capital programme but reacting to the sad sort of recent collision history.

In terms of making choices I think across the Council we always have to make choices. That isn't a new thing that has always been the case, but we try to use the money that we do have to both use it for road safety and road maintenance and sometimes they are not mutually exclusive. We can do both schemes in one in the same way that we have done it with BSIP, making road safety improvements while we are using some of the BSIP projects and we are also, as we made clear to this Chamber and in the open letters that we have recently done, we are pushing Government for additional investment in highways and I will continue to do that, so I hope that reassures you that both highway maintenance and road safety remains important."

7) Question from Councillor J Dixon to Councillor B Lewis, Cabinet Member for Strategic Leadership, Culture, Tourism and Climate Change

"Bolsover Library is in an awful state of repair. In the children's reading areas there are buckets with water dripping from the roof. Other parts of the library are no better. In the kitchen area, where the staff make drinks and prepare food, there is a gaping hole in the roof. In the room where we councillors hold our surgeries, there was water running down the walls next to electric sockets,

which could risk electrocution. The light on the stairs doesn't work. It's so sad to see it run down so much.

I would like to congratulate Claire and her staff on the superb displays they have put together. They really have put a lot of work in trying to make the Library a welcoming and stimulating space despite the poor conditions.

Can you tell me when the repairs will be done?"

Response:

"Thank you very much indeed for your question, Councillor Dixon. I have been via officers doing some careful to-ing and fro-ing on this particular topic to get under the skin of the issues that you raise here. On the face of it, it is not good that we have these continuing issues so that is why it was important that I did get on to that issue so thank you for raising it.

The majority of the items that you have raised have been actioned in a timely manner, I am told, in particular those that involved water ingress or egress near the electrics. Some of the work, I have been told, is on hold because it is linked to the significant investment in re-roofing Bolsover Library later this year which should resolve the cause of many of the issues that we are talking about here and then the ceiling tiling or the tiles etc can be replaced within the library.

The roof at Bolsover Library - and you will probably know this better than I - is considered to be quite steep in the way it is constructed. As a consequence of that it has a disproportionate effect on scaffolding costs when it comes to patching etc so it makes that a very very costly exercise, so a decision was made to resolve the roofing issue as part of a larger scheme which would deliver best value for the Council.

However, what your issue has done has highlighted that communication has not been appropriate regarding the reasons for holding that work. It has not been properly communicated to the staff in the library. This has now been rectified and all staff using sites like this will be made aware when works are being held as part of a large and more cost effective programme of work. As a consequence of the question the communication improvement is going to be made as part of that.

So a contractor will be attending site tomorrow to review any of the outstanding issues to ensure that there are no health and safety matters that are still outstanding but be reassured, Councillor Dixon, that the work on that roof will commence later this year.

There was no supplementary question however Councillor Dixon said, “If I understand what Councillor Lewis has said the library is going to be re-roofed later in the year. I very much welcome that and I very much welcome his points about the communication on this. The only reason I ended up resorting to asking a question in full Council, which I don’t like to do particularly, is because I didn’t get any response from officers on that.”

Response:

“Thank you very much indeed. Just to reiterate that if that is the case when it comes to libraries or any public buildings belonging to any other portfolio do contact the Cabinet Member if you are not getting anywhere with the officers involved. It is what we are here for. We are here, despite the fact we are on the opposite side of the political spectrum, to help and support members getting issues resolved.”

8) Question from Councillor J Dixon to Councillor J Patten, Cabinet Member for Childrens and Families

“Can you tell me why the children’s centre at Bolsover is one of those earmarked for closure?”

Response:

“Thank you, Councillor Dixon, for the question. I do find it quite strange that you have asked this question and especially the comment you have just made about “I don’t like asking questions in full Council” because I know for a fact that yourself, Councillor George and Councillor Gillott you have actually had meetings with two of my senior officers in Children’s Services where you have asked this question and you have been given sufficient information, but for point of clarity I will read it out to you for the third time, so here we go.

Bolsover Children’s Centre is not used to the same extent as other Children’s Centres within the locality. The volume of court ordered family time delivered is very low and the 0-5 specific programmes can be delivered in other Children’s Centres close-by that do provide considerably more family time.

Due to the significant financial challenges that you know are faced by the Council we don’t have the resources to sustain the current network of 22 Children’s Centres and we are having to make difficult decisions about which buildings to retain.

For Bolsover District we are seeking to retain Centres at Shirebrook and Cresswell and also you have nearby North Wingfield and Eckington, so for your area you have four Children’s Centres still proposed to be kept with only one which is down for consideration to close.”

Supplementary question:

“Perhaps you need to check with your officers with the correspondence I have had in the last 24 hours. When we did have discussions about Children’s Centres we weren’t given specific reasons or briefings on individual Children’s Centres, that is why I sent an email to officers to ask for the reasons that Bolsover was being closed. I didn’t get a response. That is why I have brought it to full Council. It is very strange ahead of today’s meeting I got a fuller response yesterday.”

9) Question from Councillor R George to Councillor N Hoy, Cabinet Member Adult Care

“Why have over 30% of beds in Derbyshire County Council’s care homes been closed and for how long will this closure last?”

Response:

“As like all Authorities from time to time due to factors out of our control it means beds sometimes are temporarily unfillable. This is a fluid position that changes daily. We wouldn’t ever temporarily close any bed without good reasoning.”

Supplementary question:

“The response to the question asked in our November meeting said “There is currently a national shortage of care workers and Derbyshire is not unique in this regard and therefore a number of beds have closed across our facilities.” It listed 139 beds of which 22 out of the 40 in my local care home of Whitestones have been closed. That has been attributed to staff shortages. However, there have been staff who have attempted to be recruited and have just not, after successful interview and DBS they have not heard back from the Council. They have had to go on after several months to find jobs elsewhere.

I have provided examples to officers who have said they will look into this but it is not an uncommon practice within the Care Division that people are finding it far too long to be able to take up jobs. I wondered whether the Cabinet member is looking into this and what is being done to streamline the recruitment process?”

Response:

“We have a robust workforce strategy and placements in place for reasons of safety to our residents, but it is not just workforce challenges it is due to essential maintenance works and complexity of needs of residents. Another

factor is a decrease in demand, but at the end of the day it comes to these temporary measures are to protect the welfare and the safety of our residents.”

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