

ELECTED MEMBER QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 24 MAY 2023

1. Question from Councillor J Siddle to Councillor A Dale, Cabinet Member for Education

“Will the Cabinet Member for Education please provide Council with an update on the recent OFSTED inspection of the Derbyshire Adult Community Education Service (DACES)?”

Response:

“Thank you, Councillor Siddle, for your question.

I am delighted to inform you that following an Ofsted visit earlier this year between the 31 January and the 3 February they found our Adult Education Service to be ‘good’ in terms of its overall judgment as well as being ‘good’ in all 7 of the categories upon which they focus their inspection activity. These are:

- Quality of education
- Behaviour and attitudes
- Personal development
- Leadership and management
- Education programme for young people
- Adult learning programmes
- Apprenticeships

I just want to take the opportunity to highlight some of the actual feedback verbatim from the Ofsted report, if that is okay. Ofsted said that:

“Most learners and apprentices make good progress on their courses or apprenticeships. They feel safe and protected. They choose to study at DACES because it feels like a community and staff treat them with respect.”

Ofsted noted:

“A significant number of our learners face substantial barriers to their learning but with staffs’ dedicated support, learners and apprentices gain qualifications and improve their wellbeing and this helps them move closer to achieving their personal and career goals.

A number of our younger learners in particular are vulnerable and have a history of not attending school or college.”

Ofsted noted:

“Learners’ attendance is improving and learners steadily develop their employability skills and gain vital knowledge of sectors such as hospitality and construction before they complete their upcoming industry placements.”

They noted:

“Adult learners on community learning courses increasingly improve their mental and physical health and wellbeing. Most apprentices develop the skills they need to be successful at work.”

They highlighted that:

“Leaders very carefully considered their programmes for young people, adults and apprentices.”

They noted:

“Leaders were ambitious to provide meaningful learning programmes so that learners can improve their future career prospects and their lives. That includes those vulnerable younger learners and in particular those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.”

They highlighted:

“Workers and tutors benefit from a range of useful training and this helps develop staffs’ teaching skills further and ensures that most learners and apprentices receive a high standard of education.”

They noted that:

“Staff are very proud to work at DACES and that leaders recognise that we are not a perfect Service and there are still areas of further improvement that requires strengthening.”

They highlighted:

“Board members and the Governance Board have a clear understanding of the strength and areas for improvement and that members of the Board routinely challenge senior leaders to improve the quality of education.”

There is evidence of that impact in the Ofsted report. Finally they highlighted that:

“Safeguarding arrangements are effective within the Service and that learners and apprentices feel safe when they are learning with us.”

I am sure all members across the Chamber will want to join me in praising DACES on a really positive inspection outcome having been steadfast in their

perseverance on their improvement journey since the last inspection. DACES benefit from an incredibly dedicated, hardworking, kind and caring workforce from the tutors right the way up to its senior management team and Governance Board and on behalf of the Council I would thank everyone involved in helping to achieve this really positive inspection outcome.

What remains for the Service now is to continue striving for further improvements and ensuring we offer the best possible education, training and upskilling for our learning community, many of whom face significant challenges and barriers and frankly would be in a much more disadvantaged position were it not for the efforts of this wonderful Service.”

Supplementary question:

“Thank you, Councillor Dale, for that detailed and encouraging response. Can I join you in thanking everybody who has worked so hard to achieve this result. I particularly note the work that DACES have done with some of our most challenging students. This has given those students an excellent opportunity to aspire and given many of them valuable apprenticeships into their own chosen career paths.

Councillor Dale may also be aware for those who wish to pursue a more academic route that my own area of Bolsover currently has no post-16 education and hasn't done since 2016. Many of our students have no option but to travel outside of our area for this. The Bolsover MP Mark Fletcher has championed a bid by Redhill Academy Trust to the Department for Education for the three schools in his constituency. Can I ask what steps Derbyshire County Council and the Cabinet Member have taken to support this bid please?”

Response:

“Thank you very much, Councillor Siddle, for the supplementary. I absolutely agree with you that it is a real travesty that the whole of Bolsover District does not benefit from post-16 education of its own. That means that most of the kids growing up in the Bolsover area know that they either have to go to Chesterfield or to North Nottinghamshire to access relevant provision.

I think there is something very symbolically important about that. How do we promote aspiration in all of our communities when they know that there isn't a local Sixth Form there to really help them get on? So we have been very supportive of Mark Fletcher's campaign. As you will know it is a manifesto commitment for this administration to support that campaign for post-16 provision. Mark has been an absolute stalwart, a real local champion and advocate for that campaign. I have had many meetings with Mark and I know he has been lobbying the Department for Education as well. We have written. We have been working with Redhill Trust, so our department has provided them with numerous statistics and evidence to really support their case to the Department for Education to help it be as strong as possible. I have also written a letter of support that goes with the bid that goes to the Secretary of State to

outline why it is so important that we support this bid and get the post-16 education that Bolsover really deserves and help really increase that level of aspiration for young people in that area. I hope that answers the question. We will continue to support that campaign whatever the outcome and work in partnership with the MP there, so thank you very much.”

2. Question from Councillor G Kinsella to Councillor K Athwal, Cabinet Member for Highways Assets and Transport

“Every week we are told of the number of potholes repaired. However, this data is not helpful without a wider context. For example:

- Apart from emergency fixes and necessary temporary repairs, how many pothole repairs need to be revisited within a 12-month period?
- What is the balance between planned and reactive repairs? If we continually patch road surfaces, rather than carry out the fundamental repairs necessary, reporting that more potholes have been repaired is a negative and not a positive.

Will this additional information be provided and if not, how can residents hold the Council to account when it displays such a poor grasp of performance data?”

Response:

“Thank you, Councillor Kinsella for your question. We are proud of the way that we have increased investment in our highways over the lifetime of this administration. However, despite the £120m three year capital programme the long-term conditions of our roads and the frequent severe weather conditions we face mean that the work filling potholes and other defects is a constant battle.

The prevalence of such large numbers of potholes reflects the national issue faced by all Highways Authorities in England. Whilst we do monitor and record the number of potholes we fill it is not possible to report the number of pothole repairs that have to be revisited within a twelve month period. We do utilise data showing roads where we have attended to repair potholes. However, identifying if these are new defects or something that has been previously repaired is not easily discerned at present.

Often the existing carriageway will fail directly adjacent to a previously filled defect. In the last financial year reactive repairs required to fill potholes on the network cost a little over £4m. Over the same period a highways delivery programme was over four times this amount with circa £18m of planned repairs to carriageways including resurfacing, surface dressing and micro asphalt schemes.

“We recognise and agree that planned and proactive maintenance is preferred to reactive works such as filling potholes. That is why we embarked on a £120m highways capital programme back in 2021. However, the Authority has little choice but to deal with hazards and risks as they present themselves on the network to keep it safe and offer a robust defence against any third party claims.

As regards being held to account, all Councils are ultimately held to account by the electorate but in continuing the improvement journey to transform Derbyshire’s highways we are embarking on a research project to look at our existing approach to reactive maintenance including materials, techniques and training.

Moving forwards I am sure that my successor, Councillor Cupit, will lead our Highways Teams to further improve both Council reporting methods on Derbyshire’s roads for all but the high number of potholes filled thus far (and you alluded to that Mr Chairman, circa 50,000 this year) is most certainly a positive measure of our good performance to address potholes as they appear.”

Supplementary question:

“I am not sure what to pick out there really in terms of the answer to the question. I am not sure it did answer specifically the question. Yeah, I would really just ask for those two further pieces of information to be provided to all councillors along with the number of potholes being repaired. I don’t think it is just myself, I am sure we all get our mailbags and I am sure we all get this issue raised and even the friend of the Conservative Party, the *Daily Mail*, featured Derbyshire County Council in a recent article about potholes, so I would just ask and implore that that additional information if not provided on a weekly basis is certainly provided on an annual basis to help us make sense of how the Council is performing.”

Response:

“I think Councillor Kinsella needs to understand that Derbyshire Highways is not a candy shop which sells sweets, we are a responsible Authority which has to keep its roads safe for all users and that is what we endeavour to do. Thank you.”

3. The question from Councillor G Kinsella to Councillor C Renwick, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Environment was withdrawn.