

COUNTY COUNCIL – 20 July 2010

WRITTEN QUESTION PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 44

1. Question by Councillor Rogers to Councillor Bentley, Lead Member for Adult Social Care

What steps are being taken with other agencies in East Sussex to explore the concept of place-based budgets, and in particular to discuss with Primary Care Trust colleagues and GP representatives the potential opportunities for more integrated neighbourhood working which will arise with the intended moves towards greater GP commissioning?

Answer by Councillor Bentley

The East Sussex Strategic Partnership had initial discussions about broader place based budget issues at its last meeting in April and at that time agreed that the impending General Election made it difficult to progress the issue sensibly. This matter will be discussed again at the next meeting on 22 July, with a wider group of partners. The Review being undertaken by the East Sussex Safer Communities partnership is providing an interesting and useful pilot for place based budget approaches in the context of significantly reducing resources.

In relation to Primary Care Trust and GP commissioning, at its meeting on 27 April 2010, Cabinet approved the Integrated Plan for Health, Social Care and Well-Being. This identified fourteen priorities for the County Council and Primary Care Trusts for integrated working and the governance arrangements for taking this forward. In relation to commissioning it has been agreed that proposals will be drafted by September for consideration by the Integrated Plan Board, whose membership includes the Chairs of the Primary Care Trusts and Lead Member for Children and Adult Services and Lead Member for Adult Social Care.

The recently published White Paper, Equity and excellence; Liberating the NHS, sets out the framework for Health commissioning arrangements in the future and has significant implications for local authorities. The intention is to develop a fully integrated approach for commissioning within East Sussex, across the whole range of health and social care services, which takes full account of the White Paper, including new proposals for GP commissioning, alongside a strategic approach that makes best use of our collective resources and improves the health and well-being of local people. The County Council, Primary Care Trust's and GP representatives will therefore be working together to develop a coherent approach to commissioning health and social care services in East Sussex.

It is also important to note that work is also taking place with Borough and District colleagues on an integrated approach to supporting vulnerable people, in relation to their housing and housing-related support needs.

2. Question by Councillor Rogers to Councillor Jones, Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development

What plans are there for making an East Sussex County Council response to the letter from the Business Secretary and the Communities Secretary about Local Enterprise Partnerships; what factors is it considered will be relevant to be included in this response; and in what way will district, borough, and neighbouring strategic authorities be involved?

Answer by Councillor Jones

East Sussex County Council has been in constant discussion with central government on this matter and in advance of the letter had started to develop a model of what a local Enterprise Partnership model might look like for East Sussex.

At this stage we are working on the basis, that given the specific nature of the East Sussex economy, we should seek to create a LEP across our county – but that it should be flexible enough to work with others across boundaries as needed to achieve a particular goal. The main areas of focus will be economic development, transport, housing and skills.

The Chief Executive has already had initial discussions with the Districts and Boroughs at officer level. Similar talks will be had at a political level once an initial model, for discussion has been drafted. Our approach to-date has been to welcome the freeing-up enabled by the abolition of the RDAs and other regional structures allowing us to work with our partners to develop models that are relevant to our specific needs. In addition, we want to recognise that much good work is in progress in a number of areas and we have some structures in place that work. Therefore our proposal will seek to build on these, rather than start from scratch. However, the limited initial guidance is clear that LEP's must be business led bodies as the main motivation for them is to assist in the delivery of private sector led economic growth.

We will also recognise that there are democratically elected decision making processes in place and that the LEP will need to work with these in terms of negotiating an overarching economic development strategy.

The deadline for presenting a formal proposal is 6 September 2010 and we intend to get our initial submission in before the end of July.

3. Question by Councillor Lambert to Councillor Jones, Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development

What is the likely cost of setting up the South East Seven Group, including ongoing resources and governance arrangements? Will these costs be offset by anticipated savings?

Answer by Councillor Jones

There are no costs in setting up the SE7 group. The work is being carried out by officers and members across the authorities as part of their normal duties. SE7 is not about creating complex governance arrangements and a bureaucracy to support them, but about a way thinking about the services we provide and how we provide them, challenging each authority to consider how and where the service is provided. Draft business cases for the first areas under examination (waste, IT, SEN provision and highways) are being prepared which will identify potential savings. Since there are no costs involved in setting up the group, any savings will be available for use by the authorities taking part.

4. Question by Councillor Lambert to Councillor Bentley, Lead Member for Adult Social Care

The County Council has made a clear commitment to protect vulnerable people when considering necessary cuts.

Is the Lead Member aware that carers seeking respite care are advised by the Social Services referral team to contact private homes? Is he further aware that such homes will not accept bookings in advance for respite care as this might block the opportunity to fill a permanent vacancy, thus making it impossible for the carer to book a holiday?

Given the proposed closure of Harvard Road, which is able to offer excellent respite care, what does he propose as an alternative to protect this very vulnerable group of people?

Answer by Councillor Bentley

The Adult Social Care Department directly arranges respite care for service users and carers who are eligible for local authority funded support and does not ask them to contact care homes (unless it is their wish to make the arrangements directly themselves). Service users and their carers may choose to contact care homes directly to determine that the identified establishment is to their liking and meets their personal choices.

Where an individual is not eligible for local authority funded support, the Department offers information, advice and signposting to assist the individual in making their own arrangements for respite care. This would involve the individuals contacting the care homes directly and making their own financial agreements with the provider.

Private sector care homes regularly and consistently accept bookings for short term respite care both from the County Council and private individuals. Across the County, every day there are in excess of 100 empty beds available in private sector care homes with quality ratings of two stars, and above. Whilst it is for each private provider to make a business decision as to whether they fill those vacancies with short term placements, the Council's experience is that they are keen to utilise their spare capacity in this way.

If Members are aware of service users or carers having difficulty arranging a respite service they can raise their concerns with the Director of Adult Social Care, who will ensure any issues are looked into and resolved.