

WRITTEN QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 44

1. Question by Councillor Tutt to the Lead Member for Resources

At the Cabinet meeting on the 16 July 2019, the Chief Finance Officer informed the meeting that the savings planned for 2018/9 were only “part year savings”. As this was not clear at the time the budget was set in February 2018 I would be grateful if the Lead Member could clarify what if any part of the savings agreed as part of the 2019/20 budget are intended to be “part year savings”. If indeed any part of these savings are “part year” could he also explain how the shortfall will be met in the current financial year?

Answer by the Lead Member for Resources

The 2019/20 budget approved by Full Council on 5 February 2019 included proposed savings of £5.131m.

The timescales for actual delivery of savings may well change due to a number of factors including as a consequence of public consultation or the service changes required. As part of the Council Monitoring: Quarter 1 2019/20, it was reported that the following 2019/20 savings will be delivered part year.

Savings	Full Year	Part Year Delivery	To be delivered in future year	Shortfall will be met by
	£'000	£'000	£'000	
ASC: Working Age Adults: Nursing, Residential and Community Based Services	247	124	123	Reported as part of ASC 2019/20 outturn
ASC: Meals in the Community	483	121	362	Reported as part of ASC 2019/20 outturn
CET: Civil Parking Enforcement	1,000	250	750	Use of projected underspend in Waste Services and transfer from reserves
Total	1,730	495	1,235	

For completeness, within Children’s Services, there are savings for which it has been planned to bring forward into 2019/20 and future years as particular programmes of review are brought to a conclusion.

Savings	Brought Forward from Prior Year	Part Year Delivery	To be delivered in future year	Shortfall will be met by
	£'000	£'000	£'000	
CSD: iSEND and ESBAS	831	570	261	Use of SEND Reform Grant
CSD: Early Help	1,561	564	997	Use of Corporate Reserves
Total	2,392	1,134	1,258	

2. Question by Councillor Ungar to the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

As we are all aware Children’s and Young People’s lungs are particularly susceptible to damaged by air pollution. Each school day here in East Sussex thousands of children attend school. Many of these schools are under the control of East Sussex County Council. During that time the council is responsible for the children and for protecting them from harm. It is reported that Westminster Council will be testing school classrooms to measure the levels of pollution that might be found in there.

What is East Sussex County Council doing to check the level of pollutants, if there are any, in the Council’s School Classrooms?

If unacceptable levels of pollutants are found, what action will the Council take?

What physical environmental protection measures will the County Council take to protect classrooms, and therefore, children from pollution?

Answer by the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

The statutory local air quality management system covers external air quality rather than internal air quality. Internal air quality can be highly complex and includes different sources to external air pollution (for example from heating sources, cleaning products, furniture and so on).

District and Borough Councils are responsible for reporting annually on external air quality. Where there is an exceedance of statutory health-based air quality thresholds, a District or Borough is required to declare an Air Quality Management

Area (AQMA) and to develop an action plan that works towards bringing air quality below the thresholds. The County Council assists this process with transport data and with identifying and implementing measures to enable and encourage modal shift and to reduce congestion. Currently, there are 2 AQMAs in East Sussex, one in Lewes and one in Newhaven. There are no schools within either of these AQMAs.

The County Council also hosts the Sussex Air partnership, which disseminates local air quality data and delivers the Air Alert service (please see: <http://www.sussex-air.net/>). In 2018-19 the County Council led a Defra-funded project to work with 25 schools across Sussex to encourage parents and carers to avoid idling their vehicles during school drop-off and pick-up times and to encourage more pupils to walk and cycle to and from schools. Monitoring of air quality outside the participating schools took place during the anti-idling interventions. A final report on the data is being produced by independent air quality experts at Kings College London.

There is on-going research into the effectiveness of different physical measures on air quality, for instance planting trees and hedges between roads and school buildings.

3. Question by Councillor Whetstone Leader of the Council

The Council is the Corporate Trustee of the Ashdown Forest Trust and has a wider remit than just its financial responsibilities. How are County Councillors kept informed to fulfil those responsibilities?.

Answer by the Leader of the Council

The Cabinet and the Council receive an annual report on the financial position of the Trust. Full Council in its role as Trustee also agrees an annual grant of £65k to the Conservators who's statutory duties align with the objects of the Trust .

The Council has delegated to the Chief Operating Officer the exercise of the day to day management of the Trust and to agree the accounts of, and grants by, the Trust after consultation with the Lead Cabinet Members for Resources and Transport and Environment, and the Director of Communities Economy and Transport. Other matters are referred to Cabinet. Issues such as the protection of Trust land from encroachments are dealt with at officer level on behalf of the Trust. The Trust has agreed a protocol with the Conservators of the Ashdown Forest.

Should individual members wish to be apprised of particular activities of the Trust other than those agreed by the Council and Cabinet then they can of course contact officers and request an update.

4. Question by Councillor Lambert to the Lead Member for Resources

What assets does the County Council hold that are underused in whole or in part, whether this is through the removal of services or for other reasons? What strategic approach is being taken to look at:

- the meanwhile use of all or part of these assets e.g. by a community group
- community asset transfer
- disposal and re-investment

Who is responsible for this work and how will it be managed and scrutinised by members?

Answer by the Lead Member for Resources

The County Council has a substantial estate across its school and non-school portfolios, comprising approximately 470 separate assets managed at either Service level or through the Property Services department.

Place Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 11 June, received a report setting out the strategic approach to assets, which included a wide review of activities. This remains part of the governance process as we move to update our Corporate Asset Management Plan.

<https://democracy.eastsussex.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=516&MId=3977&Ver=4>

The County Council has a list of approximately 15 properties noted as surplus to service needs, or currently vacant. This includes assets which are temporarily surplus (where all or part of assets are held for alternative service use) or permanently surplus (where an asset is not required for any service use and available for an alternate purpose).

Some assets offer limited alternate opportunity particularly those of a leasehold nature (subject to specific terms of a lease) or owned but held subject to specific land use or planning covenants.

Where any asset is identified as becoming available, the first step taken is to assess any current or wider service need. If it is not recyclable, or the property is not fit for purpose, it will be assessed as a development, disposal or 'strategic hold' opportunity (particularly where there is scope for some commercial development or investment).

The principles underlying the process propose that the Council should only retain an asset if:

- it is identified as having/could have development potential within the local plan, or within a realistic timescale (deliverability);
- It can be re-let/intensified for full revenue generation;
- the Council wishes to develop the site itself or through a partnering arrangement;
- it has strategic value (i.e. land to support future expansion of adjacent operational or investment assets);
- sites will unlock a development in future (within a specific timescale); and/or
- there is an identified service requirement.

As part of this process, there is continued liaison with our public partners, through groups such as SPACES in order to share opportunities, information on assets and collaborative arrangements.

Asset disposals, reflected as Capital Receipts, continue to support, and are a valued funding stream, for the Capital Programme.

With regard to meanwhile use and community asset transfers, the County has published its “Asset Transfer Policy” which supports third party use, and the Policy outlines our general approach. The link is provided:

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/media/7736/g-asset-transfer-policy-2016.pdf>

The requirements of the Capital Asset Management Strategy, particularly relating to surplus or vacant assets, are managed through Property Services, with reporting through to Lead Member and Cabinet as appropriate.

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