

Q1

COUNCIL - 13 OCTOBER 2011

**From Councillor Steven Hogben
To Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services**

Question:

Railway Bridges in Crewe

Recently what has been described as a freak electrical fault caused an explosion and fireball on the Nantwich Road railway bridge next to Crewe station, and two people were injured. Repairs on site took several days, and for that period road traffic was severely disrupted in the area. Even a week afterwards traffic lights nearby had not been restored to use, and this put both pedestrians and motorists at risk. The cause of the incident has not yet been established.

As a ward councillor for Crewe South, where this happened, I can report that there is public concern about the stability of the Nantwich Road railway bridge, and signs of stress on the roadway itself. Similar signs of structural stress have been reported on other railway bridges in Crewe, at Earle Street (over the Liverpool line), and at Hungerford Road (over the Manchester line). If the Nantwich Road bridge were closed at the same time as either of those bridges, there would be a significant effect on the people, the traffic and the economy of Crewe and surrounding areas.

Is Cheshire East Council in contact with Network Rail about the condition of the railway bridges around Crewe, and are there contingency plans to deal with incidents like the recent explosion and the resultant disruption?

Response:

Cheshire East Highways are in regular contact with Network Rail with regards to their bridges and structures that form part of the Highway Network. Records are maintained for all activities undertaken.

There are in fact two bridges on Nantwich Road adjacent to the station (Crewe Station Bridge and Salop Goods Bridge). Crewe Station Bridge was reconstructed in 1995 and Salop Goods Bridge was strengthened in the same year.

Earle Street Bridge and Hungerford Road Bridge have both been assessed as satisfactory for full highway loading and at this stage do not require any further strengthening works to either of the carriageway running lanes.

Network Rail is also responsible for carrying out regular detailed inspections of all of their bridges. Cheshire East Highways are informed of these inspections along with any recorded defects that could disrupt traffic movements. Any defects observed by Cheshire East Highways are also reported back to Network Rail for action.

Q2

COUNCIL - 13 OCTOBER 2011

**From Councillor Sam Corcoran
To Portfolio Holder for Resources**

Question:

Earmarked Reserve for Markets

There was an Earmarked Reserve of £154,000 for Markets. This should have been used for 'Displacement of market during Lyceum Square development, and maintenance/improvement initiatives'. Why was it returned to General Reserves in 2010/11 unspent, when market traders around the borough have been calling out for improvement initiatives to justify the recent 12.5% hike in rents?

Response:

- Cheshire East Council inherited the £154k Earmarked Reserve from the former Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council.
- The reserve was not ringfenced but was earmarked for potential Market Disturbance costs for the then wider Modus redevelopment of the town centre.
- Obviously those original plans have now been deferred hence during a review of reserves in 2010-11 financial year, Cheshire East Council estimated the level of likely reserves that may be required for the Markets relocation to market square and also as part of the corporate reserves review, what proportion could be considered as an element that could be offered up to central reserves.
- The final accounts for 2010-11 reflect £74k being applied to the Markets Service accounts to offset in part the income loss associated with offering lower rents to Market Traders through the relocation period and only £50k was returned to General reserves.

Q3

COUNCIL - 13 OCTOBER 2011

**From Councillor Ken Edwards
To Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services**

Question:

Household Waste in Black Bin Bags

What measures are being proposed to ameliorate the situation in which many households in Cheshire East will be subjected to the requirement to retain their household waste in black bin bags for two weeks?

Response:

The introduction of fortnightly collections in the north of the Borough brings it in line with the same practice that has been in place in the south for quite some time.

This has been done to ensure the harmonisation of waste services across the whole of Cheshire East. Residents who do experience particular difficulties should contact the Council and we will arrange for an officer to visit as soon as possible to discuss their specific needs.

One of the things that the officer can do is to arrange for a bin to be delivered to the property to assist with storage during the 2 week period.

Q4

COUNCIL - 13 OCTOBER 2011

From Councillor Martin Hardy
To Portfolio Holder for Procurement and Shared Services

Question:

Changes in Staffing Structures

There has been a lot of change in the structures within Cheshire East and change brings along uncertainty at times. How has this been managed in Cheshire East to ensure that the change has brought about colleague engagement and delivers quality services residents expect and require?

Response:

Maintaining the focus and engagement of staff during restructuring has been high on our agenda in Cheshire East. To support managers in doing this a short but effective "managing change" development programme is available to explore the rational and emotional aspects of change and how different techniques will help to fast track staff through the change and maintain performance.

We continue to embed and improve our performance development and supervision processes to focus staff on achieving key priorities, recognise contributions and provide one to one support.

Our bi-annual leading improvement conferences have proved to be very effective in engaging the Councils' managers on key issues which will help the Council to continuously improve the services we deliver to residents - these conferences have also recently been extended to a cross section of frontline staff. The conferences are very participative and we empower our managers to make a real difference in their roles and the services they provide.

Cheshire East has also recently been awarded the North West Skills Award. This award demonstrates the success we have achieved through investing in valuable training and development and other programmes and supporting and encouraging our employees to develop the skills, competencies and qualifications necessary to improve the performance and effectiveness of the Council.

Q5

COUNCIL - 13 OCTOBER 2011

**From Councillor Martin Hardy
To Portfolio Holder for Resources**

Question:

Help with Continuing Difficult Financial Situation

In what ways is Cheshire East helping its residents and businesses in the continuing difficult financial situation?

Response:

This Council has already developed a strong track record in securing new jobs and supporting our existing businesses even in the current economic conditions.

We have worked with over 800 businesses over the past two years providing the popular 'shop doctor' advice to independent retailers and holding procurement and tendering workshops that have been very strongly supported by business.

We continue to work very proactively with prospective investors that could lead to up to 2000 new jobs. We already have a couple of big successes in Waters Corporation coming to Wilmslow and Expert Logistics in Crewe. Both deals were influenced by the work of this Council and the support we gave.

We are supporting business to business networking and focusing on developing a strong future for all our town centres.

Since April 2009 the Benefits Section has worked hard to promote Housing and Council Tax Benefit and maximising the take up of other state benefits and financial assistance. This has been achieved through take up events, redundancy support workshops and surgeries across the borough, targeted mail shots, promotional materials, advertising and a dedicated home visiting service.

In 2009/10 an additional £1.1m in unclaimed benefits was identified, topped up by a further £0.6m in 2010/11 and is continuing in 2011/12. This has given the residents of Cheshire East a further £1.7m since April 2009, bringing in additional income to support the local economy. Currently resources are being targeted to support those affected by the Welfare Reform changes and promoting Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit as 'in-work' benefits, assisting those finding or retaining employment.

We are continuing to deliver new affordable homes and we are using our own property assets to develop brownfield sites for new affordable housing.

Overall we have a comprehensive programme of development and regeneration which has a proven track record of delivering new jobs, supporting our existing business base and supporting our most vulnerable residents. We are not complacent however and I recognise that we need to remain very focused and committed over the coming months and years.

Q6

COUNCIL - 13 OCTOBER 2011

**From Councillor Barry Burkhill
To Portfolio Holder for Resources**

Question:

Edited Version of Electoral Register

Why is Cheshire East Council now insisting that all electors must state every year that they wish to exclude their details from the edited version of the Cheshire East Electoral Register, which is for sale to whoever wishes to buy it, when other Councils such as Stockport Borough wish to preserve residents' privacy by automatically registering their opt out every year when this has been requested?

Response:

Historically, many local authorities have "pre-ticked" the electoral registration forms so that electors do not have to do so, thereby excluding their names from the Edited Register.

However, very recently, the Electoral Commission, the Cabinet Office and the Association of Electoral Administrators have all strongly advised that the practice of pre-ticking is unlawful and should be discontinued.

Irrespective of a range of views on the subject, we have heeded this advice and have stopped pre-ticking.

Of the 170,000 forms which have been issued, we have received negative comments from less than 50 electors. That works out at around only 0.03% of electors!

Unfortunately, some other authorities seem not to have listened to the advice from the Electoral Commission, the Cabinet Office and the Association of Electoral Administrators. Of course, Cheshire East Council cannot answer for the practices of other local authorities. They will have to answer for themselves, but they could be subject to legal challenge!

I am completely confident that we have adopted the right approach in line with the advice of those listed and I trust that Councillor Burkhill will agree with that approach.

Q7

COUNCIL - 13 OCTOBER 2011

From Councillor Laura Jeuda

To Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities

Question:

Waiving or Varying of Planning Conditions

Does the Council have a policy or practice of waiving or varying planning conditions in respect of businesses that are carrying out activities or contracts on behalf of Cheshire East Council? If so, are residents in the area informed?

Response:

Planning Conditions attached to the grant of planning permission can only be varied by means of a formal application. There is facility to do this under section 73 of the Planning Act. Such applications are treated in the same way as any other planning application and are subject to the usual public consultation processes.

In terms of the enforcement of such conditions the Council must first of all have clear evidence that a condition is being broken. Once that is established the Council must also consider whether formal action is expedient or in the public interest. In the majority of cases the presumption is that the condition should be upheld and enforced and there are a variety of formal measures that can be taken to ensure compliance.

The Council makes no distinction between companies or individuals when considering the variation or enforcement of planning conditions.