

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS TO COUNCIL – 28 FEBRUARY 2013

QUESTION 1

From Councillor Michelle Sherratt

Municipal Buildings, Crewe

It has come to my knowledge that the new build part of the Municipal Buildings in Crewe are going to be sold off in March and possibly populated with a new library including the history society and a museum.

I would like to know please:

- Where are the numerous departments within the current building going to be relocated to?
- What will become of the vacant library building?
- Why weren't ALL the Crewe Members informed?
- Have access points to the Municipal building even been considered? There is no front entrance to the offices and people would have to traipse around the back gate. This is not in the best interests of the library.
- What are the costs involved?

RESPONSE:

My I thank Cllr Michelle Sherratt for her question, and for the opportunity to quash rumour and conjecture circulating in Crewe regarding the future of the Municipal Buildings.

There is no decision that the offices attached to the Municipal Buildings are be sold off in March, or any decision as to their long term use as part of the councils property portfolio.

Yes, In line with the major property review, the future use of all Cheshire East Council assets continues, including location of staff to reflect the changing way the Council operates, this includes the Municipal Buildings. As Members will be aware, refurbishment has recently taken place to the ground floor of the Civic building in order that the Registration Service can be accommodated, providing an essential service to the public in a building that is fit for purpose. This work is continuing, with alterations to the front entrance, making the building accessible to all.

However, the offices at the rear of the building are currently under-occupied and, should they remain in use as offices, would require an extensive programme of refurbishment. As part of the on-going accommodation strategy, and in order to make best use of those corporate buildings where refurbishment has already taken place, it is likely that staff will be moved to other locations in the Spring.

As the property review progresses, in conjunction with the All Change for Crewe programme, Members and other partners will be consulted.

QUESTION 2

From Councillor Ken Edwards

SEN Funding

Is the Cabinet Member aware of the rapid changes and the reductions in funding resulting from the changes to the funding of children with Special Educational needs?

Will the Cabinet Member:

1. Ask for an urgent report on the effects on individual schools? Cuts in provision of up to £200,000 have been reported.
2. Ascertain from each school the impact on all pupils with Formal Statements of Special Educational Needs
3. Contact Edward Timpson, the Minister with responsibility for Children with Special Educational Needs, as a matter of urgency to request him to oversee a better organised transition period in funding reductions.
4. To report to the Policy Development Group procedures for managing the cuts in funding to ensure an effective service is maintained to pupils with Special Educational Needs.

RESPONSE:

I have attended the Schools Forum meetings where these issues have been extensively debated. There isn't a reduction in the total money available to schools the impact is being caused by the changes to DfE regulations which govern the way funding is distributed between schools.

1. Reports and information regarding individual schools are on the Schools Forum website
2. Cheshire East Schools Forum has agreed that for all pupils with Statements, the LA will continue to **top up** the funding to the agreed level until the annual review. Schools will receive a full year top up in their initial budgets but this will be subject to any in year adjustments resulting from the review.
3. Edward Timpson instigated a meeting, which I attended with representatives of the DfE and a number of Primary HT's, a Secondary HT representative and other LA colleagues.

The meeting provided an opportunity for the LA and Schools to articulate directly to the DfE the real difficulties posed by the introduction of the SEN funding reforms so quickly, the financial turbulence that results and the difficulty for HT's in engaging with parents and managing their expectations of support for their children.

While we left the DfE with some key issues to consider it was clear that Cheshire East has explored all avenues to implement the reforms as laid down by Government

4. This will be arranged, I will ask Officers to prepare a report.
-

QUESTION 3

From Councillor Ken Edwards

Careers Advice in Schools

The Education Select Committee has produced a report criticising the Coalition Government's decision to task schools with the responsibility for giving independent careers advice to their pupils rather than it being a responsibility for the Local authority.

What, if anything, can the Cheshire East Borough Council do to monitor careers advice in schools to ensure it is wide ranging, tailored to the needs of individual pupils, independent and effective in encouraging our young people into appropriate employment education and training? And are we doing it?

RESPONSE:

The responsibility of giving young people independent careers advice, and guidance transferred from the Local Authority to schools from September 2012. Schools have chosen a variety of ways to deliver this duty. This year Cheshire East Council has offered a purchased service through the Youth Support Service to each school in Cheshire East, which has been taken up by 7 schools. This provision has ensured a quality service has been delivered in these schools.

It is not the statutory responsibility of the local authority to monitor the schools provision of Careers advice and guidance however in the guidance to the schools; there are measures that schools can ensure are in place to support the quality of the guidance given. Awards such as Matrix, can support the company or individual that schools employ/contract to meet the guideline requirements, 3 schools within Cheshire East currently hold the award IIC (Investors in Careers).

Ofsted is the accountable body to ensure schools fulfil responsibilities to deliver Careers advice and guidance effectively.

On a wider level the Council is considering bringing together a forum/forums for sharing good practice, systems and policy, maybe one in the North and one in the South of the borough. This could look at offering support to the schools with their selection process and policies that they have in place for Careers Guidance and the curriculum, but this obviously has resource implications.

For individuals Cheshire East Youth Support Service works with those young people who are at risk of becoming NEET both in schools and other settings to ensure that they are given quality Careers Advice and Guidance at the most appropriate time and tailored to their specific needs.

QUESTION 4

From Councillor Peter Nurse

GCSEs

Will the Cabinet Member, in the light of the Secretary of State for Education's decision to withdraw his proposal to abolish G.C.S.E.'s, issue a statement to Pupils, Heads and Governors of Cheshire East Schools that confirms the Council's view that G.C.S.E.'s remain a proper and worthwhile qualification for young people to work for and achieve.

RESPONSE:

The Council has always worked closely with its Secondary Schools to ensure that the curriculum and assessment arrangements at the end of Key Stage 4 offer all our learners the best opportunities to achieve their full potential. The recent changes in the Government's direction on the GCSE qualification means that Headteachers and Governors have increased opportunities to use the flexibility of the GCSE to best suit our learners. The Council supports the view that any move to create a potentially two-tier examination system (as suggested through the EBC route) would potentially lead to less inclusivity and restrict some pupils to achieve the highest grades.

GCSE's, therefore, provide a versatile and worthwhile qualification and remain a key driver to raise standards across our schools. The EBC change is only one of numerous proposed changes to Key Stage 4 qualifications (as set out in the recent DfE Consultation response) and schools must remain vigilant to ensure that they are well placed to adapt to new initiatives. These include the on-going issue of grading as well as how GCSE's are used to measure overall school performance.

QUESTION 5

From Councillor Peter Nurse

Composition of Beef Products

Has the composition of Beef products used in East Cheshire School Meals been tested for the presence of horsemeat? If so, what were the results?

RESPONSE:

To follow

QUESTION 6

From Councillor Brian Silvester

Crewe Alexandra Football Club

Would the Mayor please agree to pass on the good wishes of Cheshire East Council to Crewe Alexandra Football Club in the Johnstone Paints Final on April 7th and encourage Council to support the team's bid to come back with the Cup?

For a small club like Crewe Alexandra to win through to play at Wembley twice in less than a year is a major achievement.

The winning philosophy of the team and their appearances in the national sporting media helps to put Cheshire East on the map and will encourage many more people to support the Alex and visit the Borough. It will also lead to more local people playing football and becoming involved in healthy activity.

Everyone involved with Crewe Alexandra should be congratulated on their continuing success.

RESPONSE:

I will be writing to Crewe Alexandra Football Club (as I did last May when Crewe were successful in the Division 2 playoff Final at Wembley, gaining promotion to Division 1), to congratulate them on their success in reaching the final of the Johnstone's Paint Trophy and to wish them the very best of luck against Southend United on 7 April.

QUESTION 7

From Councillor Roy Cartlidge

The Mayor

I would like to ask a question to the Mayor - Did you appear on national television on Sunday 27th January and state the following statements:

"There would be visible public outrage if the HS2 route was forced through "highly loved countryside" lying south of Manchester. The backlash would be horrendous if it goes through Tatton Park, which is National Trust land. Anything anywhere near there would be an absolute disaster."

If it's yes to the above questions then Mr Mayor a supplementary question be put

As Mayor of Cheshire East do you think it was appropriate to make a political point and try and make policy for the Council?

I am sure other councillor's representing the same ward as yourself could have carried your views forward without the need to put your civic duties in a political context.

RESPONSE:

Yes, I appeared on Sky News and BBC1's Northwest Tonight on Sunday 27th January, the day before the HS2 route announcement was made. The interviews started with me expressing full support of the proposal for HS2 for all the obvious reasons, whilst at the same time stating that there would be concerns amongst the farming community and villagers / homeowners affected by the chosen route.

I would point out that I represent a single Member Ward covering 7 Parishes across the Chelford area.