

COUNCIL 19 October 2022

Item 14 – Questions

1 Cllr L Anderson

Question

What is Cheshire East Council doing to encourage companies to generate renewable energies in Cheshire East to help the Cheshire East residents move away from fossil fuels and become net zero?

Written Response:

As part of the Council's commitment to influence carbon reduction and its pledge for the Borough to be carbon neutral by 2045 the Council is undertaking a detailed assessment of carbon emissions across the borough. This will form part of an update report on the Council's Carbon Neutral Plan to committee in the new year detailing best practice in decarbonisation sector by sector.

The Council is also working regionally through the Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission enabling and encouraging collaboration between local councils, communities and businesses to deliver decarbonisation on a regional scale. The Council is also working with Reaseheath college and other key partners to plan a second Cheshire Net Zero Carbon Conference to make connections and share best practice.

4 Cllr A Gage

Question

Whilst on council business I paid a visit to Delamere house and members will know that it is multi use Cheshire East office block in Crewe. When I reached the floor of my destination rather than the busy hub of a whirring council nucleus, I expected to find I walked into an open expanse where 50 desks were occupied by roughly 4 individuals. Just to make sure this wasn't an anomaly I visited the floor above and found this to be a similar experience. I noted that the leader of the councils support for climate change issues through things such as not printing paper so why is the council trying to be green when its heating entire office blocks which are almost empty, and can you tell members what percentage of usual desk staff are currently not at their desks and what method is being used to monitor and measure the performance and productivity of those working at home.

Written Response

Cllr Corcoran response at meeting:

Some of the matters are clearly staffing matters and should be dealt with by officers rather than members. In terms of the issue over climate change I do think there are benefits of people working at home for climate change in terms of travel time. I do think there are occasions where it can also be more productive and I think the aim as we

come out of the pandemic should be to gain from the positive experiences and learn from those but also change the way of working to a sort of hybrid model so I do accept that as we move to a more hybrid model there will be spare office space and that is something that I know the officers are looking in to.

Further to Cllr Corcoran's response at full council to your question when he said that some of the matters are clearly staffing matters and should be dealt with by officers rather than members, I would like to comment as follows:

The Covid pandemic required many businesses and organisations, including Cheshire East Council, to make immediate changes to how and where some staff work. However, many of our frontline staff continued to operate as they did before the pandemic.

Pre-pandemic the ratio of full time equivalent (FTE) staff: desk ratio was 7:10. Current ratios are being reviewed service by service. It is also worth understanding that staff are at a workstation as much as they ever were, just these are not in offices as much as they were. Very few staff have a fixed desk as such. Those who might be mainly in an office can also be in meetings or other activities away from a desk.

We are looking into more hybrid ways of working, which is necessary for several reasons, including the need to be an attractive employer given the recruitment and retention challenges we are dealing with. Regular supervision between staff and their line managers is routine, irrespective of where and how staff work, and we have policies for dealing with performance.

6 Cllr P Redstone

Question

When will B4B live up to its name? I attended a governors meeting earlier this week and the headteacher yet again had to report B4B had yet again failed to deliver. This business system is 100% over budget and still failing to deliver a best for business.

Response

It was debated in Corporate Policy Committee, cross party discussion and a mop up one day lessons learned session was held. I am aware of some of the problems experienced by schools, and I know that there is a special care package put in place to assist schools with that so rather than a written reply I might refer you to the papers from corporate policy committee.

Officers have been working directly with the headteacher to address specific issues and will continue to be available to help through the senior named contacts already provided.

The Corporate Policy Committee on 6 October 2022 considered a detailed report on the Lesson Learned from the Best4Business Programme. It concluded that

programme largely achieved the outcomes agreed by Members of Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils when the programme was commissioned in 2016. It also concluded that there are important lessons to learn for any future complex, multi-year change programmes involving numerous organisations, including around the procurement of such projects. For ease the report can be found here:

<http://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=959&MIId=9260&Ver=4>

The B4B Programme has now been formally closed. The day-to-day transactional services, including payroll, are run by the Transactional Services Centre, as a shared service run by Cheshire West and Chester Council on behalf of both councils.

7 Cllr A Kolker

Question

To the leader - In 2019 in your election manifesto you promised the people of Cheshire East that you would abolish rubble charges although I can see that you have kept this promise in Congleton by abolishing the entire tip I ask when you are going to honour this promise to the rest of the Borough?

Written Response:

Earlier this year the Government undertook a consultation seeking views on preventing households being charged for the disposal of DIY waste and seeking evidence on the impact of booking systems at household waste recycling centres. The Council is awaiting publication of the outcome of the consultation. Future household waste and recycling centre provision is to be reviewed by a working group established by the Environment and Communities.

11 Cllr M Beanland

Question

In light of the massacre of trees around Poynton pool I was reminded that there is/was a draft bio -diversity net gain SPD that was published for consultation by Cheshire East in the period May 2021 – June 2021 the final version of the document is yet to be published - when will document be published?

Written Response

The first Draft Biodiversity Net gain SPD was published in May 2021 and provides guidance on how Cheshire East would apply policies within its development plan. The guidance is specifically related to policy SE3 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Local Plan Strategy and policies ENV1 'Ecological Network' and ENV2 'Ecological Implementation' of the then draft Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD).

Supplementary Planning Documents provide guidance on how policies in the development plan should be applied and in this case, two of the key policies the SPD provides advice on are held in part two of the Council's local plan, the SADPD.

The examination of the SADPD took place in November 2021 and the Council has recently received the Inspectors report which concludes that, subject to minor modifications, the SADPD is a sound plan and may be adopted.

Through the examination process it was possible the Inspector would modify policies that the BNG SPD sought to provide further guidance on, and indeed, both policies ENV1 and ENV2 have been the subject of modification. Therefore it has been necessary to await the inspectors findings in order to proceed to the final draft of the document. Further, because of its reliance on policies in the SADPD, the final draft version of the BNG SPD cannot be adopted until after the SADPD has been adopted itself. Therefore, proceeding ahead of the SADPD timetable has not been possible.

Receipt of the Inspectors report means the adoption of the SADPD will now be considered by Council in December. Subject to adoption of the SADPD, the final version of the BNG SPD may be published for consultation.

13 Councillor Naismith

Question

I strongly welcome the prospect of Cheshire archives being co-hosted in Crewe in the History Centre; however, I have been approached by a number of residents who would have preferred to see the existing building repurposed rather than demolition and a complete rebuild. Can the chair of Economy & Growth committee advise on whether a full options appraisal was carried out at the outset of this project and on what basis was it decided that repurposing was not the preferred option? Has the cost of the demolition changed because of recent inflationary pressures?

Written Response

The reuse of the existing library building - unfortunately the building is one of its age and constructed using methods of its time. The option of repurposing it was originally included in the appraisal however it was found not to be fit for purpose in both economic and practical terms.

The other building being used will be in Chester Building. It will be used to store items and documents that are over a thousand years old, in a very sensitive environmentally controlled building. The building was assessed in a practical sense as not being capable of carrying the weight of the archives, that would be moving to Crewe. That is why the repurposing option was not accepted.

Costs – figures of retail price inflation are 10.1% at the moment. We know that in the construction industry that is probably higher still. The project is within budget estimate because we will be relying upon national lottery funding as match funding to deliver this with ourselves and Cheshire West and Chester Council. Cost plans have been completed to RIBA3 stage and these are within budget. That includes significant allowances for inflation (taking account of the higher than normal BICS inflation rate that tracks the construction indices) and with significant 'client risk' allowances on top. Clearly, we cannot accurately address cost until the project is tendered, but we do feel that sufficient allowances have been made at this stage to give a good measure of confidence. The cost plan for part of the scheme (related to the public realm) has also been externally verified as part of the Towns Fund bid to Government.