

WRITTEN ANSWERS FOR COUNCIL

28TH JANUARY, 2015

Questions from Members of the Public

- **Supplementary Question to No. 3 from Mr. Tawn** –“Why the Monitoring Officer was enquiring into an Independent Councillor for allegedly breaching the Code of Conduct when the Code of Conduct no longer applied to Councillors. The allegations were politically motivated and the Council cannot disqualify or suspend a Councillor.”

Answer - The current Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Code of Conduct applies to all Borough Councillors and to Councillors of Parish and Town Councils that have adopted the Borough's code. Whilst the facility to suspend or remove Councillors from office is no longer available, the obligation to behave in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Conduct remains.

The Council, through the Standards Committee applies the Code to all Members in an impartial manner.

- **Supplementary Question to No. 5 from Ms. K. Johnson** – “Where the Council's duty of care was to its workforce? This was obviously an unusual situation at Abbey and it was felt not being investigated adequately.”

Answer - The Council is fully aware of the duty of care towards its Employees and following Council policy and procedure guidelines is working with the Schools Leadership Team and individual staff members to address individual concerns raised by employees.

- **Supplementary Question to No. 6 from Ms. A. McGuinness** – “Had spoken to some of the parents of the children from the school who had an interest in this current investigation and they had assured her that there had been no contact made with them during the process and to help with their current situation. One parent had had to resign from her employment to care for her child. At what point would it become clear and the truth told about what had happened at this school?”

Answer - Children and Young People's Services Officers will liaise with the Interim Executive Board in relation to communication strategies with Parents and Carers. The proposal to close the school is currently being consulted upon, no decision has been made on the schools future and would in due course be determined by the 'decision maker'. The Strategic Director for CYPS has also commissioned an independent review of events leading up to the proposal to

close the school and the outcome of the review will be provided to decision makers for consideration as part of the statutory process.

- **Supplementary Question to No. 8 from Mr. I. Cammock** – “Why in a Cabinet meeting held on the 26th November, 2014 where it was stated “The Director for Schools and Lifelong Learning pointed out that the Local Authority had put in arrangements to support Abbey School. The school had given the Local Authority concern for the past eighteen months, long before the Ofsted inspection.” when for the eighteen months before Ofsted Mr. Burman, Executive Head Teacher from Winterhill had been in charge and his Executive Deputy Head had been Deputy Head Teacher in charge she also said “Significant support was provided to the Executive Head Teacher and the Head Teacher of the school to secure the improvements that the Local Authority deemed necessary. The recent Ofsted inspection deemed the school to be “Inadequate”. So Mr. Burman and Mrs. Holford were given significant support yet they failed, why have they not been replaced?”

Answer - The review commissioned by the Strategic Director for Children and Young People’s Services would give Elected Members an independent view of Leadership leading up to the Ofsted judgement and would be used to inform Members as part of the pre Statutory Consultation phase.

- **Supplementary Question to No. 9 from Ms. Savage** – “If the school were to remain open how would the Council justify keeping the school open now all the children or the majority of children had been moved out?”

Answer - Some pupils have been transferred to other schools where parents have requested this or where it was felt individual pupils needs could be met more effectively in alternative provision. This will have no bearing on the decision reached by Elected Members at the end of the consultation process.

There is a national framework for the funding of special schools. If a decision was taken to keep Abbey School open then the LA would fund the school for the number of places commissioned.

- **Supplementary Question to No. 10 from Ms. J. Tang** – “The Ofsted report indicated that the school would close, not that it was proposed for closure. All this time she felt left in the dark, not had any support and every question asked remained unanswered and she still did not know what was happening. It was worrying for the children and was affecting everyone in the school.”

Answer - Individual contact has been made with Mrs Tang and it is not appropriate to share this information at this meeting.

- **Supplementary Question to No. 11 from Mr. F. Sprague** – “What input the Local Authority had in the selection of the members of the I.E.B. at Abbey School?”

Answer - The IEB membership has been agreed by the Secretary of State from proposals made to her by the LA. Membership of the IEB has been extended to ensure skills, knowledge and expertise is available to support the work of the IEB.

- **Question No. 12 from Mrs. C. Carroll** – “Could children who have been moved to other schools be kept on the Abbey’s roll until after the consultation period to protect its viability?”

Answer - Education Health Care Plans stipulated the setting that a pupil would attend, no pupil has been transferred to another school or setting against the wishes of their parent/carer.

National funding framework requires funding to follow pupils. The vast majority of moves were in response to parents requests for a move. The SEN team have recorded parental views:-

	Have expressed wish for move	Have concerns, but have not expressed wish for move	Have expressed wish to stay	No comment made
Primary	15	1	0	5
Secondary	38	8	3	17
Totals	53	9	3	22

- **Question No. 13 from Ms. M. Browne** – “Was unable to attend the meeting to ask her question - Karen Halford, the Associate Head, was still in place. Why was she not fighting to keep Abbey open? Had she been offered a position elsewhere if the school closed?”

Answer - It would be inappropriate to answer any question on behalf of the Head Teacher at the school. Any personal views and actions by individual employees in relation to the consultation are the personal ones of individuals concerned and not those of the Council. No employee has been offered employment elsewhere by the Council as this would be wholly inappropriate during a period of pre statutory consultation.

- **Supplementary Question to No. 14 from Mr. S. Johnson** – “ The consultation process was taking place, but Clifton School was apparently £1 million in the red and given support to stay open and asked how much had been spent on Abbey School since the Ofsted report had been announced?”

Answer - In the time available a full response cannot be made available due to the complex nature of the funding streams which have and are being used to fund Abbey School.

- **Question No. 15 from Ms. S. Turner** – “Do you agree that closing the Abbey School would cause trauma and upset to some very vulnerable students and their families?”

Answer - The closure of any school, setting or other facility has a significant impact on individuals, hence why a full and robust period of consultation is undertaken prior to any decision being made by Elected Members. The role of Elected Members is to consider the views and opinions of all stakeholders before determining the outcome.

- **Question No. 16 from Ms. T. Wright** – “It was evident from the previous questions that the Winterhill Management Team and the Management Team at the Abbey were not fit for purpose. Why have they not been removed?”

Answer - Following the Ofsted Inspection an Interim Executive Board has been put in place to replace the Governing Body.

HMI have made a monitoring visit to the school and their current view is that the issue of the effectiveness of leadership and management will be under review by HMI.

Cabinet Meeting – 17th December, 2014

- **Question – Minute No. C109 (Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children’s Board Annual Report)** – Councillor Middleton referred to the section in the minute which referred to the early help dashboard and further on about front door referrals and asked that this could be more explicitly explained.

Answer – The Early Help Dashboard was developed by the Local Authority and reported into the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board to provide a quantitative overview of activity within a number of Local Authority “early help” teams and Services, such as Integrated Youth Support Service; Children’s Centre Family Support; Targeted Family Support Team etc. In addition to this information, benchmarking against other Children’s Services was also reported on, following agreement by the regional Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) on a set of early help effectiveness indicators (which relate to the existing national data set published by DfE).

This latter data set included information relating to social care, though given the delay in benchmarking figures being published (primarily due to this being submitted and then published By DfE), there is a natural in-built delay to what is reported and measured. In the final quarter of 2013-14, the trend of Children in Need cases and assessments was decreasing. However, in the past eight months, this trend has reversed, and the service has seen an increase in Child Protection Plans and Looked After Children. Currently, the Early Help Dashboard is being reviewed by the newly created Director post for Early Help (interim appointment made, pending permanent appointment), with this and other interdependent work (such as the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) being reported into the Children’s Improvement Board.

With regards to the term front door referrals this means the number of contacts people make to children’s social care to report concerns. So what the minute is essentially saying is that more social work investigations have been undertaken in response to concerns being raised by other professionals or the public, and that there has been an improvement in the time in which this investigations have been completed.

- **Question - Minute No. C110 (RLSCB Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan)** – Councillor Parker asked if it could be explained what the concerns were about in relation to the appointment of a person to oversee the work of the multi-agency safeguarding hub to ensure the right sort of person to deliver on this was appointed, given that this was a very important role and the people of Rotherham had a right to know.

Answer - Stefan Chapleo had been appointed and he commenced in role on 12th January, 2015.

Stefan previously set up the Liverpool Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and for Rotherham this appointment was part of critical development for the Local Authority.

The Council were, of course, concerned to ensure someone with the right experience of delivering such a project previously was appointed.

- **Question - Minute No. C114 (Sale of Unit at the Advanced Manufacturing Park)** – Councillor Parker referred to the information shared previously where it was indicated the Council would receive a net profit of £40,000 and asked had the unit actually been sold, what was the actual profit made and what was the alternative option referred to?

Answer - The Council had sold Unit 3 at the AMP to X-Cel Superturn (GB) Limited for a sum of £2.75m. The Council made a profit on this sale of £59k

The Council has received an offer on Unit 4. This deal was still being finalised. The Council was estimated to make a profit on this sale of £22k.

- **Question - Minute No. C122 (Housing Rent Increase 2015/16)** – Councillor Reynolds asked about the proposed housing rent increase for the coming year and asked what the level of non-payment rent arrears was in total.

Answer - 2014-15 Rent arrears as at 9 Feb 2015 were £600k. This is based on a total rent debit in year to date of £66.7m and total rent collected of £66.1m. Giving a collection rate in year of 99.1%.

Cumulative rent arrears (incl. arrears not collected from previous years) for existing tenants is £2.45m.

Deputy Leader Meeting – 13th January, 2015

- **Question - Minute No. D28 (Revenue Budget Monitoring)** – Councillor Parker referred to the pressures relating to printing in Legal and Democratic Services and the high income target set against the budget which had not materialised and asked why this target had not been met?

Answer - The Central Print Unit (CPU) has an annual income target of £330k. Currently there is a forecast in year shortfall of £58k against this target. The service is looking to reduce this shortfall by expanding its income generating activities with schools and academies and the Elections office, and by reducing its cost base.

- **Supplementary Question** - Councillor Parker asked who met the cost for the purchase of the equipment as it may be more cost effective to have the printing provision outsourced.

Most of the equipment in the CPU is leased and costs are met from within the CPU budget. The charge out rates for the CPU are benchmarked against other suppliers and are competitive - it would not be cheaper to have the provision outsourced. When the facility was run by RBT the charge out rates were comparatively high and a number of schools and academies withdrew from the service, some of these have since come back since we terminated the Joint Venture Agreement with BT and reduced the charge out rates and we continue to promote the CPU services to them. It should however be noted that where work cannot be undertaken by the CPU it is outsourced to other providers.

- **Question - Minute No. D31 (Individual Electoral Registration)** – Councillor Middleton considered this a very good idea and referred to the minute text indicating verification of a person's identity was undertaken with records held by the Department for Work and Pensions. The minute also indicated that those people who could not provide this information may prove their identity using an alternative form of evidence and asked what other forms could be used?

Full details of the documents required to support registration applications were set out in the following table:-

Documents required to support registration applications

Route 1: Applicants may provide any **ONE** document from **table 1** to establish their identity

Route 2: Applicants who cannot provide any documents from table 1 can provide **ONE** document from **table 2** and **TWO** additional documents from either **table 2** or **table 3** to establish their identity

Route 3: Applicants who cannot provide any document from tables 1 or 2 can provide **FOUR** or more documents from **table 3** to establish their identity

TABLE 1 Primary Identification Documents	
Document	Notes
Passport	Any current passport
Biometric residence permit	UK issued only
EEA ID card	Must still be valid
Photo card part of a current driving licence	UK or Isle of Man or Channel Islands full or provisional
Northern Ireland Electoral ID card	

TABLE 2 Trusted Government Documents	
Document	Notes
Old-style paper version of a current driving licence	United Kingdom only
Current photo driving licence	Any other than UK and Crown Dependencies
Birth certificate	UK and Crown Dependencies only
Marriage or Civil Partnership certificate	UK and Crown Dependencies only
Adoption certificate	UK and Crown Dependencies only
Firearms licence	UK and Crown Dependencies only
Police bail sheet	UK and Crown Dependencies only

TABLE 3 Financial and Social History Documents		
Document	Notes	Issue date and validity
Mortgage statement	UK, Crown Dependencies or EEA	Issued in the last 12 months
Bank or Building Society statement	UK, Crown Dependencies or EEA	Issued in the last 3 months
Bank or Building Society account opening confirmation letter	UK and Crown Dependencies	Issued in the last 3 months
Credit card statement	UK, Crown Dependencies or EEA	Issued in the last 3 months
Financial statement e.g. pension or endowment	UK, Crown Dependencies or EEA	Issued in the last 12 months
Council Tax statement	UK and Crown Dependencies	Issued in the last 12 months
Utility bill	UK and Crown Dependencies - not mobile phone bill	Issued in the last 3 months
P45 or P60 statement	UK and Crown Dependencies or EEA	Issued in the last 12 months
Benefit statement e.g. Child Benefit, Pension	UK, Crown Dependencies or EEA	Issued in the last 3 months
Central or local government, government agency, or local government department giving entitlement e.g. from DWP, Job Centre Plus, HMRC	UK, Crown Dependencies or EEA	Issued in the last 3 months

- **Supplementary Question** - Councillor Middleton referred to the telephone registration service which had been in operation since the 1st July, 2014 and asked how many people had taken advantage of this service?

Whilst the telephone registration service was proving popular it was not possible to provide figures of how many people had taken advantage of this service.