

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Council Meeting – 13th December 2012

(1) Question from Councillor Stephen Ayles to the Executive Councillor for Children and Learning

Question

Would the Executive Councillor for Children and Learning please explain why?

The Cabinet holder for highways has put into action a solid course of actions when it snows.

The Cabinet holder for housing has put into action a solid course of actions when it snows

The Cabinet holder for property has put into action a solid course of actions when it snows

The Cabinet holder for leisure has put into action a solid course of actions when it snows

In fact every Cabinet holder except one.

How much more snow has to happen before the Cabinet holder for education does something anything?

Answer

I have assured myself of the arrangements that are in place to address school closures in adverse weather conditions. They are robust. All schools know that our expectation is for them to be open and that all necessary steps must be taken to ensure this happens. The reason for any closure is followed up by officers.

No school wants to close, this is a misconception. They are absolutely committed to the best education for children. The decision to close must remain a matter for individual schools with the Chair of Governors being responsible. The council is not in a position to insist that a school opens, when the school's assessment is that it is unsafe to do so. The recent closures were due to insufficient numbers of staff being able to get into school, (despite their best efforts) to meet the required ratio of staff to pupils. In these circumstances schools are in breach of health and safety requirements.

Clearly, for those schools with a larger percentage of staff who live a long way from the school, making their plans for adverse weather conditions completely watertight for every single occurrence is more of a challenge.

(2) Question from Councillor Anne Chalk to the Executive Councillor for Public Protection, Waste and Transport

Question

The Parking Contravention Notifications issued each month by the two CCTV Vehicles between July 2011 and April 2012 were significantly higher than those that have been issued since. In fact on average they were more than double. Could the portfolio holder please tell me whether this had anything to do with a successful landmark appeal against the council in April 2012 at which the Traffic Penalty adjudicator claimed the vehicles weren't following government guidelines, or does he have a more plausible explanation?

Answer

As we all know the use of CCTV cars has been subject of substantial media attention. Although its operation was to be reviewed after two years, we brought it forward and I am pleased that the Members at the Economic and the Environment Scrutiny meeting on 29/11/12 agreed with the outcome of the review. Members were also consulted on this issue through a workshop earlier this year which formed part of the review. The CCTV cars have always been for safety and to improve traffic flow. They're not to generate income and the facts the number of tickets have decreased shows that these are having the right impact and we have seen greater compliance which is why the tickets are decreasing.

With regard to the adjudication issue in April 2012, we accepted the adjudicator's decision in this particular case. However, we do our utmost to ensure that we gather as much evidence as possible and that the tickets we issue are issued correctly and fairly and in accordance with our policies and practices within the national guidance.

We had a lot of complaints about illegal and dangerous parking, and we've helped free up the roads, and it has been successful in tackling dangerous parking outside schools. I am pleased to say that there is a decrease in complaints about residential parking issues, congestion on key routes, from bus operator, about verge and footway parking.

(3) Question from Councillor Ron Woodley to the Executive Councillor for Support Services

Question

Can the Executive Councillor for Support Services update this chamber on the current situation concerning the Pier Hill retail units.

Answer

The leases for the new retail units constructed as part of the Pier Hill scheme, were completed on the 27th May 2011, however the tenant has opted not to fit out the units himself but instead to try to sell on the leases.

The tenant has not been successful in selling on the leases either conventionally through Dedmans, or via the public auction. There was interest but not at the level of premium that he was seeking.

Clearly the Council is concerned that despite a considerable length of time, these units have not been brought forward and the Council and the tenant now need to consider their options.

The Council is in discussion with the lessee and it would not be appropriate to discuss the details at the delicate state in negotiation but taking the leases back might be one option.