

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

AGENDA ITEM 6

QUESTION 1

MR ROGER EVANS will ask the following question:

Given the cuts in Youth Services how will this authority meet its requirement as laid out in the Education and Inspection Act.

MRS KAREN BURGOYNE, the Deputy Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills will reply:

As Roger Evans well knows, Shropshire has a proud heritage of providing young people with a wide range of enriching and varied leisure time activities, provided by the statutory, voluntary and the private sector. We are committed to continuing this, and our imaginative approach to how we do this in future, will give local people even better value for money, by reducing unnecessary costs.

Our universal services probably best relate to the national standards, and these are delivered and supported by our Positive Activities Team. This includes investment in more extensive voluntary sector support and delivery. It is our ambition that more of our positive activities are delivered by the local voluntary/not for profit sector, as its capacity grows, with help from our positive activities team. This is in accordance with the policy of the Coalition Government.

Current youth legislation relates directly to young people aged 13 to 19. But, Shropshire Council has gone one step further in acknowledging that early intervention, social education and self esteem need to be developed earlier in the life of young people to be most effective. The Positive Activities team, therefore, work with 10 to 16 year olds, leaving the Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG), Target Youth Support (TYS), and Engaging with Young People teams to concentrate on 13 to 19 year olds. All 4 teams work with disabled young people up to their 25th Birthday, to provide a comprehensive, high quality service.

We have ensured that Young people are actively involved in "what facilities and activities are available to them" by undertaking a needs assessment exercise across the whole county, which included Young People, Councillors, Community Regeneration officers and partner agencies. As a result of this, we are currently piloting 3 new commissioning models which put young people at the heart of deciding the shape of the provision they want.

The Engaging with Young People team are also actively involved in a variety of consultations on behalf of the authority and ensure that young people have

a voice in council matters, through their support of the Members of Youth Parliament (MYP's) and Speak Out (SO) group.

Other parts of the council further enhance the provision available to young people in their leisure time, they include:

Arts Service
Library Service
Leisure (including community sports and active leisure)
Extended schools
Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme
Short Breaks Scheme.

I do wish that Liberal Democrat councillors would stop assuming that good quality services can be provided only by increasing spending lots of money, paid for by increasing the financial burden on local Council tax payers. That might be what they are used to doing, but it is not the way that this Council is run.

QUESTION 2

MR ROGER EVANS will ask the following question:

Given the welcome increase in pupil premiums that is due for next year, can you please give full details of what positive action Shropshire Council has done in the last 12 months and what plans does it have to give this extra publicity and promotion between now and February 2012 so that this extra money can be obtained for our local badly funded schools.

MRS CELIA MOTLEY, the Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills will reply:

The Council has taken a great deal of positive action on this, as part of our wider campaign to get a fairer funding system from the Government for our local schools, as Roger must know.

The Pupil Premium was introduced as a new government grant from September 2011. It is grant targeted at pupils from deprived backgrounds and is available to those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (and have registered), all registered forces children and all children known to be continuously looked after for over 6 months.

The current allocation for the academic year 2011/12 is £488 per pupil for those eligible for free school meals and for looked after children - in the case of Armed Forces children. the allocation is £200 per pupil. However, this will rise fourfold taking the value for each pupil up to £1,720 and £800, respectively. by 2014/15.

The funding, whilst not ring fenced, is targeted at improving the educational performance and outcomes of these pupils. Schools will be monitored on the performance of these groups and will be required to report annually about how they have used the pupil premium.

The pupil premium has been the topic at meetings of the Schools Forum. on 23 June 2011 and 17 November 2011, and detailed discussions have taken

place around the need to maximise the funding. It has been discussed also at secondary headteacher briefings, and local schools have been signposted to a good practice website.

Shropshire Council has included a statement in “The Admissions Guide for Parents”, available to all parents – which highlights the benefits of registering:

“Schools are entitled to receive additional funding and a pupil premium for the number of pupils on roll who are eligible for free schools meals. It would therefore be beneficial for the school if all those who qualify, make application for their free school meals entitlement.”

Information has also been included in the letter sent to parents/carers when advising them of the allocated places (in year/mid-term applications).

There has been an increase in uptake of free school meals (FSM) in Shropshire from 7.74% in 2008 to 10.54% in 2011. This correlates closely with the percentage of people in receipt of housing/council tax benefit, suggesting that the take up locally is good.

Schools have some responsibility to promote and encourage families to register and some schools have, as a result of Local Authority promotion, taken action such as including articles in newsletters to parents and governors etc.

There is obviously a link between eligibility for free school meals and eligibility for other benefits, for example housing and council tax benefit, and Benefits Options Advisers routinely signpost applicants to the entitlement for free school meals. Applications are being completed by these advisers.

Eligibility can be checked on the Shropshire Council website at: <http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/schoolmeals.nsf/open/065D886911B6636B8025750B00507E92>

Extended School Coordinators within school are promoting take up of FSM.

As a result of discussions at the recent Schools Forum, and the increased per pupil allocation from 2012, it was agreed to widen the promotion of the take up of FSM. A high profile publicity campaign is planned, which will be undertaken very soon and will include:

- Press releases to local press, radio interviews
- Use of social media (Twitter and Facebook)
- Members’ bulletin
- Children’s Centre and Family Information Service
- Promotion via school governor briefings/newsletters
- Included in information sent to parents/carers on primary and secondary allocation days
- Production of simple/clear leaflet/flyer
- Ensuring promotion via Extended Schools Coordinators/Children’s Centres.

Whilst acknowledging that the pupil premium does increase the funding available to schools, any increase in the numbers accessing FSM is offset by increased costs. Each FSM costs £380 per pupil to the Local Authority, and the Schools Forum meeting of 23 June 2011 noted the need to consider some

financial adjustment within the schools budget through the dedicated schools grant (DSG) to meet these extra costs.

Roger Evans can see that the Council has taken a full and active role in ensuring that our local schools get maximum benefit from this initiative.

QUESTION 3

MR MANSEL WILLIAMS will ask the following question:

Cardboard Recycling

"The current market value of mixed cardboard is an estimated £50 per tonne." Where has this estimate come from?

If it comes from our Waste Operator Veolia, then arguably there is a conflict of interest, as the same company might want to understate the value of our recycled items in order to produce feedstock for the Incinerator, which it is making great efforts to bring on-stream in Shrewsbury. Arguably its advice is not independent as it has a vested interest in understating the value of recyclables. Why didn't they predict this change in national policy? Where was the advice on best practice?

Will the Council agree to an independent assessment of the value of the cardboard (and other waste).

MR MIKE OWEN, the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and Prosperity will reply:

Mansell Williams' argument is fanciful in the extreme, and he knows this. He really should be less paranoid, and stop seeing conspiracies where they don't exist!

The estimate did come from Veolia, but is supported by other evidence gathered by Council staff. It is an estimate on the basis of projected prices for mixed, low grade cardboard over the next six months. Prices for clean, sorted corrugated cardboard are much higher, but that is not what Veolia would be collecting or delivering to mills. Veolia deliver mixed loads to local merchants who then sort and grade the material. The merchant prices published for the last six months have varied between £10 and £40 per tonne, the £50 estimated by Veolia reflects the volumes offered and the market power of the parent company.

Clearly, Mansell does not understand how the contract with Veolia works. Veolia have a direct financial interest in getting the best price for the material they collect, as they share the value of this material with Shropshire Council. The contract allows Shropshire Council to audit gate prices and total amounts received for all recyclates. Veolia gain income from the recycling they collect, providing a direct incentive to recycle more material and get the best price for it. This income is shared by Shropshire Council.

With the safeguards of this contract structure, and the Council's ability to carry out its own checks, expenditure on employing a consultant to check cardboard prices would not give value for money for local people. And, I am very surprised that Mansell Williams wants us to spend money unnecessarily in this way, as he and his Labour colleagues have always objected to the use of independent consultants, because of the costs involved.

On the subject of predicting policy, as I have already said to Mansell more than once, the reason that this issue has caused so many problems is that it was not communicated to Councils or waste management companies in advance.

Also, as Mansell knows, I have already made a response on best practice to Council. I see no need to repeat that here, as Labour Group members are starting to sound like a broken record on this topic.
