

Member questions to Cabinet Members and Committee Chairs

Council meeting: 28 September 2023

Question: 1.
From: Councillor C Wray

Response by: Councillor Franklin (Cabinet Spokesperson Regeneration and Culture)

Question:

At the time of writing, no school within the borough is on the list of those affected by RAAC (reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete). Can the council confirm that all schools within Barnsley have completed their surveys and that no school or other building in the Borough where the council is the responsible body are affected by RAAC?

Information for response:

Thank you for your question, Councillor Wray.

Between December 2018 and September 2023, in line with Department for Education guidelines, we reviewed the 26 council-maintained schools to determine the presence of RAAC and followed up with visual inspections as necessary.

We found no presence of RAAC in the council-maintained schools. There is no identified presence of RAAC in the 24 schools which were built under the PFI programme.

At the time of writing, we have not been notified of the presence of RAAC in non-maintained schools in Barnsley. The Department for Education has direct oversight of whether academy trusts and other non-maintained schools have conducted their own surveys.

We are also looking at our wider council asset portfolio, and our review is expected to be finished at the end of September 2023.

The findings will inform our future surveys of buildings. If RAAC is found, will we take any immediate health and safety actions, and prioritise the building for urgent works.

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Question: 2.
From: Councillor Lodge

Response by: Councillor Franklin (Cabinet Spokesperson Regeneration and Culture)

Question:

Berneslai Homes tenants are consistently reporting in regular delays in repairs and maintenance of their properties, many of these residents have escalated their cases through complaints procedures. These delays are having a huge impact on their physical and mental health, does the Cabinet Member agree with me that these delays of 12+ months are unacceptable and will he work with me to ensure that Berneslai Homes make the repairs as soon as possible?

Information for response:

Thank you for your question, Councillor Lodge.

The council is aware of some delays in the completion of planned works for Berneslai Homes tenants. These have been highlighted through elected members and the complaints process.

The council is investigating this with Berneslai Homes and Berneslai Homes are looking at their communication with tenants regarding these delays.

Additional funding was allocated to Berneslai Homes at the start of the financial year to complete any outstanding planned works which had rolled over from the last financial year.

The council is assured that all outstanding work is in the process of being prioritised with contractors.

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Question: 3.
From: Councillor Greenhough

Response by: Councillor Franklin (Cabinet Spokesperson Regeneration and Culture)

Question:

With the recent acceleration of AI technology, is the council concerned about the risk to jobs in Barnsley?

Information for response:

Thank you for your question, Councillor Greenhough.

The council is conscious of the acceleration of Artificial intelligence (AI) technology and is not complacent about the impact it may have on the economy and jobs in Barnsley.

With most advancements in technology, there are opportunities to take advantage of and Barnsley Council has a strong track record of supporting local businesses to do so.

Enterprising Barnsley has, for a number of years, led the way in digital business support provision, supporting businesses to embrace digital technology and ways of working, for example, by administering the Digital Innovation Grant, the Creator Space and Maker Space at the Digital Media Centres.

AI is no different in this regard. The team in Enterprising Barnsley will support businesses to develop their businesses, products and routes to markets and make the most of the opportunities that this new technology offers.

The council will also need to work with providers and through our own digital team to make sure that AI is deployed appropriately, streamlines the services we provide, and supports our employees to do their jobs. While AI is not used at the moment, it will inevitably be an element of our transformation initiatives in future years.

We will also work with the local education providers to support the curriculum to reflect employer needs so that students are equipped with the necessary skills in this area.

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Question: 4.
From: Councillor Kitching

Response by: Councillor Frost (Cabinet Spokesperson Core Services)

Question:

Given the recent news about Local Authority finances, including Birmingham City Council issuing a Section 114 notice, what reassurance can be given over the council's current and longer-term financial position?

Information for response:

We are by no means in the position of some of the councils that have hit the headlines recently.

However, that doesn't mean that we're immune to the impact of cumulative funding cuts, demand pressures linked to national issues in social care and the broader economic picture.

So, I need to be clear that the position is indeed challenging.

However, our long track record of good financial management means that I can assure Members that we have been able to put a plan in place to balance our 23/24 budget.

In addition, we are also updating our three-year financial plan taking us up to 26-27. The plan looks at how we can deliver services more efficiently to help meet future anticipated financial pressures. That will be shared with all Members as part of the upcoming budget process.

Based on current assumptions our Section 151 Officer has confirmed to me that issuing a Section 114 notice is not within his contemplation, neither at this time or in the future.

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Question: 5.
From: Councillor Christmas

Response by: Councillor Higginbottom (Cabinet Spokesperson Environment and Highways)

Question:

It was originally agreed with my predecessor over 18 months ago, that speed indicator devices were to be installed on Dodworth Green Road in Dodworth and Higham Common Road in Higham, yet we seem no closer to their installation, despite months of chasing. Could the cabinet member confirm that these two locations are still due to receive devices, and if so, when?

Information for response:

Thank you for your question, Councillor Christmas.

In response, I would refer you to the answer given to Councillor Hunt at Full Council on 27 July.

Now that the policy and guidance on Speed Indicator Device deployment have been reviewed, all historic sites put forward will be reviewed by the Traffic Team to make sure that they are consistent with the revised policy.

Elected members will then be briefed on the new programme for deployment when this is finalised.