County Council
12 March 2020

Questions for County Council Meeting
12th March 2020

Questions to the Cabinet Member for CHILDREN'S SERVICES from Julia Wassell:

Q1. How many vacancies do we currently have for social workers and how crucial is recruitment and retention of social workers to improvement of the Ofsted rating?

At the beginning of March we have an establishment of 329 qualified social work posts including first line managers. Presently we have a permanent staff of 204 plus 96 agency staff. We have 29 vacancies that we are currently recruiting to.

"During our improvement journey across children's social care, different teams have improved and developed at a different pace. One of the most critical factors to make sure all teams are performing consistently is permanent staff recruitment. The council has been relentless in its approach to recruitment which includes a national recruitment campaign, a plan to grow our own social work staff, international recruitment and strengthening the business support we offer to our front line teams. Our expectation is that all teams, regardless of their circumstances, must make progress and we will continue to be determined in our approach to support our staff to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people.

There will be a significant additional financial investment from April 2020 of c£4.5m over the next three years in children's social care staffing to recognise the continued need to use agency staff whilst supporting the development of growing our own social workers through our social work academy as well as the ongoing recruitment of permanent staff."

Questions to the Cabinet Member for TRANSPORTATION from Julia Wassell:

Q1. There appears to be a considerable backlog of work from reports on Fix My Street. Does the Fix My Street system need fixing itself to report more effectively to the public? For example, they could be better informed of how to report a very urgent defect out of hours.

Since introduction and through a steady increase in take up and use, FixMyStreet has developed into an effective system to channel reports of defects from Members of the public, and to ensure a consistent process of consideration, prioritisation and reporting.

Like any system, now that it is integrated and has been used for some time, improvements and efficiencies are being identified, with planned changes to be introduced in the coming 3 months to:

- Output softer and more user friendly messages to Members of the Public when responding to queries
- Explain in more detail the reasons why some works cannot be immediately progressed

- Align responses more to the maintenance policies with clarity on timescales rather than generic 'programmed' type responses.

Whilst a signpost within the system to the out of hours on call number is being considered, we must be very careful not to overload this call out facility which is in place for genuine emergencies.

Given limitation on resources, a backlog of less urgent defect repairs does exist (as in all Local Authorities). Whilst not a direct FixMyStreet issue, the improved messages being developed above should assist in managing customer expectations as to rectification timescales for lesser priority defects.