

Cabinet – 6 March 2019

Member Questions

Agenda Item 6

Question from Cllr Nick Ireland to the Cabinet Member for Economy, Education, Learning and Skills and the Cabinet Member for the Natural and Built Environment in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Transport

Question:

Whilst I welcome the fact that Dorset County Council recognised that no community engagement had taken place with respect to the previous paper that was withdrawn in December, I am concerned that the recent history of such engagement has been less than successful.

For example, the recent Dorset Parent-Carer Council survey received 35% less responses in 2019 than in 2017 (and that was only a consequence of the survey's existence being advertised by a third-party at the last minute).

Can DCC commit to engaging with those community groups which are already known to them both in the evidence gathering and consultation periods, and specifically the Dorset Parents Campaign for SEND Children?

Answer

Thank you Cllr Ireland for your question.

Officers continue to open up a variety of lines of communications with families of children who identify as meeting the SEND criteria. This is in order that both this authority and our successor, are well placed to maintain and develop relationships with families, assisting them in their awareness of services and support available.

The recently launched e-bulletin service is a great example of the fresh approach being adopted which already has a reach to an estimated 2,000 families. The Communications Team continue to work closely with officers and use a mix of traditional media and social media platforms to increase awareness of activities, services and policy for SEND provision.

From the information I have available, the DPCC Survey in 2017 received 262 responses when submissions closed on 31st March 2017. The 2019 Survey should really be viewed in 2 parts. The first conducted by the DPCC received 171 responses before the submissions closed on 31st January 2019. I have been informed that the decision to end submissions earlier was due to the Ofsted/CQC Revisit and the commissioning of their own survey.

The second survey by Ofsted/CQC took place during February 2019. It has been estimated that in excess of 400 completed surveys were received – an encouraging result for engagement and participation.

The Dorset Parent Carers Council, continues to play an important role as a valued partner, as a respected source for all families seeking information, support or advice. I am sure they will be happy to discuss the nature of their work directly with Cllr Ireland and I am confident, they would appreciate his support.

Agenda Item 10

Question from Cllr Jon Andrews to the Cabinet Member for Finance in relation to Pensions Asset Investment

Question:

My question is on the audit and governance of our pensions asset investment company CBRE. How is audit and governance on CBRE carried out and what findings are available from such audits?

The reason for asking such a question is that on Monday the 4th of February I had a phone call from a business owner in Northampton. His question was around the old Maplins store in Northampton which he has been trying to acquire for the last 9-10 months to no avail. All this time and since the demise of Maplins the building has been empty and Dorset county Council own it. So that's at least 10 months income that the DCC pension has missed out on, hence my question.

CBRE manage this asset on the Council's behalf or that is what I am led to understand.

Answer:

The Council, as administering authority for Pension Fund, employs a number of specialist external investment managers, including CBRE Global Investors who manage the Pension Fund's property investments.

CBRE provide a quarterly report to the Pension Fund Committee that includes an update on performance, and an overview of the main control measures and risks, such as vacancy rate, together with CBRE's strategy for mitigating these risks. These reports also provide a comparison of CBRE against the market on a wide range of measures, including vacancy rates. CBRE attend annually at least one meeting of the Pension Fund Committee, and they are in regular contact with officers. CBRE provide an externally reviewed and audited annual controls report to all their clients, including the Council, that outlines their key investment, IT, and operational controls. Controls and performance against a wide variety of measures (including vacancy rates) are reviewed and scrutinised within CBRE by their Investment Oversight Committee.

The vacancy rate of the Pension Fund's property portfolio has been consistently and significantly below the market average as measured by Investment Property Databank (IPD). As at 31 December 2018, the Pension Fund's vacancy rate was 2.1% (of Estimated Rental Value) compared to the market average of 7.0%.

As the specific detail of Cllr Andrews' query is commercially sensitive I will ensure that he is provided with more information outside of the meeting.