

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 24TH MAY 2018

**Question to Philip Atkins OBE
Leader of the Council**

By Kyle Robinson

Question

The University of Chester Academy Trust is facing significant financial troubles - directly affecting pupils, parents and staff at University Academy Kidsgrove and University Primary Academy Kidsgrove. Does the Leader of the Council agree that the Regional Schools Commissioner's failure to give timely notification and information to this authority regarding this issue is a further disappointing example of the degradation of the role of this County Council and its councillors in education?

Reply

National education policy has been established for many years placing the management of schools in their own hands and moving towards more schools becoming academies.

With the increased autonomy for schools and a greater number of academies then, appropriately, the role of the local authority has changed. Recent LGA-commissioned research shows how local authorities have evolved as a champion for learners and families, a convenor of partnerships and a commissioner of services for schools.

The local authority retains key responsibilities for ensuring that every child has a school place and that the needs of vulnerable pupils are met, and for acting as champions for children and families.

Regional Schools Commissioners (RSC) are responsible for the oversight of academies and free schools and will intervene where there is underperformance or cause for concern. We had been made aware of the RSC's concerns regarding the schools' performance.

The county council has a positive but robust working relationship with the RSC and we meet regularly to discuss academies, trusts and also maintained schools. In between meetings, we are in regular contact and it is disappointing that the notification was late however fortunately, this is not indicative of the quality of our relationship with the RSC. The RSC has acknowledged this breakdown in communication, which occurred in the aftermath of the announcement, and agreed that we will discuss how procedures can be improved at our next joint meeting in June.