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WYCOMBE DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 27 February 2014

AGENDA ITEM 5

Questions from Members of the Public

1. Question from Dr L Derrick to the Cabinet Member for Community

In Dec 2011, WDC sold over 6000 Council homes to Red Kite.

In order to get Government approval for this sale, WDC promised the Government that “receipts from the sale would enable the Council to provide more affordable homes”. It said “affordable housing is our key priority” and that the Council anticipated “a considerable increase in affordable housing in the area. “

In order to get the tenants to vote for the sale, WDC promised the tenants that the money from the sale would be used to meet “the housing requirements of local people in housing need”.

In Dec 2011, WDC received £18.5m in net receipts as a first instalment from the sale.

In July 2012, I wrote to WDC to ask how many additional homes would be provided with this 18.5m and by when.

The reply from the then Head of Homes and Housing said “The Council will be reviewing the prioritisation of reaching decisions on the allocation of all available capital resources in the autumn. It is not therefore yet possible to provide any indication of whether the Council will directly invest some of the receipts in affordable housing or how many affordable homes might be provided.”

So already, 7 months after the sale, the council had broken its promises. From affordable housing being a key priority, WDC was now not even prepared to say that any of the receipts would be spent on affordable housing.

It is now over 2 years after the sale and I am repeating my questions.

How many additional affordable homes has WDC built with the £18.5 million and how much has that cost? And how many additional affordable homes does it plan to build with the £18.5 m and by when?

Verbal reply to be given by Councillor J M Gibbs (Cabinet Member for Community)

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AGENDA ITEM 6

Questions from Members

1. Question from Councillor S F Parker to the Cabinet Member for Community

Is the cabinet member for community satisfied that, 14 months after the transfer of WDC housing stock, that Red Kite Housing are consistently serving the best needs of their tenants?

Verbal reply to be given by Councillor J M Gibbs (Cabinet Member for Community).

2. Question from Councillor I Bates to the Cabinet Member for Community.

The Community Call Service is an emergency call service used by hundreds of mostly elderly and frail people in the Wycombe District Council area. Its management was transferred by WDC along with Council Housing in 2011. On 2 February this year the external contract provider was changed with the majority of users transferring to the new provider. Red Kite chose at this point not to transfer 280 of the users and informed them at a month's notice that their service was to be terminated and that they would have to make their own arrangements from then on.

Users of a service formerly administered by WDC and entrusted to Red Kite with their undertaking to continue the care have been left to fend for themselves. Elderly and vulnerable residents who had the security and peace of mind of being able to summon assistance 24 hours a day at the pull of a cord or the push of a button were left with a piece of paper containing two phone numbers and an internet url to sort it out on their own.

Would the Cabinet Member for Community accept my thanks to him for intervening in this matter and ensuring that (at the latest reckoning) all but one of the 280 have been assisted in finding an alternative provider of emergency on-call assistance?

Verbal reply to be given by Councillor J M Gibbs (Cabinet Member for Community).

3. Question from Councillor B E Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainability.

Do you think that the possibility of a proposed development on the Buckmaster Road playing field would be beneficial to the local residents in view of the fact that Holmers Farm estate is a high density housing development and this field is vital for the area to act as a breathing lung, an area for children to play in, adults to participate in sport and for dog walkers?

Verbal reply to be given by Councillor N B Marshall (Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainability).

4. Question from Councillor M Hanif to the Cabinet Member for Finance.

A National Housing Federation survey suggests that two-thirds - 66% - of social sector tenants affected by benefit cuts for those with extra bedrooms were behind with rent after six months. It also said that 38% were in debt because of the "unfair, unworkable" policy change - dubbed the "bedroom tax".

Since April last year, people deemed to have one spare bedroom have had their housing benefit reduced by 14%, while those with two or more spare bedrooms have seen reductions of 25%. The report also said, that benefit changes were "heaping misery and hardship on already struggling families, pushing them into arrears".

Can you please tell us, how many requests for help has WDC received from social tenants so far this financial year, how many have been given help and how much has this cost WDC; with comparable information for 2012/3?

Verbal reply to be given by Councillor M A Foster (Cabinet Member for Finance).

5. Question from Councillor R B Colomb to the Cabinet Member for Environment.

During the pre- and post-Christmas period our Waste Collection service appeared to be under severe strain, if I am to judge by the complaints I received from residents. Whilst they might have some sympathy with the missed collections, they seemed unanimous in their criticism about the way complaints to the Call Centre were handled.

E Mails did not receive a reply and if they did it was an anodyne standard one that did not relate to the specific query

I have one resident whose food waste was not collected for 23 days and he received no response communication during that entire period.

I have another with a complaint about the way bags were collected who was told they would not respond further.

In my own case I contacted the call centre and it was obvious the Centre had no idea about the state of collections.

Does the Contractor notify the Call Centre of missed collections at close of business each day?

Verbal reply to be given by Councillor J E Teesdale (Cabinet Member for Environment).

6. Question from Councillor K Ahmed to the Cabinet Member for Community.

The Wycombe Racial Equality Council has ceased to function and its affairs are being wound up.

Until 2011, the REC was jointly funded by Wycombe District Council and Bucks County Council. They had an office in Desborough Road from which they gave expert and specialist advice on a range of subjects to the people in Wycombe, education, employment, benefits, hate crime and other race related issues . It had support and commitment from individuals and organisations representing different communities in Wycombe and in the 50 years of its existence it did much to promote and support good relationships in the town.

Despite considerable opposition and concern, WDC funding was withdrawn in 2011. The two remaining posts were transferred to Bucks County Council and the personal advice service provided in the heart of the community and the solid work for good race relations in Wycombe stopped at that point.

Although best efforts were made to continue its work without funds this proved impossible and the people of Wycombe are poorer for it.

The Council has a statutory duty to promote and support racial cohesion what is being done to full fill this important duty?

Verbal reply to be given by Councillor J M Gibbs (Cabinet Member for Community).

7. Question from Councillor Ms R Knight to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainability.

Please can the Cabinet Member update us for the requirements for numbers of new dwellings required for the Wycombe District over the next five years and how he proposes to meet this requirement?

Verbal reply to be given by Councillor N B Marshall (Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainability).

8 Question from Councillor B E Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Community.

There is a rumour that the new sports centre will not have a crèche or pre-school type playing facility. Do you not think that this is very surprising in view of the fact that the provision of a crèche or pre-school playgroup would encourage mothers and fathers to participate in the facilities at the new sports centre?

Verbal reply to be given by Councillor J M Gibbs (Cabinet Member for Community).

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