

Unanswered Member Questions from Full Council
Monday 28 July 2014.

Written answers despatched under Standing Order 11.11

8. Question from Councillor Ms P Lee to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainability

Could the Cabinet Member for Planning please advise why the slides presented to members at the seminar on the Local Plan, differed from those presented to the Stakeholders; as several key slides appeared to have been omitted from the Stakeholder presentation?

The slides differed because we wanted Members to focus more of their time in their session on the issues regarding the way forward with the Local Plan. It was important at the stakeholder session to provide more feedback on the outcomes from the consultation earlier in the year. Further public sessions are being set up next month for stakeholders and the public to discuss the way forward on the Local Plan.

9. Question from Councillor Ms J D Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Community

The retention of the Wycombe Museum on the existing site and the additional funding is to be welcomed. Hopefully, this will not preclude the Museum going out with exhibits into community locations. Has this decision been influenced by the debate on a Unitary Council as there are 'uncertainties' as to whether the Council Offices will be required in future?

When deciding to retain the Museum at Castle Hill House, regard was had to the economic climate and reductions in Government revenue grants which gives rise to uncertainty about the long term retention of the Queen Victoria Road offices in part or as a whole. Given that the Council would need to commit to either retaining the Museum on the Queen Victoria Road site for 25 years, or to refund a pro-rata amount of the Heritage Lottery Fund award, it was for this reason it was considered to be in the best financial interests of the Council to close the relocation project and withdraw the submitted Heritage Lottery Fund application.

At item 10 on tonight's Council agenda, we are seeking Council's agreement to Cabinet's recommendation to commit £257k for improvements to the Museum and grounds and so creating a much enhanced visitor experience.

These recommendations also include the transfer of the Museum to the Wycombe Heritage Arts Trust (WHAT). So far as outside exhibits are concerned, I think this is something we would want to discuss with WHAT and no doubt they will look at the business and community benefits in continuing with these.

10. Question from Councillor A E Hill to the Leader of the Council

Is it fair that the Group Leaders take precedence over Members when asking questions at full council, as Members could put a question in first?

This is a long standing convention at Council meetings, which predates my time as Leader. It is of course also featured under Standing Order 11.8

The key issue for me is not about group leaders having precedence but more about seeking to answer as many Member questions as possible.

As a rule, I would say that we do seek to answer as many Member questions as possible and the Chairman of the Council also has the ability to extend the time allowed for questions as well, which has been used in the past. The Constitution allows up to 30 minutes for questions from Members. In the last two years there has only been 3 occasions when all the questions have not been able to be asked. Those that were not answered received a written reply.

You will have noted the recommendation from the Regulatory and Appeals Committee from last Monday, which was agreed by Council last night which seeks to speed up the time taken to ask questions so we can take as many as possible in the public domain at Council meetings. Every question gets a response.

11. Question from Councillor M Knight to the Leader of the Council

Is it time that WDC consider the situation regarding DBS checks for councillors?

Mandatory checks for all councillors may seem burdensome and councillors could regard it as unnecessary for them. However, by the very nature of their role in serving their constituents most councillors will almost inevitably find themselves from time-to-time in positions where they have direct contact with children, young people or more likely, vulnerable adults.

Whilst our position is not unlawful it may not be satisfactory. There may be a risk to community and the Council's image and reputation if the Council does not take reasonable steps to assess and mitigate the risk of councillors with convictions having access to vulnerable people.

The Disclosure and Barring Service gives no direction about councillors, other than for those with specific responsibility for children's services or vulnerable adults.

For all other councillors this leaves a grey area to be decided by each authority. The authority could be left exposed as it cannot be aware of all the activities of its councillors.

Will you agree with me that taking into account our general duty of care and the low cost of checks we should implement these for all councillors

The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) have merged to become the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). CRB checks are now called DBS checks. There are standard and enhanced checks within the DBS system. The Council has maintained a review on the requirements under the former CRB scheme and the current scheme administered by the Disclosure and Barring Service so far as they relate to both Member and Officer roles.

Before an organisation considers asking a person to apply for a criminal record check through the DBS, they are legally responsible for ensuring that they are entitled to submit an application for the job role. Whilst we take the safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults very seriously, having regard to the guidance for the Disclosure and Barring Scheme we do not believe that our Councillor role meets the criteria for a DBS criminal record check. The Council will continue to keep this sensitive area under review.

12. Question from Councillor Ms J D Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Community

Bucks County Council will be holding a Scrutiny exercise concerning their grass cutting contract on 30th September 2014. They have already agreed to produce a 'user friendly' map of the areas they are responsible for. It is hoped that Wycombe District Council will participate in the Scrutiny, work collaboratively and ensure that any map includes the areas of responsibility for Housing Associations and the District Council. Can you confirm that you will be actively engaged with this process?

We will work with Bucks County Council if they ask the District to be involved in their review, although no such request has been received to date. We will chase BCC to seek involvement in this important review and map.