

## UNANSWERED MEMBER QUESTIONS FROM COUNCIL 23 FEBRUARY 2017

### **8 Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Finance.**

What is the expenditure on bed and breakfast in the year to date?

As at 20th February 2017 the spend on Bed & Breakfast for the financial year to date was £383,710.75.

The income figure YTD - 20th Feb 2017 - B&B Costs YTD

£

Expenditure

383,710.75

Income

-83,489.47

Net

300,221.28

### **9 Question from Councillor M Knight to the Leader of the Council.**

All district councillors of the wards of the unparished area of the Wycombe District are also required to be Charter Trustees, an ancient part of High Wycombe's heritage.

Charter Trustees set a precept to cover the costs of their activities and in doing so receive public funds. Despite this the Charter Trustees operate outside of the council's standards regime and are not bound by the same code of conduct which govern their activities as Wycombe District Councillors.

Is it right that the Charter Trustees receive public funds, collected and disbursed by this council, when there is little opportunity for them to be held to account?

Thank you for your question. The Chartered Trustees are a separate body from the Council and are therefore not governed by the District Council's Members' Code of Conduct. I am therefore unable to comment on any code of conduct or Constitutional issues associated with the Trustees, and I would refer you to the Town Clerk who does look after this.

I understand under a Charter that was set up that the Trustees do use part of the Council offices for their functions including the use of the Council Chamber to hold meetings, and office for the Mayor's Secretary.

I understand under a Charter that was set up that the Trustees do use part of the Council offices for their functions including the use of the Council Chamber to hold meetings, and office for the Mayor's Secretary.

The Chartered Trustees do set a separate precept each year where they hold a meeting which I believe is managed by the Town Clerk. The District Council bills

residents in the unparished part of the town a separate precept, which is listed separately on the bill. The Council collect this together with other local precepts and then pay this across in fixed instalments based on the total precept that has been levied by the Charter Trustees.

**10 Question from Councillor M Hanif to the Cabinet Member for Environment.**

Following the release of a list of 60 restaurants with the worst hygiene ratings by the Bucks Free Press last week, a local business owner feared that their Bourne End business would go bust after a paperwork error left the eatery with a poor hygiene rating and was forced to wait months before a re-inspection.

My concern is for many other local restaurants that may fall in the same category and experience a negative impact on their businesses as a result. Why is WDC not as efficient as our sister organisation the Chiltern District Council, who are far more responsive and caring, when it comes to supporting the local businesses?

The Council's Environmental Health Officers are responsible for carrying out official food controls at over 1100 registered food businesses in the Wycombe district and give a food hygiene rating to the over 900 businesses that fall within the remit of the scheme. This rating shows how closely the business is meeting the requirements of food hygiene law and how seriously they're taking public safety by managing food safety. The rating, from 0 to 5, takes into account:

- how hygienically food is handled
- the condition and cleanliness of the buildings
- what is done to make sure food is safe (including staff training and management systems)

Businesses do not receive a low rating simply for failures in their paperwork but for significant failings in management and food hygiene practices and/or conditions.

#### The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

The food hygiene rating scheme is run by Wycombe District Council, in partnership with the Food Standards Agency and the Council follows the official guidelines, as set out by the Food Standards Agency, around inspections and re-inspections. Officers have received training on these and the flexibilities that exist for small businesses with regards to documented food safety management systems. Refresher training and exercises are regularly undertaken to ensure consistency in scoring.

The Food Hygiene Ratings Scheme incorporates safeguards to ensure fairness to businesses, including an appeal mechanism against their rating and a mechanism for requesting a re-inspection or a re-visit for the purposes of re-rating when improvements have been made. When a request for a re-inspection is made, a business must provide evidence of the actions being taken to address the contraventions. The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme Brand Standard allows for re-inspections to take place within three months of a request being received. In addition, there is a standstill period of three months following an inspection where a re-visit should not take place. This is all clearly stated on the form which businesses complete when requesting a re-inspection.

Whilst officers will provide advice and support to businesses (including providing free documented food safety management systems) it is always the responsibility of the business to comply with food safety regulatory requirements and ensure that their premises and the food they serve is safe for their customers at all times.

I am unable to comment on Chiltern's performance in this area only to reiterate that Wycombe works within the Food Standards Agency guidelines and set timescales.

**11 Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration**

What progress has been made with Network Rail on the refurbishment of the Brunel Shed?

The Council has been trying to bring the matter to a resolution for some time as you know. The Brunel Shed doesn't belong to Network Rail but to Chiltern Railways. The matter is quite complex due to the nature of their franchise agreement. Officers have met with both Chiltern Railways and the DfT yet progress remains slow. More recently we have been told by Chiltern Railways that they have put a proposal to DfT (there is a negotiation to be had between them as they both need to agree a course of action) and that it is to be discussed on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2017 after which they will be back in touch. The Council is also in touch with the others in order to progress the matter including the MP's office and the Buckinghamshire Historic Buildings Trust.

**12 Question from Councillor M Knight to the Cabinet Member for Environment.**

Could you report to us the levels of air pollution in the London Road A40 corridor in the last year and indicate whether this shows a deterioration or improvement and whether these levels are within an acceptable range?

The situation on the London Road corridor is varied. Towards the town centre end of London Road, we are receiving Nitrogen dioxide levels that are consistently near to the National limit of 40  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  (see yearly averages below)

Site	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
London Rd	39.9	39.2	40.1	38.3	38.1

Towards the Wycombe Marsh end of London Road, the situation has shown a gradual improvement over the last few years which is starting to show a move towards compliance with National limits

Site	2013	2014	2015
Marsh	40.0	37.7	34.3

We are currently waiting for national calibration levels to be set to determine the levels for 2016. Once these have been received, we will be modelling the levels across High Wycombe town centre (including arterial roads such as London Rd) as well as Marlow Town centre and the M40 corridor. This modelling will form the basis for report to cabinet later this year which may include recommendations to approve Local Air Quality Management Areas.

**13 Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Leader of the Council.**

Could the Leader of the Council, in view of the rise in crime rate and its nature, confirm that the Council will be giving more money to the voluntary sector which supports victims of crime?

Women's Aid and Rape Crisis for example are facing increasing demand.

We have had a number of years when crimes of all types fell and I am sure you will join me in congratulating the Police and all partners who worked together to achieve this. It was almost inevitable that at some point the downward trend would not be sustained. The Police and Crime Commissioner, via the Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership Board, awards a range of grants for domestic violence services, we award a substantial grant to Wycombe Women's Aid and this year Rape Crisis applied for and have been awarded a grant. We are not commissioning these services, they are grants that any local organisation is welcome to apply for and a drop or rise in crime does not affect funding. Crime figures vary from day to day, month to month and to link funding to statistics of any kind would be a knee jerk reaction to a complex situation with multiple potential causes and solutions