

COUNCIL

Monday 8 October 2018

Agenda Item 6

Questions from Members

Unanswered Questions – Responses sent subsequent to Meeting

9. Question from Councillor M Asif to the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader of the Council please give a breakdown of monies spent on DFG (Disabled Facilities Grants) in the year 2017/18 and up to the end of September this year?

The breakdown in how many Grants permitted in groups of £1 to £5000 onwards?

In response to the question raised, I can advise that for 2017/2018 we spent a total of £756,285.48 for 81 disabled facilities grants and in 2018/2019 we have thus far spent £233,854.82 over 21 grants.

The amount is lower for first six months of this year due to the following reasons:

1. Historically, we deliver more grants in the 2nd half of the year.
2. The Occupational Therapy service at BCC introduced a Triage service in January 2018 which has affected the numbers of referrals coming through for DFGs. They have informed us they are meeting client needs in other ways for example using equipment from BCC services
3. May be also be relevant that since we improved our procedures and introduced ID checks, we have noted several applicants have not been able to prove eligibility for grant aid.

If you require any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me or Amy Starsmore (Environmental Health Officer) 01494 421706 in the housing service.

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

Some years ago, at a full council meeting, a member of the public submitted a petition regarding toilets on the Rye. I understand that £30,000 was set aside for a feasibility study but my understanding is that said study only actually cost £20,000.

Could you please update us on the progress on having public toilets in the aforementioned vicinity?

I am delighted to provide an update on the work, which is being undertaken on behalf of the Council and the High Wycombe Town Committee, which funded the feasibility work. Clearly we don't want to spend more than we need to on feasibility work and I am pleased that you have noticed how cost effective we are.

The study produced a viable financial solution, which was not supported by residents, Members of the Committee or our own Planning Service. We have listened to the many

comments made and have been exploring an alternative option to replace the old Boathouse with a larger building that will retain this much loved service but provide a better experience for residents and visitors. This would include a public toilet closer to the Ropes on the Rye play area and also provide indoor seating which could enable the Boathouse to be open all year. We have secured funding, agreed an outline scheme with the tenant, recruited a project manager and put together a team that is developing costed plans that we can go out to procurement with this year. I hope that you are looking forward, as much as I am, to seeing a bigger and better Rye Boathouse Café.

11. Question from Councillor M Hanif to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration

One Public Estate, OPE provides practical and technical support and funding to councils to get the best use out of its land and property - for example, releasing land for new homes - and using the programme to deliver them.

Has WDC any plan of working in partnership with OPE to benefit from their programme to get the best use out of our land and property by taking a strategic approach to asset management?

In March, the Council was successful in obtaining a grant of £0.5m from One Public Estate who, with the Local Government Association, administer the Government's Land Release Fund (aimed at enabling local authorities to bring forward residential development sites). The grant is towards enabling works at the Council's Bassetsbury Triangle site (the subject of a current planning application).

The Council is aware of the Government's recent announcement of One Public Estate offering an advisory role. The Council has for the past 14 years adopted active property asset management, with a 3 yearly Asset Management Plan. The Council has been successful in releasing land for a variety of developments. Little remains with residential potential that is not already being actively progressed. So it is not intended to seek OPE advice.

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

Do you think that the unparished areas of our District, within the urban area of High Wycombe, are kept cleaned and maintained to a sufficient standard, particularly in terms of street cleaning, weeds and maintenance of footpaths?

Wycombe District Council has responsibility for street cleaning on all publicly owned land across the district. Buckinghamshire County Council has the responsibility for weed spraying and footpath maintenance in terms of structural repairs. However, even though not obligated to do so, Wycombe District Council carries out weed treatments in the High Wycombe High Street area, twice yearly.

High Wycombe town centre benefits from two mobile street cleansing operatives with barrows who litter pick, empty litter bins and generally clean throughout each working day. The contractor is contractually obliged to litter pick in the High Street area to a very high standard and if litter is reported, it should be cleared within one hour.

Across the district, a combined scheduled and responsive cleansing service is provided, and the Joint Waste Team provides two officers to support identification of areas which need attention. Also, if there are any problem areas which need attention, we encourage

residents to report matters to the Joint Waste Team.

Wycombe District Council works hard as part of the Joint Waste Team to improve cleanliness standards and to develop services to make them more pro-active in dealing with litter, graffiti, fly-posting, fly-tipping and other nuisances.

13. Question from Councillor R Raja to the Leader of the Council

It is reported that spending on welfare benefits for Britain's poorest families will have shrunk by nearly a quarter after a decade of austerity. By 2021 £37Bn less will be spent on working age social security compared with 2010.

In the light of this information would the Leader tell us how the introduction of the Universal Credit is progressing in the District and do you have numbers of those who have been unable to access their benefits for more than a week?

Thank you for your question. Housing benefit changed in the Wycombe area from September 2018. Wycombe DC no longer administers new applications for housing benefit from working age claimants. Members may recall from the Members Seminar earlier this year that Housing Benefit is being replaced by Universal Credit which is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions. From now on most people of working age in the Wycombe area wishing to make a new claim for support apply to DWP for Universal Credit. This is outside the remit of the District Council and as such Wycombe has no insight into the performance of DWP. The Member concerned would need to approach the DWP for information relating to Universal Credit.

From the Councils point of view there is currently no evidence of any issues arising as a result of the introduction of Universal Credit. Housing Benefit continues to be paid in a timely manner by WDC to existing claimants and to pensioners. Universal Credit will ultimately replace Income-based Jobseekers Allowance and Income-related Employment and Support Allowance; Income Support; Working Tax Credit; Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit.

14. Question from Councillor K Ahmed to the Cabinet Member for Housing

WDC has received hundreds of thousands and is due to receive many hundreds of thousands more by central government to tackle homelessness and rough sleepers.

Can the Cabinet Member please tell what net gains and benefits have been realised from the investment of this money?

At present we are seeing a positive benefit from the investment in additional staff funded from the homelessness prevention grant. This benefit can be seen in the low numbers of homeless households in temporary accommodation at present. Our work continues and we intend to utilise the funds to further ensure we tackle all instances of homelessness where possible.

It is early days in terms of fully assessing the benefits, with work on going to continue the good work by officers and our partners, however rest assured that we will not rest on our laurels in the challenge of preventing of relieving homelessness.