

Council Minutes

Date: 8 October 2018

Time: 6.30 - 7.20 pm

PRESENT: Councillor A R Green (in the Chair)

Councillors Mrs J A Adey, Mrs S Adoh, K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, M C Appleyard, M Asif, D H G Barnes, Ms A Baughan, S Broadbent, Miss S Brown, D J Carroll, M Clarke, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, M P Davy, C Etholen, R Farmer, R Gaffney, S Graham, G C Hall, M Hanif, M Harris, C B Harriss, M A Hashmi, A E Hill, A Hussain, M Hussain, M Hussain JP, D A Johncock, Mrs G A Jones, M E Knight, D Knights, Mrs J D Langley, A Lee, Mrs W J Mallen, N B Marshall, H L McCarthy, I L McEnnis, R Newman, Ms C J Oliver, B E Pearce, G Peart, S K Raja, R Raja, S Saddique, J A Savage, R J Scott, D A C Shakespeare OBE, N J B Teesdale, Mrs J E Teesdale, A Turner, P R Turner, Ms J D Wassell, D M Watson, C Whitehead, R Wilson and Ms K S Wood

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H Bull, A D Collingwood and L Wood and Honorary Aldermen E Collins & Mrs K Peatey.

32 MINUTE'S SILENCE FOR TREVOR FOWLER

The Meeting held a minute's silence in respect of the recent death of ex-Councillor Trevor Fowler.

The Chairman remarked on ex-Councillor Fowler's many years' service as both a District Councillor and Buckinghamshire County Councillor.

33 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 16 July 2018 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman with a correction in that Councillor Ms J Wassell's apologies for that meeting had been submitted but not recorded.

34 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

35 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that he had received a letter from Honorary Alderman Ted Collins apologising for that evening's meeting but also indicating that he would not be able to attend future Council meetings, he had in that letter thanked

Members for their kind support over his many years on the Council. The Chairman confirmed that he had written in response in turn thanking him for his invaluable service over those years.

The Chairman mentioned a few of his many duties he had carried out over the previous 3 months:

- RAF High Wycombe Freedom Procession;
- The informal civic celebration for Wycombe Wanderers on their promotion to League Division 1;
- Several graduation ceremonies and other events at Buckinghamshire New University;
- A performance of 'Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat' at Wycombe Arts Centre;
- The Battle of Britain Parade (for which the Chairman thanked those Members who had attended, but remarked that these were few in number and that all were welcome to mark this important civic event);
- Meeting HRH the Princess Royal at the unveiling of the new war memorial 'soldier and horse'; and
- Opening the Hughenden Gardens Retirement Village: which was making a major contribution in housing for the elderly in the Wycombe District.

36 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

a) Question from Honorary Alderman P Cartwright to the Cabinet Member for Environment

Passengers travelling to and from the Park and Ride site now enjoy free travel Mondays to Fridays whilst parking spaces are lost in the town due to roadworks. What is the total number of passengers carried during the period 1 July to 30 September 2018 and the comparable period in 2016 (similar number of journeys), the gross and net costs of the service and the termination date of the contract for the service?

Response from Councillor Mrs J Adey (Cabinet Member for Environment)

In answer to the questions the P&R bus service is funded via a s106 agreement.

The P&R passenger numbers are:

12 week period from June 2016 – August 2016: total passengers 13,743

12 week period from June – August 2018: total passengers 16,721

Passenger statistics are provided in arrears by the bus company and I do not have September 2018 data yet.

The end date of the contract is 31st July 2020 with an option to extend for a further 12 months.

The contract is paid on a net cost basis which means that the operator is paid a fixed amount to operate the service and also retains any fares revenue.

The payment is tapered so that the subsidy reduces each year as the passenger numbers and therefore fares revenue grows.

The current payment level is £2019 per week, this reduces to £1882 in September 2019.

The recently agreed free travel on Mondays to Fridays (which started July 2018) is funded by a separate agreement at £90 per week day to reflect the loss of revenue that results.

Supplementary Question

Making a quick calculation on the two months quoted this works out at about 4 passengers per trip, this is surely totally uneconomic. Will you invite suggestions as to how this service and its economic viability can be improved?

Supplementary Response

Yes I do invite such suggestions, the car parking in town is too cheap hence why people, including many commuters, do not utilise the Park and Ride. Perhaps there is a case for putting up parking charges in the town centre.

37 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

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

Table 13b of WDC's annual accounts for the year to March 2018 show a £10M increase in the value of investment properties compared with March 2017.

Can the Leader of the council explain how this surplus was used or will be used to benefit our residents?

Response from Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).

Thank you for your question. The reasons for the increase in value of the investment property is also detailed in note 13b. In the main the increase is due to revaluation of existing assets, the transfer of assets from other classes, acquisitions and additional expenditure on major projects. The increase is only realised when the property is sold and under the accounting regulations the receipt from the sale can only be used for future capital investments which would benefit our residents in the long-term. As you will be aware market conditions change every year and therefore the increase in value cannot be used in any year until the disposal outlined earlier.

Supplementary Question

Thank you, you have pre-empted part of my supplementary question in that Capital Gains only add value they cannot bolster the annual revenue budget, only rental income as such does this. What percentage of rental income is utilised to the benefit of our residents?

Supplementary Response

Your supplementary question has switched the subject matter to revenue / rental income details of which I do not have, we will supply you with a written response.

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

Along with other Council Leaders in Buckinghamshire you are championing a major change in the delivery of local government in the Wycombe District and Buckinghamshire as a whole.

In leading this change do you believe it is your responsibility to ensure the best, and most well prepared solution for future local governance in the unparished area of High Wycombe?

Response from Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).

However much we may wish that local politicians were in the driving seat in the decision on future local government arrangements – the fact is we aren't. I am not in a position to lead this change, although I have done everything I can to influence the decision makers to achieve the best outcome for Wycombe District residents.

If a decision is made to move towards unitary local government then a body will be established through a parliamentary Order which will decide on the detail. Under either model, the current arrangements for local governance in High Wycombe unparished area can continue but whether that is what happens we will have to wait and see. The shadow body will have a great many decisions to make about the delivery of services particularly for our most vulnerable residents and for my part if I am a member of that body I will do the very best I can to champion the interests of all of the residents of Wycombe District.

Supplementary Question

So I understand you are not in a position to lead us into Unitary arrangements, but could you confirm you are in a position to support a Community Governance Review for High Wycombe given the considerably increased number of residents as a result of the considerable housebuilding / development occurring in the town? Is this an attack on democracy, blocking community involvement at a micro-level, is it not a disservice to the residents of Wycombe not to allow such a review to happen?

Supplementary Response

No.

c. Question from Councillor B Pearce to the Leader of the Council

Sometime ago, we had discussions about the unitary authorities in Buckinghamshire.

Could you please update us on the present situation?

Response from Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).

I think we are all slightly in the dark on this one but I will do my best to tell you what I know.

The original submission by the County for a unitary was made in September 2016 (quite a while ago now). Our own submission was made in January 2017 under pressure of time. But almost immediately we were told a decision would not be made until March 2017 and as you know we finally had the minded to announcement in March this year. In June we were told we would not get a decision before the end of August and so we thought it might come before Parliament went into recess again for the conference season. But we have heard nothing and have been given no further indication about timescales.

Although it is unsettling for everyone to have no conclusion to this issue, given the nature of the 'minded to' announcement one view might be that 'no news is good news'. I also recognise that we have had a change of Minister since the 'minded to' and it is reassuring that he is taking his time to form his own view about the evidence. We believe that the district councils presented a very compelling case and the ongoing pressure for housing nationally and the significance of the Oxford/Milton Keynes/Cambridge corridor to local delivery has only served to confirm the strength of the case that we made. I remain hopeful that sense will prevail; that financial expediency will not take priority; and that we are able to benefit from this unique opportunity to create unitaries truly determined by the economies and communities of the area.

We can only wait and see ...and in the meantime all we can do is get on with the business of this Council and serving our communities to the best of our abilities.

Councillor Pearce did not have a supplementary question.

d. Question from Councillor M Hanif to the Leader of the Council

According to a Sky News report based on Freedom of Information requests, dozens of councils have seized the initiative and produced their own analysis of the potential impact of Brexit on public services.

Brexit will ultimately be judged as a success or failure by local areas; real people in real communities. We need to take a lead on preparations for Brexit because our residents and our local businesses expect us to be ready.

What preparations has WDC made to address the impact of Brexit?

Response from Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).

Thank you, Councillor Hanif, for your question.

Brexit is a broad topic. There are impacts on local government and how we carry out our business and there are impacts that specifically effect Buckinghamshire – its residents and businesses. You will be pleased to know that we are looking at both aspects and working with others to anticipate any changes coming our way.

You may know that the LGA has been making representations to government on behalf of local government as a whole and have been making it clear that there are key asks of the Brexit deal that they are advocating. These issues were gathered as feedback from their members through events like those that took place here in Buckinghamshire this time last year to which we contributed.

The four key asks relate to:

- Legislation
- Funding
- Workforce
- Procurement

Many local government services are affected by EU rules and regulations, including waste management, environmental standards, trading standards and procurement. The Withdrawal Act 2018 ensures that there is legal certainty and no cliff edge for councils as those EU laws that underpin key services on exit day would continue to apply through UK law, even under ‘no deal’.

But some clarification will be needed on issues like procurement which is part way through at the end of March, or elections which are due to take place very shortly after Exit day if there is ‘no deal’. So we will need to keep an eye on progress over the next month or so and make the necessary preparations. We are keen to support the LGA and others in advocating for the right outcomes. I can circulate to members in the next members update details of the resources at the LGA and BBF which provide more detailed information about the anticipated impacts on local government and the local area.

Supplementary Question

Councils up and down the country have fears regarding the like of food safety, health inequality and homelessness in respect of Brexit. A common theme is that the Conservatives are making a mess of Brexit, would you not agree with that assessment?

Supplementary Response

No I do not share those concerns, I am confident that by the end of March all will be sorted out admirably.

e. Question from Councillor Abdullah Hashmi to the Cabinet Member for Housing

According to our Draft Plan we set a target of 10,000 new homes to be delivered in the district by 2033.

Can the cabinet member for Housing please update us on the number of new houses that have been delivered to date?

Response from Councillor Mrs J Langley (Cabinet Member for Housing).

The Local Plan submitted to the Inspector who is currently examining the Plan proposed a housing target for Wycombe District of 10,925 additional dwellings for the period 2013-2033. As of 31st March 2018, 2,404 dwellings had been built.

You should note that the 2,404 figure is what we call a “net” figure – because where homes are demolished to make way for new developments we have to take the number of homes demolished off the total.

Supplementary Question

Whichever way one defines affordable housing, have the targets for such been met or have developers once again got the better of Wycombe District Council in this respect?

Supplementary Response

Of the 2,404 homes built, 403 were affordable homes, it is the Council’s aim to fully deliver on affordable homes.

f. Question from Councillor M Clarke to the Leader of the Council

The current MLG proposals agree on one thing, that being that the status quo is untenable. Therefore it would appear that Buckinghamshire is heading inexorably towards a unitary format, be it a single county wide unitary or a two unitary solution.

Will the Leader please tell this Council what steps she and her executive have taken to ensure the continuance of the Mayoralty of High Wycombe or are they content to condemn 750 years of continuous occupation of the position of Mayor and the unique customs of this Mayoralty to history?

Response from Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).

What a night for Unitary questions! Thank you for your question.

Whilst the submissions may support unitary there remains the possibility that the Minister will not, or not at this stage, take the decision necessary to implement a change to unitary. We therefore wait to see whether change will happen.

As a Chartered Trustee you will no doubt be familiar with the role of the Chartered Trustees and status of the Mayoralty. When the Municipal Borough which served the town of High Wycombe was abolished by the local government reorganisation of 1974 the historical and ceremonial functions were taken over by the Chartered Trustees. The Chartered Trustees and the Mayoralty will therefore be unaffected by any reorganisation of Local Government. The ceremonial and historical functions are not functions of the District Council and therefore do not form part of either of the unitary submissions.

Supplementary Question

I thank the Leader for her answer. Under a unitary regime it is inconceivable that the unparished areas can remain so. There have been suggestions in high places that the unparished area will be split into parishes, I have heard the number suggested to be between 4 and 6. How does the Leader intend to ensure that the parishing of the town can be controlled by this Council and not by the Transition Authority as happened in Wiltshire which is the model being used by the County?

Supplementary Response

This will be a decision of the Shadowing Board if Unitary is pursued, and if I am a member of that Board I would ensure that Wycombe residents would end up with the best representation possible.

g. Question from Councillor S Graham to the Cabinet Member for Community

With the increasing levels of obesity, one would expect all Councils would be doing all they can to encourage people to eat a healthy diet and exercise. I am therefore dismayed to note that the Leisure centre under the control of WDC is charging £6.45 for a child over 14 years, which means that anyone with average income and two or more children over 14 would be disadvantaged and discouraged from using the facilities of the Leisure Centre.

Would the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Leisure Centre tell us what incentives are provided for people to benefit from their local council Leisure Centre?

Response from Councillor G Peart (Cabinet Member for Community).

I am sorry you have had difficulties with your email service as your question is not clear and it would have been good to understand a little more before trying to answer it. There appear to be only two £6.45 charges levied by Places Leisure, both for adult leisure activities, one fitness class and also a general swim at peak time. As adult prices start at 16 years of age these aren't charges that apply to 14 year olds. In any case the full price should only be paid by non-residents – all residents are entitled to register for a free Leisure Card, which entitles them to a range of discounts. If you would like further information to help your constituent please either ask myself, anyone at the leisure centre or in the Leisure Service here.

Supplementary Question

I have carried out research noting a review of the leisure centre and a family remark that their children have been having swimming lessons for a number of years, at £6 for 30 minutes. But this comes to a sizeable figure for those on or below average income, what can be done for such disadvantaged children in respect of learning this key skill of swimming?

Supplementary Response

I am unclear as to the issue you wish to raise if the family are residents they are entitled to apply for the free membership leisure card and cheaper prices, I do think we need to get together to explore your queries further, I am sure we can arrange such outside of the chamber.

h. Question from Councillor K Ahmed to the Cabinet Member for Planning

WDC has agreed to spend £200k on hiring someone to help regenerate the town centre.

This need for regeneration of the High Street and Frogmoor has been long overdue, so I say better late than never.

Can the Cabinet Member please tell us what the residents of Wycombe will be getting in return for £200k that you are intending on spending on their behalf?

Response from Councillor D Johncock (Cabinet Member for Planning).

Thank you for your question Cllr Ahmed but I have to say that you are quite wrong to suggest that regeneration of the High Street and Frogmoor is long overdue or something that this Council has not been taking seriously. We have invested considerable amounts of time and money in successfully bringing old shops back into commercial use; for example, Red Squirrel and the Works. In addition, there have been long standing plans for improvements to Frogmoor although those plans have frequently been put off due to uncertainty over the impacts of the needed redevelopment of the Chiltern Centre. Now these are beginning to come to fruition, perhaps we can bring new plans forward with some certainty and urgency.

It is probably timely to highlight that we have achieved a good deal in the town centre over the last 10 years in terms of regeneration following through on our the themes of strengthening the economy, transforming spaces and bringing the town together. This has been achieved through the Council's proactive and welcoming approach to new development and the implementation of the early phases of the town centre masterplan - we have made great progress implementing the alternative route and I think that the opportunities that this creates will become clearer when this is completed in 2019.

It is easy to overlook that which quickly becomes familiar but over the last 10 years we have also seen the opening of the Eden centre, investment by Bucks New University as well as public realm and river improvements, a new bus rail interchange, refurbishment of the Swan theatre. Nonetheless we cannot be

complacent; the town centre faces new and diverse challenges and the Council has an important role to ensure that it continues to adapt to thrive in the face of these challenges.

The alternative route around the town centre will be fully in place later next year so it is important to start making plans and bringing forward new projects that will reap the benefits of the reduced traffic that currently needs to use Abbey Way and Oxford Road. There are opportunities to improve the public realm, and to create new public spaces that will better connect the old and the new parts of the town centre and make these areas more attractive for shoppers, visitors and for investment, building on the success of the scheme at Paul's Row that has helped to transform what was a backstreet, encourage investment by new businesses, and complement the investment in the Swan refurbishment.

In order to do this, we need professional staff with the right experience and qualifications to bring forward the design and implementation of these future schemes and ensure that they are integrated with a new vision for the town centre that we will be developing and which will go beyond the current masterplan. The £200,000 will provide 3 years funding for this post - a key appointment for our on-going regeneration of High Wycombe.

Supplementary Question

Thanks for your response, but I do believe you are in a parallel world; our High Street and Frogmoor do not look good. We need to concentrate on improving the High Street, do you not think the Improvement & Review Commission should have a report on this planned regeneration and appoint a Task and Finish Group to look into the issue?

Supplementary Response

I can confirm that this money is being spent on a new member of staff to deliver the required regeneration, by doing so we are in charge of what is being delivered.

Questions 9 to 14 were not put as the 30 minutes time period had expired. In accordance with Standing Orders, a written reply would be sent to the questioner by the appropriate Member within 10 working days, and would also be appended to the minutes of the meeting.

38 PETITIONS

No petitions were received by the deadline of Monday 1 October 2018.

39 CABINET

Minute 25 – Digital First

Three Members commented that they had had trouble getting through to the IT Department and asked if the correct contact numbers could be circulated to Members. The Leader commented that she had not experienced such problems but confirmed that the relevant contact details would be circulated to all Members.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 30 July 2018 be received.

40 CABINET

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 17 September 2018 be received.

41 CABINET

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 8 October 2018 be received, and the recommendation as set out at minute number 40 be approved and adopted.

42 PLANNING COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings of the Planning Committee of 27 June 2018, 25 July 2018 and 22 August 2018 be received.

43 AUDIT COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 26 July 2018 be received, and the recommendation as set out at minute number 25 be approved and adopted.

44 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the High Wycombe Town Committee held on 11 September 2018 be received.

45 IMPROVEMENT & REVIEW COMMISSION

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Improvement & Review Commission held on 12 September 2018 be received.

46 PERSONNEL & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

In relation to minute number 11 (Review of Smoking Policy and Facilities on Queen Victoria Road Site – Results of Consultation), some Members queried whether this

proposed decision would result in congregations of smokers on the public highway outside the offices, and the Chairman of the Personnel & Development Committee assured them that the exact detail of how to deliver a 'smoke-free' site, subsequent to this decision, was still to be worked on and would be presented to the Personnel and Development Committee in due course.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Personnel & Development Committee held on 26 September 2018 be received, and the recommendation as set out at minute number 11 be approved and adopted.

47 QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 11.2

There were no questions submitted under Standing Order 11.2

48 COMMITTEE CHANGES / APPOINTMENTS

There were no changes to Committee membership or appointments to be noted.

49 URGENT ACTION TAKEN BY CABINET OR INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER

The Individual Cabinet Member Decisions as set out in the summons were noted.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

Peter Druce - Democratic Services
Ian Hunt - Democratic Services Manager
Karen Satterford - Chief Executive

Minute Item 37

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.

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