

COUNCIL

Monday 1 April 2019

Agenda Item 6

Questions from Members

Unanswered Questions – Responses sent subsequent to Meeting

10. Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Planning

There are many new developments planned for East Wycombe and plans for Gomm Valley have now been submitted.

Is it time for a further review on the impact of our already overloaded infrastructure, particularly in view the UK Environment Agency report that there will be water shortages within 25 years, due to climate change?

As you know, following examination of our submitted new Local Plan by the Planning Inspectorate last autumn and following the recent public consultation on the Inspector's Main Modifications, we are hoping to be able to adopt our new Local Plan this summer. This Plan identifies a number of sites across the whole District for development all of which have been assessed in an Infrastructure Development Plan. When we considered the sites that are proposed in the plan we consulted with all infrastructure providers to understand if there were any potential infrastructure restrictions and what was required to deal with them.

In relation to water resources we know that Wycombe is an area of water stress, this does not mean that there are insufficient water resources, however, supported by infrastructure providers and the Environment Agency we have included a policy in the new plan that requires new developments to be more efficient in their use of water. This policy requires new development to meet a water efficiency level of 110 litres per day per person as opposed to the standard 125 litres per person per day set out in building regulations.

Local authorities are required to undertake a review of their Local Plans every 5 years and as such, when the new unitary authority for Buckinghamshire is created, one of its tasks will be to consider how to deal with that review. At the very least, there will be a need to create a strategic plan for Buckinghamshire as a whole and this will almost certainly involve a further assessment of future infrastructure requirements.

11. Question from Councillor B Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Environment

I'm sure that you are aware of the recent events regarding Travellers congregating illegally on private land such as the former site of Homebase on London Road, Asda Superstore carpark, Buckmaster Road Playing Field, Cressex Empire Cinema carpark and many other locations.

Considering the cost to the Council and ultimately the Taxpayer in clearing up the left over debris and human excrement (which is definitely NOT from dogs as toilet paper is used!),

do you agree with me that this is an entirely unacceptable practice and could you inform Council what plans you have set up in order deal with this appalling situation both in the short term and indeed the long term?

Homebase, Asda and the Cressex Empire car parks are all examples of private land and so clear up costs were borne by the land owners, and not the Council. Buckmaster Road Playing Field is Council land and so the Council cleared this land at a cost of less than £1,000. In order to reduce further problems at Council car parks, additional height barriers have been ordered, which will be installed shortly.

Enforcement against illegal encampments on Council owned or public land is carried out by the Gypsy and Travellers service at Buckinghamshire County Council. The provision of this service is governed by a memorandum of understanding between the County Council and the District Councils in Buckinghamshire.

Whilst I believe that the BCC service is successful, and applies the law correctly when dealing with illegal encampments, the recent spate of difficult and disruptive encampments on Council land has prompted me to ask officers to look at other legal routes that may be available to try and speed up the resolution of future problems. I recently had a note circulated to all members of this council to brief them on what has been found, but to summarise; I can say that it may be possible to employ an injunction across Wycombe District and perhaps beyond this, which will have the effect of banning named individuals from setting up illegal encampments and in some cases, the injunction may also work against unnamed individuals. A considerable amount of preparatory and legal work is required for successful applications to Court and so I have asked officers to look at the detailed benefits of an injunction and the feasibility and cost of making an application for an effective injunction.

12. Question from Councillor S Graham to the Cabinet Member for Housing

Does the Cabinet member for housing know when Red Kite are likely to commence work on the long awaited Star' Block' building in Pettifer Way and Chairborough Road and would she accept that this inordinate delay is not acceptable?

As you probably know before Red Kite can begin work in Castlefield, they will need to apply for and secure a planning permission.

There has been some pre-application discussions with Red Kite.

It is an ambitious project and not without risk. I prefer to focus on the positives of Red Kite, thus far.

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

WDC has a cabinet of 10 members and around 7 deputy cabinet members.

The people of WDC are entitled to know whether you have carried out any performance related exercises to assess the performance of the cabinet members and deputy cabinet members and in particular whether there is a real need for so many deputy cabinet posts at considerable public expense, or are deputy cabinet positions needed to reward your

supporters and keep them sweet?

The number of Cabinet members is very similar to that in other authorities. The majority of Cabinets across the country have around 10 members. These are appointments of elected members not officers and they do not receive a salary but an allowance, in accordance with national legislation to encourage and enable ordinary people to take part in local democracy. They are therefore not subject to performance evaluations, although of course as you know, all politicians are evaluated whenever they go to the poll and unlike officers can be removed from office at any time and without any formal performance assessment if that is what the electorate decide.

As for Deputy Cabinet members they do not receive a separate allowance they receive a proportion of the Cabinet member allowance. This is to support cabinet members in carrying out their roles but there is no additional cost to the public purse.

14. Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources

Thank you for recently clarifying the situation regarding reserves.

Please can you inform us, in full, where the £74 m reserves are currently invested?

The answer is quite technical but hopefully you will be able to follow me. In respect of reserves and cash balances.....

Reserves

In the main there are three types of usable reserves as summarised below:

General Reserve: This is accumulated surpluses on revenue set aside. The Council is expected to hold a minimum level of reserves and this level is a balance between the risk facing the Council and the opportunity costs of holding those balances. Reserves can only be spent once and should ideally only be used to support one-off expenditure or to allow time for management actions to be implemented.

Earmarked Reserve: The Council normally sets aside specific amounts as reserves for future policy purposes.

Capital receipt and Grants Reserves: These are restricted by regulations and is normally to fund the capital investments.

Cash balances

These are cash balances held at bank and as treasury investments. These basically represents all the reserves as defined above and also includes working capital which includes the net current liabilities and long-term liabilities.

The table below summarises the council's forecast for reserves, working balance, cash position and how the cash is invested.

	As at March 2018	Forecast March 2019	Forecast March 2020
Earmarked Reserves	-15,576	-14,600	-16,339
Earmarked Reserves - Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay	-24,669	-10,951	0
General Reserves	-9,848	-9,848	-3,910
Sub-total revenue reserves	-50,093	-35,399	-20,249
Restricted by Regulations			
Capital Receipt Reserve	-16,844	-22,044	-9,970
Capital Grant & Contributions	-7,449	-5,735	0
Sub-total capital reserves	-24,293	-27,779	-9,970
Total reserves	-74,386	-63,178	-30,219
Working capital (includes Net current liabilities and Provisions)	-6,971	-2,621	-1,553
Forecast Cash Investments	-81,357	-65,799	-31,772
Analysis of Cash investments			
Cash at Bank	273	499	572
Property Pooled Fund	7,500	7,500	7,500
Treasury Investments with approved counter parties	72,800	57,800	23,700

The details of the counter party lists is contained within the Treasury Management Strategy that came to Council for approval in February.

15. Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Housing

I am very pleased that Saunderton Lodge will be relocated to a central location for the benefit of families.

Can you inform us of the definite relocation site and when this will take place?

I can advise you that the proposed new TA will be at Desborough Road Car Park however this is subject to a planning application. Once the planning application is determined, we will know likely timeframe for completion, if approved of course.

16. Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Environment

Recently you were kind enough to take up a case in Hawthorne Road where bins were on a slope.

Could you let me know the outcome of this and whether refusing to collect bins in our hilly areas is a growing problem?

I am pleased to report that collections on Hawthorne Avenue are currently being delivered successfully and residents are kindly presenting all containers at the kerbside for collection by our operatives. Up to date risk assessments are required for all services provided by SERCO and occasionally alterations are needed to ensure the safety of all concerned. Where changes need to be made we will always work with residents to find solutions or alternatives that mean they continue to receive a good service.

17. Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Environment

The Great British Spring Clean is currently underway. The Sea Cadets, Police and local residents collected 50 bags of litter in East Wycombe on 23rd March. The event was supported by Chiltern Waste.

Do you encourage these initiatives and will you be taking part?

Environmental Services encourages community clean-up activities through its participation in the Joint Waste Team and we also support various events throughout the year, including the Spring Clean events now underway. An event, Team up 2 Clean Up which I attended was held in the town centre on the 29th March, involving community participants, businesses and the Chiltern Rangers. Officers will be following up in the town centre by employing Serco to wash down certain areas and as already mentioned in an earlier, stubborn graffiti has been removed and the areas marked have been repainted last Friday. I am sure you will be pleased to hear that another Team Up 2 Clean Up is to take place on Wednesday 17th March when I hope to see many more residents and councillors, especially those from the town taking part - drinks and snacks provided for the workers. Wycombe District Council has provided considerable financial support for both these BidCo organised events via a government grant, to enable the purchase of tools and equipment for community groups and also to provide for support services and promotional materials.

I certainly encourage these events and have been liaising with my local parish council to promote the Great British Spring Clean and assisted in pointing other areas/groups in the right direction to obtain help and equipment to carry out their own clean ups."