

**Council Meeting:** 11th October 2012

**Councillor M.A. Vivona** will ask the **Executive Member for Housing and Welfare** the following question:-

### **PROPOSED REFORMS TO COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT**

Will the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Welfare please update the Council on any progress regarding the proposed reforms to Council Tax Benefit?

### **OBSERVATIONS**

In April 2013, council tax benefit will be abolished as part of the government's changes to the welfare system. All councils must set up their own local scheme for people on low incomes to replace it, called council tax support.

Funding for the new local scheme will be provided by the government, but it will only cover 90% of the current cost of council tax benefit. We are consulting on a new scheme based on the existing council tax benefit rules, but with some changes that mean most working age claimants will be asked to pay at least 10% more towards their council tax bill than they do now.

The period of public consultation started on 28<sup>th</sup> August and runs to 23<sup>rd</sup> October.

So far we have received over 1,000 responses, with an overall support for the changes proposed from both current benefit recipients and other residents who do not receive benefit. There have been a number of specific comments about the proposals and these will be taken into account when the final recommendations are considered by the Council in December.

**Council Meeting:** 11th October 2012

**Councillor Ms. S. Finch** will ask the **Executive Member for Planning and Development** the following question:-

#### **POTENTIAL LOCATIONS FOR NEW REDHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL**

What formal contact has there been between the Borough and County Councils to discuss and assess potential locations for the new Redhill Primary School?

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

Two years ago County Council officers met Borough Council officers to explore a shortlist of 14 potential locations for a new primary school to serve the North Redhill / South Merstham catchment. Further suggestions were made which were then also explored by the County Council as the Education Authority.

Since then, officers of both Councils have continued to discuss the emerging preferred site at Battlebridge and to look for and evaluate other potential sites.

However, the County Council has not yet reached a decision on which site to progress. The County Council intends to engage with the Executive and other Borough Council Members as appropriate when it is further advanced with this work.

**Council Meeting:** 11th October 2012

**Councillor C.T.H. Whinney** will ask the **Executive Member for Recycling and Street Services** the following question:-

### **NEW RECYCLING SYSTEM**

I am in full agreement in principle with the Council introducing the new recycling system for waste, whereby less waste should go to landfill.

Some residents have found that hardly any waste now goes into the green bin supposedly for landfill, even one resident thinks that the new system should have been introduced sooner, so I thank the officers and the two Executive Members responsible for introducing this system BUT there is some confusion now noted by residents as to what the collection staff are actually doing.

There is a perception that the residents are asked to separate out their waste but on collection it is not kept separate and goes into one place within the refuse vehicle. Clearly this has implications on the extent of landfill and associated taxes and fees currently charged.

Could the Executive Member please comment on the perceived confusion and potential costs involved?

### **OBSERVATIONS**

The vehicles are especially designed with two separate compartments to store the recycling and waste materials collected. Food and paper are collected on a weekly basis and rubbish and mixed recycling every two weeks, all materials are collected in separate compartments.

Residents were asked to line their food caddies with paper or purchase liners. This has two major benefits, as it ensures that the food comes out of the caddy easily and absorbs the liquid.

This message has been communicated from the introduction and continues to be reinforced as a benefit to the resident and the collection staff. This continues to be an area of development and in the interim it has been necessary for the collection crews to use a small quantity of the paper to mix with the liquid food as an absorbent.

All materials collected are inspected by the recycling processors and they are extremely pleased with the product and low levels of contamination. The service "roll-out" was completed on time, to budget and we anticipate a slightly higher than expected percentage of waste to be diverted from landfill than forecasted. At this very early stage of the new service introduction it would be premature to increase our initial budget projections.

**Council Meeting:** 11th October 2012

**Councillor J.C.St. Essex** will ask the **Executive Member with responsibility for the Better Ways of Working Programme** the following question:-

### **PUBLICATION OF COUNCIL QUESTIONS**

We note that to date questions asked and answers given in Council meetings have not been published. Will the Council record and publish the questions asked by residents and councillors in council meetings from now on, along with the answers given?

### **OBSERVATIONS**

Copies of Council questions with officer observations are available in the Members Room in line with requirements of the Constitution. Additionally, since July copies have been placed on emembers. I will now ask the officers to place this information on the public Web site after each Council meeting.

However, it needs to borne in mind that the officer observations do not always reflect the answer that is actually given. Additionally, there is no requirement for Members to give notice of supplementary questions and consequently there are no written details of these or the supplementary answers given.

Officers are not able to take verbatim notes at meetings and the only way to meet the request by Councillor Essex would be to record proceedings through the audio system in the New Council Chamber and then have the answers, supplementary questions (and answers to these) transcribed. This would not, in my opinion, be a good or efficient use of resources.

I appreciate the sentiments behind the question by Councillor Essex but there are practical and, perhaps more importantly, resource implications associated with his request.

The Better Ways of Working programme, which I am overseeing, is about streamlining practices not making them more burdensome especially when there would be little benefit to the residents of the borough.