

REIGATE AND BANSTEAD BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL: 18th December 2014

Public Questions

None.

Questions by Members

Question by	To be answered by	Subject
1. Councillor N.D. Harrison	Executive Member for Planning and Development (Councillor T. Schofield)	Surrey CC – Strategic Planning powers
2. Councillor G. Norman	Executive Member for Housing and Welfare (Councillor Mrs R. Renton)	Homelessness

Council Meeting: 18th December 2014

Councillor N.D. Harrison will ask the **Executive Member for Planning and Development, Councillor T. Schofield** the following question:

Surrey County Council: Strategic Planning powers

Cllr David Hodge, Leader of Surrey County Council and Chairman of the County Council's Network, has proposed to Government that Surrey County Council is given strategic planning powers in relation to plans in this Borough. His report says:

"The Duty to Co-operate has proved inadequate for delivering joined-up planning for more quality homes and infrastructure. Counties need additional powers to provide sub-national county-wide investment and delivery plans for infrastructure and housing, working with district councils, the private sector and investors. Local plans would be drawn up by upper-tier authorities with a duty to cooperate with LEPs and partners."

Does the Portfolio Holder agree that the County Council should assume this role in regard to housing strategy and plans?

Answer

I have a short answer and a long answer to this question;

The short answer is NO

The long answer is as follows:-

It is unclear to me what exactly is being proposed by the County Councils Network.

Is it that powers for setting housing numbers and planning infrastructure should be handed to County Councils? Or is it that all local planning powers should be given to them?

The statement is entitled "strategic planning powers" but references Local Plans. The strategic work highlights joint working with Districts/Boroughs but the Local plan statement does not.

So are County Councils looking for new additional powers or seeking to take some of our plan making powers?

Either way I have real concerns.

Strategic planning determines the scale and general location of growth, and shapes the future of our communities. This is the process we are now engaged in.

Local Planning ensures that the development that happens in the borough is sensitively designed and located, and the things that make the borough what it is are protected.

The suggestion that either of these things should be drawn up by the County Council in cooperation with unelected bodies such as Local Enterprise Partnerships leaves me cold!

Of course there has to be a role for the County Council in planning for the future. As a delivery partner for vital infrastructure such as transport and schools it is imperative that we continue to work closely with our County colleagues as we prepare our Community Infrastructure Levy and Development Management Plan.

BUT as borough councillors we have on-the-ground knowledge of local challenges and opportunities and it is we who are democratically elected to represent the interests of our local communities. The responsibility for planning the future of our area must rest with us.

It is true that fulfilling the Duty to Cooperate has proved difficult for some local authorities. However, our own experiences in preparing and securing approval of our Core strategy show that fulfilling the Duty to Cooperate is not impossible. Yes, tough decisions have to be taken, but it is right that they are taken by local authorities working together with their neighbours rather than being imposed top-down upon us. I am not a fan of mushroom management!

It remains unclear how the proposals will achieve the original County Councils Network purpose on how best to achieve improvements in unit costs and the quality of services for local residents.

County Councillor David Hodge, at a recent Surrey Leaders meeting, stated that this CCN paper reflects the national picture and is not a reflection of the positive joint working in Surrey. It has been suggested that an away day be established to explore ideas and I very much look forward to joining that debate.

BUT my long answer to the question is also NO.

Council Meeting: 18th December 2014

Councillor G. Norman will ask the **Executive Member for Housing and Welfare, Councillor Mrs R. Renton** the following question:

Homelessness

Homelessness is always an emotive issue, especially at this time of year, for those families requiring temporary accommodation, they have often reached a crisis point in their lives.

Last week a mother and her two children having had their flat condemned by R & B Environmental Health Officers were placed in temporary accommodation. That accommodation was in Thornton Heath an area unknown to them and one that could create difficulties with the childrens schooling in Redhill.

As we are now using s106 money to provide more housing, and with negotiations taking place with Raven Housing Trust and other providers.

Can the Executive Member advise Members as to the current level of demand for homelessness accommodation and the amount of extra homelessness accommodation that might come as a result of these negotiations.

THANK YOU COUNCILLOR NORMAN FOR YOUR QUESTION

OBSERVATIONS

The Council is required under the Housing Act 1988, amended by the 1996 Act, to help households who present themselves as homeless. Current demand for Bed and Breakfast accommodation in Surrey is at a high level which has led to a scarcity of suitable accommodation locally for our residents. This Council currently has 50 households in bed and breakfast, which includes single homeless people. The high demand quite often means that we are left with no alternative than to house families outside of our area. We are very conscious of the need to house families as close to their local area as possible, but also acknowledge that the law requires families with young children to spend no more than six weeks in non self-contained emergency accommodation.

As you are aware this Council plans to use Section 106 money to purchase property, refurbish existing properties where necessary for temporary accommodation and also to build new temporary accommodation. This will not be an immediate solution, but our portfolio of properties is likely to build up over the next year or so. However, I can confirm that work on the first refurbishment

project will start in the new year, and plans to build two new homes are with architects and likely to be ready by the end of 2015.

A big boost to our supply of temporary accommodation will be the opening of West Mount in Redhill, which has been built by Raven housing Trust on the former site of Colne House. This will provide the Council with an additional 19 units of temporary accommodation which will be managed by Raven Housing Trust and will enable some families to move out of B&B accommodation. Regretfully there have been delays in completion but it is now planned to open in late January.

As well as liaising closely with Raven Housing Trust, I have met with several of our other main housing providers to discuss our need for both temporary and permanent accommodation. Generally it appears that housing providers do not have much of an appetite to build or supply temporary accommodation, but we have received expressions of interest around developing permanent accommodation from several and contact details have been exchanged and this is being followed up.

However providing more homes is not the only solution. The Council is working on preventative measures to help residents keep their homes in order to stop or delay eviction. It is also helping residents to secure accommodation in the private sector as an alternative to temporary accommodation and helps financially with deposits, rent in advance, and the Council can now act as guarantor in some instances.