

**REIGATE AND BANSTEAD BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL: 16<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

**Public Questions**

| <b>Question by</b> | <b>To be answered by</b>   | <b>Subject</b>                            |
|--------------------|--|---|
| Mr B. Horne        | Executive Member for<br>Licensing and Enforcement<br><br>(Councillor J. Durrant) | Air Quality                               |
| Mr J. Bolton       | Executive Member for<br>Finance<br><br>(Councillor G. Knight)                    | Property Revaluation<br><br>Old Town Hall |

**Council Meeting:** 16th April 2015

**Mr B. Horne** will ask the **Executive Member for Licensing and Enforcement, Councillor J. Durrant** the following question:

The Council has a legal duty to monitor air quality in parts of the Borough which are subject to intense pollution, such as Reigate Town Centre, Drift Bridge Junction and the environs of Gatwick Airport. Could the Executive member for air quality monitoring confirm to this Council that all parts of the Borough are below the danger limit when it comes to measuring the levels of nitrous oxide and other harmful chemicals in the atmosphere?

### **OBSERVATIONS**

The Environmental Health team monitors air quality in the borough and the data they've collected suggests an overall improvement in pollution levels. However, there are nine areas where there is a chance that the EU/UK standard for nitrogen dioxide may be breached.

The standard limit, which is 40 micrograms per cubic metre of air, is an annual average and in 2014, six of the nine areas identified were above this limit. One-off pollution events, like the smog over the whole southeast last week, will affect our average so there will always be some degree of variation year on year.

The council is undertaking a range of studies and work aimed at improving air quality in these areas, these include:

- A major proof of concept study funded by DEFRA examining traffic signal timings and road layout designs around Drift Bridge, which, if successful, could be extended to other parts of the borough.
- Consideration of air quality issues prior to significant development, for example providing input into the redesign of Redhill town centre to minimise and reduce the impact on air quality.
- Working with others, such as Gatwick airport to reduce airport related emissions.

It's important that we remain vigilant about pollution as it can have serious negative health effects for residents with pre-existing breathing conditions such as asthma and COPD. For these residents, the council, along with Surrey County Council, offers a free warning service that gives 24 hours notice by text, voice or email. By using this service, people can ensure they can take precautions and have adequate medication to hand.

Please be assured that we will continue to be robust in monitoring air quality and looking for innovative solutions to protect our residents and our environment.

**Council Meeting:** 16th April 2015

**Mr J. Bolton** will ask the **Executive Member for Finance, Councillor G. Knight** the following question:

Would the Executive Member for Finance agree that in order to help the revenue budget with income generation in the face of declining revenue support grant from central government which is likely to end in 2020, a revaluation of domestic property throughout the land is long overdue?

## **OBSERVATIONS**

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you for your question Mr Bolton.

It's true that the current valuations date back to the introduction of the Council Tax in 1993 – and it's true that a revaluation would result in changes to the Tax charged on individual properties. But what is less straightforward is the impact on the overall income for a Council.

When the current system started the value of a property at April 1st 1991 was used to determine which Council Tax band a property would be assigned to and how much Council tax it would be charged.

Since then all new properties have been assessed based on their theoretical 1991 value. This is essential to ensure that all dwellings are valued on the same basis.

There actually was a plan to revalue at around the time of the start of the financial crisis but this was – quite sensibly - postponed in the light of the severe economic downturn facing the country.

So here in 2015 it is clear that the values are long out of date - but that is not the only factor in determining a Council Tax bill. It is important to note the each dwelling is allocated to one of eight bands. It is these bands which determine the relative amounts of Tax paid.

If properties were revalued then it is likely that the bands would have to be recalibrated to reflect the new range of values throughout the borough.

Which means that if all property values have increased by around the same percentage then the split between the different bands is unlikely to change very much - and the overall impact is likely to be revenue neutral.

Looked at in another way, if a three bedroom house was worth twice as much as a one bedroom flat in 1991 - and it is still worth twice as much in 2015 - then it is likely that the Council Tax bills will reflect this in proportionally the same way.

But it is also a characteristic of the current system that, even without changing the bands, there is no guaranteed increase in a Council's total income.

A revaluation exercise in Wales in 2005 (based on 2003 values) did cause a high number of properties to move to higher bands but this led to no increase in the total Tax received - as the overall Tax requirement was just spread differently around the same number of properties. The total amount collected was the same but the impact on individual households changed.

To summarise, a revaluation on its own would not generate significantly more income for the Council as it is relative property values and the Council Tax bandings that drive the system, not absolute values.

To create additional income we would require a more fundamental change to the way that local taxation operates in the United Kingdom.