

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 21 October 2021

Written answers to O&S Advance Questions

Agenda Item 4 – Organisation Portfolio Holder Updates

Note – these Advance Questions for Agenda Item 4 – Organisation Portfolio Holder Updates refer to p15 - 38 ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21/10/2021 19:30 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Question 1

During the Covid-19 pandemic there were problems in councillors contacting officers. Officers could “see” a phone ringing but could not pick up the call, as it would not connect. Why was this? Has the problem been solved? (p17)

Written answer

The telephone system we use is not fully compatible with the type of remote access systems that we have in place and was never a major issue until we had the workforce working remotely from RBBC buildings. The issue is not 100% resolved, although much improved. We are scheduled to replace the entire telephony and remote access systems in 2022 and this will fully resolve the issue. These issues only occur when it is an external call going direct to a staff extension number. Internal calls and the Borough Council’s main phone line are not affected.

Question 2

What transactions are now handled through the CRM? What are the next priorities? (p17)

Written Answer

There are approx. 60 plus transactions handled through CRM at present (a full list can be made available if required). We are taking the opportunity to review the work done to date to move processes online, facilitated by the CRM platform. As part of this we will be revisiting potential further processes and prioritising the work against our Five Year (Corporate) Plan priorities.

Question 3

Hybrid working – for office-based staff. Will there be a practice/policy for a minimum number of days in the office each week? Will we have surplus office space to dispose of? (p22)

Written answer

We are still working through the detail for hybrid working with staff and the impact this will have on working conditions/employment legislation before communicating more widely the future planned approach to attendance in the office (staff currently can attend the office when they wish subject to booking a desk). It is likely we may wish to reduce our footprint and an Estate review is currently underway to determine this.

Question 4

A recent review of Organisational Development and HR included a recommendation to focus on improved workforce planning – can you expand on this? (p24)

Written answer

A workforce plan is required to align the organisation to the delivery of the Corporate Planning cycle. The recent HR Service Review has highlighted this in its recommendations. HR aims to improve the planning processes the Council currently undertakes with a formal workforce planning cycle. This will involve consultation with Heads of Service to look at requirements for delivery on objectives, where efficiencies may be made and any further works which may come on. This will also be aligned to the overall Human Resource and Organisation Design Strategy.

Question 5

Procurement audit – it would seem that we have reasonable arrangements for “routine” goods and services, so could priority now be given to projects procurement? (p28)

Written Answer

A paper has been presented to the Council’s Organisation Board, which explains that the Council requires strategic and corporate procurement and contract management processes embedded within all Council services, this is to be delivered as a project. The next step is to present a project brief to the Organisation Board that contains a high-level plan to deliver the identified objectives.

These objectives include:

- To undertake an analysis of the current processes and arrangements to determine the full scope of procurement activities
- Review current contract management arrangements
- Determine full scope of contracts let by the Council across services.

Question 6

Business Growth Grants Scheme – what is the source of the £1m ringfenced funding? (p36)

Written Answer

The £1m ring fenced funding is a grant we applied for from the government (BEIS). If unspent by 31/3/22, any balance will need to be returned.

Agenda Item 5 – Environmental Sustainability: Progress Update

Note – these Advance Questions refer to p39 - 78 ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21/10/2021 19:30 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Question 7

Council energy is reported as carbon neutral, with 66% through offsets. There is public concern about “greenwashing”. Please set out how the offsets work for our council? (p50)

Written Answer

In terms of Council energy, we are taking a ‘staged’ approach to working towards our 2030 net zero carbon target.

Stage 1 is to transition our energy usage to ‘green’ tariffs however we can only do this as contracts come up for renewal. At the moment we have been able to move a third of our energy (half-hourly, or ‘big’, electricity meters) to green tariffs. We will look to move our other tariffs (non-half hourly electricity meters and gas) to green tariffs when the remaining contracts expire (non-half hourly electricity in September 2023, gas in October 2022).

In the meantime, for these remaining contracts we utilise carbon offsetting to make our supply carbon neutral. We see this as an important but temporary measure, which reduces our immediate environmental impact and sets an example to residents and businesses. The background information provided below gives a more detailed explanation of the rationale and the more technical elements of our approach.

However – this is not a final solution. We recognise that off-sets cannot be used to provide a business-as-usual approach to consumption, but rather they provide a suitable temporary solution on our journey to net zero.

Stage 2 of our work will therefore be undertaking measures to reduce our consumption and reliance on grid energy, through investment in energy efficiency measures and renewables on council-owned properties and driving behaviour change. There will likely be an element of our emissions that will need to be offset in the long-term (hence why we are aiming for ‘net zero carbon’ rather than ‘zero carbon’), but we are taking steps between now and 2030 to ensure that this is as small as possible.

Background information

On our journey to being net-zero carbon by 2030 as a council, we will be reporting on our carbon footprint annually, taking 2019/20 as our baseline year. Work is currently being undertaken to assess both our baseline and footprint for 2020/21.

Under the Green House Gas Protocol, there are two ways in which an organisation can account for carbon: a market-based method and a location-based method. The former relates to how you spend your money, such as investing in green tariffs for energy rather than a standard one. The latter refers to what emissions you actually produce at your sites. There is a difference because the national grid still has a mix of energy that includes fossil fuels. However, recognition should be given to commercial decisions that have a positive environmental impact. We will be following the GHG Protocol guidance that states both methods of reporting should be used.

The council is responsible for 0.2% of emissions within the borough. We therefore need to ensure that the borough of Reigate and Banstead is taking the required steps to become net-zero by 2050, by setting a clear example and facilitating the change required from residents and businesses alike. Part of this journey is to encourage a shift to green energy tariffs, so we have set this as a clear example.

A word on green tariffs then: not all are equal. Without going into too much detail, a ‘good’ green tariff is one where there is a green mix of energy purchased by the energy company from renewable generators. These units of energy are backed by ‘REGOs’, OFGEM-issued certificates that guarantee origin. It’s worth noting that REGOs can be bought and sold independently of the energy they relate to, which serves as a market-tool but can also lead to REGOs being bundled with energy bought wholesale (rather than direct from renewables generators) . We buy energy for our half-hourly electricity meters from Brook Green, who publish their energy mix here: <https://www.brookgreensupply.com/fuel-mix>. These green tariffs are important as they increase demand for renewable energy and help ‘green the grid’.

Our energy contract management company, Beond, provides off-setting of non-green tariff energy as part of their service, which we have taken up. The offsets they purchase off-set both electricity and gas consumption (based on projections). This effectively makes our energy supply carbon neutral.

Question 8

I have assisted residents with complaints about overgrown hedges not being cut in the Borough. Can the Council give more information to residents about when the hedge cutting schedule is carried out in different areas and clarify for residents on how often it is done? Can this include which is the Borough Council responsibility and which is Surrey County Council responsibility e.g. on the paths towards schools? Can a timeline or information be publicised in the Borough News for residents who do not have access to the internet? (pages 48 to 51)

Written Answer

As part of our highways maintenance operations, hedges have a full cut twice per annum, this is normally carried out between the months of September/October and February. Whilst hedges and vegetation across the borough and highways network are not generally cut during bird nesting season -as per the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981-, if potential public or road user safety risks are identified during the active season, targeted remedial works will take place subject to bird nesting surveys being undertaken. We have requested the up-to-date list of agreed rural highway hedges from SCC but have not received it yet.

It is important to note that where hedges and vegetation border schools, footpaths and alleyways, it is the responsibility of the landowner or occupier to ensure that these do not encroach or create a potential hazard to the public using them.

Regarding the point raised relating to hedge cutting around schools, the Greenspaces team only cut back hedges on our land (St John's School common land) in anticipation of the commencement of the new academic year.

RBBC maintain all parks and cemetery hedges in the borough, these are also cut twice a year.

Advance Questions – Overview and Scrutiny Committee 21 October 2021

Agenda Item 6 – Companies Performance Update – Autumn 2021

Note – these 3 Advance Questions refer to p82 ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21/10/2021 19:30 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Question 1:

When is it envisaged that detailed plans on Horley Business Park will be presented to councillors and public?

Written answer:

The Development Management Plan (policy HOR9) sets out the Council's policy expectations in relation to the site. This explains that the site is allocated for a strategic business park of predominantly offices, supported by a complementary range of commercial, retail and leisure facilities.

As required by the policy, the Council's Planning Policy Team is currently preparing a Supplementary Planning Document which will explain in more detail the Council's expectations about site development. This is intended to be consulted on later this year or early next year.

Question 2 - Have alternative uses of the proposed Horley Business Park site been looked or are currently being looked at?

Written answer

During preparation of the DMP the Horley Business Park site was subject to sustainability appraisal to consider its suitability for a sustainable urban extension as well as for an employment site; as noted in the response to question 1 this resulted in the site being allocated for a strategic business park of predominantly offices, supported by a complementary range of commercial, retail and leisure facilities.

As part of work to prepare the Supplementary Planning Document, an economic and market assessment is being undertaken to consider the implications of recent events including Brexit and the pandemic on the office market. This work will be reported alongside the consultation.

Question 3 - Do Gatwick Airport plans have any impact on the proposed Horley Business Park site?

Written answer

The emerging plans for Gatwick Airport propose that some of the land currently allocated in the DMP for the Business Park be used as a site compound, specifically land within the identified 'strategic gap' between the main development site and the M23 spur road. The Gatwick proposals also include works to the M23 spur road, which will need to be considered in conjunction with the DMP site allocation.