

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council
Meeting of Council 7 April 2022
Questions by Members

	Question by	To be answered by	Subject
1.	Councillor Baker	Councillor Schofield, Deputy Leader of the Council	HMS Ark Royal Ensign
2.	Councillors Buttironi and J. King	Councillor Neame, Executive Member for Housing and Support	Support for Ukrainian refugees
3.	Councillor Stevens	Councillor Schofield, Deputy Leader of the Council	Council Tax relief
4.	Councillor Booton	Councillor Schofield, Deputy Leader of the Council	Heritage Open Day brochure
5.	Councillor Ritter	Councillor Ashford, Executive Member for Community Partnerships	Woodhatch and Whitebushes Community Development
6.	Councillor Sinden	Councillor Humphreys, Executive Member for Economic Prosperity	Redhill market
7.	Councillor Chandler	Councillor Sachdeva, Executive Member for Leisure & Sport	Supporting Run Reigate
8.	Councillor Torra	Councillor Bramhall, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services	Street cleansing and littering
9.	Councillor Essex	Councillor Bramhall, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services	Cost of vehicle fuel and building heating
Written responses to be given after the meeting			
10.	Councillor Ritter	Councillor Schofield, Deputy Leader of the Council	Russian and Belarussian energy contracts
11.	Councillor Essex	Councillor Humphreys, Executive Member for Economic Prosperity	Business cases for purchase of diesel vehicles

Councillor Baker asked the **Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Schofield**, the following question:

Question 1: HMS Ark Royal Ensign

At a recent armed forces breakfast I came across the following interesting story.

During the Second World War, as part of the war effort, the Borough of Reigate sponsored HMS Ark Royal. In recognition of this, the Borough was presented with the ship's White Ensign (a flag flown by a ship to indicate nationality, in this case a red St George's Cross on a white field with the union flag in the upper corner) and a large ship's plaque.

A local Sea Cadet unit, known as T.S. Beatty S.C.C at the time, was granted permission to be renamed as T.S. Ark Royal S.C.C. and happily we still have one of the original cadets with us.

For many years, the ensign was on display in the Mayor's Chambers and was removed during refurbishment and not subsequently replaced. It became lost for many years but was recently found in the basement of the Town Hall.

The Reigate Branch of the Royal Naval Association have paid for a frame to be made to house this famous and important relic. Will Reigate & Banstead Council commit to finding somewhere to display this wonderful link with our past, be it at the Town Hall or the Harlequin Centre.

The Borough's association with HMS Ark Royal goes back to 1588 when Lord Howard, (The Howard Family Home was Reigate Priory) commanded the fleet on board Ark Royal that engaged the Spanish Armada as it sailed up the English Channel. (It is worth noting that Lord Howard's second in command was Sir Francis Drake.)

Response

Thank you, Councillor Baker.

The Council is the custodian of several items that relate to HMS Ark Royal (1937):

1. A chair, which is currently displayed on the ceremonial stairs leading to the Council Chamber.
2. A plaque with the ship's crest; and
3. The ship's ensign (flag), and an accompanying letter.

The plaque and ensign are currently in storage whilst arrangements to display them are on-going. In 2019, the Council and the Reigate Naval Association (RNA) discussed options for displaying these important items in the Old Council Chamber. However, those plans were postponed by the Pandemic which began in March 2020.

We are very grateful to the RNA for funding a frame with special UV protective glass to display the ensign, which needs suitable protection because of its age and condition. The ensign is 80 years old. However, there are limitations on the weight of any frame that can be hung in the Old Council Chamber. Further consultation is therefore necessary to agree and secure a suitably sized frame at a weight which can be supported by the walls in the Old Council Chamber.

The ensign is large and will need to be carefully folded to fit the frame. It may be necessary to seek expert advice to ensure the fabric is properly preserved.

I can therefore confirm that the Council will continue to work with the RNA to find a solution so that this wonderful link with our past can be displayed.

No supplementary question was forthcoming.

Councillors Buttironi and J. King asked the **Executive Member for Housing and Support, Councillor Neame**, the following question:

Question 2: Support for Ukrainian refugees

The Borough of Reigate & Banstead stands in solidarity with the people of Ukraine against the unprovoked act of war unleashed on the sovereign nation of Ukraine by armed forces at the behest of the President of the Russian Federation.

The UK has a long and important tradition of offering sanctuary to those who need protection. The Jewish Kindertransport children, the Poles following the Second World War, the Vietnamese Boat People, the Asian Ugandans fleeing Idi Amin, and the people who fled the war in Kosovo. This is our proud and decent tradition and most recently, this Borough has resettled refugees from the conflict in Syria.

We are proud of the response of Reigate & Banstead residents to the war in Ukraine, with charitable donations and fundraising, and many generously opening their homes to Ukrainian Guests

Can the Executive Member explain what the Council is doing to uphold this proud tradition to welcome and support all those fleeing Ukraine and help them find safe refuge in the Borough?

Response

In Reigate & Banstead Borough Council we are fortunate to have very experienced Teams when it comes to dealing with refugee resettlement. This comprises but is not limited to our Intervention Team, Money Support Team and Family Support Team. Our existing Intervention Team will head up the Homes for Ukrainians scheme with assistance from all parts of the Council.

We are providing, sponsors with accommodation and *Disclosure and Baring Service* checks. While our Revenues & Benefits department will administer the 'Thank You Payment' system.

Providing for Guests

Once Guests have arrived, a full service will be provided by all Teams. This will include:

- Administration of the £200 initial grant.
- Support access to healthcare, work, schooling, homelessness advice and community integration.
- Our Money Support team will make appointments to process a Universal Credit & Child Benefit claim. This will be followed-up with a check-in appointment three weeks later. Money Support will also be offered to Sponsors as appropriate.
- Weekly drop-in support sessions for Sponsors and Guests.
- Direct connection to our Community Centers and Community Development Workers.
- Provide support to families through our Family Support Team.
- English language support and help to access learning and support.

- Provide work and volunteering support.
- Housing advice and opportunities to discuss any needs arising from the arrival through our Housing Team.

Working with partners

Partnerships are critical in the successful delivery of all our local Resettlement Schemes. We are working closely with:

- Colleagues in the Voluntary & Community Sector who are being very supportive in their response to the schemes.
- A local group comprising settled Ukrainians and their families, which has been formed to support arriving Guests.
- Statutory partners will be advised as Guests arrive in the UK.
- Volunteers from within our existing resettlement work will form part of the Council's support plan.

Supplementary question from Councillor J King

I am pleased the Council and residents are offering places to Ukrainian Guests. However, there have been significant delays in the Visa process causing issues for those arriving in the country without anywhere to live. Please can Councillor Neame provide an update on the number of local Visa applicants and those who have actually received their Visas. Will the Council please petition the Government to speed up the Visa process especially for those who have been waiting for nearly three weeks in temporary accommodation. This includes those families unable to travel because their children inexplicably have not received their Visas at the same time as other family members.

Supplementary response

I can give you the reported figures for the number of Sponsors. There are 53 in Reigate & Banstead, 40 in Mole Valley and 46 in Tandridge giving a total of 139. However, these figures change on a daily basis, and I've been told that these figures are now higher.

Thirty-five local Visas have been agreed, 42 are being processed and 290 are still waiting which gives 367. This is not good enough, but it is out of the hands of the Council because unfortunately, Visas are not controlled by the local Council but by Government. However, where a Sponsor and a Guest are matched, the Council does not wait until Government issues the Visa to start undertaking accommodation and *Disclosure and Barring Service* checks. This is enabling the Council to be one step ahead.

A brochure has been produced for Ukrainian Guest and Sponsors which is available online and will be made available to Members. This has been published in English, Ukrainian and Russian. It explains exactly where to go, what to do and is a very good leaflet.

I totally agree that there are families where some members do and others do not have Visas. Obviously, families will not leave some members behind. We are

pushing as a Council including contacting Surrey County Council, Crispin Blunt MP and other MPs. You are right to contact your MPs to continue to push the Government. The Council supports you in this action because the quicker Guests get their Visas the quicker they can be settled. There is a whole team in the Council which is working on settling Guests as well as achieving business as usual. It is amazing that it is picking this up as well. Guests and Sponsors can make contact with this team using the email address: resettlement@Reigate-Banstead.gov.uk. No supplementary question was forthcoming from Councillor Buttironi.

Councillor Stevens asked the **Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Schofield**, the following question:

Question 3: Council Tax relief

Due to the recent slight increase in the Council Tax, as well as the recent National Insurance rise and the general cost of living increasing, some residents may find some difficulty in making their Council Tax payments. Could the Executive Member please remind us what help is on offer from Reigate & Banstead Borough Council for those who may face difficulties in making these payments, and how residents can apply for this assistance?

Response

Residents who are on a low income or receiving national benefits are able to apply for a reduction in their Council Tax through the Council's local Council Tax Support Scheme. This is a means tested scheme which broadly mirrors some national benefit schemes.

Where a resident does not qualify for this reduction, the Council can reduce the Council Tax liability under its discretionary powers where an application is made, and the resident is able to demonstrate financial hardship.

Additionally, residents are able to spread Council Tax payments over 12 months as opposed to the standard ten.

We would encourage any residents who are experiencing difficulties in keeping up with their payments to either apply for these reductions or contact the Council Tax Team to discuss their repayments and avoid further costs due to non-payment.

No supplementary question was forthcoming.

Councillor Booton asked the **Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Schofield**, the following question:

Question 4: *Heritage Open Day* brochure

The *Reigate Society* provides an annual *Heritage Open Days* brochure highlighting key events that take place across our Borough to promote the heritage and character of Reigate & Banstead.

The events are suitable for all age ranges and help promote a wide range of natural and cultural amenities and landmarks that the Borough offers residents. The brochure used to be funded by Reigate & Banstead Borough Council with an agreement to part-fund taking over, ultimately ending in a complete withdrawal of support.

The latest brochure features none other than our Mayor as a headline supporter. Would this Council reconsider supporting this valuable cultural offering to residents?

Response

This Council has a long tradition of supporting *Heritage Open Days*. Through our various Council communications channels, we actively promote *Heritage Open Days*. We regularly provide content for the publication and have also paid for advertisements to be placed in the document.

You mentioned funding stopped. However, funding ceased by mutual agreement. One of the popular events in the *Heritage Open Days* programme is the opening of the Town Hall to the public. This involves substantial work for the Mayoral and wider officer team to provide a rich experience for visitors whilst also ensuring visitor safety and security.

We remain committed to supporting and promoting the event as we have done in the past. The Mayoral Team is actively exploring options relating to supporting this year's brochure in consultation with the Mayor-Elect, Councillor Frank Kelly.

Supplementary question

It is great that the Council does promote and support *Heritage Open Days* as well as supplying contents for the brochure. However, there would be no point supporting something that ceases to exist. The *Heritage Open Days* initiative needs funding. I appreciate it has not been funded by this Council for some time, but the past few years have been a burden on many organisations within this Borough. They are coming to us for help. Are we willing in their time of need to give them the money to continue to survive?

Supplementary response

From what I understand the issue is between the *Reigate Society* and its publisher which has declared it is no longer financially viable to produce the brochure. Having looked at an example of the brochure, it contains many advertisements from commercial business and national sponsors such as the *National Trust*. I suggest this is a business-related issue for the *Reigate Society*. I will ask Councillor Humphrey and

his economic team to see what can be done to help and advise the *Reigate Society* to make sure the brochure gets produced.

Councillor Ritter asked the **Executive Member for Community Partnerships, Councillor Ashford**, the following question:

Question 5: Woodhatch and Whitebushes Community Development

In answer to a question raised at the last full Council meeting it was confirmed that the Council is reviewing the resourcing of the Community Development Worker Team, before agreeing when and how to appoint dedicated resource to cover the Woodhatch and Whitebushes area.

Please provide an update on the progress of allocating a dedicated Community Development Worker covering Woodhatch and Whitebushes going forward, and what the point of liaison for Councillors, residents and community groups is now to ensure continuity of projects and whether any funding is being allocated to a new dedicated worker for this area going forward.

Response

I note this question's similarity to the question from the member of the public which I have already answered, and I will therefore keep this response brief to avoid repeating myself.

I am pleased to confirm we have secured external funding towards our Community Development work, and we will now recruit a Community Development Worker for Woodhatch & Whitebushes.

Preparations to advertise the vacancy are already underway and I hope the successful candidate will be confirmed and perhaps even in post by the time of the next Woodhatch & Whitebushes Network meeting on 16 June 2022.

In the meantime, please continue to liaise with Tracey Agnew, my Community Development Team Leader, for any Community Development matters relating to Woodhatch & Whitebushes, as I know you have already been doing. Tracey is very happy to continue to advise you of which Community Development Team member is keeping a watching brief on existing projects ahead of the vacancy being filled.

To finish, I'd like to thank Tracey and the Community Development team for all their support.

Supplementary question

I believe this was a full-time post funded by this Council until the worker left when the post was effectively deleted from the Council budget. This does not recognise the great work of the past 17 years that you mentioned earlier nor the importance of relationships within our communities which can take many years to establish. Is it possible to assure us that this post will not just be reliant on the funding from the other partners that you mentioned earlier but brought back into the Council budget after the two-year period mentioned?

Supplementary response

The answer I gave when I spoke at the Executive meeting talked about the fact that this was a good time post-Pandemic to look at how we do Community Development. The Council has been doing it the same way and it's been involving for a long time. However, we are now seeing the County Council and Health Service looking to work within communities. I genuinely believe, as I said at the last Council meeting, this is a time for us to take our Community Development forward including making more partnerships.

I think we've got the expertise, knowledge, and connections because we've been doing Community Development for a long time. However, I think it's important that we don't look backwards but forwards. We are still in the process of revamping, rethinking, and re-energising the Community Development offer. This strand, offered in partnership with health, is going to benefit the outcomes for residents right across the Borough and is a really important step forward. To focus purely and simply on a timescale is misguided because we don't know what will happen. If you look at what was happening in health pre-Pandemic, just over two years ago, you will see how much the world has changed. The idea of working in partnership with health would have been unheard of two years ago. I think we need to focus on the future and how we move forward. Perhaps this needs to be done slowly.

I'm very happy to give a commitment to Community Development. As the Portfolio Holder, I want to see our residents properly served. I don't want to talk about timescales. I want to talk about funding, working in partnership and how we move forward into a more modern way of thinking.

Councillor Sinden asked the **Executive Member for Economic Prosperity, Councillor Humphreys**, the following question:

Question 6: Redhill market

Redhill Market has been a mainstay of the Town Centre for many years and has had a far greater variety and number of stalls in the past. In recent years it has lost its big flower stall and the main fruit and veg stall. Can you confirm how the number of market stalls in Redhill, and elsewhere in the Borough, has changed since Covid, and what the Council is doing to encourage a greater variety of stallholders in our markets in the future.

Response

The Covid period was very difficult for market traders, along with other sections of the business community. As restrictions have been lifted the number of stalls has steadily increased and we hope to return to 2019/20 levels during this year.

A new flower trader has been operating for several weeks and is steadily increasing their offer as they enjoy some trading success.

A temporary fruit and veg stall has been on site for the past few weeks. We anticipate that this will be replaced soon with a more substantial offer.

Increased operational costs and supply chain issues earlier in the year impacted on the viability for some stall holders. Significant efforts have been made to attract new traders and we are pleased to see some clear signs of recovery.

Supplementary question

How do you promote/encourage an increase in the number of market stalls?

Supplementary response

We work with the market organiser and encourage them to get new traders. We are also talking directly to local traders.

Councillor Chandler asked the **Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Schofield**, the following question:

Question 7: Supporting Run Reigate

Run Reigate is a community running event that started in 2014 and has been an asset to the Borough since then. This event brings people to the Town Centre of Reigate and the flagship Priory Park encouraging many to improve their health by taking part and to visit our centre. It is the largest community event in East Surrey and over 30,000 households/runners between the ages of 4 and 84 have participated in the event which has won best Half Marathon in the UK twice at the *National Running Awards* (2017 and 2019).

The last two years have threatened its continuation due to lack of revenue and loss of sponsorship, making a significant loss in 2021. Reigate & Banstead Borough Council has supported this event financially since its inception helping to get it off the ground but this year that support has been withdrawn.

Given the local significance of this event and the impact on the health and wellbeing of the participants preparing for and taking part in it, largely drawn from our Borough residents, does it not warrant the continued support of the Council? Perhaps it should be considered as an initiative relevant to the grant of £538,000 the Council has just received from *East Surrey Heartlands*?

Response

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council and Leisure Service are extremely proud of the long-standing relationship that we have held with *Run Reigate*. We have been one of the primary supporters of the event since its early conception and have been overjoyed with watching it grow year-on-year and for it to carry the prestige that it now has. For many events that we are associated with, we have always supported via two distinct avenues:

1. Financial contribution to an event.
2. In-kind support including the free use of Priory Park, staffing before, during and after the event, equipment etc.

We have provided *Run Reigate* for many years with both of the above support avenues. After a review we aim to make our contribution sit in line with other events within our Borough by continuing to provide *Run Reigate* with the use of the park, free of charge and the other in-kind support as outlined above. This was always the intention, and the details of a revised Memorandum of Understanding are in the process of being discussed with representatives from *Run Reigate*. We aim to redistribute the financial contribution to support other events that offer a variety of strong health, wellbeing and cultural events for our residents within the Borough.

The grant funding from *Surrey Heartlands* referred to has been secured for specific projects and is therefore not available to subsidise *Run Reigate*.

Supplementary question

On the element of our services versus financial support, would it not be accurate to say that the services provided are a drop in the ocean compared to the financial support previously given particularly in relation to the road closures? In relation to the *East Surrey Heartlands* money you mentioned, it sounded from an earlier question that we had manoeuvred to put some of that money towards Community Development.

Supplementary response

I think I can respond to some of the question, but as you will appreciate this is not my portfolio. This year it has cost quite a lot of money to support this event. This is not just in terms of the costs we directly incur but also as a result of the loss of revenue from parking as well as other activities. The Council's support for this event is not a drop in the ocean.

Any further response to your supplementary question I will refer back to the Portfolio Holder, with a written response to be provided.

Councillor Torra asked the **Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Bramhall**, the following question:

Question 8: Street cleansing and littering

Post-Covid there are many areas of our Borough with a greater prevalence of litter than pre-Covid. Whilst community volunteering to litter pick helps it cannot be the answer. What is the Council doing to reduce the culture of littering, encourage more to pick-up rather walk by and how is the Council's Street Cleansing Team changing what it does to address that?

Response

Thank you, Councillor Torra. I suggest you visit Mole Valley, Tandridge and compare them with ours.

We take the issue of littering very seriously and our Cleansing and Joint Enforcement Teams are out every day cleaning the streets of the Borough, as well as taking action against people who drop litter and fly tip.

Last year we launched our '*No Rubbish Excuses*' campaign with a clear message for residents and visitors to '*Find a bin or take it home*'. The campaign was focused on places with high littering incidents and included telephone kiosk advertising in Redhill and Horley Town Centres, posters to display in cafes in our parks and other local town centre businesses, as well as via social media.

In an article in the latest edition of *Borough News* we highlighted the enforcement message of our campaign and let residents know that between April and December 2021, the Council issued 77 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) - 42 FPNs (£400) for fly tipping and 35 FPNs (£80) for littering.

Campaign messages have also been used to wrap (visual messages) the new 26 tonne HIAB truck used by the Cleansing Team, which took to the streets last month.

Over the last year we increased our Cleansing Team's shifts to include a Saturday evening in Redhill Town Centre in response to the increase in litter in this area, and this year, we'll be replacing 30 litter bins and introducing four new recycling bins as part of the regeneration of Marketfield Way. The new bins will also be used to display our '*No Rubbish Excuses*' campaign messages.

We have also introduced 'smart' technology by installing '*Big Belly*' (tradenname) litter bins. These bins compact waste and hold up to six times the capacity of standard litter bins. When they're full a message is sent to the Cleansing Team to task a crew to empty them. This is a far more effective way of collecting litter and results in efficiency savings allowing our teams to spend more time dealing with litter elsewhere. We hope to introduce 10 more of these bins in the not-too-distant future.

We continue to work closely with litter picking groups in the Borough and thank them all for their work. We were delighted when the Tadworth, Kingswood, Lower Kingswood, Walton & Burgh Heath Litter Pickers were recently crowned national *#LitterHeroes* at the prestigious *Keep Britain Tidy Awards*.

Supplementary question

I realise it was a repeat question, but my son has been doing litter picking every day as we go to school. Particularly on bin days we've noticed that the streets are actually dirty; we are having to pick-up the rubbish after the binmen have come. Can I ask if there is a policy such that if litter is dropped in the process of rubbish being collect, that the bin men have to pick it up as this does not seem to be happening. I know this may be controversial but, on our road, bins are being dropped and we are having to pick-up all the way down our road and all the way up to St Johns Avenue. This is something about which our community is getting flustered.

Supplementary response

That is quite interesting because we do have cameras on our vehicles, so they monitor exactly what is going on. I actually live in St Johns and spend a lot of time in the area and have not noticed any prevalence of litter. Perhaps litter in Earlswood is because there are a lot of different retail establishments near the station. However, I will check with my Head of Service to see whether there is anything we can do to castigate our bin men so that they do not to drop anything when they are doing their jobs. When the weather is like it is tonight, people put out their bins in the evenings and if it is windy, this will pick-up and remove items from open crates.

Councillor Essex asked the **Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Bramhall**, the following question:

Question 9: Cost of vehicle fuel and building heating

Please provide the latest estimates of how much the Council's monthly cost of vehicle fuel and building heating for its own vehicles and buildings will increase this year, and what the Council is doing to reduce these cost increases.

Response

We've seen diesel costs rise from £1.23 per litre on 1 March 2022 to about £1.68 currently. Consumption is 9,000 litres per week.

Fuel is purchased in bulk at a reduced unit price to ensure our reserves remain above 20,000 litres or thereabouts (two weeks' worth).

We are prioritising alternate fuels as far as car and vans are concerned but the refuse collection fleet is the principal draw on our bunkered fuel stock.

With regards to increased gas supply costs, our current contract is expiring, and we are finalising the terms of a new deal. The costs and any increases will be highlighted to members once complete along with the mitigating measures adopted to minimise cost and usage.

Supplementary question

I don't think you've given me what the monthly costs are or what anticipated cost increases which was my question. Please may I have a response on these points.

Supplementary response

No. Thank you.

A Point of Order was made by Councillor Essex. A response was provided by Councillor Bramall to the effect that she had noted that Councillor's request for further information and would consult with the Head of Service.

WRITTEN RESPONSES TO BE PROVIDED AFTER THE MEETING

Councillor Ritter asked the **Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Schofield**, the following question:

Question 10: Russian and Belarussian energy contracts

Please can you confirm whether the Council has recently held any contracts, such as to purchase energy, with firms in Russia or Belarus, and if so whether this has now ended.

Response

The Council has not held any contracts with firms in Russia or Belarus – either before the war in Ukraine commenced or currently.

Councillor Essex asked the **Executive Member for Economic Prosperity, Councillor Humphreys**, the following question:

Question 11: Business cases for purchase of diesel vehicles

Please can you share the business cases for the Council's recent purchase of a new £180,000 Hiab and six Ford Ranger diesel vehicles, and their level of utilisation since being purchased.

Response

Recent vehicle purchases were made in accordance with the Council's Fleet Replacement Programme. A new Fleet Replacement Strategy was adopted in September 2021.

A new HIAB (26t lorry with integral loading arm) was purchased at a cost of £158,890, not £180,000 as stated, in January of this year (2022).

Three, not six, Ford Rangers were procured at a total cost of £88,036.18.

All of our fleet vehicles have a nominal replacement date, and a capital budget is set aside for that purpose.

However, each September our Fleet Manager meets with teams to discuss operational requirements and future vehicle procurement. Vehicles that are serviceable remain on the fleet strength whether or not their nominal date of replacement has been reached. Only vehicles that are no longer fit for purpose or are unserviceable are replaced.

The HIAB replaced a vehicle that was 14 years old. A decision was taken to increase both the payload capable of being carried and the lifting capacity of the integral loading arm. This enables our Cleansing Team to deal more efficiently with the significant increase in fly-tipping that has been experienced since the Pandemic and at our 23 Recycling Bring Sites.

The vehicle is equipped with a Euro 6 diesel engine.

Some delay took place whilst the vehicle awaited livery and driver/operators were trained. The vehicle became fully operational on 1 February 2022.