

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council
Meeting of Council 7 April 2022
Public Questions

| Number | Question by | To be answered by | Subject |
|---------------|--------------------|---|---|
| 1 | Mr Chris Reynolds | Councillor Ashford, Executive Member for Community Partnerships | Woodhatch and Whitebushes Community Development |

Council Meeting: 7 April 2022

Mr Chris Reynolds asked the **Executive Member for Community Partnerships, Councillor Ashford** the following question:

Question: Woodhatch and Whitebushes Community Development

The Woodhatch and Whitebushes Community Development Worker has done a great deal of good over the last three years, bringing a Food Club, a Community Fridge, and a new pump track to the area, as well as the switch-on of the Christmas lights in Woodhatch, along with linking-up partner organisations such as churches and charities to work together to improve outcomes for residents.

When the previous Community Development Worker left the Council, recruitment was suspended pending a review of the Council's Community Development provision. On 24th March 2022, at the Council's Executive meeting, it was announced that the vacancy would be filled temporarily, for two years, meaning we may soon lose this pivotal role from our community.

The selection of Woodhatch and Whitebushes to receive this funding cut appears to be nothing more than an unfortunate coincidence based on the vacancy, rather than related to the need for the role - a role which is extremely important to our local community, and has already been shown to have a huge positive impact.

Will the Council commit to employing a permanent Woodhatch and Whitebushes Community Development Worker, showing commitment to Community Development work, to our communities, and to ensuring this extremely valuable work can continue to deliver positive outcomes for residents?

Response

At the last Executive meeting, I was pleased to confirm that we have secured the additional funding from health partners that allows us to expand our investment in Community Development across the Borough. This funding from our partners represents a recognition of the value delivered by our community-based Community Development Workers.

As I announced at that meeting, this additional funding has allowed us to add to our existing Community Development budget, and this has allowed us to go ahead with the recruitment of an additional Community Development Worker for the Woodhatch and Whitebushes areas. It is not correct to suggest this role is temporary as has been suggested. This is a full-time appointment.

Working together with our local partners, this Council is committed to providing long term Community Development in those communities in the Borough most in need, which includes Woodhatch and Whitebushes. The Council will continue to identify and secure additional funding to add to our future budgets to allow us to continue to expand this commitment in future budget proposals to which I would welcome your interest and support.

In addition to the funding, I announced at the Executive, we have also secured funding from Surrey County Council that allows the Council to expand its community development in Merstham from part-time to full-time which I hope you would agree, represents further recognition from another partner of the importance and the success of this Council's Community Development Team.

Supplementary question

Surely after two years of having someone in post then having to handover projects and work, this will have an impact on effectiveness. When I was working, if I had seen a role advertised for two years only, I would not apply. I believe you will get a lesser quality person apply for a two-year job than you would for a permanent role. I think it should be permanent.

Supplementary response

What concerns me is the lack of understanding about how councils work. Reigate & Banstead Borough Council has a large number of staff who work on fixed-term contracts, and move from council to council.

The wonderful work that has been done to transform and completely revamp our community centres, was done by someone who was working on a fixed-term contract. In the middle of that contract, they had to move onto working on the response to Covid. When they returned to their substantive role, their contract was extended.

I think there is a misunderstanding regarding fixed-term contracts. We are in a process where Community Development is in flux – it is changing. I explained this at the last Executive meeting. The County is actively looking to work with communities. The Health Service is actively looking to work with communities. Reigate & Banstead Borough Council has 17 years of experience in this field. However, it is early days. The two years gives us time to continue to think about what we are doing. The suggestion that the Council would employ staff who were not appropriate to the role, is not realistic.

So I am afraid, that is the way that it is. We have two years to look for additional funding and two years to look at where our Community Development is going. Otherwise, it would mean looking backwards, replacing a member of staff with like-for-like, with no way of preparing to work in the future. I am sorry if you disagree. But as far as I am concerned, this funding is a major step forward for Community Development in our Borough and this Council.