

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council
Meeting of Council 9 February 2023
Questions by Members

	Question by	Answered by	Subject
1.	Councillor Ritter	Councillor Ashford, the Executive Member for Community Partnership Support	Resident use of Community Partnership Support
2.	Councillor Kulka	Councillor Schofield, Deputy Leader, and Executive Member for Finance & Governance	Voter ID Publicity
3.	Councillor Essex	Councillor Schofield, Deputy Leader, and Executive Member for Finance & Governance	Pre-payment Meters
4.	Councillor Torra	Councillor Bramhall, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services	Pedestrian Zones in Redhill Town Centre
5.	Councillor Booton	Councillor Bramhall, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services	Benches on Earlswood Common
6.	Councillor Chandler	Councillor Bramhall, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services	Electric Vehicles as part of the RBBC Fleet
7.	Councillor McKenna	Councillor Biggs, Executive Member for Planning Policy, and Place Delivery	National Planning Framework Consultation

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

Question 1: Resident use of Community Partnership Support

Could the Executive member for Community Partnerships give an update on numbers of residents accessing support from the following core voluntary sector partners in 2021/22; Citizen's Advice Reigate and Banstead, MHA Communities East Surrey, Stripey Stork, Community Debt Advice and Age Concern; the proportion of these referred directly from the Council.

Response:

Thank you, Councillor Ritter.

In 2021/22 Community Debt Advice received 99 referrals, a total of 52 of these were directly from Reigate and Banstead Borough Council this equates to 53%. Stripey Stork responded to 3,498 referrals, 19% of which were via district and borough councils, which includes referrals from the departments at Surrey County Council and from other East Surrey district councils. Referrals to the other organisations you mentioned in the question would be mostly self-referrals from residents who approached the organisations directly or who were signposted via another agency, therefore there is no captured data on these figures, however I can tell you in 2021/22 Citizens Advice, Reigate and Banstead dealt with 17,480 issues and supported 4,456 borough residents. MHA communities received 98 referrals and delivered 1,019 sessions to their members Age Concern Banstead received 296 referrals, and the organisation delivered 2022 sessions to their members. Age Concern Merstham, Redhill and Reigate received 24 referrals and delivered 4,822 sessions to their members.

No supplementary question was forthcoming.

Councillor Kulka asked the **Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance & Governance, Councillor Schofield**, the following question:

Question 2: Voter ID Publicity

Could you please outline what work the Council is doing to help the groups most affected by the introduction of photo voter ID (young people, older people, and people with disabilities), to raise awareness of this new requirement?

Response:

Thank you, Councillor Kulka.

I will ask the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer, Mari Roberts-Wood, to provide the comprehensive answer to your question.

Mari Roberts-Wood - We have already provided a webinar for Councillors, but if any further information is required, please ask, because it is a really important and pressing issue.

The Elections Act of 2022 included a wide range of measures aimed at improving the integrity of our democratic process by tackling electoral fraud.

This includes the implementation of a new requirement for electors to provide photo identification in polling stations from May 2023, which will apply to the Borough, Town and Parish Council elections scheduled for the 4th of May this year.

This is to ensure that someone is who they say they are, in a polling station.

A communications plan is in place to achieve two core objectives regarding the voter ID requirements-

- Firstly, to ensure that all voters in the borough are informed of the new requirements to provide photo ID if they are voting in person on the 4th of May.
- Secondly, that if a voter doesn't have an accepted form of photo ID, they can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) in order to vote at these elections, provided that they apply before the deadline at 5pm on Tuesday, the 25th of April 2023.

The plan includes a blend of both targeted and borough-wide publicity activities to achieve both of those objectives effectively including -

- A postcard will be dispatched this month to every residential property in the borough, which is approximately 64,000 properties.
- An e-mail will also be sent in February to every registered elector who provided their e-mail address when they registered to vote, which is approximately 69,000 e-mails.

- An amended poll card, which in addition to the usual information, also explains the new requirements and how to apply for a VAC for station voters only, will be sent to every registered, eligible voter in the borough.
- The use of the Council's website Borough e-news, social media channels, news releases and local advertising. Some of you may already have seen that we're pushing out the national campaign on our various channels, however not everybody accesses those channels so it's really important that we do reach all of our residents and of course we will rely on your support to help us do that.
- Targeted messaging and resources, such as leaflets posters, newsletters and social media resources will be shared through our Council's Community Partnership Team to reach community centres, Raven Housing Trust Town and Parish Councils, community groups, GP surgeries, libraries and if we've missed anything that you think would help for us to get those messages out to in a leaflet form, please do let us now, and we will endeavour to do so.
- The Electoral Commission has also published accessible materials for those who are partially sighted and those with learning difficulties, which we will also be sharing; it's also available in a variety of languages as well.

The targeted campaign is aimed at the following groups, based on the Electoral Commission's guidance:

- Young people (those who are 18 – 34 years old)
- Social renters
- The private rented sector in certain wards, for example those with a transient population
- Older people and vulnerable groups, for example those who may be concerned about coming out to vote
- Trans and Non-Binary people
- Non-native English speakers
- Groups and communities that are likely to wear face coverings
- Attainers (those who are 16 - 17 years old)
- New homeowners/recent movers
- First time voters (those turning 17 or 18)
- Hard to reach groups, such as anonymous voters, homeless households and Gypsy Roma travellers.

Further guidance from the Commission on the administration of the voter ID process in polling stations is also expected in the coming weeks.

It is important to note another new requirement, which is for Returning Officers to ensure appropriate measures are in place from May 2023 to improve the accessibility of voting policy polling stations for voters with disabilities. With that in mind, the Electoral Commission has recently conducted a public consultation with stakeholders, such as community and disability groups, to inform the reviewed guidance, which is expected to be available to Returning Officers in the coming weeks.

However, until that guidance is available, I am pleased to inform you that work is already underway locally to provide:

- Easy-read format resources for voters.
- Pencil grips in polling stations.
- Portable lamps for polling booths.

In addition to the existing provision, we've got a whole range of things. We are really trying to make sure that our polling stations are welcoming and usable for all of our residents, whatever their needs may be, and if you do think there is anything that we haven't thought of or we have missed or residents contact you about, please do let us know, and we will endeavour to do our very best. There is a great deal of information on the Electoral Commission website.

Supplementary Question:

Are polling cards going to go out in time to allow people to apply for voter ID by 25 April?

Response:

The deadline is 25th of April, so we will be trying to issue polling cards as soon as possible.

Quite a range of documents can be used as ID, such as an older person's buss pass, not just a passport or driving licence.

We are sending the postcards out in February and what we want people to do is apply as early as possible, so please encourage your residents to apply as soon as possible.

Between the 25th April and voting day, if people contact us because they have lost their VAC, there are ways in which we can assist them. We do everything we possibly can to ensure people can vote, that is my underlying role, as the returning officer, to enable people to vote.

Supplementary question FAQ's

What photo ID is acceptable?

A full list is published on the Electoral Commission website, as well as on our own website at www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/voter-ID

Are postal voters affected?

Not for the polls in May 2023, however changes affecting postal voting arrangements are included within the Elections Act 2022 and will be implemented after the polls in May this year. The Returning Officer and ERO will communicate these changes to voters in due course.

How do I apply for a VAC?

If you don't already have an accepted photo ID, you can apply for a VAC either:

- **Online**, at: www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate
- **By post**, delivered to the Town Hall. Application forms can be downloaded from our website or requested by contacting our helpline 01737 276794; or,
- **In person**, if you don't have a camera at home, by visiting the Council's reception.

But please remember, if you need a VAC to vote for the elections in May 2023, you must apply by 5pm on Tuesday 25th April 2023. You should also apply early to ensure you receive it in time.

My Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) has not arrived

If the elector applied for a VAC before the deadline of 5pm on 25th April, they can be issued with a temporary VAC. These can be issued until 5pm on polling day. This must be collected from the Town Hall. Voters can call the elections helpline for support, on 01737 276794.

I wear a face covering; what will happen at the polling station?

You can request to prove your identity in privacy at the polling station. All polling stations have a privacy screen and at least 1 member of staff is female.

How long is a VAC valid for?

There is no expiry date, but there is a recommended renewal date on a VAC, which is 10 years since issue date.

A temporary VAC is only valid on election day.

I've lost my VAC, can I get a replacement?

They can re-apply for another VAC if it happens before the VAC application deadline.

If they lose it after the application deadline of 25 April 2023, they can apply for an emergency proxy up to 5pm on election day, the emergency proxy must have photo ID and vote at their polling station.

Councillor Essex asked the **Executive Member for Housing and Support, Councillor Neame**, the following question:

Question 3: Pre-Payment Meters

Does the Council have a list of those on pre-payment meters locally and/or have a way to reach out and help those whose energy meter has been removed during the Cost-of-Living crisis, including those forcibly removed by energy companies, removing the human rights of people to have a decent quality of life in our communities.

Response:

Thank you, Councillor Essex.

The Council does not have a list of households on prepayment meters. Data is available on the overall numbers, but data on individuals is not available to us.

The Council, however, does have a Money Support Team and residents experiencing financial difficulties in keeping up with their payments are advised to reach out to this team for support. The skilled team can help with a range of money issues and will work to help residents become more confident in budgeting to maximise their income and prevent them from going into debt.

It is also noted that from the current Household Support Fund, £31,000 has been allocated to our local charitable organisations to assist residents who unable to keep up with their pre-payment top-up meters.

If residents approach you as Councillors and they are having problems with prepayment meters, please advise them to get in touch with our Money Support Team who will help them and signpost them to additional help.

Supplementary Question:

Can I request that the details of how to contact the Money Support Team might be included in the minutes of this agenda, so those listening here today who might be affected, can contact the Money Support Team.

You mentioned data is available on the overall number and that we don't have a list of those on pre-payment meters. Can you confirm what the number is in our borough currently and whether we could request such a list via Ofgem through government, if necessary, so that we can target our support to those individual people rather than wait for them to contact us, just as we are able to do for those who are on revenue support, another other benefits and have particular needs, because I think it's really important that we don't wait for people to come to us that we are able to actively go to them.

Response:

I will be happy to supply contact details for the Money Support Team.

With regards to providing information on households with pre-payment meters I will have to check and provide a follow up answer.

Website link:

[Money Support service | Money Support service | Reigate and Banstead \(reigate-banstead.gov.uk\)](#)

Email moneysupport@reigate-banstead.gov.uk

Call 01737 276375

Text 07880 013126

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

Question 4: Pedestrian Zones in Redhill Town Centre

How does the council deal with handing out permits for vehicles driving and parking onto pedestrian zones in Redhill town centre and penalise those that are not exempt to do so when there is no contravention code 54 (Enforceable Restrictions for the Parking Enforcement Team)?

Response:

Thank you, Councillor Torra.

The Council currently carries out on street enforcement on behalf of Surrey County Council (SCC). SCC have not issued a Traffic Order for the pedestrianised zone in Redhill to ban vehicles from parking, therefore we are unable to enforce in this area.

Other pedestrianised areas of the borough do have an order in place, and we have petitioned SCC to extend this to Redhill. As the vast majority of vehicles parking in the centre of Redhill are in the Rachel East part of Redhill i.e. Station Road East can I suggest you petition your County Councillor to request these restrictions.

Supplementary Question:

We are in talks with police about this because, unfortunately the Joint Enforcement Team have informed me they cannot do anything about it. The police will have to take action because there are no double yellow lines.

Do you not foresee the current situation of abusing the safety of pedestrians getting worse when residents move into The Rise and when the entertainment development of The Rise fully opens?

Response:

As I have said, this is a Surrey County Council pedestrianised area, so I suggest you speak to your County Councillor and ask them to raise this with the relevant Highways officers at SCC.

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

Question 5: Benches on Earlswood Common

Residents have told us that the benches on Earlswood Common are rotting and there are concerns that now the golf club is no longer there, these benches when they become unfit for purpose, will not be replaced. What capital budget does the Borough Council have for renewing these to improve amenities?

Response:

Thank you, Councillor Booton.

I can confirm that as part of the Greenspaces department's operations, regular audits of parks infrastructure are undertaken, and if any items are found to have degraded to a point where they are no longer safe or usable, appropriate remedial action will be taken.

Across all of the Council's parks and open spaces, benches are regularly installed in new locations as well as being replaced as required, and these tend to be funded through various means, including Greenspaces department revenue budgets, CIL funding, and as part of the memorial bench service.

In this financial year to date we have spent circa £15k on benches, which includes replacements, repairs, installation costs as well as memorial benches and we have received circa £13k income.

It is with this in mind, I can provide assurances that should the benches in question be assessed to require replacement, this will be co-ordinated at an appropriate point in future.

As you know, the two replacement benches for Pettridge Wood Common, have now arrived and will be installed, hopefully next week, as per my e-mail to you today.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you for helping to organise replacement of the two benches on Pettridge Wood Common. There are indeed two benches on Earlswood Common that are no longer there; I would like to work with you to ensure that they can also be replaced.

Response:

If you could let me know the area where these benches have been removed from, then I would be happy to help you get these benches replaced as quickly as possible.

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

Question 6: Electric Vehicles as part of the RBBC Fleet

According to the inventory of RBBC vehicles a year ago there were 8 electric vehicles out of 132. Parking Services were allocated 4 of those vehicles but this function moves to Surrey County Council shortly. Are these vehicles also moving to Surrey County Council so that we are left with just 3% of the fleet being electric or have we progressed towards a zero-emission fleet this past year?

Response:

Thank you, Councillor Chandler.

Reigate & Banstead Council operates 14 electric and hybrid vehicles, this represents around 10% of the current fleet and we are steadily replacing older vehicles with EV alternatives as they reach the end of their service life.

I would remind Members that 17 of our newest Refuse Collection Vehicles are equipped with fully electric bin lifts. They have been in operation since 2020. This helps to reduce emissions and means that they are quieter when operating 'on street' this also helps create a better and safer working environment for our bin crews.

Our Fleet Manager, along with the Operations Team, has arranged for several trials involving electric vehicles, including lorries, vans, and mechanical sweepers. This is to help evaluate their performance. Unfortunately, not all of these have been successful, and some vehicles have not met operational requirements.

We remain committed to achieving carbon reduction targets by 2030 and will continue to introduce new vehicles, powered by alternate fuels, whilst ensuring that operational capability is not compromised.

Parking vehicles will not transfer to Surrey County Council, rather they will be repurposed within our existing fleet replacing diesel and petrol-driven vehicles.

It has been reported that electric vehicle batteries have a risk of fire. Around 150k EVs have already been recalled by manufacturers due to history of fires caused by charging process. As battery density advances, so does potential for a serious incident as amount of energy increases.

Crucially, nearly all incidents happen when a battery is charging as a result of thermal runaway which can lead to ignition or even explosion. The power of these fires is underlined by work that has been undergoing in Denmark, where they have developed one of the few things that can extinguish a lithium-ion fire. It is in essence a huge freight container filled with distilled water into which the vehicle on fire is dropped and left.

I think that our team are right to be cautious in waiting for vehicles to reach the end of their service life. Other councils can trial the electric vehicles, and we can assess their experiences before we start to take that step further ourselves.

Supplementary Question:

Do you not recommend our residents to take up electric vehicles?

Response

It really isn't for me, as a Councillor and a County Council, to recommend what vehicles our residents drive.

Councillor McKenna asked the **Executive Member for Planning Policy & Place Delivery, Councillor Biggs**, the following question:

Question 7: National Planning Policy Framework Consultation

With regards to forthcoming changes in the planning system it is understood that this Council is committed to provide a full response on the current National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation which finishes in early March. This NPPF is likely to introduce some significant changes including proposals to roll back the requirement for a five-year housing land supply, such as by allowing councils to take into account previous years over delivery of housing completions. How will the Executive Member ensure both that councillors are briefed on the implications of these proposed policy changes and their input sought to inform the Council's response to this important government consultation?

Response:

Thank you, Councillor McKenna.

I agree that the NPPF consultation has the potential to have significant impacts for our next local plan and planning more generally.

The Group Leaders, at their recent meeting, agreed that the appropriate forum for agreeing a response to the consultation, along with review of other planning work, would be the Local Plan Advisory Group or LPAG. This new group will take over from DMAG whose primary responsibility was the Development Management Plan.

LPAG will be cross-party and include Members from both Overview & Scrutiny and Planning Committees. The first meeting is scheduled for 22nd February where the draft consultation response will be reviewed before the submission date of 3rd March. We will circulate the final response to all Members for their information.

Supplementary Question:

If the NPPF makes some radical changes, do you think the Council will be in a good position to roll back on some of the sustainable urban extensions and other such sites that were previously allocated in the Green Belt as a result of this housing pressure being removed?

Response

We don't know that. We are comfortable with our five-year land supply and if it changes but this is a consultation at the moment. I hope so because we always want to protect our green belt; we will work together to make sure we get the right outcome as we go forward.