

Follow Up Questions from Overview &Scrutiny 25 January 2024

See meeting information here:

[Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 25th January, 2024, 7.30 pm | Reigate and Banstead Borough Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Agenda Item 5

Leader's Update January 2024

Question 1 – Gatwick Development Consent Order – The Chair requested an update on the Council's position regarding the Gatwick DCO.

Written Answer

An update on the Gatwick DCO was emailed to all Members on 12 January 2024.

Agenda Item 6

People Portfolio Holder Update

Question 2 – Asylum Seekers – Confirmation would be provided of when asylum seekers/refugees qualifying period for period of residency begins in order to apply for the housing register.

Written Answer

The qualifying period of residency that will be taken into account when assessing a Housing Register applicant's Local Connection, begins at the point the asylum seeker receives a positive decision from the Home Office and they obtain 'Refugee Leave to Remain' status. This is usually around 28 days before they must leave Home Office procured accommodation.

Question 3 – Affordable social housing - A visiting member requested information on the amount of the £30million Council aspiration to spend on affordable social housing that has been spent to date.

Written Answer

The Executive is undertaking a range of initiatives that are contributing to achievement of its ambition to invest up to £30 million in affordable housing.

This follows on from the successful investment of:

- £5.8 million to deliver 25 homes at Camelia Close (Pitwood Park)
- £7.9 million to deliver 32 homes at Wheatley Court (Cromwell Road); and

- £0.9 million to deliver 4 homes at Octavia Cottages (Lee Street).

Over the past couple of years, the Council has continued to increase its housing stock. During 2022/23 and 2023/24 just under £4 million has been invested so far by this Council in purchasing 11 houses and flats to provide temporary and emergency accommodation:

- 3 homes in Merstham; one to be let initially to a local Ukrainian homeless household, as per the funding terms.
- 3 homes in Tadworth – one to be let initially to a local Ukrainian homeless household and two to Afghan households.
- 4 homes in Redhill – two to be let initially to local Ukrainian homeless households.
- 1 home in Horley – to be let initially to a homeless Afghan household.
- Plus, a flat at New Pond Farm that has been brought back into use using s106 funds.

Note: This purchasing programme is still in progress, therefore the above figures are a snapshot of the current position and not the final outcome.

The purchases have been funded by drawing on a range of sources:

- The Council's capital reserves (primarily 'right to buy' and 'clawback' sums received following the stock transfer in 2002) - £1.4 million.
- Homes England Grant - £1.7 million.
- Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) grant contributions from Government to fund temporary accommodation for refugees - £1.3 million.
- A call on the earmarked Housing Delivery Strategy Revenue Reserve - £0.7 million.
- Section 106 Affordable Housing Contributions - £ 0.4 million.
- Plus, other small contributions from UKSPF grant and CIL funding.

In addition, the Council has also been supporting other local social housing providers make homes available:

- 1 home in Merstham - purchased by Mount Green HA and part-funded with Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) grant (£309,110 LAHF grant and £55k RBBC funding) – first let will be to a homeless Afghan household.
- 4 homes in Redhill, £240k.
- 2 homes in Redhill, £120k.
- £450k contributed to East Surrey YMCA since 2019 towards their purchase and refurbishment of 2 houses of multiple occupation for young people.
- £500k agreed in 2022 for Raven Housing to bring forward their social housing site at Chavecroft in Tadworth.

- £250k for Raven Housing in 2024 to support their purchase of 8 social rented homes at Horley (two 2-bedroom houses, two 3 bedroom houses and four 1 bedroom flats).

Question 4 – Autism-friendly venues – A Member asked what is being done to make public centres and buildings, such as leisure centres and community centres, more autism friendly.

Written Answer

Currently, our leisure centres and our community centres are not designated as autism friendly facilities. The Community Centres Team are currently assessing the public spaces within our community centres to see what adaptations could be undertaken to provide a more autism friendly environment. Furthermore, the Community Centres Team and the Leisure Development Team are liaising with the National Autistic Society and Surrey County Council's autism lead to improve understanding of the local need and what services or activities may be appropriate to offer at our community centres and at our leisure centres and will involve GLL (as our leisure centres operator) in those discussions.

Question 5 – Star for a Night – A Member asked for details on the plans for delivering Star for a Night while the Harlequin Theatre is closed.

Written Answer

Officers are continuing to work on plans for Star for a Night following the theatre's closure. Once confirmed, news and dates will be publicly announced.

Question 6 – Food Club waiting lists – A Member asked for further information on food club waiting lists.

Written Answer

At present, Redhill food club is only taking referrals from other organisations (no self-referrals) and has one person on their waiting list, Merstham has four people on their waiting list. None of the other food clubs have waiting lists at present but all are looking at how they manage increasing numbers. Members of the Horley Food Club have decided that each member will take slightly less food so that they can continue to take members. We are currently supporting Food Clubs through Household Support Fund 4 funding which will end at the end of March 2024 and there is concern that at this point all the clubs will need to look at ways of reducing the number of members (this might mean that membership is limited to six months or that people are only able to attend every second week). The Leader is writing to the DWP and the Chancellor to

convey his concerns regarding the impact if there is no further funding to replace Household Support Fund beyond March 2024.