

REIGATE AND BANSTEAD BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL: 31 OCTOBER 2019

Questions by Members

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4.	Cllr J. Essex	Cllr R. Ashford, Executive Member for Community Partnerships	Index of Multiple Deprivation
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9.	Cllr S. Kulka	Cllr G. Knight, Executive Member for Housing and Benefits	Affordable Housing Progress

Council Meeting: 31 October 2019

Councillor S. Fenton and Councillor J. Philpott will ask the **Leader of the Council, Councillor M. Brunt** the following question:

Question: Women's State Pension Changes

In light of a request from a group of female residents of several wards, born in the 1950s, whose pensions have been severely affected by both the 1995 and 2011 Pensions Acts, would the Leader of the Council send the government a strong request to make fair transitional State Pension arrangements for all women born in the 1950s who have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the state pension age with lack of appropriate notification?

Many women born in the 1950s are living in hardship as the rise of women's state pension age has been too rapid, and made without sufficient notice so that these women have not had time to make alternative pension arrangements.

More than 150 councils have already passed a motion - written by campaign group Women against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) - in support of transitional arrangements.

Background to this question <https://www.waspi.co.uk/background-information/>

Response / Observations:

I recognise the concerns of the Members and their residents regarding the implementation of these changes, and will therefore be writing to the government to express these concerns, and to request that they ensure fair transitional State Pension arrangements are put in place for all those women who would be unfairly affected.

As the questioners identify, whilst changes may need to be made to pensions, it is important that any changes are implemented fairly, and that appropriate notification is given to enable those affected to make alternative arrangements. It is far from clear that the current process meets either of these requirements. I hope that the government will therefore take note of the concerns, and work to improve their plans.

Council Meeting: 31 October 2019

Councillor S. Fenton will ask the **Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Finance, Councillor T. Schofield** the following question:

Question: Brexit

This council has been allocated £34,968 to spend on planning for Brexit. I understand that none of this has yet been spent. Given that the borough is home to almost 5,700 businesses (not to mention the many charitable and social/not-for-profit organisations) what does the council consider to be the best use of this money in terms of helping to mitigate the economic impact locally of Brexit (bearing in mind that divided equally between all the businesses this would mean about £6 per business)? How, specifically, will the money be spent?

Response / Observations:

➤ **Written Response**

As the Council's Deputy Leader, with responsibility for implementing the Government's advice on Brexit planning, I can confirm that £34,968 has been received for specific Brexit related issues.

Let me first clear up an apparent misunderstanding.

This funding from central government is specifically intended to help Reigate and Banstead Borough Council to adapt to the changes caused by Brexit and ensure that we are able to protect vital local services. If necessary, this could include enhanced emergency response capability, for instance managing the potential impact locally of 'Operation Brock' which may see goods vehicles stacked along the M20 and wider motorway network whilst awaiting clearance at cross channel ports.

To quote from the MHCLG press release dated 28 October 2019

"Councils will decide how to allocate their funding. It is expected that money will be spent on resources like recruiting extra staff to ensure councils have the capacity to provide timely and accurate information to residents who have questions on how Brexit will affect them."

Allocations may also be used to support more vulnerable residents who are adversely affected by Brexit. This may include resolving short term issues in the local supply of goods and services.

The funding affords Reigate & Banstead Borough Council the flexibility to respond quickly to local Brexit related issues without the need for a prolonged bidding process through central Government.

Council Meeting: 31 October 2019

Councillor J. Essex will ask the **Executive Member for Community Partnerships, Councillor R. Ashford** the following question:

Question: Index of Multiple Deprivation

The index of multiple deprivation survey for 2019 was recently published (see <https://www.surreyi.gov.uk/dataset/index-of-multiple-deprivation-2019>). This showed that the most relatively deprived areas in Surrey is now in Reigate and Banstead, in Merstham, and this is far more deprived in relative terms than it was four years ago (ranking from 6373 highest deprivation nationwide in 2015 to 4800 nationwide in 2019). In the last four years Reigate and Banstead has gone from being the 282nd to 275th most deprived local council area in the country, and Surrey is now also ranked slightly lower than four years ago. Please can the council confirm it has looked at this data, how is this being used, and confirm what actions are being taken in response.

Response / Observations:

Lower Layer Super Output Areas were introduced after the 2001 census to allow better reporting of deprivation statistics. Typically these geographic areas consist of around 1200 households.

One of the lower super output areas (008A) is an area around Portland Drive in Merstham which has consistently been identified as being one of the three most deprived areas in Surrey since the development of the IMD statistics.

Currently the IMD statistics provide a relative measure of deprivation across seven parameters referred to as 'domains':

- Income Deprivation
- Employment Deprivation
- Education, Skills and Training Deprivation
- Health Deprivation and Disability
- Crime
- Barriers to Housing and Services
- Living Environment Deprivation

Naturally, changes can occur within each of these domains, however the figures provide a snapshot which can be used to compare areas at a point in time.

The guidance notes which accompany the release of the 2019 IIMD figures make it clear that the statistics are not intended to provide comparative figures over time.

- **Measuring real change in deprivation over time**

As explained above, one can compare the rankings as determined at the relevant time point by each version of the Indices of Deprivation. But the Indices are not designed to provide 'backwards' comparability with previous iterations. Changes between versions of the Indices can limit the ability to make comparisons over time and are described in Section 3.4 of the Research Report.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835119/loD2019_FAQ.pdf

Whilst the IMD figures do not provide any kind of comparison over time, they are a useful tool amongst others.

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and its partners continue to actively support local people in Merstham through its commitment to Community Development and physical Regeneration of the place itself.

There are new restaurant and retail units and a supermarket selling fresh produce for the first time in Merstham. There are new flats, many of them genuinely affordable shared-ownership properties.

Merstham residents now have access to a purpose-built community centre. The Merstham Hub, offers access to a range of services and facilities including a well used library, community cafe and services ranging from Citizens Advice (CAB) to peer-led breast feeding support.

Through the work of the Merstham Community Development Worker (CDW), the Borough Council has contributed to strong local connections between voluntary, faith and community sector organisations and statutory organisations.

The CDW works closely with the Merstham Community Facilities Trust (MCFT) which holds the lease on the community space within the Hub in making significant bids to the People's Health Trust and the National Lottery for funding to support community projects; for example, those aimed at reducing health inequalities and helping local people into employment and volunteering in the wider community.

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Council Meeting: 31 October 2019

Councillor K. Sachdeva will ask the **Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor N. Bramhall** the following question:

Question: Recycling

I understand that Reigate & Banstead's recycling rate has now increased to 54.9% which places this Council in the top 10 of Councils for recycling in the Country. Can Cllr Bramhall let the Council know how you intend to increase recycling to hit the target of 60%?

Response / Observations:

The national recycling target for 2020 is 50%.

In 2015 Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, along with 11 other Surrey Authorities, signed up to a Joint Waste Management Strategy that set an ambitious target of achieving a 60% recycling rate across the county of Surrey.

Since then we have actively encouraged our residents to recycle.

We have helped our residents to recycle more by offering: -

- Weekly kerbside collections of paper, card and cardboard.
- Weekly kerbside collections of food waste.
- Fortnightly collections of plastic bottles, tubs and trays along with cans and glass bottles and jars.
- Garden waste collections for those residents who choose to sign up for the service.
- Twenty-three local bring sites yielding more than 1000 tonnes of recycling each year.
- More than thirty textile banks to help recycling clothing.

Last year, 2018/19, we introduced kerbside collections to 1,983 flats and properties with communal bins.

This year, 2019/20, we're expanding our flats recycling service to another 2,300 flats.

In December 2018 Council approved the replacement and refurbishment of our refuse fleet. We will take receipt of 11 new dustcarts in 2020 with another 5 replacements due in 2021 at an estimated cost of £3.5m. This investment allows us to continue the provision of reliable, regular kerbside recycling collections.

We work actively with other members of Surrey Environment Partnership to deliver a variety of communication campaigns. These have included television, local radio and social media advertisements along with posters in shopping centres and on vehicles,

including local buses and our own dustcarts, as well as direct communications with residents.

We provide paper recycling services to our trade customers and will look at ways to expand this commercial offer to include other materials.

However, there's more to do. We work hard to maintain and increase our recycling rate. This results in both environmental and economic benefit for our residents.

At the end of 2020 we will still have around 6,000 flats that do not have a full range of kerbside recycling. We will work with landlords, freeholders and residents groups to include more properties in our full kerbside service.

The composition of material recycled is changing, for instance people are moving away from traditional newspapers but order more of their shopping online. This has seen volumes of paper reduce whilst cardboard packaging is increasing.

Last year the Government began consultation on its new 'Waste and Resources Strategy', this may bring new statutory duties and different methods of funding.

I'm pleased that Reigate and Banstead Borough Council is among the top performing 10% of local authorities nationally and we will continue to invest in services to achieve even more.

Council Meeting: 31 October 2019

Councillor M. Blacker will ask the **Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor N. Bramhall** the following question:

Question: Air Quality

Residents, particularly parents with young children, are concerned about the air quality in the area of Holmesdale School. There was an air quality investigation carried out in 2018. What were the findings of this report and when will it be published?

Response / Observations:

While the Holmesdale School's western boundary sits on the edge of an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) declared in 2011, the Council has not carried out or been consulted on any other formal air quality investigation near the school. There is ongoing monitoring carried out by the Council on Reigate Hill and I am pleased to report that the annual air quality standards for NO₂ (Nitrogen Dioxide) in this area were between 32 µg m⁻³ (micrograms per metre cubed) and 33 µg m⁻³ which are better than the recommended maximum annual average of 40 µg m⁻³ for this pollutant.

I am aware that there was a campaign in 2018 being run by the County Council through the Surrey Air Alliance. This campaign aims, through education, to reduce air pollution around schools by encouraging families to consider several steps, including turning their car engine off whilst stationary, using public transport, parking a little further away and walking or cycling to school.

Council Meeting: 31 October 2019

Councillor S. McKenna will ask the **Executive Member for Planning Policy**, **Councillor R. Biggs** the following question:

Question: Zero Carbon New Homes

The government is currently consulting on the Future Homes Standard (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-future-homes-standard-changes-to-part-l-and-part-f-of-the-building-regulations-for-new-dwellings>) up until 10th January 2020. This includes consideration of whether to commence the amendment to the Planning and Energy Act 2008, which would restrict local planning authorities from setting higher energy efficiency standards for new homes. The proposals being consulted upon include stronger building regulation standards either by increasing building fabric (insulation) standards by 20% (similar to the 19% uplift in our adopted local plan) or higher, including on-site renewables (which the government's planning inspector rejected from our local plan).

Please confirm that the council will respond to this consultation and request that the newer standards should be at least for Zero Carbon new homes, including both higher standards of building fabric (such as the Passiv Haus standard) and a requirement for renewable energy to included rather than excluded as standard in all new developments.

Response / Observations:

We are very pleased to see the Government's proposed changes to Building Regulations which will improve the energy efficiency of new buildings and reduce carbon dioxide emissions and the Council will be responding to the consultation in conjunction with the Southern Building Control Partnership

We will be pushing for the maximum improvements possible in terms of higher standards of building fabric and requirements for renewable energy. This is something we have consistently strived for wherever possible through our planning policies and, as you mention, whilst we succeeded in improving building fabric standards within the DMP the independent inspector did not allow us to require more in terms of on-site renewables. We remain committed to this however and will look at other ways to encourage developers to build homes that are more energy efficient and include more energy from renewable sources. This may include additional guidance or new requirements through the planning application validation list which is soon to be updated. Through Planning and Building Regulations I want to ensure that this Council remains ahead of the curve when it comes to environment and sustainability.

Council Meeting: 31 October 2019

Councillor H. Brown will ask the **Executive Member for Investment and Companies**, **Councillor T. Archer** the following question:

Question: Common Land

Recently, the council applied to de-register a section of land in Salfords from its common land status, in order for the land to be tarmacked over.

Such applications could lead to a worrying precedent of council-owned common land – which should be for the benefit of residents not private business – being de-registered from common land status.

Could the council explain its policy regarding common land and when it deems it appropriate to de-register land for other uses?

Response / Observations:

I would like to thank the Councillor for his question.

I can confirm that the Council has not applied to de-register the area of land referred to which was an area totalling 18m² and abutting an existing area of hard standing. A proposal had been received for a possible de-registration and swap of common land that would have seen the replacement of a larger area of new common land. However, this proposal is no longer proceeding.

We will only seek the de-registration of common land in circumstances where there is clear benefit that is in the public interest and have concluded that the public interest test has not been met in this case. The Council will continue to consider each enquiry on its individual merits.

The Council places great value on all of its green spaces and understands the benefits that common land provides in terms of biodiversity, recreation and heritage to its residents.

Council Meeting: 31 October 2019

Councillor S. Kulka will ask the **Executive Member for Housing and Benefits, Councillor G. Knight** the following question:

Question: Affordable Housing Progress

Residents quite frequently ask me to explain their council's progress against the commitment to provide affordable housing in the borough. They see articles in the local press from time to time concerning proposals, but no significant evidence of increased appropriate provision.

Some large developments are often allowed to go ahead on the site, without providing affordable dwellings, on the condition that they contribute to a levy, which the council can use elsewhere.

For the purposes of clarification, would the executive member please use this opportunity to explain, in simple terms, how much money the council has effectively committed to current affordable housing projects, how many dwellings have been completed over the last year, the split of those between Social Rent, Shared Equity and Market Rent, and how much currently exists in the pot, waiting for projects to be proposed?

Response / Observations:

Mr Mayor, I would like to thank Cllr Kulka for his question, and to refer him to our Draft Housing Strategy, to be submitted for approval by the Executive in its next meeting. I believe I speak for all members of this Council when I say that there is insufficient housing provision in this Borough for young families, police officers, health care professionals, teachers, local government officers and those working in our local economy. Developers are quick to point to a demand for 4- and 5-bedroom homes and they're right. If you sell a two-bedroom flat in Clapham for £700,000 you can afford to buy one of those big executive homes built on back land or on our rapidly disappearing green fields. But as Cllr Kulka says quite rightly, developers regularly shirk their obligation to build affordable housing on their sites citing economic viability and I leave it to your imagination how creative their accounting processes might be. This Executive believes we have a duty to those of our residents who are priced out of the housing market to correct that anomaly by investing in and facilitating shared-equity, discounted market rent and social housing projects. We will work with housing associations like Raven, with government agencies and other investors to build housing that residents can afford.

We've already started. Currently around £16 million is committed to deliver a mix of affordable housing and market housing on three Council sites. The market housing will cross subsidise most of the build over time (projection of 15 years following the release of equity sales at point of first resale), therefore at the end of the projected

period the net capital cost to the Council will be in the region of £500,000. The Cromwell Road site will deliver 4 retail units, 32 flats with 16 being sold as shared equity, the Council retaining a 25% equity stake and the remaining 16 being sold as market housing. The Pitwood Park site will deliver 25 units with the affordable / market housing mix yet to be agreed. The Lee Street site will deliver 4 modular units for local low paid single workers.

Between 01 October 2018 and 30 September 2019, we had in total 69 affordable housing completions in the borough, of those, 55 were recorded as affordable/social rented and 14 as shared ownership. It's not enough, Mr Mayor, that's why we have crafted the Housing Strategy and I am confident in future years we will be able to report an increase in affordable homes for residents of our Borough.

Currently the Council holds in the region of £4.8 million s.106 money ring fenced for affordable housing. Of this £1.9m has been collected from developers through implementation of Core Strategy policy CS15 (now replaced by DES6 in the DMP) which sought contributions from every development delivering an additional home. DES6 no longer seeks contributions from each site. The remaining S106 funds have been collected from homeowners selling or stair casing shares of homes in which the Council has the benefit of an equity interest.

In the last two years just over £1m has been used to deliver additional affordable housing including emergency accommodation in Horley, to support the YMCA to deliver an affordable housing scheme for single people and on works to the Council's temporary accommodation units.