

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council

Meeting of Council 13 February 2020

Questions by Members

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1	Councillor Kulka	Councillor Bramhall, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services	Litter
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3	Councillor McKenna	Councillor Bramhall, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services	Air Pollution
4	Councillor Fenton	Councillor Ashford, Executive Member for Community Partnerships	Arts Funding
5	Councillor Sinden	Councillor Bramhall, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services	Recycling
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7	Councillor Blacker	Councillor Humphreys, Executive Member for Place and Economic Prosperity	Reigate Post Office

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

Question 1: Litter

I am sure that Members would agree that we are fortunate to live in what is normally a very pleasant area. Sadly, it seems that many of our roads, especially those with verges and hedgerows are suffering from an ever-increasing amount of discarded litter. Cans, plastic bottles, takeaway remains, and the ever-present problem of bulk fly tipping can often make our environment unpleasant, but also dangerous. I always try to carry a bin bag with me on my walks, a hang-over from my dog walking days, but if the Executive Member shares my concerns, could she please advise Members as to whether there are any new council plans to tackle this problem.

Response:

Comparing our Borough to other surrounding Boroughs including the London Borough of Croydon, our verges and hedgerows are for the most part cleared to a very high standard and I would therefore respectfully disagree that there is an increasing litter problem in the Borough. There are some roads in the Borough that border private land which our cleansing crews are not permitted to enter. A specific issue is in London Road South which we are addressing by contacting the landowner. This is not limited to this one site and we have similar situations elsewhere.

The standard of cleanliness in our Borough is high. The Cleansing Team prioritise key areas for litter picking and sweeping and execute their duties 7 days per week. They work every day of the year including Christmas day to maintain these high standards. Our town centres have 'Beat-men' teams and their weekend shifts have recently been reviewed and extended to include a Saturday evening shift in Redhill Town Centre.

Where possible, fly tipping is cleared from public areas when discovered by the Cleansing Team or reported by residents, within 24 hours. We proactively support local community litter picking groups and work with the Probation Service to support keeping areas of the borough free from litter, weeds & fly tipping.

We will be supporting the Keep Britain Tidy 'Great British Spring Clean' again this year which runs from 20 March – 13 April 2020.

In 2020/2021 we will be trialling new litter disposal containers and a new system to maximise productivity of our operatives.

Councillor Brown asked the **Executive Member for Planning Policy, Councillor Biggs** the following question:

Question 2: Horse Hill

On February 13, a former Reigate and Banstead Green Councillor attended court in connection with her campaign for a judicial review of Surrey County Council's decision to allow massive expansion of oil drilling at Horse Hill. This was not the judicial review itself but a hearing to decide whether to proceed to the full judicial review. Given Reigate & Banstead Council's commitment to tackling climate change (as expressed at previous Council meetings during motions brought by the Green party) and the Council's responsibility to protect the local environment, would the Council like to join me in wishing every success for the court action brought by the activist and former Councillor?

Response:

This Council is indeed committed to tackling climate change. However, this relates to the judicial review of a planning decision made by another local authority which will be subject to the usual legal processes of the court system. For this reason, it would not be appropriate for the Council to offer support in this case.

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

Question 3: Air Pollution

Public Health England publish public health profiles which includes the indicator for particulate air pollution at District and Borough Council level. In 2019 Surrey Air Alliance commissioned consultants to carry out county-wide air pollution dispersal modelling, source apportionment and local mortality calculations for each Local Authority in Surrey. Please advise whether these reports have been published across the county including for our Borough, and if so, how we compare against other districts in Surrey in terms of the three factors, especially mortality; and finally, what specific measures are recommended to reduce air pollution locally including in Redhill and other town centres in the Borough, either at source or by reducing exposure. If the reports have not been published what other evidence is being gathered and analysed concerning air pollution in our Borough as a whole or in specific AQMAs?

Response:

The Surrey Air Alliance report is due for publication in April 2020 and looks at the impact of particulate pollution and nitrogen dioxide combined rather than just particulate pollution. The report is intended to provide the science to underpin any future air quality policies at either the Borough or county level, and as such makes no specific recommendations about reducing pollution. In terms of other evidence, the Council has an ongoing monitoring programme measuring pollution within all of the Council's air quality management areas (AQMAs) to examine compliance with air quality limit values and also long term trends, and at certain background sites around the Borough to look at regional changes and trends in pollutant concentrations.

With regards to Redhill, the 2019 monitoring data will be out later this year, but data from 2018 indicates that the air quality standards for nitrogen dioxide were met at all sites within the Redhill air quality management area, where there is what is termed 'relevant exposure' i.e. essentially where people live.

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

Question 4: Arts Funding

The Council has agreed to subsidise the loss-making Harlequin and Waller Studio for at least the next two years, which would seem to be good news for the Arts. However, the Council has also cut all funding from the Borough of Reigate & Banstead Arts Council, a voluntary body that represents more than 50 local organisations devoted to drama, music, visual and creative arts. This means that the Council – which had previously asked the BRBAC to act as a central point of contact for the distribution of small grants to member groups - will now have to individually assess the numerous grant applications from Arts Council member organisations. Can the Council please explain the inconsistency of funding the Harlequin while removing the Arts Council grant; how having to deal with multiple grant applications separately can possibly save time or money; and whether it considers that the closure of small arts organisations that might result from the loss of funding will be an acceptable outcome, given that Arts activities are well-known for improving community cohesion and mental health?

Response:

It is disappointing to read that the heart of the arts in our Borough, The Harlequin Theatre, is so simply dismissed here as "loss making". The theatre provides so many opportunities for so many people to enjoy the arts; from avid pantomime goers to fans of dance, the movies and music. Not to forget special events for example dementia and autism friendly screenings and a craft fair. Even more recently the Harlequin complex has become a regular venue for a Baby Cafe. So please be assured that the Council values the role of the Harlequin and is proud to have supported the theatre complex for some 30 years and will continue to do so into the future. Over the last two years one of the priorities for the Community Partnerships Team has been to review the way the Council funds the voluntary sector. The purpose has not been to make cuts but to maximise the value of the services delivered to our residents.

During 2019 the Portfolio Holder, together with Officers from the Community Partnerships Team held a number of Funding Surgeries where we met with voluntary organisations from across the Borough, including the Borough of Reigate and Banstead Arts Council (BRBAC), to fully discuss the funding review. Recommendations from the review were agreed by the Executive in June 2019.

The Council has a medium grant fund budget of £50,000 for which we received 15 applications totalling over £130,000. Successful applicants have been able to demonstrate a close alignment to the Council's corporate priorities and clearly show the impact of the expenditure of public funds. In addition, all successful grant applicants have secured at least some, and often very significant, match funding from other sources for their proposals. Unfortunately, BRBAC has not been able to provide either evidence of impact or match funding to us.

The question infers an inconsistency where clearly there is none. The Council remains committed to supporting and nurturing the arts at all levels throughout our Borough. For example, through our recent support of the "Include Choir" which develops Wellbeing through public performance amongst its members who are some of the most vulnerable in our community. And with our support of the "RB Writes" creative writing competition for young people aged 10-14 from across the Borough and the newly developing "RB Fringe" arts festival.

Neither the Portfolio Holder nor the Community Partnerships Team is aware of any arts organisations at risk of closure. Throughout the funding review, both have recommended voluntary organisations to engage with their local elected Members not only to demonstrate the value of the work they are doing within our communities but to discuss Members' endorsement of applications for small grants funding. In addition, we would actively encourage the BRBAC or indeed any of its member arts organisations based in our Borough to contact Voluntary Action Reigate & Banstead who offer funding searches to voluntary and community groups in our Borough.

We would also like to raise awareness of the Community Fund for Reigate & Banstead which awards grants to voluntary organisations and to the Council's in-kind support offer which we launched last year – including access to "at cost" printing services. Both of which are alternative avenues through which voluntary organisations can seek support. The Portfolio Holder would also confirm his commitment to the role of the arts in Wellbeing and mental health through his continued membership of the all-party parliamentary group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing.

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

Question 5: Recycling

Most of the litter bins in Reigate and Banstead only have an option to 'throw away' as opposed to recycle things that can be recycled. The government published an aspiration to increase recycling in public places back in 2013. In light of this, and the push to raise standards in this area, will the Council review its number of litter bins in public places and introduce bins that enable separation of recycling and litter as standard in well used public places including Redhill Town Centre, Battlebridge, Memorial Park and Redhill Common. This should both discourage littering and make sure our residents have the opportunity to recycle wherever they are, not just at home. In addition, can the seated planters in Redhill town centre be filled to the top as many of them seem to trap litter, and cleaned out whenever the bins are emptied in the town centre?

Response:

We are trialling 'Big Belly' bins at Earlswood Lakes which we will review in due course and which could have Borough wide application and include a recycling option. These bins are solar powered, compact waste & recycling therefore increasing the capacity of the bin, this then reduces the frequency of emptying and provides efficiencies in the cleansing team. We are awaiting the findings from our consultants on the Environmental Sustainability Strategy document and Action Plan to inform/support our future focus around recycling options in our town Centre.

We have already identified that the design of the planters, which form part of the street furniture in Redhill town centre, is challenging for the Cleansing Team to manage. There are 5 of these running along Station Road from McDonalds towards the town centre. We are working on a solution which unfortunately is more complicated than simply 'filling in', which preserves the trees and allows for ease of cleansing. This solution is imminent. As mentioned in the previous question we will be support the Great British Spring Clean which supports the message around recycling.

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

Question 6: Tree Planting

Surrey County Council has recently pledged a plan for at least 1.2 million trees to be planted across Surrey. If all borough's and districts were to make commitments to deliver this based on land area, this would equate to an additional 93,000 trees in Reigate and Banstead. At typical planting densities for native trees this would require around 40 to 100 hectares of land. And this is assumed to be in addition to replacement planting associated with development or ash die-back. In light of this, please can you confirm how engaged the Council is with this pledge and what target Reigate and Banstead Borough Council is proposing for planting of new trees in this borough, both in terms of land area and numbers of trees to be planted:

- a) In total.
- b) What land has already been identified to the council's knowledge, including any land that is owned, leased or managed by the council.
- c) Alongside the budget set aside by Surrey County Council what budget and/or other resources has Reigate and Banstead Borough Council allocated to this.

Response:

Thank you for your question. I can confirm that as a Council we are fully engaged in the tree planting pledge. We have been in conversation with Surrey County Council, The Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust regarding this initiative and will continue to work closely with them. Government targets for urban tree cover is currently 20%, and at present, Reigate & Banstead as a borough has 27.8% coverage. As a County, Surrey is the most wooded in the UK. At this time, some sites have already been identified within Reigate & Banstead which are suitable for tree planting, such as the Riverside Green Chain in Horley, Priory Park, Reigate, Memorial Park, Redhill, Banstead Woods, and Colesmead Road, Redhill. In addition to those identified thus far, we are continuing to seek out additional suitable sites for planting.

Alongside any new tree planting initiatives, it is important that our existing tree stock is managed effectively to ensure its continued longevity. We are achieving this through our recent investment in the recruitment of an in-house arboricultural team, who are managing the tree stock more proactively. The Council's Greenspaces team are also working alongside volunteer groups who have expressed their intention to assist in the delivery of the tree planting pledge initiative.

In addition to the budgets set by Surrey County Council, an initial budget of £12,000 from CIL funding has been allocated to purchase trees, together with Section 106 funding and potential funding schemes available from the Woodland Trust. Going forwards, it is our intention to plan our future budget allocations to meet our Environmental Sustainability policy objectives.

Councillor Blacker asked the **Executive Member for Place and Economic Prosperity, Councillor Humphreys** the following question:

Question 7: Reigate Post Office

As you are aware Reigate High Street has lost three banks in the space of approximately twelve months. First Santander closed and then one of the major banks, the National Westminster, closed in the middle of last year. Then to my surprise, one of the oldest banks in Reigate, Lloyds has shut their doors. I find it extraordinary that a town as vibrant as Reigate should lose three banks. To make matters worse we are now told that the Post Office will close on March 3rd. My question is therefore, what is the Council doing and what can it do to help reverse this trend and at the very least ensure that none of the two remaining major banks close. I and other Reigate Councillors together with our MP are trying to find a location for a new Post Office.

Can the Council please assist Reigate in finding a new venue for the Post Office?

Response:

The closure of bank branches is part of a wider trend and reflects the change of behaviour of customers and less reliance on counter services. We are working with local agents to find alternative occupiers for these important buildings to ensure on-going town centre vibrancy. With regard to the Post Office closure we are working with the local MP and other local stakeholders to help find a new venue for the Post Office and hope to be able to help in a successful outcome. WH Smiths have been approached to see if the Reigate branch might be a suitable location, and we are also working with the County Council to see if they might have appropriate accommodation. I know that local Councillors are also working hard to find a new venue.