

# Reigate and Banstead Borough Council

Meeting of Council 28 July 2022

## Questions by Members

Verbal responses to be given at the meeting			
	Question by	To be answered by	Subject
1.	Councillor Walsh	Councillor Schofield, the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance & Governance	Council reserves
2.	Councillor Essex	Councillor Schofield, the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance & Governance	Charities paying business rates
3.	Councillor McKenna	Councillor Lewanski, The Executive Member for Corporate Policy & Resources	Support for fuel bill costs
4.	Councillor Ritter	Councillor Sachdeva, on behalf of Councillor Mrs Bramhall, the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services	Children's play areas
5.	Councillor Sinden	Councillor Humphreys, on behalf of Councillor Mrs Bramhall, the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services	Allotments
6.	Councillor Booton	Councillor Schofield, on behalf of Councillor Mrs Bramhall, the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services	Recycling
7.	Councillor Chandler	Councillor Biggs, the Executive Member for Planning Policy & Place Delivery	Green Belt protection
8.	Councillor Torra	Councillor Biggs, the Executive Member for Planning Policy & Place Delivery	Demolition of affordable homes

9.	Councillor Chester	Councillor Biggs, the Executive Member for Planning Policy & Place Delivery	Gatwick consultation
10.	Councillor Proudfoot	Councillor Archer, the Executive Member for Investment & Companies	Commercial venture funding
11.	Councillor Baker	Councillor Sachdeva, the Executive Member for Leisure & Culture	Swimming at Horley Leisure Centre
12.	Councillor Stevens	Councillor Neame, the Executive Member for Housing & Support	Safeguarding
13.	Councillor Buttironi	Councillor Schofield, the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance & Governance	Horley Network Rail car park income
<b>Written responses to be given after the meeting</b>			
14.	Councillor Sinden	Councillor Ashford, the Executive Member for Community Partnerships	Cost of Living Officer
15.	Councillor Baker	Councillor Sachdeva, the Executive Member for Leisure & Culture	Christmas lights working group

**Councillor Walsh** will ask the **Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance & Governance, Councillor Schofield**, the following question:

**Question 1: Council reserves**

Over the course of this year comments have been made, from various quarters, about the healthy level of reserves that this Council has maintained through careful stewardship of its finances. Suggestions have recently been made that substantial, unbudgeted, sums should be given to private landlords and property owners to improve their properties for such purposes as improved recycling facilities or increased insulation. Could the Executive Member for Finance & Governance confirm the current levels of reserves held by the Council and what they are intended to be used for?

**Councillor Essex** will ask the **Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance & Governance, Councillor Schofield**, the following question:

**Question 2: Charities paying business rates**

In around 2018, the Council changed the way it funds local charities with a small core of charities retaining core funding and the remaining charities instead invited to bid for small or medium sized grants (which have been suspended for this year).

However, those charities that are no longer receiving core funding from the Council are subject to pay up to 20% business rates. This includes Furnistore, for which I am a trustee.

Please can you confirm how many charities are now paying business rates that were not paying them before and what the total cost is this year for those charities as a result.

**Councillor McKenna** will ask the **Executive Member for Corporate Policy & Resources, Councillor Lewanski**, the following question:

### **Question 3: Support for fuel bill costs**

With the huge increases in prices of energy and foods, many of our local residents are struggling to pay their bills and this situation is likely to be significantly worse as the colder weather approaches and the energy cap is removed, allowing energy costs to rise even more sharply.

There is an opportunity for our Council to lead the work on helping residents just as was done during the pandemic. Whilst it is known that there will be more availability of grants to enable people to secure improvements that will save money on their bills, residents will need advice on an impartial basis. Unfortunately, there will be ceilings on available funding as with many grant-aided initiatives. Furthermore, there will potentially be an increase in scams, such as dodgy installations or overcharging so our residents will need to be supported here.

It is therefore hoped that our Council will not only liaise with Surrey County Council's Fuel Poverty Team but will undertake its own direct measures. Could the Council advise on the sort of measures being considered, in particular;

- Setting up a Retrofit Unit to aid with advice for residents on what are the best solutions to reduce fuel poverty. For instance, PV panels and double glazing are not always the optimal way ahead because there is heat loss through walls and roofs.
- Adopting procurement best practice, advice notes and guides to protect residents from scams and other bad practices.
- Bulk buying and reducing unit costs so that savings can be passed onto residents.
- Increasing training for local fitters in liaison with East Surrey College.

**Councillor Ritter** will ask **Councillor Sachdeva** on behalf of the **Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Mrs Bramhall**, the following question:

**Question 4: Children's play areas**

Please can the Executive Member give an outline of the rolling plan for children's play area refurbishments, the expected length of time between planned upgrades within the current budget envelope and how residents and playground users are consulted as part of the process of play area upgrades?

**Councillor Sinden** will ask **Councillor Humphreys** on behalf of the **Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Mrs Bramhall**, the following question:

**Question 5: Allotments**

I have just completed the Council's Carbon Literacy training for Councillors. This highlighted the value of allotments in allowing residents to be more self-sufficient, to have more fresh fruit and vegetables, and reduce food and packaging waste for the Council to collect.

Please can you list the waiting time for an allotment for the different sites across the borough and how the cost for an allotment now compares to five years ago.

**Councillor Booton** will ask **Councillor Schofield** on behalf of the **Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Mrs Bramhall**, the following question:

**Question 6: Recycling**

Noting the excellent work that our recycling teams do, what is the Council doing to increase the types of items that can be recycled from our kerbsides, including, amongst other things, items that are currently recyclable at supermarkets and through the national Terracycle scheme?

**Councillor Chandler** will ask the **Executive Member for Planning Policy & Place Delivery, Councillor Biggs**, the following question:

**Question 7: Green Belt protection**

Please can the portfolio holder indicate what is being done to protect the Green Belt where the Sustainable Urban Extensions in the Development Management Plan have been located. This extract from the Housing Monitor Report: "In accordance with DMP Policy MLS1, the allocated sustainable urban extensions are not required to be released for development at this time. The Council however remains committed to maintaining an on-going dialogue with those involved in promoting and delivering the allocated sustainable urban extension sites and will actively support and encourage planning performance agreements and/or the preparation of joint development briefs (where appropriate) for the sites in order to facilitate their timely delivery upon release."

**Councillor Torra** will ask the **Executive Member for Planning Policy & Place Delivery, Councillor Biggs**, the following question:

**Question 8: Demolition of affordable homes**

Please can you confirm how many affordable homes have been demolished in Reigate and Banstead since 2012, including homes lost in the redevelopment of sites, such as in Merstham?

**Councillor Chester** will ask the **Executive Member for Planning Policy & Place Delivery, Councillor Biggs**, the following question:

**Question 9: Gatwick consultation**

Please will the Council make publicly available its response to the latest Gatwick consultation, in light of the greater impact these latest changes to the proposed development would have on Horley residents, with particular reference to the partial destruction of the widely used Riverside Garden Park.

Please can the Council also confirm that its response has ensured that we as a Council are able to meet our sustainability and carbon reduction targets, and is line with progress towards similar targets nationally, with particular reference to elements such as widening roads to allow for greater traffic flow rather than focusing on public transport improvements.

**Councillor Proudfoot** will ask the **Executive Member for Investment & Companies, Councillor Archer**, the following question:

**Question 10: Commercial venture funding**

Please can the Council confirm the amount of money it has spent to date on in its business venture for a Crematorium (previously referred to as Project Baseball) and the amount of money lost so far in its business venture called Pathway to Care.

**Councillor Baker** will ask the **Executive Member for Leisure & Culture, Councillor Sachdeva**, the following question:

**Question 11: Swimming at Horley Leisure Centre**

I have been contacted by several residents regarding swimming at Horley Leisure Centre. Prior to Covid, pool users could simply turn up and use the facilities as required. During Covid a booking system came into force, limiting the number of swimmers and generally reducing accessibility for residents. At the time this was understandable, however, the system is still in force, the pool is regularly understaffed and is being operated well below capacity. What checks and measures are in place to ensure that 'Better' are fulfilling their contractual obligations to our residents.

**Councillor Stevens** will ask the **Executive Member for Housing & Support, Councillor Neame**, the following question:

**Question 12: Safeguarding**

Recently, we have seen an investigation conclude that many young children and vulnerable individuals were targeted and abused over a long period. Although local authorities had various opportunities to act against the many perpetrators, the local Police, Social Services and relevant Councils failed to do so. This follows a disturbing trend as concluded in similar reports from Rochdale and Rotherham in recent years.

Whilst these examples are found in towns hundreds of miles away from Reigate and Banstead, as a Councillor it is shocking to see the many failures of these local authorities to act to safeguard youngsters and ensure perpetrators were brought to justice for their actions. Please could I ask the Executive Member what safeguarding policies we have in place for those children and vulnerable adults who may be at risk. Additionally, if any concerns of a similar nature were brought to this Council, what course of action would we undertake?

**Councillor Buttironi** will ask the **Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance & Governance, Councillor Schofield**, the following question:

**Question 13: Horley Network Rail car park income**

Please can the Executive Member advise whether there is a proposal for income from the Network Rail car park in Horley to be used for the benefit of the Borough and its residents? Please provide details of this proposal and any agreed actions or activity in this regard.

## **WRITTEN RESPONSES TO BE PROVIDED AFTER THE MEETING**

**Councillor Sinden** will ask the **Executive Member for Community Partnerships, Councillor Ashford**, the following question:

### **Question 14: Cost of Living Officer**

The rising cost of living is already impacting the lives of many residents. Some have said to me that the Council Tax is too high and is causing hardship to many.

Raven Housing Trust is supporting their tenants to monitor electricity use and have provided a cost-of-living payment. In addition, there are an increasing number of food banks and food hubs used across the borough. I have heard that the London Borough of Wandsworth has a cost-of-living support package to help with the cost-of-living crisis. This includes providing an advice hub in partnership with its Citizens Advice Bureau, requiring all Council contracts to pay at least a local living wage and providing a cost-of-living payment to all pensioners on their Council Tax support scheme.

Does the Council have, or have plans to employ, a cost-of-living officer who works with residents, not just to deal with fuel poverty but also rising food costs, which are already being seen on a weekly basis when shopping?

**Councillor Baker** will ask the **Executive Member for Leisure & Culture, Councillor Sachdeva**, the following question:

**Question 15: Christmas lights working group**

In cities, towns and villages across the UK, Christmas lights are a common sight, popular with residents and an important part of our national identity. I am part of a group of volunteers in Horley which has been decorating our town centre for many years, including fundraising, repairing lights, organising insurance and everything else that goes along with it.

New regulations and required certifications are making it very difficult for us to continue with this tradition. Costs are prohibitive to the point where this may be the last year we put the lights up.

Though streetlighting is dealt with by Surrey County Council and Skanska, would Reigate and Banstead Council be prepared to set up a working group to look into ways in which we could make the festive lighting process easier and encourage residents to get involved.

This is a pattern being repeated up and down the country. It would be great to see our Council taking a lead on this emotive issue.