

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday 27th July 2017

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WestBerkshire
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Public Questions as specified in the Council's Procedure Rules of the Constitution

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holders for Children, Education & Young People and Culture & Environment by Mrs Diana Pattenden:

“Could you please tell me what the Council’s intentions are for the future of the Waterside Youth and Community Centre in relation to its use and the current state of the building’s repair?”

The Portfolio Holders for Children, Education & Young People and Culture & Environment answered:

The Council has had a long standing commitment to refurbish the site and potentially open the facility for the wider benefit of children and young people in Newbury. The issue facing the Council has been affordability. The Council has not been in the position to fund and resource such a project and has been looking for potential partners to assist.

I am pleased to be able to say that we are now in the advanced stages of negotiation with two other parties who are prepared to come forward to run the building and provide resources to refurbish it, and which will ensure a continuing community youth use for the Waterside Centre. These discussions are currently at a contractual stage, so it would not be appropriate to release further details at this stage. However, we will be delighted to do so at the appropriate time.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Mrs Diana Pattenden asked the following supplementary question:

“It’s encouraging what you’ve said. The supplementary question is: Can the Council provide categorical assurance the building is secured for community use and that it will not be sold for commercial gain?”

The Portfolio Holders for Children, Education & Young People and Culture & Environment answered:

It is the intention for the building to remain for community use.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport by Mr Simon Pike:

“What is the cost to the Council of the survey on public transport and roads, undertaken on its behalf by Ipsos Mori?”

As Mr Pike was not in attendance at the meeting, a written reply would be sent to him.

Members' Questions as specified in the Council's Procedure Rules of the Constitution

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People by Councillor Lee Dillon:

"As the planned catchment area for Highwood Copse means that pupils have to walk past the Willows school first will the Council review the boundaries of both of these schools to address that?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People answered:

Highwood Copse has been built to ensure this authority can meet the demand for school places for primary aged children in the Newbury area. Its purpose is to ensure sufficiency of places due to pupil number pressures across Newbury and therefore there is no planned catchment area, so I am unsure how to answer your question Councillor Dillon.

The Chairman asked: *"Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?"*

Councillor Lee Dillon asked the following supplementary question:

"That's not what we were led to believe from Officer briefings around a catchment area. We were led to believe that one had already been established and that children would have to walk past The Willows to get to Highwood Copse? Hence the reason for the question".

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People answered:

I'm really quite surprised by this as it's a question I've been asked quite a lot and Highwood Copse will not have a defined geographical catchment area.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships by Councillor Lee Dillon:

"What plans do the Council have to enable the housing of large amounts of residents after an emergency situation?"

The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:

The Council has a Major Incident Plan which is the overarching response plan detailing the coordination of resources and staff during an emergency response. We have also developed a number of supporting plans to assist us with our response, which focus on supporting displaced people, including the Rest Centre Plan, Vulnerable People Plan, Assistance Centre Plan and Recovery Plans to name but a few.

In outline, the response of the Council when faced with a number of people who have been evacuated or displaced as a result of an emergency falls into two main areas:

Firstly, short term: this normally involves placing people into rest centres for a period of time and delivering immediate support to them.

Long term: the aspiration with any emergency is to move people back to their own homes as soon as possible. This may, however, not be possible for some or all of the displaced people and as a result the Council, through its Recovery Coordination Group, would be managing the process of rehousing those affected.

I'd like to add that myself and a number of people know we've got a good Emergency Planning Team in the Council, which has been tested in real and exercise situations on a number of occasions, not least in the floods in Thatcham 10 years ago.

The Chairman asked: *"Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?"*

Councillor Lee Dillon asked the following supplementary question:

"Obviously we've had the recent fire and we had an excellent answer from Councillor Cole at a previous meeting on that to reassure residents, and I found this plan touched on the complex issue of the actual rehousing side after the immediate emergency and given some of the facilities we have in West Berkshire, were a disaster to happen, I am pleased to hear that we have plans in place. Would the Portfolio Holder be happy to share those with me so I can look at them in more detail?"

The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:

Absolutely.

(c) Question submitted to the Deputy Leader of Council, and Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure by Councillor Lee Dillon:

"There has been a reduction in homelessness across the district according to recent reports. Are the Council now more selective about how they classify someone as homeless?"

The Deputy Leader of Council, and Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:

I am trying to answer the question and cover your actual question, but I have a feeling that it might not be the answer that you are looking for.

The definition of who qualifies as a homeless person is specified in the Housing Act 1996 (s.175). This definition is broadly that a person should be considered homeless if they have no accommodation anywhere which is available for their household to occupy and which they have a legal right to occupy. Further to this, a person is considered to be homeless if their accommodation is not reasonable for them to continue to occupy and there are a number of things that could make a property unreasonable for a household to continue to occupy, including being at risk of violence, the accommodation being unaffordable, severe overcrowding or extreme disrepair. A person will also be classified as homeless if they have accommodation which is reasonable for their household to occupy and which they have a legal right to occupy, but that they cannot secure entry to (if the landlord changes the locks, for example).

The Housing Service always use the statutory definition of homelessness whenever data is produced, but it is worth considering that other agencies and the media may use a different definition of homelessness.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Councillor Lee Dillon asked the following supplementary question:

“I appreciate the Council may have to use the definition as prescribed in the Act, but if the Council was to look at homelessness in a broader sense, do you feel that we have a larger homelessness population than our figures record?”

The Deputy Leader of Council, and Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:

Are you referring to homeless people or rough sleepers Councillor Dillon?

Councillor Lee Dillon answered: “To both. I think to the general public, if you haven’t got anywhere to sleep you’re homeless.”

The Deputy Leader of Council, and Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:

I think I’ve given you the answer in the first part. With regard to rough sleepers, we do an annual count on those. The last count was done in November of last year and that number was 14. I also think you should be aware that there is a group which covers the Voluntary Sector, West Berkshire Council Officers and the Police which is working with a very small cohort of rough sleepers called ‘Making Every Adult Matter’ and that is to ensure that we work quite closely with that small group who have got a number of issues to ensure that we can progress them through from being rough sleepers into having accommodation and access to other services.
