

Questions and Answers

Council
Tuesday 3 July 2018

West Berkshire Council is committed to equality of opportunity. We will treat everyone with respect, regardless of race, disability, gender, age, religion or sexual orientation.

If you require this information in a different format or translation, please contact Moira Fraser on telephone (01635) 519045.



WestBerkshire
C O U N C I L

This page is intentionally left blank

Council Meeting

3 July 2018

Questions and Answers



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

(a) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Mr Stephen Masters:

Question:

"With the delay to implementation of the 'Bin Tax', will council delay the rise in allowances and expenses to minimise and offset the impact of lower revenues?"

The Leader of the Council answered:

Thank you Chairman. Thank you Mr Masters.

Unfortunately, it's difficult to give you an answer as no tax is proposed as the premise of the question is false. Now you do not make clear which allowances you are referring to. However, I'll make some assumptions and try give you the best answer I can.

Like many councils across the country we are operating on a much smaller budget than we were a few years ago, whilst simultaneously dealing with a much greater demand for social care services. A stunning statistic is that sixty percent of the Council's resources now get spent on three percent of the population. Now that the Revenue Support Grant is all but phased out, all costs of providing Council services falls locally, whereas only a few years ago a third came from the Treasury.

As we take our responsibility and obligation to look after the most vulnerable in society seriously, the reality is there is very little resource left for discretionary services, new solutions are needed. Libraries has transitioned to new community based models, regrettably the green waste composting service were having to raise revenue. We introduced this service at a time when resources were more plentiful and clearly it is a service that many value.

We've explored many avenues to keep this service as it is, and is thus with regret, that we, like other councils, Conservative, Labour and Lib Dem, are having to introduce charging. As the Green Party have pointed out on social media, both parties represented in this chamber, supported the principle of introducing a charge for this service. Yes we have made a difficult decision, balancing the books as we do in these fiscally tough times requires tough choices. Our neighbours, Reading, have not been willing to make those tough decisions, and now have a black hole of seven million pounds and the auditors are not willing to sign the accounts off. Labours financial mismanagement is rebounding on the people of Reading.

We can all pray to the gallery in hope that the day of financial of predictional reckoning will never come. The Lib Dems nationally did this over student fees, but got found out.

If a charge for this service is not introduced, we all need to ask ourselves, what will be cut? That's a serious question and the answer hinted at in your question is a smoke screen, as the numbers don't add up, nor do they correlate with what the Green Party's councillors do elsewhere.

When you act as a Councillor and be an aid to take up key roles in the running of an authority is something that should be available to all, not just those who can afford to do so. For many, particularly younger people, taking time off work and away from a career can be very difficult.

Not all employers are accommodating. Our allowances are not set by ourselves, but by an independent panel. Recently based on the workload and responsibility, they revised some allowances up and others down. The net impact was three-thousand seven-hundred pounds. Outside of this process, due to an additional Liberal Democrat councillor being elected, the Liberal Democrats are entitled to an additional responsibility allowance of two-thousand two-hundred, which I understand is paid to their deputy leader. As it is, the basic allowance is the lowest in Berkshire and also one-third less than the Green councillors received, in Brighton, in 2015 when they controlled the council.

After the next election, this additional cost of three-thousand seven-hundred pounds will be dwarfed by sixty-six thousand pounds saving in allowances as we move from fifty-two to forty-three members.

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?”*

Mr Masters asked the following supplementary question:

“If this “bin tax” is merely to cover the costs to the composting service, do you agree that we can commit to the principle of returning any additional funds raised could become popular and with high revenue to returning that to council tax payers”

The Leader of the Council answered:

Thank you for that question.

I'm afraid again that the actual situation is that were not actually allowed to make a profit out of this charge, in essence that answers that question.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste by Mr David Marsh:

Question:

“Does the council's contract with Veolia allow residents of West Berkshire to dispose of garden waste in their black bins, as advised by the current portfolio holder at the executive meeting on June 14?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:

I would hope then that residents will subscribe to the new service, if they don't choose to recycle their garden waste and they have space, they are not prevented from putting it in their black bin which has always been the case. We do of course encourage those residents who have the facilities to compost, to compost their own garden waste at home.

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?”*

Mr Marsh asked the following supplementary question:

“If residents actually followed this course of action, what would Councillor Cole, estimate will be the environmental impact of the consequent increase of landfill, in particular the amount of methane gas released into the atmosphere?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:

In actual fact we send very little to landfill Mr Marsh. What we do is, the residual waste is sent mainly for energy from waste recycling, so very little goes to landfill and I would not envisage our landfill charges and amount going to landfill to increase significantly.

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste by Mr Stephen Masters:

Question:

“With the delay to the implementation of the Green waste 'Bin Tax' what impact does council expect this to have on its revenue projections?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:

As the Leader has already mentioned in his previous answer, this is not a tax, it is a discretionary charge for an opt-in service. The unexpected delay in the Council's plan to charge for garden waste will be a one-off cost in year of around £150,000.

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?”*

Mr Masters asked the following supplementary question:

“I have, along with my Green colleagues, done a lot of surveys and questions out in the constituencies and a large number of people said that they are going to return their bins, because they are going to refuse to pay and not opt in. What plans do you have to facilitate and store the large number of green wheelie bins that hundreds of people we have spoken to, stated that they will be returning them? Might I suggest an art installation or a (bow ex boy) maybe?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:

Mr Masters I think that what people say and what people do are two totally different things, so I will reserve my answer until I see just how many people are wanting to return their green bins. People can retain their green bins to put their food waste in and that will be emptied as part of the normal recycling collection. So I would strongly advise all residents to retain their green bins if they want to dispose of their food waste, if they don't want to compost it. So the green bins will not in my view, be redundant.

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste by Mr David Marsh:

Question:

“What financial impact does the current portfolio holder expect as a result of her advice to West Berkshire residents to dispose of garden waste in their black bins free of charge,

bearing in mind that the £50 green bin charge that was due to be introduced on 1 July was, or so we were told, going to bring in £900,000 in the financial year 2018/19"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:

Thank you Mr Marsh, the Council agreed to charge for garden waste at its meeting back in March, with an expected roll out from the first of July, which was planned to deliver part year £575,000 in additional income. Against the full year target of £900,000 pounds.

The unexpected delay of implementation of the new charge, will be a one off cost of around £150,000. We're not expecting any impact on this position as we hope that residents will continue to recycle garden waste by subscribing to the service or by using our recycling centres at Newtown road and Padworth, or as I've previously mentioned composting at home. And as I've already said to Mr Masters, I also need to remind residents that they can continue to use their green wheelie bins for food waste disposal free of charge.

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?"*

Mr Marsh asked the following supplementary question:

"Regardless to the income generated, would you agree with the BBC that this charge is an example of rip-off Britain, introduced for no other reason to allow you to increase council tax by the maximum five-point-nine percent, than slap an additional payment on top?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:

I would certainly disagree with the BBC, Mr Marsh, and if they were in our position of having to make significant savings in areas which affect the most vulnerable, I'm sure that if they were in our position they would be slapping on far more increases than we are allowed to do as a local authority.

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

No Member Questions were received.