

COUNCIL – 10 FEBRUARY 2022

QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 10 FEBRUARY 2022

The following questions have been received under Standing Order 8.1. The draft replies, which are subject to amendment, are set out below.

“Councillors are thanked for their questions.”

1. Question from Councillor J Brown

“At the O&S during the Green Book item I was pleased to highlight the affordable housing numbers as we had exceeded the target for the year, the first time in several years. The Green Book also reports different numbers for affordable housing elsewhere.

Please would the portfolio holder explain why there are different published numbers and how they are derived.”

Reply from Councillor D Harlow

“The number of Affordable Homes completed this year is very encouraging and I am pleased that you have highlighted this. The increase in the number of Affordable Homes this year is mainly (not exclusively) due to larger developments at Broadoaks, the Sheerwater regeneration and our fantastic new Extra Care scheme at Hale End Court.

The Green Book monitors two sources of Affordable Housing indicators - one by Planning Services and the other by Housing. The Planning indicators monitor newly created dwellings which are logged as Affordable Housing upon receipt of planning permission. This almost always means that they are secured by S106 Agreement or a Unilateral Undertaking. The Housing figures also capture street property purchases and/or new affordable homes delivered outside of the planning process (for example, Waterman House which was converted under permitted development rights).

The Green Book already includes an explanatory note of the different sources between the two figures to avoid confusion. The difference in the figures is therefore due to the different ways of monitoring, plus the timing of when they are monitored. The Planning indicators are prescribed by Planning Policy/guidance and should be monitored accordingly. Collectively, the two figures help provide a comprehensive overview of total Affordable Housing provision over time. Given that the figures are monitored separately, it does not lead to any double counting.”

2. Question from Councillor W P Forster

“I understand the deadline for applying for the Green Flag Awards was 14th February. Please can the Council confirm if it submitted any bids for Green Flag status for any of the Borough’s parks or open spaces? If so, which one or ones?”

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

“No new applications have been submitted for Green Flag awards at this time. Following on from the previous Motion regarding Green Flag Award, Officers have been working with Serco to identify areas for improvement in Woking Park, taking guidance from the Green Flag Award criteria, and are preparing an action plan for these proposed enhancements. The intention is to bring the park in line with requirements for the Green Flag award in the future. Some additional planting is planned for this spring, with other priorities for the coming year currently being discussed. Where possible these improvements will be achieved through the main environmental services contract with Serco, and existing revenue budgets. Where additional funding is required,

neighbourhood CIL funding could be considered. Officers will share details of these proposals with local Councillors in due course. Once the programme for Woking Park is in place, this approach could then be replicated at other sites so that we can work towards more of our parks meeting the requirements in the future.”

3. Question from Councillor W P Forster

“Putting aside our shared frustrating with South Western Railway, I am pleased work as started on improving the underpass under Woking Station.

Please will the Council consider also working with Network Rail and South Western Railways to revamp West Byfleet’s Station subway?”

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

“We would be pleased to work with Network Rail, South Western railways and other partners on any project should the opportunity arise. Practically, there are no such plans to revamp West Byfleet’s station subway at the current time unless the rail operators have other plans they have not shared with the Council to improve their structure.”

4. Question from Councillor D Roberts

“From 27th January, a day on which 338 deaths (within 28 days of a positive test) were reported, the government lifted restrictions including the use of face coverings in indoor venues. What does the council intend to do to encourage the continued use of masks in indoor settings in venues where it can control or influence policy?”

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

“The wearing of face coverings is no longer a legal requirement in England. However, government guidance states that they are recommended within indoor places which are crowded and where you may come into contact with people you do not normally meet. The Council endorses this by;

- asking staff and visitors to continue wearing face coverings when moving around Council buildings;
- publishing frequent public messages reminding residents and visitors to wear face coverings (and observe other safety measures) on social media; and
- retaining and positioning signs reminding people to wear face coverings at entrances to public places such as shopping centres and leisure centres.

The government have made clear that they are now asking individuals to take responsibility for their own safety with regard to Covid, but the Council will continue to encourage safe behaviours as described above.”

5. Question from Councillor L M N Morales

“Woking Borough Council has produced a graphic video saying the council has borrowed money for sustainable energy, illustrated with a wind turbine. How many functioning wind turbines does Woking Borough Council own?”

Reply from Councillor K M Davis

“Neither the Council or ThamesWey currently own or operate any wind turbines in Woking borough. The turbine image used within the video is an often used, and easy to decipher, image to represent renewable energy.

Further to the cross party climate and ecological emergency declaration made in July 2019, the Council has pledged to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2030 across its own estate and by 2050 or before across the wider borough. A continuing ambition of the Climate Change Working Group is to consider the role of renewable energy

technologies, including wind and solar, in decarbonising the Council and borough's energy supply. This objective is captured with the [Renewable Energy Plan](#) which was adopted by the Executive in June 2021. Set within supportive local and national policy frameworks, this Plan includes a range of actions in order to move towards greater proportions of locally generated renewable energy. A number of our Council owned buildings receive sustainable and renewable energy supplies via a mixture of Combined Heat and Power and solar photovoltaics operated by ThamesWey. Supplementing this, the Council's current electricity contract arrangements mean that 100% of our grid-supplied electricity is from [renewable sources](#) (57% of which is derived from wind energy). However, the Renewable Energy Plan looks to increase the proportion of energy derived from local renewable generation."

6. Question from Councillor L M N Morales

"What actions are the council taking to ensure that all EU residents are aware that they are able to register to vote in local elections?"

Reply from Councillor A Azad

"At the beginning of February, a Household Notification Letter accompanied by an elector leaflet was sent to all properties in the Borough. The leaflet provides full details of the Woking Borough Council election being held on 5 May 2022. It clearly outlines which electors on the Electoral Register are entitled to vote in a Borough election which, of course, includes European Union citizens. All electors eligible to vote in the May 2022 election will automatically be issued with a Poll Card from the end of March. The Council's website provides further information on who is eligible to register to vote at a Woking Borough Council election."

7. Question from Councillor I Johnson

"Will the Leader please advise how much has been received by the Council under the Government's Household Support Fund intended to support vulnerable households, and how is it being distributed?"

Reply from Councillor S Ashall

"The Council has received £244,000 for distribution under the Household Support Fund. The eligibility criteria for the scheme was established to focus on local need and to incorporate financial assistance for a broad range of challenges that residents are facing within the scope of the Fund, as follows:

- low income household;
- at risk of homelessness;
- in receipt of means tested benefits; and
- struggling to pay essential household bills or food.

Recipients need to evidence at least one of the above and be a Woking resident. Households with children are eligible for a supermarket voucher of £200 and households without children £100. Energy bills have been paid up to the value of £500. Wider housing needs have been provided on an individual basis, for example support for rent arrears. An internal database has been set up to track spend and avoid duplication. The funds have been shared with Citizen's Advice Woking, who have partnered with the Council in this.

At the time of writing, £164,289.19 has been shared with Woking Households and have included households supported through Citizen's Advice, Family Services, Independent Living, Housing Services and wider colleagues."

8. Question from Councillor A-M Barker

“How many staff, consultants and contractors were employed at Woking Council at

a) 31/3/21

b) Currently

and how many are currently planned for the 2022/23 municipal year.”

Reply from Councillor A Azad

“Please see the table below which sets out staffing numbers in March 2021 and January 2022:

	Full Time Employees	Part Time Employees	Agency Workers	Variable Hours employees
March 2021				
WBC funded	248	103	10	8
Externally funded	53	24	2	4
Head count	301	127	12	12
Total Head count	452			
Full Time Equivalent total	326.8			

	Full Time Employees	Part Time Employees	Agency Workers	Variable Hours employees
January 2022				
WBC funded	256	96	12	8
Externally funded	64	22	2	4
Head count	320	118	14	12
Total Head count	464			
Full Time Equivalent total	335.8			

The Council employs consultants and contractors to cover some posts in the staffing structure on a short term basis or where additional or specific skills or capacity are required. Specialist resources are also employed to support some projects on a full or part time basis. There are consultant budgets within specific services such as Property Services whereby certain services are bought in as required due to the nature of the service.

Budgets are set for the permanent staffing structure and approved for projects which include the costs of consultants and contractors.

A number of the Council’s services are provided through contractors where the Council does not employ an in-house team.

The Council captures these costs annually, and throughout the life of a project, but not the number of individuals on any given date.

The budget for 2022/23 reflects staffing at a Full Time Equivalent of 373 posts. The increase of 33 compared to the 2021/22 budget of 340 includes 26 posts resulting from the insource of the Housing Service and other NHS funded posts.

There will also be contractors and consultants used during the year funded from project and service budgets, and in some cases covering vacant posts. It is not possible to quantify the number of individuals this will represent.”

9. Question from Councillor A-M Barker

“The motion calling for a Financial Review, agreed by Council, and the Statement of Motion as repeated in the EY report states "The report is to contain amongst other things Full details of any grants, loans or other contracts which contain performance conditions, which, if not met, would incur financial penalties for the Council or any of its companies." My understanding is that this clearly defines contingent liability. Does the portfolio holder agree?”

Reply from Councillor S Ashall

“No, as the Leader of the Opposition has already been advised in correspondence following the meeting of the Executive. The term “contingent liabilities” is an accounting term that could have been specified in the Motion, as others were, but was not. I have already undertaken to bring details of any contingent liabilities to the next meeting of the Council as part of the MTFS update. I have offered Cllr Barker a meeting to discuss this issue but so far I have not received any response.”

10. Question from Councillor A-M Barker

“How much did it cost to produce the video which purported to give an overview of the EY financial review agreed by Council?”

Reply from Councillor S Ashall

“The production of the published short film explaining to residents the EY assessment in a clear and transparent manner cost a total of £5,400.44 which covered pre and post production costs, and voiceover costs.”

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REPORT ENDS

