

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL – 28 SEPTEMBER 2023

The following questions have been received under Standing Order 13.1. The draft replies, which are subject to amendment, are set out below.

“Councillors are thanked for their questions.”

1. Question from Councillor Saj Hussain

“Is there capacity at the Eastwood Centre to take on extra swimmers and groups displaced by closing pool in the park?”

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

“Eastwood Leisure Centre has proved to be very popular since it opened in October 2021. Whilst the Eastwood Leisure Centre will have some capacity to take on a proportion of Pool in the Park users, it would not have sufficient capacity to accommodate all displaced users and groups.”

2. Question from Councillor Steve Dorsett

“What are the latest visitor numbers on a monthly and annual basis that use the Pool in the Park every year?”

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

“Please see Appendix 1 for visitor numbers for Pool in the Park and our other leisure facilities.”

3. Question from Councillor Kevin Davis

“Is the new S151 officer contracted inside or outside of IR35?”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“The Section 151 role is a statutory post and as such any appointment is deemed to be an employee of the Council and would be inside of IR35 regulations.”

4. Question from Councillor Josh Brown

“How much CIL developer contributions has WBC received since the S114 was issued?”

Reply from Councillor Liam Lyons

“The Council has received £688,524.56 of CIL contribution since the S114 was issued.”

5. Question from Councillor Saj Hussain

“Surrey county council have taken over highway verges who is responsible for areas which are not highways?”

Reply from Councillor Peter Graves

“A land owner is ultimately responsible for maintaining their land. Woking Borough Council continue to maintain its own land and any land it has historic agreements in place to manage.

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In addition, during this transitional period, Council Officers are supporting Surrey County Council to improve the accuracy of their mapping data (to ensure their new verge maintenance contract covers all SCC land) and investigate any areas where the land ownership appears unclear. These are reviewed on a case by case basis to ensure the most appropriate outcome. Any areas of specific concern can be raised to our Neighbourhood Officers.”

6. Question from Councillor Steve Dorsett

“What alternative options have been investigated to keep Pool in the Park open?”

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

“Freedom Leisure manage the leisure facilities on our behalf and their contract expires in November 2025. To date, discussions are ongoing with Freedom Leisure to review costs and in particular the approach to pricing to consider changes. When compared to other similar pools in the surrounding area, Pool in the Park charges are comparatively cheaper. Re-programming of the pool is also under consideration to make it more commercially viable, but this is likely to displace some current users. In August 2023, the Council submitted a bid to the Sports England Swimming Pool Support Fund, but our bid was immediately declined due to the Council’s financial position and the Section 114 notice. The consultation launching on 2 October 2023 will seek further suggestions on other options.”

7. Question from Councillor Kevin Davis

“The most recent Green Book with Treasury Information featured (March 2023), has no loans from 1989. How was Pool in the Park financed when it was built 34 years ago, how much did it cost, what was the loan valued at, and how is this reflected in the March 2023 Green Book?”

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

“The Council does not hold data on the original financing of the Pool in the Park in 1989. There are no financing costs assumed in the current costings for Pool in the Park relating to its original construction.”

8. Question from Councillor Josh Brown

“What steps has the Council taken to ensure it can cope with increase in demand for Council services if it agrees cuts to funding for Citizens Advice and Woking Community Transport?”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“It is regrettable that grants to these wider services will be affected due to the financial challenges faced by the Council. If the proposals are agreed at Council this evening, then Officers and I will be meeting with both organisations to best plan the way ahead. Feedback on the proposals is also being sought through the consultation process. This will inform the Council’s impact assessments and subsequent plans for how we continue to engage with the voluntary sector moving forward.”

9. Question from Councillor Kevin Davis

“At such an important time post S114 notice, why have we had no Treasury Information since the March 2023 Green Book, six months ago?”

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Reply from Councillor Dale Roberts

“As part of the review of the Council’s performance management and financial reporting, work is ongoing to improve the way all financial information is compiled and presented, for example the recent new budget monitoring report. Given the limited resources in the finance team and urgency of other work, the information in the Green Book has had to be put on hold until this review is completed. However, I can confirm that a mid-year review of Treasury Management is planned for the November Executive that will provide information for Members in accordance with CIPFA Codes of Practice.”

10. Question from Councillor Kevin Davis

“What is the actual cash subsidy (not interest payments or capital depreciation) that is required to run Pool in the Park?”

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

“The capital and financing costs are true costs reflective of running the venue however it is true to say that these would not all be saved by closing the venue. The actual cash subsidy projected for 2023-24 is circa £450,000. This figure does not include significant capital works required or debt finance. Further work will be done over the coming weeks to understand the ongoing investment needs of the building.”

11. Question from Councillor Kevin Davis

“If Pool in the Park is closed, what is the interest amount we will still need to pay and for how long, and when will the capital depreciation be written down to zero?”

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

“There are two elements to this. Firstly, the cost of financing all of the ThamesWey energy equipment and plant, which will come to an end in 6 years’ time and is valued at circa £2 million. Secondly, there is £1.5 million outstanding on a loan for the refurbishment of slides and changing rooms with 16 years remaining on the loan term. The repayments of both loans are currently encapsulated in the leisure accounts, but if closed these would become a liability.”

12. Question from Councillor Kevin Davis

“What is the Woking Borough Council obligated liability to Woking Football Club in the event of their promotion out of the current National League into the fourth level of the English Football League?”

Reply from Councillor Dale Roberts

“Further work is being undertaken on Kingfield Leisure and the link with Woking FC as part of the review of the 24 companies that the Council has an interest in. Further information will be provided when this review is complete.”

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REPORT ENDS

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Leisure Contract Visitor Numbers on a Monthly and Annual Basis (in response to Question 2)

Last year's attendances for the contract are as follows:

	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Woking LC	21846	26778	24870	23091	25552	23262	25749	24024	18441	26688	25226	26731	292258
Pool in the Park	25996	27301	26554	27679	31548	24259	25315	22861	14901	26013	25997	25563	303987
SportsBox	11300	14606	15162	10821	7880	11732	14019	16247	8383	15318	12366	17878	155712
Eastwood	12478	16719	17836	13271	14345	16051	17496	17998	11951	19607	20357	22738	200847
TOTALS	71620	85404	84422	74862	79325	75304	82579	81130	53676	87626	83946	92910	952804

This year to date is:

	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Woking LC	31680	31147	26932	29936	29173	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	148868
Pool in the Park	26450	27331	37830	41971	42275	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	175857
SportsBox	14911	19344	18513	18811	9131	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	80710
Eastwood	24358	24763	26711	28716	23019	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	127567
TOTALS	97399	102585	109986	119434	103598	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	533002