

COUNCIL

TUESDAY, 25TH FEBRUARY, 2020

At 7.00 pm

in the

DESBOROUGH SUITE - TOWN HALL,

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

PART I

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>PAGE NO</u>
5.	<u>PUBLIC QUESTIONS</u> Written answers	3 - 12

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- a) Jane Stone of Belmont ward will ask the following question of Councillor Carroll, Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health:**

How many organisations tendered for the contract which was currently with Ways into Work and has now been awarded to Optalis?

Thank you for your question on this important issue. Rather than go out to tender, the council has asked its own delivery company, Optalis, to provide the service. As you might be aware, from April 2017, the council started delivering all statutory and discretionary adult services through Optalis, which is a Local Authority Trading Company; jointly owned by Wokingham Borough Council and the Royal Borough.

As Optalis is a jointly owned Local Authority Trading Company, the Council is not required to formally tender any contracts for statutory or discretionary services, if they can be fulfilled by Optalis.

In the case of the existing contract with Ways into Work, the Royal Borough was not, therefore, required to re-tender the contract when it expires on 30th April 2020, as Optalis already has a successful and established Supported Employment service in operation, in Wokingham, which has been running for more than 18 years. Delivering through Optalis is our long term strategy and all part of our overall plan to deliver better adult social care through enablement, prevention and independence.

- b) Janet Hayes-Brown of Clewer and Dedworth West ward will ask the following question of Councillor Carroll, Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health:**

How many clients can the new Optalis supported employment service work with for the £74,000 budget, and what targets, including job outcomes, will be set with the new provider?

Thank you for your question on this important issue. It is important to understand that there is a fully operational Supported Employment Service already operating within our Local Authority Trading Company, Optalis. This has been in operation for more than 18 years and supports around 300 residents in Wokingham. There is an existing staff team comprising a Head of Employment Services, as well as Team Leads, Coaches and other support staff, who operate to the high standards required to be accredited to the British Association of Supported Employment. Delivering through Optalis is our long term strategy and all part of our overall plan to deliver better adult social care through enablement, prevention and independence.

We are, therefore, not setting up a service from scratch, but rather, are adding additional investment into the existing infrastructure that is successfully operating. This means that more staff can be recruited (or transferred from the existing provider, Ways into Work), to support the cohort of people likely to transfer across when the existing contract comes to an end on 30th April 2020.

Detailed discussions are still ongoing between the outgoing provider, Ways into Work, and commissioners, regarding the number of customers who are likely to transfer

across to Optalis. The Royal Borough understands that the existing provider is intending to continue to support and maintain a significant number of their existing clients.

Clients for whom the existing provider has not yet managed to find employment, around 79 people, or who are still on their waiting list, around 78 people, are likely to be offered the opportunity to come across to the Optalis Supported employment service.

Regarding job outcomes, you may be aware that each year the Government ranks each Local Authority on the percentage of people with a learning disability who are supported into employment (the indicator is called ASCOF 1E (proportion of people with learning disabilities in employment)) and the Optalis service at Wokingham, ranked number 2 in the country this year behind London Borough of Hounslow. We will ensure that the contract with Optalis includes all relevant employment targets to meet the national ASCOF standards.

c) Susan Edwards of Furze Platt ward will ask the following question of Councillor Carroll, Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health:

My son has benefitted greatly from funding provided by RBWM to Ways into Work and works for the Council. He has multiple and complex issues including severe learning disability, hearing impairment and, difficulties with communication. Whoever supports him needs to know him well. By changing service provider to Optalis, how can you guarantee that he will not be disadvantaged?

Thank you for your question on this important issue. The Royal Borough is aware of the group of people to whom you refer, who work for the Council. They are currently supported 8 hours a week through the coaches employed by Ways into Work. The council has asked Ways into Work for costings to continue to support these people which is £12,000 per annum. The council is seeking alternative funding to ensure this support continues, including employment benefits, and has committed to pay any shortfall.

d) Lisa Hughes of Furze Platt ward will ask the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council:

Many residents with disabilities will be greatly affected by cuts of £166k to supported employment and £330k to the council tax reduction scheme plus increases to adult health and commissioning charges. Can RBWM provide evidence that due regard was given to its equality obligations in relation to residents with disabilities?

Thank you for your question. I can confirm that the Royal Borough has given due regard to all its equality obligations in respect of the proposals it is making for the 2020-2021 budget. Equality Impact Assessments have been completed where applicable and these are available on the website at this [link](#).

Turning to the three specific points that you mention, in relation to the supported employment service, we will be commissioning this from our jointly owned Local

Authority Trading Company, Optalis. Optalis has been successfully operating a high-quality supported employment service for more than 18 years and therefore we are building on the existing structures and staffing that are already successfully in place. We are confident that by investing into the existing service, there will be greater efficiencies and economies of scale through shared use of staff and resources so that we will be able to build and strengthen the support across the two boroughs, whilst providing value for money.

In relation to the proposed changes to the council tax reduction scheme, there is no evidence that residents with disabilities will be any more affected than any other working age customer with a protected characteristic. The authority will continue to disregard income received from disability related benefits, e.g. Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payments. However, there is no proposal to exempt individuals, en masse, as a result of disability. They, like anyone else, will be able to apply to consider remitting the costs on the basis of financial hardship in accordance with the authority's existing S13A(1)(c) Policy.

In line with the council's overall approach to fees and charges, adult social care fees and charges have been increased by inflation on all but domiciliary care. For domiciliary care, we are proposing full cost recovery for self-funders only, on the basis that they will have been assessed as able to pay the full amount. Removing the Advantage Card discounts for parking is being applied across the board and there is no evidence that residents with disabilities will be any more affected than anyone else using the car parks. Blue badge provision for residents with disabilities is unaffected by this proposal.

e) Angela Clark of Cox Green ward will ask the following question of Councillor Carroll, Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health:

Ways into Work provides personalised employment support that enables residents with disabilities to be a part of the workforce, with commensurate benefits to their finances, health and well-being. Will the £166k of savings next year be realised by reducing the number of people supported or reducing the scope of the services provided?

Thank you for your question on this important issue. We recognise the importance that a Supported Employment Service holds for people with additional needs and the benefit and sense of self-esteem that comes with finding paid employment.

I would like to reassure you that the service that we will be commissioning from our jointly owned Local Authority Trading Company, Optalis, has been successfully operating providing a high quality Supported Employment service for Wokingham Council for more than 18 years. It is important to recognise that we are therefore not setting up this enterprise from scratch, but are building on the existing structures and staffing that are already successfully in place within Optalis, so that when the council commissions this service it can also operate for our Windsor and Maidenhead residents. As a long-established service, Optalis Supported Employment works with many local and national companies and has many contacts and links into employment,

maintaining the high standards required from the British Association of Supported Employment.

As our Local Authority Trading Company, Optalis already operates in offices and day centres across the Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead providing statutory adult social care (social work, Occupational Therapy, reablement services, residential care homes and day centres) and other support for vulnerable adults on behalf of the Local Authority. We are confident that by investing into the existing Supported Employment service already running, there will be greater efficiencies and economies of scale through shared use of staff and resources and we will be able to build and strengthen the support across the two Boroughs, whilst providing value for money and that important employment support that you refer to in your question. Delivering through Optalis is our long term strategy and all part of our overall plan to deliver better adult social care through enablement, prevention and independence.

f) Paul Stretton of Clewer East ward will ask the following question of Councillor Coppinger, Lead Member for Planning and Maidenhead:

During the Council meeting (Sept 2018), concerns of asbestos hazards, during demolition (surface and airborne) in the Dedworth area were raised. Authority to proceed with demolition was given by RBWM, without ensuring all planning conditions had been met. What actions and recommendations have been implemented to protect and reassure the community from this and any such future suspected contaminations?

Thank you for your question, however the question states points that are factually incorrect. The Council did not authorise the demolition of the building ahead of the discharge of conditions, the developer took this course of action without informing the Council or applying to discharge relevant pre-commencement conditions. The planning department cannot prevent such a course of action being taken. It can only seek to rectify allegations of a breach of planning control through the planning enforcement process.

Concerns over alleged nuisance during construction works should be raised with the Council's Environmental Protection team, however, concerns over asbestos are a matter for the Health and Safety Executive where this is alleged to relate to unsafe building practices. This is no different to the position as advised by the Council at the time.

g) Andrew Hill of Boyn Hill ward will ask the following question of Councillor Hilton, Lead Member for Finance and Ascot:

On 26th March Simon Dudley announced at the St Mary's Church Areli/Tikehau meeting, that he had "... already entered into" an agreement to sell Central House, and our 50% freehold of the Nicholson centre to Areli. On what date did he enter into that agreement, and had any officer or Cabinet approved this massive agreement beforehand?

Thank you for your question. Following discussions between officers of the Council and its wholly owned property company with the new owner of the shopping centre heads of terms were agreed with them on the 1 March 2019. These were non-binding

and were there to form the basis for a contract to include the Council's ownerships within a future redevelopment. A report was taken to Cabinet on the 25 April to gain formal approval to negotiate and agree a contract on this basis. Cabinet agreed delegated authority subject to a report being brought to Council. On the 23 July Council approved the sale of the Council's freehold interests in Nicholson's and Central House for £6million and delegated authority to enter into contracts for these.

h) Andrew Hill of Boyn Hill ward will ask the following question of Councillor Coppinger, Lead Member for Planning and Maidenhead:

Why is the Local Planning Authority putting residents' health and safety at risk, and rewarding developers who significantly breach allegedly "strict" prior planning conditions, by retrospectively approving demolition management plans for sites where there had already been breaches of several statutes including the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012?

Thank you for the question however I do not agree that considering a planning application has put residents' health and safety at risk. The planning authority is duty bound to consider all planning applications received. This includes where retrospective applications are made. Applications are considered against the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and are assessed against relevant planning policy, and legislation. The planning system does not regulate the control of asbestos.

i) Ray Hayes-Brown of Clewer and Dedworth West ward will ask the following question of Councillor Carroll, Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health:

Currently 168 vulnerable adults are working in the borough, supported by WIW. You propose to continue this with Optalis on a third of the current budget. Have the council made proper assessment of the complex needs they all have, and risks they will be exposed too if their needs are not supported adequately? With impunity can you guarantee their safety?

Thank you for your question on this important issue. Discussions are continuing between Commissioners and Ways into Work but we have been told by Ways into Work that they intend to continue their employment support for the group of 168 people who are currently employed. There are around 78 people who are currently on a waiting list that Ways into Work are not yet supporting and a further 79 people who Ways into Work are working with but not yet found employment for. We understand the intention is that this group of people will be offered the opportunity to transfer into the commissioned service provided through Optalis.

Each individual who is referred into the Supported Employment service provided through Optalis, will have an assessment of their needs, their aspirations and outcomes that they would wish to achieve and a tailored support plan will be drawn up between the Supported Employment coach and the individual. Optalis work to the same high standards required by the British Association of Supported Employment as we have required from our existing provider and will apply all of the principles of risk assessment for the safety of individuals and staff when assessing and working with individuals and employers.

j) Valerie Pike of Sunningdale and Cheapside ward will ask the following question of Councillor Cannon, Lead Member for Public Protection and Parking:

The council "...has now explicitly confirmed to the [Information] Commissioner" that it holds no information, such as a business case, for the £240k capital scheme (Chobham Road, Sunningdale New Parking Scheme) bid for in February 2018. Why did RBWM approve this spending without a submitted business case as to what benefits this scheme would deliver to residents and how?

Thank you for your question. Funding for this project formed part of the budget (capital programme) for 2018/19 which was approved by Council on 20th February 2018. Formal approval was preceded by consideration at Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny Panels and was, therefore, subject to opportunities to scrutinize and challenge in public prior to approval. I understand this information has been provided on previous occasions which included input from the Head of Finance.

k) Valerie Pike of Sunningdale and Cheapside ward will ask the following question of Councillor Hilton, Lead Member for Finance and Ascot:

When a Parish Council or the Police & Crime Commissioner submit their precept demands, what governance and scrutiny is undertaken by RBWM itself to ensure their demands are reasonable, fair and value for public money, and in keeping with relative size of that parish, or in proportion to the scale of the public services offered?

Thank you for your question. The council has no responsibility for the precepts raised by Parish Councils or the Police and Crime Commissioner, it is simply responsible for collecting the amounts precepted. In 2020/21 the increase in the precept for the Police and Crime Commissioner was subject to a limit of a £10 increase. Anything above this level would have required a referendum of all constituents in the Thames Valley.

Members of Parish Councils are elected and they are responsible for setting the Parish precept. Unlike Borough Councils the Parish Council precept increase is not capped. Any questions around value for money or the level of increase for either the Police or Parish Councils need to be directed to these bodies directly.

l) Adam Bermange of Boyn Hill ward will ask the following question of Councillor Cannon, Lead Member for Public Protection and Parking:

With the proposed savings in funding for our community wardens meaning the administration will not be able to fulfil its manifesto pledge to retain a 25 warden-strong unit, will the Lead Member commit to holding a public consultation before finalising the adjusted tasking of the remaining team?

Thank you for your question. Community Wardens currently respond to the needs within all RBWM wards. This is not proposed to change. The proposed savings will see a reduction in 6 wardens (25 to 19FTE) and as such, coverage by the team as a

whole will be diluted in terms of the total area patrolled by an individual warden and the manner in which they are deployed.

In order to mitigate any potential impacts and ensure wardens have the ability to meet ongoing need, a smarter working pattern for wardens is being implemented by service managers. This will see the wardens move away from ad-hoc patrols within a ward, towards a more targeted patrol pattern that is much more dependent on risk and informed by local intelligence. A public consultation is not proposed to shape this, due to the manner in which wardens are tasked, needing to be a dynamic process so that any emerging issues can be addressed as required.

To ensure that the intelligence used for tasking is fit for purpose, the warden team are committed to expanding the number of mechanisms in which engagement with stakeholders (including resident groups and elected members) can occur. Residents will retain a named warden for their area, acting as a single point of contact; and be able to build relationships and a profile of the issues being encountered in each ward.

Wardens will continue to provide all current work streams including: antisocial behaviour enforcement, engagement with the local community, dog fouling, littering, school patrols and support to rough sleepers – albeit in a much more focussed manner.

The Community Warden team will continue to provide a visible presence to all wards; albeit the degree of time spent in a particular ward will be more dependent on intelligence and identified need.

Assurance should be provided in the core aims of the warden team remaining unchanged, namely to build community cohesion and to provide a visible deterrent to crime

m) Louis Wright of Hurley & Walthams ward will ask the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:

Since declaring a "climate emergency" and proposing a cross-party developed strategy to achieve carbon neutrality, how has the Royal Borough identified the minimum competencies and skills, within its own staff, to understand, develop and implement the aforementioned strategy?

Thank you for your question. Since declaring the climate emergency, officers and Members have been working together to develop the strategy. This has been done in consultation with the community and special interest groups. The nature of the climate emergency is that the strategy will need to be delivered across all services of the Council. Therefore the cross-party group has utilised knowledge of specialist officers across many parts of the council such as waste, transport, biodiversity and energy. We have utilised best practice from other councils and also engaged with experts in different fields to generate a wide range of ideas for the strategy.

Given the importance of this issue, the Council has also recruited two new posts to lead the development of the strategy. A new Head of Infrastructure, Sustainability and Economic Growth is now in post. We have also recruited a new Service Lead for

Sustainability and Climate Change who will be responsible for finalising and delivering the strategy. They will work with our existing Energy Reduction Manager to co-ordinate delivery of the strategy working with other services across the council.

n) Louis Wright of Hurley & Walthams ward will ask the following question of Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside:

What plans does the Royal Borough have to engage with young people (children and teenage demographics) on the topic of climate change?

Thank you for your question. The council has been undertaking a series of public engagement meetings to help to generate ideas for the climate strategy. These have been open to all members of the public and have attracted interest from some young members of our community. We also recently held an event specifically for 6-19 year olds on Thursday 20th February 2pm-4pm in Maidenhead Library – with around 20 young people attending the event. We have also presented at a number of schools to raise awareness of climate change and the development of our strategy.

We will continue to engage on this important matter with the wider community and there will continue to be an important role for young people in the process.

o) Terence Pike of Sunningdale and Cheapside ward will ask the following question of Councillor Clark, Lead Member for Transport and Infrastructure:

Noting its statement introducing the October 2017 consultation on increasing parking availability in Sunningdale by a net 5 bays that “Pedestrians are having difficulty crossing Chobham Road”, how does the council plan to create a safe crossing?

Thank you for your question. The scheme to create new parking bays in Chobham Road was the subject of public consultation which resulted in 88% support for the scheme. In addition, the proposal to introduce a raised pedestrian crossing was consulted upon at the same time and resulted in 65% against this element.

(For background: Details of the scheme are available at https://www3.rbwm.gov.uk/info/200213/parking/664/parking_consultations/15)

Issues were raised during the design and construction phase raised by concerned residents with respect to improving conditions for pedestrians - no formal pedestrian crossing was installed as part of the parking scheme which reflects the outcome of the public consultation.

However, in order to positively respond to the resident concerns around vehicle speeds and pedestrian crossing points a ‘flat-top’ road hump at the southern end of the scheme together with other modifications to reduce vehicle speeds and increase awareness of the nature of the area was installed.

A further commitment was made to review vehicle speeds and pedestrian movements following completion of the project. This has been completed and I can advise that

works have been commissioned to upgrade the 'flat top' hump to a pedestrian (zebra) crossing.

A budget of £240,000 was approved to develop, consult and deliver this project. I am pleased to advise that the scheme was delivered within budget and funding is available to extend the scope of the scheme to provide a pedestrian crossing.

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