

COUNCIL

TUESDAY, 20TH JULY, 2021

At 7.00 pm

in the

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, MAIDENHEAD,

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

PART I

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>PAGE NO</u>
10.	<p><u>MEMBERS' QUESTIONS</u></p> <p>Written responses</p> <p>(The Council will set aside a period of 30 minutes to deal with Member questions, which may be extended at the discretion of the Mayor in exceptional circumstances. The Member who provides the initial response will do so in writing. The written response will be published as a supplement to the agenda by 5pm one working day before the meeting. The questioner shall be allowed up to one minute to put a supplementary question at the meeting. The supplementary question must arise directly out of the reply provided and shall not have the effect of introducing any new subject matter. A Member responding to a supplementary question will have two minutes to respond).</p>	

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a) Councillor Bond asked the following question of Councillor Coppinger, Cabinet Member for Planning, Environmental Services, and Maidenhead:

Following the Greenpeace investigation into UK plastic recycling being dumped in Turkey, can you confirm which countries RBWM plastic waste is now being sent to please, giving a percentage breakdown, and also what supply chain audits are undertaken to ensure it is actually recycled?

Written response: All plastics material collected by the borough in the blue bin recycling collections is sent for sorting in Warwickshire. From there recycling is sent to a range of destinations depending on the type of material. Plastics are sent to a company in Swinton, where it is sorted into further types and sent to a range of UK or EU based reprocessors to be flaked for manufacture of new plastic packaging. We report on a quarterly basis through the national Waste Data Flow System what has been collected for recycling and waste and the destinations of all materials. The contract with Pure for reprocessing of recycling, includes regular checks of the material we are sending to the MRF, which is designed to sort the recycling to provide the quality of material required by the reprocessors and to meet UK and international quality standards.

b) Councillor Knowles asked the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council:

The LGA peer review carried out last year identified areas of weakness in RBWM scrutiny process. Is it the intention to invite the LGA peer review team to revisit this and to assure us of progress being made to improve the system?

Written response: Overview and Scrutiny was identified as a particular area for improvement in the LGA Peer Review that took place in September 2017 during which the LGA team recommended a number of suggested actions including all Member briefings, Member development, timely papers, ensuring the executive and scrutiny functions had more separation and a review of the number of Panels. During a follow up visit in September 2019 progress in implementation was noted and the Peer Review Team recommended that;

“The Council must now ensure that the supporting infrastructure is appropriate and well-resourced with papers prepared carefully and circulated on time. Scrutiny should move away from verbal only updates and build a deeper level of analysis with a focus on forward looking scrutiny and debate.”

Since then the Council has adopted the “strong foundations” approach and in January 2021, the work towards building a more effective scrutiny function included Member training sessions, run by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, who have worked closely with the LGA on scrutiny development so that Members could equip themselves with the skills to become effective scrutineers. To further embed a positive and purposeful culture of scrutiny at the Royal Borough, there is further work to do and this year the Council will see a focus on developing the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels to help them add value to the business of the authority.

To this end scrutiny is an important theme in the Annual Governance Statement Action Plan, to be considered by the Audit and Governance Committee at their meeting on 29th July 2021 where a number of key actions are proposed. Members will be able to review the Action Plan once it is published later this week and attend the meeting to hear the debate on the proposed actions.

In terms of further reviews, I can confirm that I am in discussion with the LGA to timetable in a Peer Challenge in the next calendar year so that the Council can carry on its improvement journey, and once this is arranged I will advise Members.

c) Councillor Hill asked the following question of Councillor Clark, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity:

The Greenfields Zebra Crossing, surrounding road markings and street furniture are in a poor state of repair and the result of numerous residents and councillor complaints. When will this area of Stafferton Link Road be renovated and brought up to standard?

Written response: After a recent reported incident near the crossing, the Highways team has been out to assess the site and this has indicated that the current markings are within the acceptable limits for maintenance. Therefore, no immediate action is required but this will be kept under review. The development of the nearby site at Statemans House is going through the planning process and will provide the opportunity to review the crossing and surrounding area and make any necessary improvements.

d) Councillor Price asked the following question of Councillor Carroll, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health:

The delivery of the Transformation Strategy is key to RBWM achieving its long-term objectives. The Cabinet Transformation sub committee was formed last year. Its TOR included monitoring progress of delivery of the Transformation Strategy. The Constitution states it will meet quarterly. Why has it therefore only met once in September 2020?

Written response: *Thank you to Cllr Price for her question and I completely agree that the Constitution states that the sub committee should meet quarterly. However, the transformation team has been heavily involved in the operational delivery of the council's COVID response, including the support of the volunteers and clinically extremely vulnerable and delivery of the plan has been affected accordingly. Along with colleagues, they have been embracing innovation and invention, both a keystone of transformation throughout this period. As we start to move into a state of new normal and the team can focus efforts, the delivery plan is being developed for publication and a review of progress to date will be presented at a Cabinet Transformation sub committee (date to be confirmed), with the quarterly meetings now diarised thereafter accordingly.*

In summary, as the responsible Cabinet Member, I wish to make it clear that it has always been my earnest view and profound undertaking to ensure all staff have been

given the unequivocal direction, support and steer to prioritise the COVID response to support the NHS aims and objectives of preventing death, preventing hospitalisations and protecting the public more broadly. There is nothing more important than those aims and objectives, and ensuring as a local authority we continue to do what is necessary to contribute to the extraordinary pandemic response we have seen locally and for which I am so deeply grateful to all our officers for the incredible job they have done and continue to do, and for their heroic professionalism during this difficult time.

e) Councillor Price asked the following question of Councillor McWilliams, Cabinet Member for Housing, Sport & Leisure, and Community Engagement:

The Transformation Strategy is clear that ‘investing in strong foundations’ is key to underpinning RBWM’s three core values. Such underpinning includes ‘modern and robust IT’. More and more information is being communicated exclusively to residents via the website. When will time, effort and money be invested in making the RBWM website easy to navigate and thus ‘fit for purpose’?

Written response: Thank you to Cllr Price for her question and I completely agree that the website is a crucial part of our communication and engagement work with our residents. The new website was developed and launched last year in the middle of the pandemic and that had an inevitable impact on the initial stages of embedding the new site.

I am, however, very pleased to confirm that the website is constantly being reviewed but we are about to commence an overall review of the functionality of the website as part of the transformation programme which will also look at the resource available to support it.

However, it is important to state that we have implemented a number of updates in recent months with plans to improve and develop more as we move forward. In particular, I would draw your attention to the following:

- The search functionality has been completely overhauled and a new search engine has been implemented. This has improved the accuracy of the search responses and allowed for a filtered approach to be taken.*
- A website user group is being set up to engage with residents and they will act as a critical friend to the site helping to improve the ‘look and feel’ as well as the website content.*
- We are in the process of embedding a feedback function onto all pages within the website. This will give users the ability to comment not only on the look and feel but to give views on the suitability of the content and language used within a specific page. This will be open and transparent for all to see.*
- We are also working with a group of other local authorities who use the same content management system. This enables us to share best practice and knowledge as well as resources in order to enhance the delivery of the website.*

f) Councillor Larcombe asked the following question of Councillor Cannon, Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Parking:

On 21 June Datchet Parish Council passed a resolution requiring the Environment Agency to limit the Jubilee River conveyance capacity to a volume that is compatible with current Datchet flood defences and land drainage infrastructure. How will RBWM be demonstrating their support for the resolution?

Written response: *The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 places a duty on the council, as Lead Local Flood Authority, to co-operate with other public bodies identified as flood risk management authorities (FRMAs) to manage flood risk in the borough and across boundaries. The Environment Agency is the FRMA with responsibility for the management and operation of the Jubilee River. The council will therefore continue to work closely with the Environment Agency to manage local flood risk, including interactions with the Jubilee River, local flood defences and land drainage infrastructure.*

Datchet is within the scope of the River Thames Infrastructure Project, a partnership with the Environment Agency which focuses on flood risk management in the Datchet, Horton, Wraysbury and Old Windsor areas. The project includes engagement with local stakeholders, including Datchet Parish Council, and will consider options for flood risk management in the area.

g) Councillor Davey asked the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council:

One issue highlighted by the CIPFA Review of Governance 2020 was that there was “no appropriate challenge or recognition that challenge was a good thing”. What have you done to demonstrate to both the public and this council that you believe challenge is a good thing, and encourage both Members and residents to challenge?

Written response: *The Royal Borough is committed to an open and transparent decision making culture and since the CIPFA Governance Review, a number of improvements have been made to embed a culture of robust and appropriate challenge both from within the council and through engagement with residents and external partners. We have done considerable work on the values of the Council that support an open and honest culture. In particular much work has been done on ensuring that reports being presented for decision contain appropriate professional advice to enable Members to make robust and well thought through decisions. In addition, there are clearer processes to show how decisions are made and who is making them and officers have been trained so that the roles/responsibilities of officers and Members are better understood. We have opened up our meetings virtually and this is yielding higher levels of engagement with our communities. We are working together with our parish councils to develop a better understanding of what they are seeking to achieve. Members will have seen our changed approach to resident and stakeholder engagement being exemplified in our community development response, our libraries transformation, development of the new corporate plan and the consultations that happen throughout the Royal Borough. This opens up the Council to constructive challenge in a way that we haven't done before, so that we can make better decisions about issues that matter to our communities.*

h) Councillor Davey asked the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council:

The CIPFA Review of Governance 2020 suggested the new Audit Committee, and an Independent Chair. Why did you not take up the recommendation for an Independent Chair?

Written response: *At the July 2020 meeting of full Council Members considered a proposal for the transfer of audit oversight functions from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel to a separate Audit and Governance Committee. Following debate, during which Councillor Davey was present, the report was unanimously agreed which included the following:*

- i) Approves amendments to the constitution detailed in Appendix A to establish an Audit and Governance Committee.*
- ii) Appoints Councillor Bateson as Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee and Councillor L. Jones as Vice Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.*
- iii) Meeting dates for the remainder of the municipal year be set as:*
 - 14 September 2020*
 - 9 November 2020*
 - 16 February 2021*
- iv) Notes the terms of reference of the Cabinet Transformation Sub-Committee detailed in Appendix B.*
- v) Delegates authority to the Monitoring Officer to update and publish the council constitution in line with the recommendations in the report.*

As I made clear during that debate, and as was ultimately agreed by all Members via the unanimous decision, the key requirements of the chair are the ability to robustly and accurately challenge decision making and without fear or favour, hold the council to account. A key requirement was also to propose and initiate suggestions to strengthen the council's overall position of robust governance. For that reason, I also made sure that the recommendation included the provision for the position of vice-chair to be given to a senior member of the opposition, with Councillor Lynne Jones currently holding that position.

The establishment of a sperate audit committee was a key recommendation within the CIPFA report and one we have had no hesitation in implementing following that unanimous approval at the July 2020 meeting of full council.

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