

WINDSOR TOWN FORUM

TUESDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 2021

PRESENT: Councillors John Bowden (Chairman), Samantha Rayner (Vice-Chairman), Christine Bateson, Jon Davey, Karen Davies, Neil Knowles, Helen Price, Shamsul Shelim, Amy Tisi and David Hilton

Officers: David Scott, Andy Carswell, Emma Congerton, Tracy Hendren and Neil Walter

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Cannon and Paul Roach. Councillor Hilton was attending the meeting virtually as he had been advised not to attend in person following surgery.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on September 2nd 2021 be approved as an accurate record.

Councillor Price noted there was an action from the previous minutes regarding circulating a bike theft leaflet to members and asked if this had been done. Jeffrey Pick from Thames Valley Police said he had sent it on but was happy to recirculate it if necessary.

THAMES VALLEY POLICE UPDATE

Jeffrey Pick introduced the item and provided an update on crime figures for Windsor in the previous 31 days up to November 10th. He explained that 18 domestic burglaries had been recorded but for the purposes of statistics these included break-ins in sheds attached to a residential property, and only six of these had been burglaries or attempted burglaries of properties. He stated that burglary was not currently particularly prevalent in Windsor.

There had been 23 reported thefts from motor vehicles, compared to 34 in the corresponding time period last year. The Forum was told there had been reports of males walking along residential roads with torches looking for vehicles to attempt to break into. In many instances vehicles had been left unlocked and with items on display, leading to them being broken into. In other cases tourists' cars had been targeted as they often had suitcases and other items on display; some of these break-ins occurred during the day. There had been five recorded thefts of motor vehicles, although one of these occurred when the owner had misremembered where they had parked and the car was subsequently found. Jeffrey Pick said some keyless cars were being stolen as the fob was still within range of the vehicle despite being inside a house. He advised that placing the fob inside a Faraday cage would prevent this from happening.

There had been 12 bike thefts reported, compared to 18 in the same time period last year. Jeffrey Pick said police were now working closely with the Windsor Cycle Hub to get as many bikes marked and recorded with Bike Register as possible. Bike owners were also encouraged to take photos to make it easier to reunite them with their bike if it was stolen. Any bikes that could not be reunited with their owner would be sold on eBay, with any profits going

to charity. The possibility of donating some bikes to youth projects was also being investigated.

The Forum was told that a campaign to prevent residents from becoming a victim of crime while Christmas shopping was taking place.

TOWN MANAGER UPDATE

The Chairman provided members with an update as Paul Roach, Windsor, Eton and Ascot Town Manager, was unavailable to attend the meeting. The update said that trading in the town centres remained positive and visitor numbers had continued to increase into October. All business sectors were now fully open but there had been a reduction in the number of office workers coming into the town centre, and this had impacted some of the businesses that benefitted from that trade. As a further update the Chairman stated that the office building at Windsor Dials was being refitted and approximately 400 people would be employed there from August onwards. A refit was also taking place at the building at the junction of Victoria Street and Sheet Street.

There would be a return to live events over Christmas, and there would be an online programme available to market the events taking place. Print versions would also be distributed to homes, shops and businesses. Members were shown a copy of the online programme via presentation slides.

Regarding the Hello Lamppost, there had been 4,639 interactions and 1,325 conversations with 853 unique users. The overall engagement score was very strong. Interactions showed users had a good first impression of Windsor and there was a positive consensus on food and drink options. Feedback was mixed on the cleanliness of the town and users returning to the high street after Covid, and some feedback indicated that parking in Windsor was expensive. Users felt public transport could be improved; the Chairman stated that a shortage of bus drivers had been reported.

The Forum was occupancy levels in Clewer, Dedworth and Ascot High Street remained high and most businesses were staying open. The Chairman advised that the former owner of CS Lewis butcher had passed away since retiring and closing the business, and that one of the barber shops that had closed in Windsor had since re-opened in Eton.

Councillor Davey complimented the marketing team on the Christmas brochure that had been produced. He compared the figures for the Hello Lamppost against the September report and noted there had only been 239 interactions in the last two months. Regarding the car and coach parking figures, he said it would be useful if these could be provided separately on future updates.

Councillor Tisi said it had been suggested previously the Hello Lamppost scheme would be rolled out to include Clewer and Dedworth and asked if there was an update on this. The Chairman said he was unaware of any news on this and advised Paul Roach would be able to provide any update.

Councillor Price said My Royal Borough had done an excellent job of promoting businesses in the town centre and asked if those outside the town centre were on the database. Councillor Rayner said My Royal Borough were encouraging businesses that wanted to be promoted to contact them if they wanted to be included in the database. The Chairman said he would contact Paul Roach on this matter.

Councillor Knowles said a good indicator of tourist numbers visiting Windsor would be to know how many people were visiting the castle. Councillor Rayner said visitor numbers were currently being restricted due to Covid; Councillor Knowles suggested a figure showing a percentage of the capacity would be appropriate. The Forum was reminded that overseas

visitors, particularly from the main markets of the Far East and the USA, were not currently visiting Windsor due to travel restrictions.

It was noted that the Borough had been referred to as the Royal Borough of Maidenhead and Windsor in the media recently and members were keen to know how this had happened.

Resident Ed Wilson asked if a list of new retailers could be provided, noting that a number of new shops and restaurants had opened in recent months. He also asked if insights coming from the Hello Lamppost could be published, and for information to be given on what the Council was doing with this information. The Chairman said he would raise this with Paul Roach.

The Chairman stated that an open event was being hosted by Legoland to discuss its future development plans for the resort hotel was taking place from 2-7pm on November 24.

COVID-19 UPDATE

David Scott, Head of Communities, introduced the item and provided members with an update on Covid figures as of 12pm on November 15th. He stated that testing rates in the Royal Borough were the highest of all the local authorities within Berkshire, although the number of tests being carried out and the number of positive results were falling. During the recent spike in cases the Royal Borough was ahead of the national rate and that for the south east, but local rates had now dropped back down below these averages.

It was noted that Datchet, Horton and Wrybury was the ward with the highest rate of cases and the 10-14 age cohort had the most cases. The next highest age group was those aged 40-44, which was said to be the parents of those school-age children who had tested positive.

Members were provided with an update on hospital admission rates across the two trusts covering the Royal Borough, which were broadly similar. Although infection rates were increasing, this was not necessarily translating into hospital admissions and/or a higher death rate. The overall death rate was roughly the same as the expected average figure over the past five years. However, David Scott advised that increases in hospital admission rates would put pressures on the system and some elective procedures were being disrupted within the Frimley Trust as a result.

Members were given an update on vaccination rates, with a full breakdown of rates among different age categories. Takeup rates among the highest age ranges was more than 90 per cent, but an awareness drive was taking place to encourage even more people to get vaccinated as around 20 per cent of residents had not been fully vaccinated. One of the messages to residents was it wasn't too late to receive a vaccine if you had not taken up an earlier offer. Initiatives such as the vaccine bus that visited locations where takeup had not been high had been implemented. Residents were also being advised to take a third booster jab as the effectiveness of the vaccine started to subside after five to six months.

Councillor Tisi asked what was being done to try and reduce Covid rates in schools and to encourage pregnant women to have the vaccine, as some concerns had been raised. David Scott said a letter had been sent to the headteachers of all state and independent schools across Berkshire informing them of additional measures they could implement to prevent the spread of Covid, and to re-emphasise key messages regarding infection prevention and control. Guidance was also issued to see if there were any missed opportunities in schools that had had an outbreak, and if anything could be learnt from this. Regarding pregnant women David Scott said the advice from the Nursing and Midwifery Council was for women to take the vaccine as this would cause fewer medical issues as a result.

Responding to a question from Councillor Davey, David Scott said the advice was receiving a third booster jab provided more effective immunity than the natural antibodies produced by

vaccinated people contracting Covid. The possibility of prioritising vaccines to under 19s attending college was being investigated.

Councillor Hilton asked if it would be possible to be given figures for the number of people who had tested positive for Covid against the number of vaccinations they had received, whether that was one, two, three or none. He said this could demonstrate to the public the reasons why getting vaccinated was important. David Scott said he would look into whether these figures were available.

Councillor Shelim noted the Royal Borough had always had low numbers of infections compared to Slough but the situation had changed recently, and asked why this was the case. David Scott said this was due to more people being tested in the Royal Borough, and differences in vaccination rates and greater variation in age group distributions.

Councillor Price drew members' attention to the Outbreak Engagement Board. The last meeting had been very informative and provided councillors with the opportunity to ask questions. She said the next meeting was scheduled for December 20th.

Responding to a question from the Chairman, David Scott said the figures in relation to the Frimley CCG only related to cases within the Royal Borough and not the Trust area as a whole.

PARKING CHARGES AND RESIDENT PARKING REVIEW

Neil Walter, Parking Principle introduced the item and gave an update on the parking situation in Windsor. He stated that the parking strategy had been formally adopted a year ago but had been kept under review ever since. An officer review group had been established as part of this process. Members were told that 26 individual work streams had been identified, which had been categorised into short, medium or long-term projects and officers assigned to them. One of the reviews, looking at parking restrictions at The Boltons, was already underway. Colleagues in the Transformation team were involved as part of projects that aimed to reduce emissions and introduce more electric charging points.

Members were told that 50 parking ticket machines had been removed from the streets and car parks as they had come to the end of their life. These had been replaced through the use of the parking app, and additional signage pointing out nearby machines.

Members were shown a number of presentation slides showing proposed changes to signage and restrictions due to be implemented in the Thames Street area of Windsor, particularly around the Theatre Royal.

Neil Walter told the Forum that a review of fees and charges was currently taking place, and was due to be discussed at December's Cabinet meeting. The meeting would also discuss a residents' discount scheme.

Regarding visitor numbers, members were told that there had been a 60 per cent drop in car park usage in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20, because of lockdown restrictions imposed due to Covid. Neil Walter said however there had been 540,000 users of Windsor car parks in the seven months to date in 2021/22, which was comparable against the 569,000 recorded car park users for the same period in 2019/20. The major difference was the number of coaches using the coach park. In 2019/20 there had been 20,000 coaches using the coach parks, compared to just 165 in 2020/21. This had still not recovered and 1,022 coaches had used the coach parks in the year to date. Neil Walter said it was predicted this would not begin to pick up for another six months at least.

Responding to a question from the Chairman regarding traffic outside the castle, Neil Walter said buses were often unable to pull into bus stops due to other vehicles stopping to drop

people off at hotels. However this often couldn't be enforced because it was not an offence to idle on a double yellow line.

Resident Faye Wessely asked if there was any progress on the residents' parking review, stating that she lived in an area with significant issues with parking. Neil Walter said there were three self-administered schemes that were due to expire in December. When these expired residents would have the options of buying into a Council-run scheme or having the restrictions removed entirely; however there had not been any indication from residents as to what they would prefer. Neil Walter said the specific case raised by Faye Wessely was being assessed as a stand alone case, with the results of the wider residents' parking scheme across Windsor due to be completed within 18-36 months as it was a medium-term part of the strategy. Responding to a question from Councillor Tisi, Neil Walter added that the review of the active travel plan was still ongoing and had involved a large number of officers.

Resident Brian McCormack raised concerns over the proposed lifting of parking charges on certain days to help Christmas shoppers. He said retailers in Windsor had not been consulted on the proposals and claimed he had been ignored when he had raised the issue with elected members. Additionally he stated his belief there was disparity between Windsor and Maidenhead in terms of the offers of free parking and said Maidenhead was the main beneficiary. Neil Walter explained the free parking concession took into account existing restrictions in place, and that each town manager had been approached to ask for what concessions they felt would be required. Neil Walter said these requests were made to him personally. He added that a final decision had not yet been made and further discussions would take place at Cabinet. Members said they were surprised to hear that town managers had an input into the concession, and stated that it appeared, from an announcement from Councillor Johnson made earlier in the day, that the proposals had been confirmed.

Responding to a point made by Councillor Davey about which car parks the concessions would apply to, Neil Walter said it would be made to those which had the highest rates of usage by Advantage card holders.

Members said they were confused about the announcement over the Christmas parking concession as it had been mentioned it would need to be confirmed along with the Budget and go out to consultation. Councillor Hilton said any spending for the 2022/23 financial year would need to be agreed at the Full Council meeting in February, where the draft Budget would be presented. The discussion taking place at the December Cabinet meeting related to whether or not the proposed parking concession should be included in the draft Budget; if agreed it would then be subject to a full consultation.

Councillor Knowles left the meeting at 8.44pm.

Responding to a question from resident Ed Wilson, Neil Walter said there had been 180,000 individual uses of the RingGo app to pay for parking in the Windsor car parks in the first seven months of the municipal year. The only issues had arisen from users failing to stop their sessions and being overcharged, although it was possible to overturn this if evidence of a genuine error could be provided. Neil Walter explained the system operated differently compared to other boroughs and users had to start and stop their parking session themselves.

Responding to a question from Councillor Price, Neil Walter said there were no plans to introduce charges in car parks where parking was free, but consideration was being given to restricting the length of time vehicles could stay for to, for example, a couple of hours.

Responding to a question from Councillor Davey, Neil Walter said it was not possible to update the parking meter machines to a flat rate per minute, similar to the RingGo app, as there were too many variables that would affect the tariffs. Replying to a question from the Chairman, Neil Walter confirmed King Edward VII Hospital Trust would be ending evening and weekend parking for residents and this would be effective from November 20th.

HOUSING OF MULTIPLE OCCUPANTS

Emma Congerton, Housing Service Manager, introduced the item and outlined which directorate the Housing Service was part of and its responsibilities. This included the rough sleeper pathway, funding disabled facilities grants, temporary accommodation and securing affordable homes on new developments.

Tracy Hendren, Head of Housing, Environmental Health & Trading Standards, explained the Housing Services was also responsible for administering licences and carrying out inspections of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), and for caravan site licensing. Members were told that the Housing Strategy was formally adopted at the Full Council meeting in June 2021. Its three key priorities were to deliver new homes, promote health and wellbeing, and to support vulnerable residents in obtaining and sustaining appropriate accommodation. This would be done by delivering a mixture of housing tenures and working with partners to create a ladder of housing opportunity. Health and wellbeing would be promoted through regeneration of area with social and economic deprivation through regeneration; supporting innovative designs that promoted wellbeing and better health through gardens and green open spaces; and by incentivising developers to bring forward schemes to support the climate change obligations to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The Strategy also set out a target of creating a coalition of temporary accommodation landlords to provide sustainable, reliable, cost-effective temporary accommodation to support homeless households into long-term solutions, and the use of technology to improve access to services and clearly demonstrate outcomes.

Tracy Hendren explained that the Housing Act required certain types of leased properties to be licensed as HMOs and outlined the licensing requirements for such a property. There had been an increase in the number of enquiries relating to HMOs. However the Housing Strategy did not include specific measures around HMOs, although a commitment to working with private sector landlords to improve accommodation standards was contained within the Strategy and was deemed to be appropriate towards HMOs. The internal Service Plan stated its intent to review HMO licensing procedures and standards, and whether a Private Rented Sector Strategy was required to enable the authority to deliver against its private rented sector needs.

The Forum was told the Housing team had gone through a significant transient period over the last two years with roles being empty or undertaken by temporary members of staff. However the team was now fully staffed with permanent team members and the review was ongoing to enable the current procedures to be updated and the backlog of applications to be cleared.

Tracy Hendren outlined the operational practice as to how an HMO licence would be granted and what was required to be demonstrated. She stated that issues relating to car parking was not currently a consideration during the licensing application process. Tracy Hendren explained about the implementation of an Article 4 Direction, which would require property owners in a specified area to obtain permission to convert any dwelling into an HMO by removing their permitted development rights. She explained that Article 4 directions could not be used retrospectively and only applied to new HMOs coming into use. Because the Direction effectively took away the rights of the homeowner to use their property as they wished, this would only be considered if absolutely necessary.

Councillor Price stated that parking issues associated with HMOs was a problem in her ward and asked for confirmation this could not be taken into account when granting a licence. Tracy Hendren said this would go against the planning approach, as parking considerations were not required as part of new developments.

Resident Ed Wilson thanked officers for the presentation and asked how many HMOs were in Windsor and how many people lived in them; what would trigger an Article 4 consultation; and when was the Council's register of HMOs last updated. It was agreed that an answer would be sent to Mr Wilson in writing outside of the meeting.

The Chairman noted that some HMOs were not part of residents' parking schemes and this was likely to be a part of the tenancy agreement. Councillor Price said this would be appropriate in town centre locations where residents were within walking distance of amenities.

DEDWORTH COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS COMMITTEE

Councillor Tisi said residents, councillors and local businesses had got together to organise a Christmas fair at Clewer Rec from 2-6pm on Sunday November 28th. Anyone wishing to attend was encouraged to walk or cycle as there would be a number of stalls in the Rec car park, although parking would be available at the nearby schools.

WINDSOR CONSULTATIONS

Councillor Price highlighted that the Tivoli contract was to be discussed at a meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on November 18th and hoped as many residents as possible would be able to attend.

CONTINUATION OF MEETING

At this point in the meeting, and in accordance with Rule of Procedure Part 4A 23.1 of the Council's Constitution, the Chairman called for a vote in relation to whether or not the meeting should continue, as the meeting had been in progress for three hours. Upon being put to the vote, those present voted in favour of concluding the meeting and for discussions regarding the work programme to be done outside of the meeting.

Members gave their thanks to the clerk Andy Carswell, as this was his final meeting before leaving the Council.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 9.30 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....