

WINDSOR TOWN FORUM

WEDNESDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2020

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

Also in attendance: Councillors Gurpreet Bhangra, Gerry Clark, Wisdom da Costa, Ross McWilliams and Gurch Singh

Officers: Paul Roach, Chris Joyce, Olivia McGregor, Julia White, Tracy Hendren, Barbara Richardson, David Scott, Andy Carswell and Shilpa Manek

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Bateson. Cllr Sharpe was attending as a substitute.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES

Arising from the minutes Cllr Price asked if there was any update on the themed pedestrian crossings, as the consultation had just finished. The Chairman said this, along with the results of a corresponding petition, would be published in due course and passed on to members of the Forum.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman stated that he had amended the running order of the agenda, in order to allow for the items which had speakers to be heard first so the speakers may leave the meeting once their item had been heard, if they so wished. The Chairman stated that he would permit an Any Other Business item at the end if time permitted; however he stated that the topic of waste collections was not to be raised. He explained that the Lead Member and relevant officers were not present to answer any questions. The Chairman said there was to be a meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel the following week, which would be attended by representatives of Serco in addition to the Lead Member and officers, and the Chairman stated that this would be the more appropriate forum for Members to receive answers to any questions they may have.

THAMES VALLEY POLICE UPDATE

Inspector Tracey Croucher introduced the item and told the Forum that this update referred to the period July 20 – September 21. The Forum was told there had been no reported residential burglaries in Windsor Central in this period, compared to nine in the corresponding period the previous year. In Windsor East there had been 14, a reduction of five compared to the previous year, and in Windsor West there had been seven, down from 16. Two arrests had been made in connection to the burglaries in Windsor West. There had also been reductions in incidents of thefts from motor vehicles and thefts of pedal cycles. Inspector Croucher said three arrests had been made in connection to the cycle thefts.

Inspector Croucher said demand for police services was likely to rise as Covid19 restrictions were lifted. Already there had been a rise in reports of breaches of Covid19 legislation and

violent crime, and Inspector Croucher asked for forbearance as officers worked to prioritise call-outs. She said Windsor's Neighbourhood Policing Team consisted of five Police Constables as others were either on maternity leave or self isolating due to Covid19. Responses to major incidents were coordinated by a central command team.

Inspector Croucher spoke about the role of PCSOs in the Royal Borough, and their importance of feeding back information to the Neighbourhood Policing Team in Windsor and talking to residents by being community based. She said PCSOs had been conducting a survey in Dedworth by knocking on residents' doors and asking what was being done well and what was not in the area; in addition to this they had been asking residents if they could help the community in any way by providing skills or locations that could be used by other residents. This survey was being done in addition to one being carried out by Thames Valley Alert. Inspector Croucher said she hoped Jeff Pick from Thames Valley Alert would be able to attend a future meeting.

Inspector Croucher confirmed, following a question from the Chairman, that the bicycle rack at Eton railway station had been stolen after being unbolted from the floor. More modern racks elsewhere were sunk into the pavement to stop metal theft. Inspector Croucher said the police were working with the Council to improve CCTV coverage of bicycle racks at the Borough's railway stations. Cllr Rayner said the rack had now been replaced, and expressed her surprise at the lengths the culprit had taken to steal the rack. Cllr Cannon confirmed, following a question from Cllr da Costa, that the rack had not been covered by CCTV but added that racks were not under constant surveillance as the cameras would cover a wider area.

Cllr Tisi asked if the crime figures Inspector Croucher referenced could be made available in advance of future meetings, so Members could prepare any questions they may have about the statistics. Inspector Croucher said she was happy to do this.

Inspector Croucher said some stolen bikes had been recovered and some had been returned to their owners as they had been marked with personal details, and Inspector Croucher said the police were trying to convey the message that it was important for bike owners to get them marked. She said a suspect had been arrested and charged with up to eight offences of bike theft, and had been banned from entering Windsor.

Responding to a question from Cllr Price, Inspector Croucher confirmed that a stabbing had taken place recently in Windsor. This had been outside a pub and the wound had been a minor one to the hand. A suspect had been arrested and the investigation was ongoing; however Inspector Croucher said the victim, who had been intoxicated, was not engaging with the police investigation. She added that this incident of a stabbing was regarded as very unusual for Windsor.

Regarding the introduction of the 'rule of six' for gatherings, Inspector Croucher told the Forum that the police had been instructed to be more forceful in trying to stop large gatherings, and that more direct action had been required. There had been some reports to police of large gatherings, and it was anticipated that this would increase.

The Forum was told about the Street Wise programme to help street sleepers, which operated a traffic light system depending on the number of reports that had been made about a particular individual. A pattern of repeated poor behaviour could lead to enforcement and possible prosecution. Inspector Croucher reminded the Forum that it was a criminal offence to beg. The Street Wise programme was designed to give help to street sleepers and potentially take them off the streets.

Members thanked Inspector Croucher for attending the meeting and for the work of the police during Covid19, as it was appreciated that officers were doing an impressive job during difficult circumstances.

CYCLE ACTION GROUP UPDATE

Susy Shearer introduced the item and reminded members that the Council's Cycle Forum had been in operation for more than 20 years, providing an important way of sharing ideas around cycling, before being disbanded in May 2019. However the former group had had an input into the Cycling Action Plan for 2018-28, which had been formally adopted by Cabinet and become a policy document. Since then a new Cycle Action Group, which worked closely with the Council, had been established and had around 40 members. It was hoped that the establishment of the group would promote cycling and lead to it being viewed as a normal mode of transport. Its aims were to increase the number of cyclists and to reduce the number of casualties by improving cycling infrastructure and safety.

Chris Joyce told the Forum that an application for funding had been made to the Department for Transport, to help accelerate the development of the cycle plan. The application stated that the cycle plan was consistent with the Borough's draft climate strategy and had been made as part of a second tranche of applications being considered. An application for a smaller amount of funding had been made by the Council during the first tranche, which was aimed at re-opening up town centres and supporting social distancing by providing more cycle paths and bike racks. Chris Joyce said he was not able to confirm the details of individual projects in the bid until the DfT announced its decisions. At this stage no indication had been given over when these decisions would be made.

Responding to a question from Cllr Davey, Susy Shearer confirmed it was hoped that the A308 corridor could be incorporated into the strategy in future.

It was confirmed that the terms of reference for the Cycle Action Group were available online and it was asked if this could be circulated amongst Forum members.

Susy Shearer said it was hoped signage in Peascod Street could be reviewed over the coming months, as there was confusion over whether cycling was allowed in all sections of the street due to the signage being unclear.

Members thanked Susy Shearer for her presentation and for her work in helping to establish the new Cycle Action Group.

SHEET STREET, PARKING

Responding to a question from a member of the public, the Chairman informed the Forum that the vehicle mitigations put in place in Sheet Street as security measures were no longer in position. The mitigations had been introduced as a security device during the guard change, and this had not been taking place during the Covid19 pandemic. It was unlikely to be reintroduced before Christmas.

A question was asked about the results of the consultation into parking in the Royal Borough, and what scheme was proposed to replace the Advantage card. Cllr Cannon told the Forum that a parking review of Windsor was taking place, and security arrangements formed part of this. Due to the confidential nature of these arrangements it was not possible to discuss them in an open forum, but it was an important factor to be taken into account due to the arrangements for the guard change. Cllr Cannon stated that although it had been hoped to implement a new parking scheme by September, there had been slippage on the project because of the Covid19 pandemic. The option paper would be considered at October's Cabinet meeting.

Cllr Cannon said no changes to individual streets' parking schemes were proposed, unless they had been requested by residents. However reviews were taking place in areas where a specific parking issue had been identified. If residents wanted to change a parking scheme – either by implementing one, or withdrawing an existing one – then they would need to raise it with the Council themselves in order for a review to take place. This would generally be done by raising it with the relevant ward councillor. Cllr Cannon explained that the review was

looking at ways of improving parking capacity in areas of insufficient provision, along with online payment options.

Responding to a question about the implementation of RinGo, Cllr Cannon said some issues had been identified and raised within the first week of operation. These were mainly to do with signage, as the app itself had been taken over by a different provider and was considered to be a continuation of the pre-existing system.

It was asked if consideration could be given to making the York Street car park available to the public from 5pm instead of the existing 7pm start time. Cllr Cannon said he would look into this, and that it would require him to make enquiries with the building's tenants.

DRAFT CLIMATE CHANGE CONSULTATION

A public question was asked about what plans there were to increase education on climate change, as part of the consultation by the UK Climate Assembly and their strategy. Olivia McGregor explained that the Climate Assembly's report set out how the country as a whole would meet its targets by 2050, and improved education was one of the main recommendations. The Council was assisting in informing residents about the consultation on its own draft climate change strategy, and was carrying out a programme of engagement such as through meetings and the Council's usual channels to make people aware of the consultation. Partnership working was also being developed to help raise awareness of the Council's draft climate change strategy.

Cllr Price said she had been promoting the draft strategy on social media. She stated she had started to fill in the consultation document but felt not all of the questions were worded in a way that supported her views and the message she was trying to convey. She asked if it was possible for written responses to the strategy to be sent in instead. Olivia McGregor said there was space at the end of the consultation document for residents to submit their own responses in a text box, and that responding to all of the questions was not mandatory. The email address associated with the strategy was for technical support only. Cllr Price said staff had been very helpful at answering her queries when she had contacted them.

The Chairman stated that the Borough had benefitted from better air quality during the Covid19 pandemic due to less air traffic to Heathrow and fewer HGV movements associated with the airport. Cllr Davey told the Forum that he was also chairman of the youth team at the Rotary Club, which ran a young environmentalist competition each year. The theme for this year was climate change and carbon reduction.

Responding to a question about making the public more aware of ongoing consultations, the Chairman suggested Around the Royal Borough could be used, although it was noted a print edition had not been produced recently because of Covid19. Chris Joyce said attempts had been made to promote the consultation through the local media, although at the same time responses being sent through methods other than by email were being discouraged. Members agreed that it was hard to make residents aware of ongoing online consultations, due to their number and because not everyone had internet access. Susy Shearer said the Cycling Action Group was drafting its response to the RBWM consultation. Olivia McGregor said it was hoped RBWM would be able to respond to the main Climate Assembly consultation, once all of the issues that had been raised were fully understood.

TOWN MANAGER UPDATE

Paul Roach introduced the item and explained that a number of changes had had to be implemented to Windsor town centre due to Covid19, and the need to maintain social distancing. This included the removal of some benches, and Paul Roach stated that there were no plans to remove all of them, contrary to speculation that had been circulating. Work had taken place to ensure social distancing was able to be more stringently enforced in areas

that had been identified as being at high risk of transmitting Covid19. This included relocating part of the main taxi rank outside the castle to further along Thames Street.

Paul Roach said the response from businesses to the changes had been positive, as the changes had shown a willingness to support the local economy. The possibility of the food market being reintroduced, in line with government guidance, was being explored. The Forum was told that the most recent piece of guidance to be announced concerned businesses being able to have their own NHS QR code. Businesses were being contacted to make sure they were being assigned their unique code, and to ensure the correct track and trace data was being recorded. Paul Roach said work was being undertaken with external partners to deal with issues that would improve access to Windsor town centre still further.

The Forum was told that a new social media platform, My Royal Borough, had just been launched as a way of allowing businesses and the visitor information team to promote activities and offers taking place and to circulate news and information.

Paul Roach told the Forum that the recent town centre health check had shown that visitor footfall was being maintained. Although it was accepted that because of Covid19 normal visitor numbers would be lower compared to previous years, weekend footfall levels were starting to approach normal figures. Overall footfall was down 16 per cent compared to the previous year and was down 42 per cent year to year. The UK average footfall was down 48 per cent year to year. Coach park visits were significantly down, particularly from international travellers, although over the last month there had been an increase from local visitors. In terms of vacant retail units, Paul Roach stated Windsor had 9.4 per cent of its units vacant, against a national average of 10.3 per cent. However there were a number of businesses that had not opened at all during the pandemic, and if they failed to reopen then the vacant units could go up to 16 per cent. It was not currently known the plans were for these businesses. Paul Roach said that Windsor Yards were in discussions over two new tenants potentially coming in; these would be significant businesses rather than a pop-up or charity shop. There was also the possibility of new businesses at the Royal Station Shopping. Paul Roach said he would provide updates when more information was available. In addition, although footfall was down, spending was slightly higher in comparison to the previous year.

Paul Roach told the Forum that a number of businesses had been in contact with him to say they were deeply concerned at the impact of a possible second lockdown due to Covid19. He said the retail sector had been hit particularly hard; although many retail outlets had had assistance with business rates, they were still struggling to afford other costs. Some businesses had not been eligible for assistance because they were outside of the thresholds, and these were the ones that had been contacting Paul Roach to ask for further assistance. Many of these were now being promoted through the My Royal Borough group.

Following questions from Forum members, Paul Roach clarified the NHS QR code system. He also confirmed that the 10pm shutdown meant there was no leeway for drinking-up time in pubs, and although restaurants providing takeaway service were able to continue operating this beyond 10pm they were not able to accept any more sit-down customers.

Cllr Rayner said there was a strategy review of the museum and tourist information centre was being undertaken, which would go to Cabinet. There would also be the possibility the review would go to the relevant overview and scrutiny panel, in order for it to be discussed in public. She explained that because the museum had been closed as a result of a Cabinet paper, it could only be reopened if recommended to do so in a subsequent Cabinet report.

Julia White told the Forum that a new website, www.windsor.gov.uk, had been launched thanks to money from a European fund aimed at reopening high streets. The video footage used on the website was a mix of existing footage and additional material shot using a drone. There were two videos; one lasting around 30 seconds looked at returning to the high street in a safe manner, and was aimed at local residents to encourage them to support local businesses. A longer video was aimed at the domestic 'staycation' market to encourage

visitors to use hotels, hospitality and local attractions, which had been badly affected by lockdown.

It was suggested to the Forum that more independent retailers could be encouraged to use any vacant units. The Forum was also told the area around St Leonards Road was looking shabby, with little evidence of cleaning and maintenance. Cllr Rayner agreed this was an opportunity to reach out to local businesses about having more independent retailers in the town centre, and this was being done. She also said she would look into the claims regarding St Leonards Road. Paul Roach supported Cllr Rayner's statement that independent retailers were being contacted about the vacant units, and told the Forum that the Council was also receiving a large volume of queries from mobile catering businesses.

WINDSOR TOWN PLAN

Barbara Richardson introduced the item and reminded the Forum that a paper including a procurement brief to improve Windsor town centre had been approved by Cabinet in February. The Forum was reminded that a previous feasibility study of improvements had never been implemented. Barbara Richardson stated that the Town Plan was not a formal planning document, but set out how Windsor town centre currently looked and what it could look like in 10-15 years' time and what changes would be needed. There would need to be a full consultation with key stakeholders, businesses and residents and a new joint venture partner would be needed to help deliver the vision. Prioritising what needed to be done had been deferred until January next year due to uncertainty in the property market. It was therefore hoped a robust version of the Windsor Town Plan would be ready in the summer. The work which had already been done would be incorporated into the Town Plan charter, rather than it being duplicated.

Barbara Richardson stated that the joint venture partner would not be carrying out the work itself, but instead would be involved in the planning and procurement process. Barbara Richardson reiterated that the Town Plan was not a planning document, nor did it have anything to do with the Windsor Neighbourhood Plan. It was noted that the Neighbourhood Plan had just passed the examination stage.

HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

Tracy Hendren introduced the item and reminded the Forum that a strategy incorporating homelessness and rough sleepers had been approved by Cabinet in June. This aimed to help the Council focus on how it could help rough sleepers in the Royal Borough with supported accommodation, together with their wider needs. Four 'tap and donate' boxes were to be implemented in the four main towns in the Royal Borough, with the paperwork approving this due to be signed off imminently.

Tracy Hendren told the Forum that there were 62 people listed on the Council's service user pathway, although none of these were sleeping rough within the Royal Borough. One pathway user had been referred to services at Slough Borough Council. The Forum was told issues persisted with begging and other street activities, and the Council was working with its community wardens and the police to address these issues.

The Forum was told there were eight pending assessments of pathway users to determine their levels of need. 24 were in stage 1, where their needs were investigated further, and 14 were in stage 2. Of these three were ready to join the 16 users at stage 3, where they were considered ready to move into their own accommodation. Some were already in the process of moving into accommodation. The Council was working with the private rented sector to ensure none of the pathway users were returning to rough sleeping on the streets, and other options were being explored to provide further mitigations.

Tracy Hendren said the first Homelessness Forum was scheduled to take place the following week. The Forum's intention was to monitor and deliver the five agreed prioritised actions in

the homelessness strategy. Some of these were new actions that had not previously been worked on. The Forum would also help to ensure the Council was working with the correct partner agencies and the voluntary sector to ensure the aims were being met. Weekly meetings regarding operations and intelligence were taking place.

Tracy Hendren said the number of service users was not going down, but the number was able to be managed. Cllr McWilliams told the Forum that an additional £145,000 in funding had been obtained from central government to help support the scheme.

Members said they were pleased to hear about how well the strategy had been working so far.

CONTINUATION OF MEETING

At this point in the meeting, and in accordance with Rule of Procedure Part 4A C25.1 of the council's constitution, the Chairman called for a vote in relation to whether or not the meeting should continue, as the length of the meeting had exceeded three hours.

Councillor Bowden, seconded by Councillor Knowles, proposed the items on the work programme and armed forces covenant be covered via email outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That:

- i) The meeting should end as it had exceeded three hours in length.**
- ii) The work programme and armed forces covenant update would be dealt with via email.**

The meeting, which began at 6.15 pm, finished at 9.21 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....