

Responses to Councillor Questions for Council on 24 January 2023

a) Councillor Bond will ask the following question of Councillor Rayner, Deputy Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Business, Corporate & Residents Services, Culture & Heritage, & Windsor; Armed Forces Champion

Will the council be publishing the number of people turned away from exercising their democratic right to vote at each polling station in May because they do not have acceptable photo ID or have forgotten to bring it, and how many free Voter Authority Certificates (the new voter cards) do you anticipate issuing please?

As part of the implementation of the Elections Act 2022 each polling station will be maintaining a record of the number of people presenting themselves at the polling station without valid photographic identification as well as noting how many of those then return and take part in the poll. This statutory report will be submitted to the Electoral Commission. Although not currently a requirement to be published we will endeavour to share the statistical data as soon as is practically possible. The most recent research has estimated that 96% of the population would already have at least one form of acceptable photo ID. The new system allows many accepted forms of photo ID from passports to bus passes. Electors within the borough without valid photo ID can apply for the free Voter Authority Certificates (VAC) by visiting the government website (<https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate>). They may however choose instead to register to vote by post or appoint a proxy to attend the polling station on their behalf. If 4% of the borough's population applied for a VAC then 4,400 applications would be processed. Once approved the VAC is posted from a central national supplier. The changes to the Election Act 2022 have been made to improve democracy by seeking to combat voter fraud as every ballot matters.

b) Councillor Brar will ask the following question of Councillor Rayner, Deputy Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Business, Corporate & Residents Services, Culture & Heritage, & Windsor; Armed Forces Champion

As the Voters ID law has been passed how are the RBWM planning to communicate with residents in the Borough and educate them about the change in good time for the forthcoming local elections in May 2023, so that the Borough residents do not find themselves turned away from the polling stations?

We have started the campaign for informing residents about the change in the law which will complement the Electoral Commission's national campaign with information available at libraries, polling stations, and in Maidenhead town hall. Information will also be made available on our website, and promoted through our social media channels, e-newsletters, and other communications with key stakeholders. We will work with our partners, including parish councils, schools, and other key community groups, to support our campaign, and to ensure messaging is spread effectively throughout the borough. As part of this community engagement, we will raise awareness of the new requirements at our World Cafés which will give residents an opportunity to ask questions, remove doubt, and gain confidence in the new process.

c) Cllr C Da Costa will ask the following question of Councillor McWilliams: Cabinet Member for Digital Connectivity, Housing Opportunity, & Sport & Leisure

How many people on the part 3 Homeless Pathway, being supported by Browns, were not helped to apply for council tax support, and how much was, or is owed to the council by this failure to claim the benefit, that has either been paid for by the resident, the Household support fund or remains an outstanding debt?

We can confirm that the support agency do submit council tax support applications with customers who have moved into their own accommodation at stage 3 of our rough sleeper pathway. When the referrals were initially set up for customers, unfortunately council tax was not one of the utilities that were supported, however, this was quickly resolved. All 6 of the original applicants who were not supported initially are now in receipt of council tax support so the situation has been resolved and BROWNS have confirmed that they will continue to ensure council tax support is applied for at the earliest opportunity for all future cases. However, it must be noted, that when Council tax support is in place the resident does still have a contribution towards their council tax to make. Even with maximum support in place a person of working age is likely to still be responsible for at least 20% of their council tax bill. As such, arrears can also be accrued this way if the residents is not paying the personal contribution.

d) Councillor Singh will ask the following question of Councillor Haseler, Cabinet Member for Planning, Parking, Highways & Transport

I understand following the Broadway car park closure which has now been deemed unsafe due to rust from structural steelwork which was open to the elements. When were these issues first highlighted by/to Officers/Members and why the delay in carrying out any repairs?

The car park is regularly inspected for any health and safety issues and any remedial work identified is completed. It was necessary to close Nicholsons car park at short notice in the interests of health and safety, due to an area of overhead concrete that required swift assessment and remedial action. On a precautionary basis, the car park has stayed closed to undertake technical condition assessment of all levels, and the requirement for further remedial work has been identified. Spalling within the car park has been occurring over the last 10 years and has been treated accordingly. However, the amount of spalling is increasing and it is not possible to treat all of the areas safely without completely closing the car park. The steel work was not open to the elements however due to the ingress of chemicals and water/salt it has started to rust within the surrounding concrete beam which then causes the spalling. The car park will remain fully closed while contractors undertake further assessment works, initially prioritising the two lowest floors to see what would be required to re-open those levels to Shopmobility users and blue badge holders. Since the closure, we have been working with People to Places to find a solution for Shopmobility services which is now located at unit 69/71 Queens Walk Mall. There is no parking provision on-site at the new location, however the Brock Street entrance to the centre can be used as a drop-off point for those unable to walk from the town's other car parks. The nearest disabled parking bays are on Queen Street. We apologise for the inconvenience of this closure, which is required in order to undertake this important work.

e) Councillor Singh will ask the following question of Councillor Bhangra, Cabinet Member for Environmental Services, Parks and Countryside

At the last full council meeting I highlighted the resident's concerns with losing the sensory water cascade feature, pond, and footbridge, the Lead Member provided assurances that he would meet and look at alternatives to backfilling this valued feature, unfortunately, that has not happened and the decision has been made to backfill regardless, please explain why?

Details of the plans for this area of Kidwells Park were provided at Full Council in November. Officers had been exploring options for the pond, bridge and other features at the park to look at what would be possible to bring them back into use. Unfortunately, on this occasion the cost of repair work to the upper pond and associated streams meant that reinstatement was not feasible at this time.

Following an options appraisal for the leaking top pond, associated streams and bridge, these are in the process of being removed and will be laid back to grass. The bottom pond and fountain will remain, still giving park users a sensory water experience and providing the benefits of blue space for park users.

Kidwells Park has received considerable investment this financial year. The surface for the play area was replaced at a cost of £55,000, the largest single investment in any of our parks this year. In addition, funding has been secured from the Lawn Tennis Association to improve the tennis courts.

f) Councillor Davey will ask the following question of Councillor Johnson, Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Growth & Opportunity

As leader of RBWM will you be actively encouraging prospective candidates to respect the mental health of all candidates in the May 2023 elections?

Councillors make a huge difference to the quality of life of local people and how local issues are dealt with. As leader of RBWM I will be encouraging people from all backgrounds and experiences who reflect the communities we serve to put themselves forward for election. Many recognise that robust political debate is part of a healthy democracy but that this can sometimes can go too far and some people have experienced harassment and intimidation. Guidance will be available on our website for prospective candidates which has been created by the National Police Chiefs Council, working with the Crown Prosecution Service and the Electoral Commission. The guide has been designed to help them understand when behaviour goes beyond political debate and may be unlawful. It also provides more detail as to the nature of possible offences, and some other sources for advice on keeping themselves safe, including online. It is important to recognise what might happen and the action they can take to protect and respect all prospective candidates.

g) Councillor Davey will ask the following question of Councillor Carroll, Deputy Chairman of Cabinet & Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, Health, Mental Health, & Transformation

As advisor on vaccines to the Government during the Covid pandemic, can you advise on any concerns you may have regarding the Yellow Card reports for RBWM or relevant PHE geographical area?

Thanks for the question. For full transparency, I wish to note that I was a Senior Expert Policy & Strategy Adviser to the UK Vaccines Taskforce between August 2020 and January 2022 and I currently work for Moderna. This is all stated in my public Register of Interests along with other interests as required. I have taken advice from the Monitoring Officer who has advised I can answer this question in the interests of public health, but I wish to declare these personal interests for full transparency which I consider important.

The UK has an independent regulator called the Medicines Healthcare product Regulatory Agency (MHRA), which deals with all matters relating to vaccine safety, quality and effectiveness/efficacy. It is extremely thorough and robust in its approach. The similarly independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), which is the expert body that provides recommendations on vaccination strategy and campaign, also looks at safety considerations pertaining to public health to ensure real world evidence is also being utilised to inform recommendation decisions.

Having worked with the MHRA closely, I can assure everyone of its world class independence, science and public health first approach, and robustness and serious

diligence on all pharmacovigilance matters. Likewise the JCVI, which is seen as world leading and very methodical, expert and considered in all its recommendation decisions. As the MHRA and JCVI have continually stated, the benefits of licensed vaccines in preventing Covid-19 and serious complications associated with Covid-19, including death and hospitalisation, far outweigh any currently known side effects. As with all vaccines and medicines, the safety of Covid-19 vaccines is continuously monitored, and benefits and possible risks remain under constant review. Reports into the Yellow Card Scheme are important to ensure data are continually collected and analysed. It is worth noting a significant number of those adverse events reported pertain to minor events such as injection site reaction, or more commonly known as a sore arm, from the vaccine administration. In addition, a Yellow Card report does not automatically mean the vaccine is the cause. The Yellow Card system is an open system and any member of the public can complete a form without verification. This is to ensure openness of adverse event reporting and to encourage collection of data. Thus, some reported adverse events might actually be a correlation due to other underlying conditions, natural causes or other illnesses that are the cause for the adverse event. Or it could be a reported adverse event that has nothing to do with the vaccine, be an incorrect submission, or be from someone who has not even had a vaccine. Thus, distinguishing between causation compared to correlation and no association is vital. These are the extensive datasets the MHRA sedulously review and evaluate for safety first considerations.

On a local level, the NHS has provided assurances all the vaccination incidents, which would include those that are reported through the Yellow Card Scheme, come through to the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and are reviewed at the Vaccination Board as well as being sent to NHS England regional team. This is an additional system analysis to ensure public health is being protected.

Sadly, there remains a serious problem with dangerous misinformation regarding Covid-19 vaccines and it is vital we all play our role in ensuring such misleading and potentially devastating misinformation is not allowed to propagate and disseminate, and that the scientific facts in the interests of public health are always published, made available and communicated. Vaccines have saved so many lives and prevented serious illness and disease. As someone who sadly lost a family relative to covid-19 prior to the vaccines being available, this has particular poignancy as I know it does for so many people.

I hope this answer is helpful.