

Agenda Item 30.

TITLE	Public and Member Questions
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 20 September 2016
WARD	None Specific
DIRECTOR	Andrew Moulton, Head of Governance and Improvement Services

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the checks and balances which ensure that the Council and its partners make and implement effective decisions for all the residents of the Borough. Questions submitted to the Executive and Council give an indication of issues of interest and concern. These issues may generate review topics for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee considers the list of questions set out at Annex A and determine whether any of the issues raised should be included in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2016/17.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

At its meeting on 31 May 2016, the Committee considered a report containing suggestions for improving the Overview and Scrutiny process. One of the suggestions related to the monitoring of questions submitted to the Council's Executive and Council.

Members agreed that regular monitoring reports be submitted to the Management Committee.

Background

At its meeting on 31 May 2016, the Committee considered a report containing a number of suggestions aimed at improving the Overview and Scrutiny process and developing greater public interest and involvement. One of the suggestions related to the monitoring of questions submitted to the Executive and full Council meetings.

Members and residents regularly ask questions at the Executive and Council meetings. These questions indicate areas of interest and concern and may generate ideas for Overview and Scrutiny investigation. The Committee agreed to consider regular monitoring reports on the questions submitted. Annex A contains details of the public and Member questions raised at the meeting of Council on 21 July 2016, the Executive on 28 July 2016 and the Extraordinary Executive on 1 September 2016.

Analysis of Issues

Members are requested to consider Annex A and to determine whether it contains issues requiring further consideration and inclusion in the Work Programme for 2016/17.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None

List of Background Papers

None

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Date 7 September 2016	Version No. 1

QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL 21 JULY 2016

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

CP1

Guy Grandison has asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question.

Question

Could the Executive Member for Highways give us an update on the Third Thames Bridge Project, specifically the traffic modelling progress being carried out by WBC?

CP2

Nicola Greenwood has asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:

Question

Thank you for accepting Wokingham Bridleway Group's petition for an increase in the % of equestrian access in the Borough, the subsequent meeting and letter following the meeting. Please could I ask if the petition issues comes back to council and if not please could you explain how the matter now lies?

CP3

Claire Symes has asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

I am writing with regard to a safe walking and cycling route to the new Bohunt School, Wokingham from The Lilacs in Barkham. My son is due to start at the school this September. This was our first choice school, and as we live under 3 miles away, I believe that free transportation will not be provided by WBC. We were hoping that our son would be able to cycle to school, providing a healthy and independent means of travel.

However, at present, this is not a safe option from The Lilacs. The speed limit on the Bearwood Road only drops to 30 mph at the end of the road, near the roundabout. The WBC factsheet on road speeds states that a child hit by a vehicle driving at 40mph is likely to die! How can I send my child safely off to school on his bike or by foot, when he is at serious risk of death?

There is no safe crossing at the bottom of Bearwood Road, which is a very busy road during rush hour/school commuting times; and there is no safe crossing on the Barkham Road/Barkham end of Langley Common Road. Furthermore, the pavement around the Barkham Manor is dangerously narrow, with a high wall to one side. Traffic regularly speeds around this corner, with little regard for pedestrians.

I urge you to press for a reduced speed limit of 30 mph on the Bearwood Road and to provide a safe crossing on the Bearwood Road and Barkham Road/Langley Common Road, as well as considering what needs to be done to improve the safety of pedestrians and cyclists travelling past the Barkham Manor.

We were encouraged to consider Bohunt as an option, and were assured that whilst the Arborfield development was in progress, the council would ensure that there were safe routes to Bohunt from Barkham, or alternatively, free transportation until this was established.

MEMBER QUESTIONS

CM1

Charles Margetts has asked the Deputy Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question.

Question

I travel regularly between Wokingham and Waterloo and the train service seems to be inordinately slow. Can the Deputy Executive Member please tell me what representations Wokingham Borough Council has made to seek shorter journey times?

CM2

Alistair Auty has asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question.

Question

Could the Executive Member please update the Council on the situation with Emmbrook Infant and Junior School?

CM3

Tim Holton has asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question.

Question

Could the Executive Member explain the basis for the Council's current approach to grass-cutting in the Borough?

CM4

Kate Haines has asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question.

Question

Does the Executive Member agree that the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub will lead to more effective pooling of knowledge between the Council, the NHS, the Police and the Probation Service, in order to ensure the safety of our children?

CM5

Bill Soane has asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question.

Question

Could the Executive Member explain the benefit to residents of the introduction of permits to use recycling centres?

CM6

David Chopping has asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question.

Question

Can the Executive member for education please update the residents of the Maiden Erlegh Ward on the second stage of the expansion of our primary schools to meet the ever increasing demand resulting from being one of the best Education authorities in the south of England?

CM7

Lindsay Ferris has asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question.

Question

What is the overall cost to the council of the decision by West Berkshire Council to cease paying for its residents to use the RE3 recycling centres and the subsequent introduction of a permit system for residents of Wokingham, Bracknell and Reading?

CM8

Prue Bray has asked the Executive Member for Resident Services the following question.

Question

In an attempt to address its financial challenges, the council has begun work on remodelling itself. We understand that the business case for the 21st Century Council project will come to the Executive in the Autumn. For this remodelling to succeed, there will need to be a shift in the way the council interacts with the public, so that the public can more easily get their queries answered satisfactorily and the work load on staff is reduced. This presents both threats and opportunities. If this is got right, there is a genuine chance to improve the responsiveness of the council to its residents. What steps does the administration intend to take to involve the public and others in contributing ideas to the changes to its customer-facing functions so that the outcome is as good as it can be?

CM9

Gary Cowan has asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question.

Question

At the Arborfield Garrison Public Forum held at Henry Street Garden Centre on June the 29th Officers gave a presentation on safe walking routes to Bohunt School which some residents of both Arborfield and Barkham have serious concerns with. As the Executive Member responsible do you approve of the plan as presented and therefore accept responsibility for its implementation and have you seen and approved any risk assessment attached to this plan?

CM10

Clive Jones has asked the Executive Member for Health and Well-being the following question.

Question

The Government is conducting a dangerous experiment by cutting funding for pharmacies which will see up to 3000 close, thereby reducing people's access to medicines and healthcare advice, and putting extra pressure on GPs and hospitals.

The proposals put at risk a part of the health system that holds the key to solving many of its problems. Patients would be the biggest losers. There are particular concerns about the risks to the most vulnerable people and the most deprived communities, where local pharmacies are often (literally) a lifeline.

What action will you take to minimise the negative impact on Wokingham Borough residents of this government cut to pharmacy funding?

QUESTIONS TO EXECUTIVE 28 JULY 2016

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

EP1

Liz Slocombe has asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question.

Question

Since the expense in setting up the Hearing Impaired Unit at Emmbrook infants has already occurred and the only expense is in employing a single Teacher for the Hearing Impaired, who could do outreach work from the school if underemployed, what is the benefit in removing the Unit when the huge number of new family houses being built in Wokingham Borough makes it impossible to predict the number of children moving here who may require it?

EP2

Chas Hockin has asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question.

Question

The proposed trial of the different car parking charges for Woodley is too short. It should be at least a year to iron out any seasonal fluctuations. Can the Council change its proposal so that the trial lasts at least a year?

MEMBER QUESTIONS

EM1

Lindsay Ferris has asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question.

Question

What success criteria have been set to enable evaluation of the Woodley car parking charging trial?

EM2

Beth Rowland has asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question.

Question

Given the Conservative government's preference for schools to become academies, we welcome the idea of establishing a member/officer working group to explore the possibility of establishing a local multi-academy trust to minimise uncertainty, disruption and expense for schools and thus to benefit their pupils. Can you please confirm that this working group will be formed on a cross-party basis?

QUESTIONS TO EXTRAORDINARY EXECUTIVE 1 SEPTEMBER 2016

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

EP1

Pam Stubbs has asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

A consultation on speed limit changes was initiated by a householder letter on 25th July and the last date for comments was 18th August. Barkham Parish Council, who were not consulted, feel that this TRO is not satisfactory and that since the changes are due to the new school complex, Bearwood Road (within Barkham) ,Barkham Street and Langley Common Road should be considered as part of this TRO.

The School is due to open in a matter of days and we are bewildered by the fact that no thought was given to this until July and also why the Traffic Management Team will not meet with the Parish Council to discuss their proposals until the end of September, when, presumably their changes will already be in place.

EP2

Bernie Waters has asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

The response from Barkham Parish Council stated they would like to see the extent of the proposed 30mph, speed limit on Bearwood Road extended further north to Highlands Avenue. This will be picked up as a wider issue by the Project Manager outside of this TRO process.

What commitment will the Council give to actioning this feedback given that:

- A) The Parish Council is the most informed party to this speed restriction need and that Highlands Avenue is the “Gateway” to the residential area of Bearwood Road Barkham
- B) The cost addition is negligible – a few more signs between the proposed 30 mph limit and the Parish Councils requested limit.

MEMBER QUESTION

EM1

Gary Cowan has asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

WSP had a scheme which the Traffic Management Team and the Highways Inspector asked the Council to look at because the plastic bollards on the extremely narrow footway were being regularly hit by vehicles, which meant they were had to be mounting the footway.

The scheme was on a list to be done just over a year ago that extended the 30 mph speed limit and gave the illusion that the road was narrowing so that this should slow

vehicles entering and leaving the village at this point where currently pupils/parents (many with pushchairs with young children also) walk to The Coombes and when Bohunt opens there will be two traffic with many more pupils/parents walking in the opposite direction at the same times.

The footway is so narrow in this area and it cannot be widened because that is the extent of the footway width of the Council owned land.

Can you explain why this scheme has been totally ignored when the very clear risks to pedestrians, mainly children and their parents is there for all to see and for which you appeared to balk at taking responsibility for as I asked you to do in my recent question at Council?

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