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COUNCIL – 8 FEBRUARY – SO 30 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Question from Councillor O'Driscoll

Question to the Chair of the Housing Committee (Councillor Pursehouse)

Towards the end of last year, a site visit was arranged at my request for the Head of Housing, Chairman of the Housing Committee, and myself as a member of the Council to visit temporary accommodation in Whyteleafe, to address some of the concerns raised with me by residents.

Since this visit was conducted, I have received reasonable intelligence that at least two large families of more than five members have been housed in the accommodation. Given how small the rooms are in this block, the fact that this overcrowding in the accommodation is taking place is problematic.

What steps are being taken to prevent overcrowding like this from happening in future?

Response from the Chair of the Housing Committee (Councillor Pursehouse)

Members will be aware that the Council's Homelessness Prevention Service has been under considerable pressure, which has led to a significantly increases of use of bed and breakfast accommodation as emergency accommodation, not satisfactory to anybody in any shape or form.

It is unlawful for families with children to remain in bed and breakfasts for more than 6 weeks and the Council, therefore needs to source other short-term arrangement. This has to include Temporary Accommodation in Whyteleafe, which is intended to meet the short term needs for most families. They are not meant to be in there for overly long periods.

However, it is accepted that the use of Temporary Accommodation in Whyteleafe for any extended period is, generally, not appropriate for families, particularly larger families and the Council is actively looking for more suitable accommodation options within our own stock and the private rented sector. Unfortunately, in the present climate, it is proving particularly challenging to secure more suitable accommodation for these families.

The Council recognises that there is a particular shortage of properties suitable for larger families and to help address this, is in the process of procuring three 3-bedroom properties for use as temporary accommodation, using funding provided through the Local Housing Authority Funding Round 2.

2. Question from Councillor O'Driscoll

Question to the Chair of the Community Services Committee (Councillor Wren)

Reporting from The Tandridge Independent this month has raised awareness of the torrid conditions residents in Blize Court and Manorview Court in Whyteleafe are living in as a result of a rat infestation. Residents have had damage done to their cars. They are scared to use the lifts to get them to their homes, instead having to use the concrete staircase outside and one young resident had the traumatic experience of a rat falling on her head.

Residents have repeatedly tried to raise their concerns with their housing association L&Q, and they have loudly ignored them. Members will agree with me that this is unacceptable.

No one in our community should be living in these squalid conditions. This proves to be yet another case where remote housing associations are not looking after residents in our district.

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What steps are this Council going to take to ensure L&Q address the infestation at Blize Court and Manorview Court? And will this Council hold Housing Associations to account and ensure that residents in their properties live in decent, adequate housing free of mould and infestations?

Response from the Chair of the Community Services Committee (Councillor Wren)

Our Environmental Health Service received a complaint about rats and the bins being full at these properties shortly after Christmas. Officers take these matters very seriously and contacted the housing association, L&Q, who instructed their pest control contractor to attend and carry out treatments.

During the Christmas holiday period refuse collections were not made on the usual dates but refuse was collected on the dates scheduled during this time, and collections have now returned to their normal days.

As part of their investigation, the Environmental Health Officers visited the properties on the 15th of January and I'm pleased to report that at that time, there was no evidence of rats or overflowing bins at the time of their visit, and they also observed that rodent bait boxes were in place. The Officers will continue to work with L&Q to ensure that this site is being monitored by their pest control contractor until the rodent matter is resolved.

Tenants who are concerned about mould growth in their homes should contact their service provider or landlord in the first instance to give them the opportunity to deal directly with the matter. If they fail to act within reasonable period of time, they can report it then to the Environmental Health Service who will investigate.

However, Councillor O'Driscoll you have sent me some pictures recently taken at the site that show that the bin storage areas continue to be overflowing and they look a health hazard to me, bearing in mind some of the stuff that had been put around the bins I would not have thought very safe to be around a bin area, so I am going to forward those to the Environmental Health and request they return to do another site visit as quickly as they can and if need be, if it is still like that when they attend, that they get back in touch with L&Q.

Supplementary Question

Will this Council commit tonight to sending an Environmental Health Officer to Blize Court and Manorview Court and, if the findings were the same as what I found, will a long overdue enforcement notice be served?

Response from the Chair of the Community Services Committee

I will personally get Environmental Health to go back to those premises and have a look, and see what the situation is as of now, rather than back in January, and if the findings are the same, if they can take measures to get L&Q to make that a safe environment for the people there, and, if need be, we can instruct them to put a notice on L&Q that they have to make that whole premises habitable.

3. Question from Councillor Cooper

Question to the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

At full Council on 14 December 2023 under item 192, various Caterham and other councillors raised very serious issues of anti-social behaviour, drugs, litter, and traffic chaos relating to the installation of a McDonalds shop in the centre of Caterham Valley. Acknowledging these potential issues, the Chairman of Strategy & Resources Committee committed to meeting with Surrey Police to discuss these issues and agree police actions to mitigate them. Therefore, could you please update us on who and when, Councillor Langton met with Surrey Police, to progress

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these matters and what written agreement is now in place with Surrey Police to define how the concerns raised by the Caterham Councillors are going to be dealt with. Also, given the importance of having proper agreements in place before McDonalds use the site, why has the S&R Chairman not passed copies of these agreements to the Caterham and other interested councillors.

Response from the Vice Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Crane)

It has always been recognised that there are both upsides and downsides to any Quadrant House retail letting and that, ultimately, the critical issue is where the balance lies. As the administration, we believe the opportunity for economic regeneration is the major factor in favour of the current proposal. However, in both Investment Sub-Committee and Strategy & Resources Committee meetings it has also been repeatedly emphasised that recognising the downsides and then taking actions to mitigate them is vital.

Consequently, in both Investment Sub-Committee, Strategy & Resources and Full Council, the commitment that has been made is that Tandridge District Council will meet with both Surrey County Council Highways and the Police to establish what mitigations measures can be made in an attempt to address the concerns of some Councillors. Indeed, Leader Cllr Sayer has already talked with Surrey County Council's Tim Oliver who has confirmed that Surrey County Council is very willing to work with Tandridge District Council Officers in this respect. These discussions are therefore ongoing, and Tandridge District Council will, in March, produce a paper summarising the conclusions, which will be discussed at a meeting with Members. This will be a pre-requisite for finalising the Heads of Terms agreement with the proposed leaseholder.

I should also like to point out that the statement made in this question and the next two questions submitted by Cllr Cooper contain the statement that the Chairman of Strategy & Resources committed to meeting with Surrey Police and Highways is factually incorrect and misleading.

Supplementary Question

What action has been taken, if not by Cllr Langton, by others to actually talk with Surrey Police and, as you have said, to agree actions to mitigate the issues that we have raised? Secondly, if none has been taken, please say so, as they will understand why no copies of agreements have been passed.

Response from the Vice Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee

The discussions are ongoing. At the moment, there is no clear conclusion to that. Therefore, that is why you will not have any information from Cllr Langton, but you will have in March, and you will be invited to take part in those discussions.

4. Question from Councillor Cooper

Question to the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

At full Council on 14 December 2023 under item 192, various Caterham and other councillors raised the problem of large numbers of motor scooters running around the streets of Caterham creating havoc on the roads and a serious noise nuisance to local residents until late at night, which relates to the installation of a McDonalds shop in the Croydon Road in Caterham Valley. Acknowledging these potential issues, the Chairman of the Strategy & Resources Committee committed to meeting with Surrey Highways to discuss these issues and agree changes to the local road network to mitigate them. It should be noted that many local Caterham Councillors, with huge experience of dealing with Surrey Highways, had very little confidence in Surrey Highways actually doing anything in the near future, if ever. Therefore, please could the S&R Chairman update us on who and when, he met, at Surrey Highways, to progress these matters and what written agreement is now in place with Surrey Highways to ensure changes to the local

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road network/parking wardens etc, are going to be implemented prior to McDonalds being allowed to set up shop in the Croydon Road in Caterham. Given the importance of having these alterations in place before allowing McDonalds to use the site, why has the S&R Chairman not passed copies of these agreements to the Caterham and other interested councillors.

Response from the Vice Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Crane)

The basis of the question is very similar to the first. My answer to the second question is identical to that of the first, and I do not intend adding anything more to that.

5. Question from Councillor Cooper

Question to the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

At full Council on 14 December 2023 under item 192, various Caterham and other councillors raised the issue of motor scooters creating havoc in Croydon Road as they arrive and leave, to take deliveries from a McDonalds site in the Croydon Road Caterham. Acknowledging this problem, the Chairman of the Strategy & Resources Committee committed to producing a detailed plan of alterations to the rear of Quadrant House to deal with the problem. I believe the changes also had to be agreed with McDonalds, that seems to be what has been said. Therefore, given that many weeks have passed since the last Council meeting, please could the Strategy & Resources Chairman, or Cllr Crane, update us on what changes have been agreed, when they will be implemented and explain why the Chairman has not passed plans/timescales/costs of these changes to the Caterham and other interested councillors.

Response from the Vice Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Crane)

Again, Cllr Cooper, your third question is virtually identical to the first with a slightly different nuance towards scooters. My answer is the same as the first two, but I would add on this particular question, that at the last Strategy & Resources Committee, the Principal Asset Manager had said he would distribute floor plans of the proposals for mopeds at a rear delivery point to members and I am not sure that that has actually happened.

Supplementary Question

What concerns me as a local Councillor, is that this Council shows scant regard for the impact of this on Caterham residents, and I wonder when this Council is going to take that seriously and actually start to produce something which we can show to Caterham residents to show that this Council does care?

Response from the Vice Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee

I have nothing further to add Chairman.

6. Question from Councillor Cooper

Question to the Chair of the Housing Committee (Councillor Pursehouse)

In his answer to my question on KPIs H04 and H05, at Full Council on 14 December 2023, the Chairman of the Housing Committee explained that Tandridge District Council does not know how many local residents are unable to get the housing they vitally need, it could be thousands. He then explained that he stated that, and I quote here, "we will be reviewing the KPIs at the housing committee". As I cannot see a report on the review of these KPIs in the minutes of the last Housing Committee on 23 January 2023, perhaps the Chairman of Housing could explain why nothing has happened especially given the current KPIs indicate that potentially thousands of Tandridge residents are being failed by the lack of housing in Tandridge.

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Response from the Chair of the Housing Committee (Councillor Pursehouse)

I refute the last statement that thousands of people have been failed by lack of housing. Cllr Cooper quoted me accurately that we would be looking at KPIs at the Housing Committee, I did not say the very next Housing Committee. It takes a little bit of time to do work on these things.

Officers have committed to reviewing KPI's for 2024/25 and are liaising with members who attend the Housing Committee mid-cycle meetings, at which all groups have a representation. A proposed set of revised KPI's will be presented to the Housing Committee on 19 March as an extension to the 2023/24 Q3 Performance and Risk committee paper.

Supplementary Question

He is refuting something; what is the Chairman actually refuting?

Response from the Chair of the Housing Committee

I am refuting that we are letting down thousands of Tandridge residents.

7. Question from Councillor Alun Jones

Question to the Chair of the Community Services Committee (Councillor Wren)

The council is rightly proactively managing its tree stock on council land. In some circumstances this may involve the removal of a tree which causes a danger to the public.

Some trees are much loved by our local residents adding to the character of our communities. This is in addition to the trees helping mitigate flood risk and creating much needed natural habitats for wildlife. They also help reduce the impact of urban heat island effect.

Where there are trees that it is concluded that removal is the best option, can the Chairman of Community Services advise what policy is in place for the replanting of trees?

Response from the Chair of the Community Services Committee (Councillor Wren)

Currently, the Council does not have a tree planting policy aside for a requirement to plant a replacement tree when a tree with a tree preservation order has to be felled in certain circumstances. However, I am pleased to say that when the new tree officer is in position a review of the tree planting requirements will take place and a report will be coming back to our Community Services Committee to look at that policy.

8. Question from Councillor Wren

Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Sayer)

I have been in conversation with representatives of the Hair and beauty industry across Tandridge and since 2021, the hair and beauty industry has now been recognised as part of the vital Personal Care Sector, and they have asked for this council's support in their plea for a reduction in the VAT they have to pay to be 10% to align them with some of the other Personal Care sector providers. This is a National Call by the industry that is spearheaded by the Salon Employees Association.

Since 1992, the industry has been encumbered by a misclassification that has subjected them to having to pay full retail VAT which has negatively affected their industry's growth.

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In the aftermath of the pandemic, when hair and beauty salons were forced to close their doors for over 8 months, without the alternative revenue streams that were available to retail or hospitality they were again overlooked when VAT relief was distributed for 20plus months to other sectors.

This industry now finds itself in a state of crisis. The very foundation of our high street salons-the commitment to local employment across the whole of Tandridge and the apprenticeship training that they offer, is now under threat. A recent survey shows that half the business owners in this industry who are VAT registered are actually considering closing. The closure of High Street salons would cause the potential loss of around 60,000 footfall visits annually, a year, across Tandridge, diminishing the vibrancy and economic health of our communities across the whole of the district.

So could we please consider writing to the Government ministers and the UK treasury to ask them to follow the example of Ireland, Finland and the Netherlands and support this industry in crisis, by recognising their role in our economy and addressing the need for the correct VAT classification of 10%.

Response from the Leader of the Council (Councillor Sayer)

I appreciate the salons across Tandridge do bring a great number of people into our high streets, our towns, our villages, as well as making contribution to employment and apprenticeships, and, of course, contributing revenue to this Council though business rates. I think we should be supporting them as much as possible and I am more than happy to write to government ministers and the UK Treasury in support of the Salon Employees Association campaign to bring their VAT in line with some other personal care sector providers, as have been done elsewhere as Cllr Wren set out.

9. Question from Councillor Cooper

Question to the Chair of the Housing Committee (Councillor Pursehouse)

I have recently been made aware of a single mother and child being provided with a council home. A very positive action. However, the individual did not have any furniture. She eventually contacted a local charity which was happy to assist.

Do Tandridge District Council establish the needs of individuals taking council accommodation to ensure they either have the basics or are given details of a charity which would be able to assist before they move in?

Response from the Chair of the Housing Committee (Councillor Pursehouse)

I would like to thank Cllr Cooper for bringing this to my attention, and I am sorry to see if someone has slipped through our net, so if you were to provide me with the contact details for this particular person, I will happily take it up with the Officers to make sure that she has been dealt with in the proper way.

Residents' needs are established at the earliest opportunity, usually being at the time of application to join the housing register. Needs are reviewed again at the time of allocating and viewing property.

Referrals are made to partner agencies such as Parashoot which provides finance and budgeting support and acts as a tenancy sustainment service. In addition, residents are signposted to local charities such as Furnistore and the Glasspool Charity which can assist with furniture and white goods. In the most severe cases, residents will be referred to the Surrey Crisis Fund which can assist by providing a grant to the householder for essential items.