

**EXTRA COUNCIL MEETING – 28 JULY 2020 – RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS
FOR PUBLICATION****INFRASTRUCTURE, HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Reports from the Lead Member for Transport and Economic Development (Cllr Stephen Giles-Medhurst), Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy (Cllr Steve Drury), Lead Member for Housing (Cllr Andrew Scarth).

Question to Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, Lead Member for Transport and Economic Development, from Councillor Reena Ranger

In light of Covid-19 and the unknown and potential waiting time outside shops due to social distancing, should TRDC not extend all TRDC owned parking to two hours free to support our local shops, business and residents?

Lead Member Response:

The new parking service introduced in the short-stay car parks was to encourage the movement of cars ‘churn’ in the Council’s car parks. As our businesses and high streets recover this will be important to support this economic recovery.

Question to Councillor Andrew Scarth, Lead Member for Housing, from Councillor Joan King

How many homeless (rough sleepers) across Three Rivers District Council’s area are there or were housed in temporary accommodation e.g. hotels, due to Covid-19 and what is planned for those individuals in the future by this authority?

Lead Member Response:

The Government issued advice for Council’s to make sure that rough sleepers, or those at risk of rough sleeping, are supported into accommodation. Since the “Everyone In” advice at the end of March, the Council has accommodated a total of 23 households that would not ordinarily have been placed into temporary accommodation. As at 20 July, of those 23, there are 12 still in temporary accommodation [In the District and elsewhere]. The 11 households that have moved on from temporary accommodation have been helped as follows:

- 3 housed through the Housing Register [in the District]*
- 3 housed into the private rented sector [in Bricket Wood]*
- 2 reconciled with family/partner*
- 1 moved into supported housing [YMCA Watford]*
- 1 referred to another Local Authority for assistance*
- 1 voluntarily left*

For the remaining 12 households, one household is due to move into private rented at the end of July, [Bricket Wood], three households have since become priority cases for the Council and so they will be owed the full duty (which means they will be offered further housing in social or private rented housing). The intention is to help the remaining eight households into private rented accommodation [hopefully in the District]

Question to Councillor Andrew Scarth, Lead Member for Housing, from Councillor Alex Michaels

Can you explain why the Council has decided not to buy in specialist long term support via the Refugee Council for the refugees we have settled?

Lead Member Response:

I wish to state that I and the Head of Housing Services are sympathetic to the plight of refugees arriving one way or another in the UK. When I was Chair of the Council, one of my charities was the Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Partnership. This was promoted by Ann Shaw.

For those who do not know, we have two Syrian refugee families in the District,

The Refugee Council is a national charity, and was heavily involved in year 1 basically 'holding the hand' on a weekly basis to assist the two families settle into the District. TRDC paid £37,000 to this charity in Year 1 and £15,000 in Year 2.

However, during year two, it was evident that the support was not sufficient for the families as considerable officer time was needed to sustain the tenancies. When the offer for year three support was made by the Refugee Council it was decided that this was not good value for money and so not purchased. At the time there were also financial concerns in relation to tenancy sustainment for the families and so Housing Services wanted to ensure the Home Office money remained available to provide assistance for the families for as long as possible without the risk of eviction or using Council budgets.

The Council is paying for English lessons managed by East of England LGA, and both families are receiving support from Herts Welcome Refugees [a charity] as it's more locally aware of needs than the national charity.

LEISURE, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY – to include any report from February 2020 that the Lead Members thinks appropriate

Reports from the Lead Member for Leisure (Cllr Chris Lloyd), Lead Member for Environmental Services & Sustainability (Cllr Phil Williams), Lead Member for Community Safety and Partnerships (Cllr Roger Seabourne) and questions.

Question to Councillor Chris Lloyd, Lead Member for Leisure, from Councillor Paula Hiscocks

What pressure is this Council using to stop Thames Water discharging sewage into our rare chalk stream River Chess thereby protecting our residents and our beautiful Chalk stream habitat?

Lead Member Response:

A number of public and Member concerns have been raised with regard to the recent sewage discharges into the River Chess. The Environment Agency (EA) issues licences and permits for waste discharges into surface and ground water which includes the River Chess. They monitor compliance and take enforcement action where appropriate. The responsibility for the monitoring and publicising of any sewage discharges into the River Chess lies with the Environment Agency. They are aware of the current concerns regarding the recent discharges and are investigating. Officers have been in contact with the Environment Agency initially

seeking information and more recently requesting the Agency lead on ensuring the public are aware of any sewage discharge events and impacts. TRDC have posted social media posts detailing the responsibilities and providing the EAs incident hotline.

Question to Councillor Chris Lloyd, Lead Member for Leisure, from Councillor Shanti Maru

What diligence has been followed for the contractor to build the new swimming pool at South Oxhey Leisure Centre as many residents have complained about damage to their verges and cars?

Lead Member Response:

The works to South Oxhey Leisure Centre are being undertaken by Vincent Stokes, on behalf of the Council's Leisure Management Contractor, Sports and Leisure Management Ltd (SLM). The works site is overseen by the Site Manager whose contact details have been made available on the site noticeboard and via newsletters to local residents, should residents have any concerns regarding the works or site.

All deliveries and vehicles accessing site are confirmed 48 hours in advance of arrival. A banks-man then sees the vehicles both onto and away from site. All vehicles details are recorded at the time of arrival.

In September 2019 Officers were made aware that a resident had raised that a bollard, outside their property, had been damaged. The resident advised that the damage was done by a vehicle that was going to the Leisure Centre works site. On investigating with the Site Manager and the wider project team, it was confirmed that there had been no reporting's of any incidents involving vehicles coming or going from the site.

In September 2019 Officers received communication via the planning department that following some bad weather that vehicles exiting the works site had left mud on the road. Once raised with the Site Manager a road sweeper was arranged and the road was cleaned later that same day.

In November 2019 Officers noted that there were a tyre mark, from a vehicle, on a grass verge near to the Chapel. Contractors and users of the South Oxhey Leisure Centre were reminded that parking, to access the venue, was in All Saints Church car park and the public car park on Henbury Way.

These are the only incidents that Officers have been aware of. There have not been any reported complaints of damage to cars.

Question to Councillor Chris Lloyd, Lead Member for Leisure, from Councillor Stephen Cox

Are the flower beds at the junction of Hayling Road and Prestwick Road the responsibility of this authority?

Lead Member Response:

The rose beds are the responsibility of Three Rivers District Council (TRDC).

Question to Councillor Phil Williams, Lead Member for Environmental Services and Sustainability, from Councillor Reena Ranger

Following my question to Council on 16 July 2019 asking about stopping or deterring cars idling outside schools and my email on 02/03/2020 asking if there was any update. Also noting that Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) have a legal duty to

ensure that incidents of environmental pollution are kept to a minimum and that TRDC declared a climate emergency on 21 May 2019. Could the Lead Member please let me know, now one year on, if he has looked into this and has an answer. In July 2019 the Lead Member informed Council "Whilst the cost of seeking designation would be minimal and that this would be something to look into (implementing)."

Lead Member Response:

As previously advised at Full Council the Council may apply for designation under The Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) (Fixed Penalty) (England) Regulations 2002. However, specific criteria needs to be met. The Council has an Air Quality Management Area so meets the first criteria for designation. However, part of the application for designation would include the submission of evidence to demonstrate that there is a problem locally. There is no current available evidence detailing there is specific problem outside schools in Three Rivers District Council as such the designation has not been pursued.

If designated the Council would be empowered to issue fixed penalty notices to users of vehicles in their area who fail to switch off their vehicle engine, when requested so to do, by a suitably trained and authorised officer of the Council. (The offence is only failing to turn off your idling engine when specifically requested to do so, rather than just idling).

Civil Enforcement Officers are able to issue Notices under the legislation but this would either require an increase in Officer resource or reduction in parking enforcement capacity. Hertsmere Borough Council have been asked for an initial view on costs.

What Officers have been asked to consider as part of the Climate Emergency work is to investigate the work of other Local Authorities who do not have a formal designation (with associated costs) but have 'no idling' promotional/publicity campaigns, often in partnership with schools. This maybe an alternative approach. This will be taken forward by the Climate Strategy Officer once in position.

Question to Councillor Phil Williams, Lead Member for Environmental Services and Sustainability, from Councillor Alex Hayward

When will the works on the Depot in Rickmansworth begin?

Lead Member Response:

Works on Batchworth Depot are due to commence in September.

Question to Councillor Phil Williams, Lead Member for Environmental Services and Sustainability, from Councillor Paula Hiscocks

Last year this Council declared a Climate Emergency and declared it would use all practical means to reduce the impact of Council services on the environment why therefore a year later do we still not have recycling waste bins in our principal town of Rickmansworth or the Aquadrome?

Lead Member Response:

This is the responsibility of Environmental Protection but can now also be picked up by the Climate Officer and the funding available from Keep Britain Tidy.

Question to Councillor Phil Williams, Lead Member for Environmental Services and Sustainability, from Councillor Paula Hiscocks

Why is this Council failing our Muslim residents and treating them differently to our other residents, causing them emotional stress by allowing BWF to open the graves of their loved ones without their authority and bury a total stranger on top?

Lead Member Response

A written reply to be provided.

RESOURCES AND SHARED SERVICES – to include any report from February 2020 that the Lead Member thinks appropriate

Report from the Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services (Cllr Matthew Bedford) and questions.

Questions to Councillor Matthew Bedford, Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services, from Councillor David Sansom

With the advent of Virtual meetings making Councillors Laptops crucial, what are the reliability/failure figures on the Surface Pro PC?

Lead Member Response

We have replaced 6 units for four members

- o 3 through physical damage - screen breakages due to physical damage.
- o 3 through battery issues

Additionally 2 members have migrated to laptops to manage specific eyesight-related issues

Am I the only Councillor who is locked out by McAfee, log on with the help of IT only to have it lock again within 1 hour?

Lead Member Response:

McAfee is a security feature, encrypting the device. McAfee is installed on all laptops (Officers and Councillors) across both Councils, in the region of 550 devices. As with the surface pros themselves, McAfee is used successfully by multiple commercial and public sector bodies for many thousands of employees.

Multiple McAfee lockouts can be caused by a range of causes including low battery level or overdue Windows updates. If you are having difficulties I would urge you to contact the Helpdesk so they can advise and ensure there is a fix.

Question to Councillor Matthew Bedford, Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services, from Councillor Paula Hiscocks

Following the pandemic which Government grants are available to Three Rivers District Council?

Which grants have we applied for to date?

Lead Member Response:

See attached spreadsheet

Question to Councillor Matthew Bedford, Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services, from Councillor Alex Michaels

Your flagship property investment scheme involved £20 million cash being taken from TRDC reserves and being spent on commercial property despite warnings from several Members at the time, including myself. One of these properties, in Norwich,

has not paid rent since March 25th, and leaves an ongoing £60,000 per annum hole in our accounts. How will this be accounted for?

Lead Member Response:

Unfortunately the question itself contains a number of misconceptions. The property investment scheme has not reduced the Council's reserves in any way. It has prudently invested in property in order to make better use of surplus cash. Not to do this would be a dereliction of our duty to act as prudent stewards of residents' funds. Nor is the investment solely in commercial property as the question states. As was stated publically at the time, the aim was for a balanced portfolio across different classes of residential and commercial property. This was achieved. Specifically there is an extremely limited exposure to retail and zero exposure to leisure.

We do have one retail property, actually in Nottingham not in Norwich as stated. In common with the vast majority of retail tenants in the country, encouraged by the Government, the rent has not been paid since end of March. The rent has not been waived and we are continuing to pursue through normal debt recovery processes. Clearly there is a risk that some rent will ultimately not be recovered. The impact of this is included in the figures reported to the Policy and Resources Committee.

Question to Councillor Matthew Bedford, Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services, from Councillor Alex Hayward

What evidence can the Council provide to the residents of the Three Rivers District that they have been best served by the Administration's policy to purchase property outside the District?

Lead Member Response

Clearly if we have surplus cash, it is prudent to invest it in a way that maximises the return for residents, but without putting the underlying investment at risk. As you know, the Council went through a rigorous risk-assessment process in setting up the fund and a rigorous due diligence process in relation to each investment. Overall the Council is generating around £1m per year more income to fill the gap left by reductions in Government support. That has helped us to protect services. We recognise this is not risk-free – that is why we established at the same time a specific reserve (the Economic Impact Reserve) in order to protect the Council against unexpected shocks. We are confident that we have got the right balance and that this is the best approach.

Question to Councillor Matthew Bedford, Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services, from Councillor Michael Revan

I know it's on a four year cycle, but does the Council believe that the Microsoft Surface Pro is not fit for purpose and should be upgraded immediately.

Lead Member Response

I am aware there are issues with the surface pro but I am also aware that these devices are widely and successfully used in commerce and the local authority sector. My own experience is that the Helpdesk are able to resolve all issues very quickly when contacted and I would urge all Members with any problems to utilise that.

Question to Councillor Matthew Bedford, Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services, from Councillor Joan King

What is the Lead Member's view on the permitted hours of working at the construction site referred to as South Oxhey Central?

Lead Member Response:

The current permitted hours at the development site known as South Oxhey Central (Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm, Saturdays 8am-1pm, no working Sundays and Bank Holidays) were agreed as part of a Construction Management Plan secured by planning condition. The hours reflect the standard hours agreed historically by this Council under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 which, amongst other matters, considers noise nuisance from construction sites. The permitted hours have been considered appropriate for this development site.

Question to Councillor Matthew Bedford, Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services, from Councillor Stephen King

How much funding has been paid by way of grants to businesses in Three Rivers during the pandemic and how much business rate income is presently outstanding?

Lead Member Response:

See list below

£825,000.00 of Business Rates arrears remain outstanding for April, May and June 2020. Reminder notices have been issued to these accounts which are now being followed up with phone calls.

<i>Fund</i>	<i>Number of Businesses</i>	<i>Amount of Grant</i>	<i>Total grant paid</i>
<i>Small Business Grant Fund (SBGF)</i>	491	£10,000	£4,910,000.00
<i>Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Grant Fund (RLHGF) A Fund – (RV up and including £15,000)</i>	113	£10,000	£1,130,000.00
<i>RLHGF B Fund – (RV £15,000 - £51,000)</i>	216	£25,000	£5,400,000.00
<i>Total</i>	820		£11,440,000.00

Question to Councillor Matthew Bedford, Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services, from Councillor Joan King

What is the difference between the costs to the Council of all measures taken due to Covid-19 and the monies received or pledged by the Government?

Lead Member Response

	£
Additional costs of Covid-19 response	530,385
Forecast reduction in income levels	1,602,927
Expenditure not incurred due to Covid-19	(287,915)
Government funding to mitigate Covid-19 impact	(1,081,683)
Increased Budget pressure	763,714

REPORTS AND QUESTIONS TO THE CHAIRS OF THE AUDIT, PLANNING, LICENSING AND REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEES (RULE 14) to include any report from February that the Chair thinks appropriate

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Report from and questions to the Chairman of the Audit Committee (Cllr Margaret Hofman).

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Report from and questions to the Chairman of the Planning Committee (Cllr Sarah Nelmes).

Question to Councillor Sarah Nelmes, Chair of Planning, from Councillor Reena Ranger

Does this Council think it's acceptable for a development to completely overlook neighbours and the developer not provide any trees or mitigation measures? Do we as a local authority believe that where we are the applicant/developer, schemes should be of the highest standards not only to protect all our residents but also lead by example?

Chair of Committee Response:

From Planning Policy and Projects - Trees: The Local Plan Sub Committee unanimously voted to recommend to the Policy & resources Committee the policy on Biodiversity, Trees and Landscape for inclusion in the Local Plan on the 16 June 2020. The policy includes a requirement for developers to submit landscape proposals which seek to retain trees and other important landscape and nature conservation features. The policy also seeks new trees and other planting to the landscape of the site where it is appropriate.

From Planning Team - No. Each application is assessed on its own individual merits having regard to national and local policies and other material considerations. In assessing a planning application Officers would have regard to any real or perceived overlooking of neighbouring properties and the impact on these properties. There may be mitigation such as distances between properties, juxtaposition, type and orientation of windows for example to be considered. Whilst landscaping may assist, it should generally not be relied upon to provide screening. In order to refuse an application on overlooking grounds demonstrable harm must be identified.

Any Council scheme should be of a high standard that takes into account relevant national and local policies, however, the benefits of any scheme have to be carefully judged and weighted and it may mean certain standards or harm is outweighed by other benefits on the basis of what is referred to as the planning/tilted balance.

LICENSING

Report from and questions to the Chairman of the Licensing Committee (Cllr Martin Trevett).

REGULATORY SERVICES

Report from and questions to the Chairman of the Regulatory Services Committee (Cllr Martin Trevett).