

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**POLICY COMMITTEE**

**5 DECEMBER 2016**

**PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 1**

Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services:

**Consultants' fees for Sport and Leisure**

I would like to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport, and Consumer Services:

- a) how much has been spent by Reading Borough Council on consultants fees for sport and leisure for each of the financial years from 2003/4 to 2015/16;
- b) the expected out-turn expenditure on such fees for the 2016/17 financial year; and
- c) the anticipated spend on such fees for each of the financial years 2017/18 to 2020/21?

If it is not possible to provide historic information going as far back as 2003/4, please provide information going as far back as reasonably possible.

Please also inform me of which consultancies have undertaken work on sport and leisure issues for the council over the period 2003/4 - 2016/17?

**REPLY** by Councillor Gittings (Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services):

The Council has used consultants to undertake a wide variety of necessary work where it does not have the resources or technical abilities in-house, although we only have detailed information on this spend for the last three years.

Our use of consultants has been for a range of tasks from the assessment of strategic needs and associated facility requirements to the preparation of technical information such as condition surveys or ground investigations. We have also used consultants to support the specification and implementation of major improvement schemes, for example the improvements to the outdoor synthetic pitch, wet-changing and heating that have all been carried out at Rivermead in recent years.

Spend has increased in the last two years to support the strategy work required for us to plan how and what we do to secure a major enhancement of Reading's facilities and, over the last 12 months, to support the work required to progress a major procurement exercise to deliver these new and improved facilities, including a range of professional fees related to the detailed work required to commission a demountable pool at Rivermead. The strategic element of this work has also been

supported by financial contributions from Sport England in recognition of the value and significance of this work.

The Council spending in the past 3 years has been:

|           |         |
|-----------|---------|
| 2015 -16  | £69,950 |
| 2014 - 15 | £59,402 |
| 2013 - 14 | £12,833 |

The anticipated spend in 2016 -17 is in the region of £140,000, primarily related to the essential work required to deliver new and improved facilities as outlined above.

We anticipate a reduced level of expenditure in 2017 - 18 as much of the preparatory work required to deliver both the demountable pool at Rivermead and the major procurement exercise for a new leisure operator will have been done. We currently estimate expenditure in the region of £80,000.

**The consultants used across this whole range of work and activities are set out below:**

A M Sports Services  
Atkins Limited  
Bates Wells & Braithwaite  
Broadway Malyan  
Clive Carruthers  
Cohesion Consult  
Ecoconsult  
Engdesign  
Environment Agency  
Faithful & Gould  
Hampshire County Council  
Mace  
Martin Arnold  
Max Associates  
Paul Mew Associates  
Robinson Low Francis  
Tripoint Surveys  
Soils Ltd  
The Sports consultancy  
Total swimming

PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 2

Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services:

Loss of Public Open Space

Reading Borough Council's Open Spaces Strategy, published in March 2007, sets an objective to ensure that there is no net loss of recreational public open space.

What quantity of public open space does the Council consider will be lost by the construction of planned new swimming facilities and new car parking spaces at Palmer Park and Rivermead, and how does the Council intend to compensate for the loss of this public open space? At which specific sites does the Council anticipate opening up new public open space to compensate for the areas which will be lost at Palmer Park and Rivermead, and how will the costs of acquiring this land be met?

REPLY by Councillor Gittings (Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services):

At this stage, no specific figures are identified for how much public open space might be lost as a result of provision of swimming facilities, or what might be required in terms of compensation. The principle of whether specific loss of public open space is justified will be a matter for consideration during the planning process.

In more general terms, the Open Spaces Strategy published in 2007 states that the Council's principal aims include ensuring that there is no net loss of recreational public open space, as well as securing additional open space where opportunities arise. A specific loss must therefore be considered in the context of changes in the amount of recreational public open space in the Borough as a whole. It should be noted that there has been a net increase in such space since the Strategy was published in 2007, both through on-site provision on large developments such as Battle Hospital and Kennet Island, and through opening up existing spaces for public access, such as part of Clayfield Copse.

The Council is currently working on a Local Plan for Reading, which is due to be published in draft form in April 2017. One of the tasks of this plan will be to consider whether the amount of public open space in the Borough is sufficient to support existing and planned development, which areas need to be protected and where additional space should come forward.

COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor McDonald to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods:

Emptying of Green Bins

Recently residents have reported green bins being left un-emptied or only partially emptied by RBC's bin collectors as a result of being frozen, which is causing frustrations as it is still autumn and people are clearing their gardens of fallen leaves etc. Once residents are forced to pay £50/year for this service will they be able to expect a higher level of service, i.e. all of their green waste collected regardless of chilly temperatures?

REPLY by Councillor Terry (Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods):

The collection of green waste is a discretionary service and residents are free to make alternative arrangements rather than subscribe to the chargeable service should they wish. Whilst we regret that we have been unable to fully or partially empty green bins due to the recent freezing conditions, it should be remembered that the service collects approx. 3,000 green bins per day, and that this is not a common occurrence.

The emptying process usually dislodges a frozen bin lid, but if the contents are frozen or partially frozen, particularly if there is water or very wet green waste at the bottom of the bin it may not be possible to empty the bin completely. The standard crew procedure is to loosen the waste by banging on the bin or failing that to turn it on its side to dislodge the contents, followed by an attempt to empty it into the hopper as normal. If it is not possible to dislodge the contents then the bin will be left until the next scheduled collection day.

It is not possible to return to collect bins that may still have frozen contents on another day, as this has a negative impact on the daily collection schedules and the efficiency of the service. This has been the situation for many years and this will continue to be the case when the service becomes chargeable.

It should be remembered that it is the residents' responsibility to present their bin in such a way that it can be emptied and in this case, tips and advice for cold weather are available on the web and on social media.

The Council's position with reference to the collection of frozen green bins is outlined in the updated waste collection service standards, which are available on the Council website, and are also covered in the Terms and Conditions for the service, which will be sent to every green waste customer.

Under the current free service collections are currently suspended for two collections over the Christmas period, but under the charged system there will only be a suspension on one collection over Christmas, thus providing an enhanced service.

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### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor McDonald to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods:

#### Sharing of Green Bins

The Council's website states that up to two green wheelie bins will be collected for the annual charge of £50. Would the Council recommend to residents that they may wish to share the £50 annual cost between two homes, thereby reducing the likelihood of green waste being dumped or being put into grey bins?

**REPLY** by Councillor Terry (Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods):

No. The £50 charge is for the collection of up to two green bins per household. The collection crews will only collect green bins with the correct sticker from outside properties that are on their schedules which have purchased a green bin or bag from the Council and subscribed to the collection service.

Householders who wish to subscribe will be responsible for payment of the full charge, presentation of the bin with the correct sticker outside their property, and that the contents of the bin comply with the requirements of the scheme as set out in the Terms and Conditions. Checks will be undertaken to ensure that householders that present 2 bins, have purchased both from the council.

Information about the green waste collection scheme will be sent to every household in the Borough in January 2017 explaining the scheme and how to subscribe as well as giving further information about how to home compost garden and vegetable waste. Further information is available on the Council's website on the green waste collections page.

It is the responsibility of the householder to present their waste in compliance with the Council's collection service standard, placing the correct type of waste in the correct bin and presenting it for collection in the right place at the right time. Due to reductions in funding from Central Government the Council is having to make efficiencies in its waste collection service and introduce charges for discretionary services such as the collection of green waste.

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### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 3

Councillor Hopper to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

#### Telephone Boxes

Local residents across the town have expressed dismay at the potential loss of phone boxes following the notices which BT has displayed on a number of boxes across the town. Many residents and also Residents Associations have expressed a desire to adopt the boxes themselves for use as a local community resource, but this is only open to organisations which hold Public Liability Insurance and are a Registered Charity or a recognised local authority (parish, town, borough or county council).

As Reading does not have either Parish or Town councils would Reading Borough Council be prepared to investigate acting as the official "adopter" of underused phone boxes across the town where there is a residents group or association prepared to take on the maintenance and management of the box into the future?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport):

Based on Ofcom guidance, the Council's remit is focussed on phone boxes located in areas of identified deprivation, or where more vulnerable persons are likely to benefit from their retention. The Planning Service has issued a draft decision, in respect of 16 phone boxes proposed for removal, based on these socioeconomic criteria. This is available to view on the planning register website under ref 162004. Comments on the draft should be submitted to the Planning Service by 3 January 2017.

The Local Highway Authority wishes to be supportive of the proposal for local groups to adopt less well used telephone boxes, but is unable in the current financial climate to become the adopter of the boxes, or fund the costs of indemnity cover for local groups.

COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 4

Councillor White to ask the Leader of the Council:

Fossil Fuel Divestment

With Donald Trump winning the election to become president of the United States of America, it is more important than ever that councils act to tackle climate change. Much could be achieved, for example, if public sector pension funds invested in social housing and renewable energy instead of fossil fuels.

Can the Leader of the Council update me on what has been achieved following the successful Green Party motion on fossil fuel divestment?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

Councillor White will recall he originally proposed a motion at the October meeting of Council last year, and that whilst the motion as drafted broadly aligned with some Council policies, it had some problems, such as not properly recognising the duties of those charged with managing the pension fund. The motion was therefore referred to the Policy Committee to enable proper advice to be sought on the important issues raised.

An amended resolution was agreed by Policy Committee in November 2015, and both in preparing the report to Councillors and following the meeting relevant officers raised the issue with the Pension Fund Manager.

We understand the Chairman of the Pension Fund Panel was in principle content for the Panel to discuss the issue but that has yet to happen, because the future of pensions' funds has been uncertain during this year: the previous chancellor appeared to be insisting that Pension Funds were merged into bigger areas. The new chancellor has yet to make his intentions clear and the issue of fossil fuels will be raised when the future arrangements become clear. Cllr Dennis is now the Council's representative to the Berkshire Pension Fund Panel and I have asked officers to ensure he is fully briefed when the situation on the future becomes clearer.