

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

25 SEPTEMBER 2017

QUESTION NO. 1

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

Demountable pool at Rivermead

Is the proposed demountable swimming pool at Rivermead on target to open at the end of December?

REPLY by Councillor Hacker (Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport & Consumer Services):

Thank you for your question Mr Burt, although to clarify we have always stated that the pool at Rivermead would open in the New Year. However, the demountable swimming pool is progressing very well. There has been a slight delay related to the supply of steelwork and we currently anticipate that the pool will be ready to open in the second week of January.

You may also be aware that the Council is closing the pool at Academy Sport in South Reading for an extended period until the end of January 2018 to carry out some major improvement work to essential plant and equipment. In order to ensure that as much water space is available to users we will defer the closure of Central Pool until the end of January to coincide with the Academy Sport pool re-opening. I would also like to emphasise that the school lesson programme at Academy Sport has been transferred in its entirety to Central Pool along with transport provided so that there is no additional cost for the affected schools.

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QUESTION NO. 2

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

Contract for provision of Leisure Services

What is the timetable for the planned Council contract to privatise Reading Sport and Leisure and the Council's leisure centres? What format will the contract take, and please can you confirm it will be open to all commercial leisure services providers to tender for the contract?

REPLY by Councillor Hacker (Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport & Consumer Services):

Thank you for your question Mr Burt. Firstly, I would question your use of the word 'privatise'. Yes we are outsourcing the management of our leisure facilities but the operators who are likely to tender for the contract are highly likely to be organisations that have Trust or Charitable Trust status.

As you are aware we are looking for a new operator who will both run our existing facilities and construct and operate two new swimming facilities. The form of contract will therefore be a Design, Build, Operate and Manage (or DBOM) contract which, although complex, are widely utilised in the procurement of leisure facilities and services.

You will also no doubt understand that the Council is required to comply with rigorous Public Procurement Regulations to ensure open and transparent procurement processes. The first stages of the procurement process will be to issue an OJEU (Official Journal of the European Union) notice to advertise the opportunity, followed by issuing a Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) to anyone who registers an interest - so yes this a totally open process.

With regard to timescales we would anticipate issuing the OJEU notice later this Autumn with the appointment of our preferred provider at the end of 2018.

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QUESTION NO. 2

Billie Reynolds on behalf of UNISON to ask the Leader of the Council:

Response to Budget Savings proposals

Alongside colleagues in UNITE and GMB representing staff across the Council, UNISON has been following the development of the Policy Committee's response to budget pressures with growing concern.

All unions understand that Reading Borough Council is under great financial pressure and all unions are committed to working with elected members and management to ensure that vital services for the vulnerable in the many communities of Reading are protected.

With a package of a further £11.3 million in savings agreed at the July meeting, which will include cuts to staff terms and conditions, we are carrying out a detailed consultation with staff which has already highlighted serious risks and what appear to be inconsistencies in the July package, together with issues with the nature of the figures quoted.

We have outlined some examples in a written submission to the Leader of the Council.

UNISON members have also put forward a number of proposals to help combat the millions of pounds in unrecovered Council Tax, non-domestic business rates and other debt - a figure greater than the budget of some service areas.

On behalf of the Joint Trades Unions, we ask: Will the Policy Committee consider the evidence we have collected, and delegate members to discuss the evidence and the proposals with us ahead of any further action on the budget?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

Firstly can I thank you for the question and assure you that the Labour Administration is making savings proposals very reluctantly but, regrettably, we have a duty to set a legal budget, unlike the Government which is imposing the cuts on Local Authorities.

I welcome the detailed feedback from UNISON and the work that branch members have put into reviewing the savings proposals, and also any alternative proposals from staff.

The matters raised concern operational delivery and management effectiveness. The Council's Director of Finance is happy to go through the detailed concerns with Trade Union representatives and take them through the detailed saving

proposals and departmental project monitoring information concerning each proposal. He will also ensure that any Trade Union proposals are evaluated. The Chief Executive and Council Leadership have met with the Trade Unions and proposed a joint review of options to save money on staffing budgets, and meetings are already planned in the near future. My colleagues and I are also happy to meet with you again to discuss progress on the discussions with management.

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QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods:

Fly Tipping on the Increase in Reading?

In March of this year, the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods gave full Council figures showing a likely rise in fly-tipping in Reading this year, but stated that although she didn't know if fly-tipping would increase, she thought it would not. The Lead Councillor thought that there would be no significant increase due to changes at Re3 or the bin rounds and green bin charges. Can the Lead Councillor update us on those figures?

REPLY by Councillor Terry (Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods):

Firstly Councillor White states that I had said that there would be no increase in fly-tipping due to various changes set out in his question. I have read my previous reply and cannot see anywhere that I said this.

As the table below shows the trend was increasing. It also updates the figures I provided in my previous answer.

	Reports	Cost of Clearance
2014 - 2015	2521	£125,174
2015 - 2016	2214	£117,253
2016 - 2017	2213 (to Dec)	£99,423
	Total for year 3066	£136,621
2017 (April -June)	778	£32,028

The figures show that there has been an increase in reports of fly-tipping in the last financial year and that this trend has continued in the first Quarter of 2017/18. The numbers increased to 345 in March 2017, compared to the average of 250 per month, but then dropped to 226 in April, indicating that if there was in fact any relationship the waste changes, it was only temporary.

The chargeable green waste collection service was introduced in April and clearly had no adverse effect on the number of fly-tips reported for that month.

Again as stated in my response in March this year, the increase in fly-tipping is a worrying national trend which all Councils are struggling to address with reducing

budgets. Due to the continuing pressure on budgets caused by central government cuts in funding, Councils, such as the Re3 partners and West Berkshire, are being forced to introduce access restrictions and charges to deposit waste at Household Waste Recycling Centres and this may be reflected in an increase in fly-tipping reports.

In my previous answer I gave some figures which compared the scale of the fly-tipping numbers in Reading with Southampton and Milton Keynes, who had 8,100 and 4,282 fly-tips in 2015/16 respectively. However, neighbouring councils are also seeing an increase in the number of fly-tips. Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council had 3025 fly-tips in 2015/16 and 4499 in 2016/17, an increase of 32% and the first quarter figures for 2017/18 confirm that this trend is continuing with 1271 reports of fly-tipping.

As I outlined in my previous answer, the Council has demonstrated its commitment to addressing this environmental blight by introducing two dedicated Environmental Enforcement Officers. Since their introduction in April they have issued 133 Fixed Penalty Notices for waste related offences including fly-tipping, compared to a total of 12 in 2016/17.

However, this initiative must be seen against a backdrop of severe and sustained reductions in funding from central government. As one of numerous savings proposals needed to close the circa £40m budget gap, the Council took the very difficult decision last year to reduce the number of Neighbourhood Officers from 9 to 4 and to delete the post of supervisor. Inevitably, this has reduced the Council's overall capacity to carry out the enforcement action. Notwithstanding this, the Council will continue to devote what resource it can to investigating and prosecuting fly-tippers and to investigate alternative ways of addressing this problem.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor White to ask the Leader of the Council:

Reconsider Aspire's bid to buy the Central Club Building

Green Party councillors have backed and will continue to back Aspire's bid to buy the Central Club building and save the mural. The benefit which Reading would gain from the bid in terms of heritage, culture and practical support is priceless. Does the Council agree that there were some inaccuracies with the summary of Aspire's bid in the report which went to the Policy Committee on 17 July 2017?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

Firstly the Council completely rejects any suggestion that there were inaccuracies in the summary of Aspire's bid in the July Policy Report. By asking the question Councillor White is deliberately misleading the public and insulting the integrity of the officers who wrote the report.

The July Committee report explicitly listed the bidding documents as background documents that supported the recommendation made on the night. The individual bids were available on request for inspection by Policy committee members and a hard copy of the bids - including any all correspondence on clarifications - was also lodged with Member Services for ease of inspection. While the Council is still unable to make the bid public, unless Aspire gives permission for that, Councillor White as a member of Policy Committee is welcome to read the whole bid if he has not done so already.

However, from his question I can only conclude that Cllr White did not bother to read the background information and any of the bids, prior to coming to a decision on this very important matter in July. If he had done, surely he would have raised the alleged inaccuracies when the item was considered in closed session - he did not.

I understand that officers briefed Councillor White on this matter last week, and provided extracts of the bid documentation to address his concerns.

Since July the Council has been repeatedly frustrated by the fact it cannot make full details of Aspire's bid public. Despite requests to Aspire to waive confidentiality, this has been refused by Aspire. The fact that the Council cannot divulge the full detail of the bid has been used to mislead the public and I'm afraid your question tonight, Councillor White, is another example of that same tactic.

Once again, I will reiterate that Reading Borough Council remains fully committed to securing the future of the mural. It is wholly inaccurate and disingenuous to suggest otherwise. It is also misleading to imply that only the Aspire bid would

secure its future - that is just not true. The mural is a cultural icon and remains of huge importance to the black community, the wider community and the Council as it represents Reading's long history of celebrating different cultures and promoting tolerance.

The Council is clear that it expects any offers received in the next round of bidding to include plans to secure the mural's future. We have also contacted the mural artist to invite him to discuss its future treatment and preservation.

The Council continues to make it clear that all bidders - including Aspire or any other community group - can either carry forward existing bids, or submit a fresh offer for the building as part of the new bidding process this autumn.

At a time when Government funding for public services is failing to keep pace with huge increases in demand, the Council owes it to the local tax payer to understand the full value of the property, what people are willing to pay for it and to compare these bids with ones which make offers to keep elements for community use. The Council has asked Aspire to update or confirm their bid as part of this process so that it can be considered alongside alternatives.

I can only hope that Councillor White recognises the potential damage to wider community relations that such deliberately misleading statements can have and act more responsibly in future. Councillor White has a long history of jumping on any bandwagon with little regard for the facts - after all his time as a member of this Council I would have hoped he would have learned some integrity.