

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

9 APRIL 2018

QUESTION NO. 1

Roger Lightfoot to ask the Leader of the Council:

Capital Programme - new swimming pools

Under which entry in the latest version of the Council's capital programme are allocations for the new swimming pools to replace the Arthur Hill Pool and Central Pool? If no such allocations have been made in the capital programme, what are the reasons for this?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

Thank you for your question Mr Lightfoot.

I can confirm that there are currently no specific allocations for the new swimming pools to replace Arthur Hill and Central in the Capital Programme and there are very good reasons for this.

The process for the provision of new and upgraded pool facilities is an integral part of the leisure procurement strategy which seeks to secure a new leisure operator through a design, build, operate and maintain (or DBOM) contract. This competitive procurement process will determine the final capital costs to be incurred but will be predicated on the basis that the costs of borrowing to invest in new and refurbished facilities will be covered by the payments made by the operator to the Council for running the facilities.

The position is further complicated by the potential for as yet unknown and/or unconfirmed capital contributions from other sources, including:

- The value of the capital receipts from the disposal of Arthur Hill and Central Pool sites;
- Capital grant funding from Sport England;
- Potential Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions secured from developers through the planning process.

Once all these 'unknowns' are resolved, the quantum and phasing of the capital investment required will be incorporated in future revisions of the capital programme.

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QUESTION NO. 2

Peter Burt to ask the Leader of the Council:

Bids for Arthur Hill Pool

How many bids have been received by Reading Borough Council for purchase of Arthur Hill Pool from a) the private sector and b) the voluntary sector, and by which organisations have these bids been submitted? By what process, and on what date, will the Council make a decision on bids received?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

The closing date for receipt of offers was 21st March 2018. A late bid was received which has been discounted.

8 parties submitted commercial bids and 2 parties submitted third sector bids. It is not possible to identify the bidders at this stage as bids are being analysed and due diligence is being carried out by officers and agents, which will enable a full report to be considered by Policy Committee later this year.

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QUESTION NO. 3

Luke Coltman to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:

Student Housing

Given the number of students within the Reading area, many of which are living in poor conditions, what can the Council do to make it easier for students to get their landlords to up their standard of private rentals?

REPLY by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Housing):

The majority of landlords in the Borough provide good quality housing and meet the required health and safety standards.

Officers in the Private Sector Housing Team will investigate complaints of sub-standard properties and take appropriate action which has been demonstrated in the number of prosecutions taken against Rogue Landlords over recent years.

Residents are encouraged to contact the Council if they are living in poor housing conditions. In the first instance however, residents are encouraged to contact their landlord or managing agent to try and resolve issues. If this fails then contact the Private Sector Housing Team.

In October 2015 Reading Borough Council adopted the Private Rented Sector Charter. The Charter sets out a number of key actions that the Council would take to help and support tenants, landlords and letting and management agents to deliver a safe, healthy and thriving private rented sector in Reading. One of the key actions of the Charter was to develop and promote the 'Rent with Confidence Scheme' for Reading. The Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme has recently been implemented with its first member being approved a few weeks ago. The aim of the Scheme is to rate landlords, lettings and managing agents based on which of the criteria of the Scheme they achieve. As part of the audit process a number of properties are inspected to ensure that they achieve a decent standard. Whilst the scheme is voluntary, it encourages landlords, letting and managing agents to work with Reading Borough Council to provide tenants with good quality accommodation and good property management services with initial interest from landlords and agents being very encouraging. Reading University were key to the development of the scheme and are working in partnership with the Council on this scheme and further initiatives.

In addition to the above the Council has enforcement powers to tackle landlords who provide sub-standard properties for example the Housing Act 2004 and the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Management Regulations 2006. The HMO Management Regulations require anyone managing a HMO to undertake procedures to ensure the HMO remains a safe and healthy environment for residents.

From 1st October 2018 the extension of Mandatory Licensing is being introduced that will require a greater number of properties across the country to have an HMO licence. This will provide a further tool to improve standards.

The Council has just introduced the part of the Housing and Planning Act which deals with rogue landlords. The Housing and Planning Act allows the Local Authority to impose Civil Penalty Notices on landlords as an alternative to prosecution for certain offences.