

PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 1

Tom Lake to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

Royal Berkshire Hospital Trust

Royal Berkshire Hospital Trust has announced, with a few weeks' notice, that 3 departments, Audiology, ENT and Plastic Surgery, would move their outpatient clinics to Townlands Memorial Hospital in Henley-on-Thames, outside the area of our Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group, with a residual unit in Reading "for those who don't want to travel". They have stated that they would be working with local authorities to provide improved public transport to Henley (the Reading bus is currently 11 minutes normal walk from Townlands).

The background to this is that Oxford Clinical Commissioning Group took out a 25-year build, lease and maintain contract with Amber Solutions for Care Ltd, for a building containing room for an 18-bed rehabilitation ward and a 12-bed palliative care unit, neither of which are actually to be used, despite fierce opposition from the residents of Henley-on-Thames. The upper floor of the facility (it is not actually a hospital) has presumably been empty since the opening in 2017.

Surely the public of Berkshire West should have modern facilities in area.

The NHS constitution gives the public the right to be consulted directly or through their representatives on planned developments.

- a) Has Reading Borough Council been consulted well in advance of this move and if so when and how?
- b) What are the employment effects, especially for support staff, of the move of these three departments out of Reading.
- c) What are the anticipated costs of the improved public transport service to Henley-on-Thames?

If invited to ask a supplementary question I will ask about the potential benefits of locating such services in our town centre as retail and office demand weakens.

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you Mr Lake for your question about this important health service provided by the Royal Berkshire Hospital. The leader of the council, Cllr Jason Brock, the deputy leader of the council, Cllr Tony Page, and I were able to meet the acting chief executive of the RBH, Nicky Lloyd on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> August to seek reassurances on the matters you raise.

As the proposal is, at this point, for a temporary and partial relocation of services to the Townlands site in Henley and it is expected that patients wishing to continue to attend the clinic at the RBH will be able to do so, it was not considered by the hospital trust that a full public consultation was necessary. The trust though did

want to engage with partners and patients on the matter and the council did receive a letter from the trust in early March.

Ms Lloyd was able to expand upon the rationale for this move. The current location of these departments in the West Drive area of the hospital site are out of date, inadequate and long overdue modernisation. Furthermore, there are particular problems of re-establishing the service in the existing facilities with the current Covid-19 precautions required. The combination of the clinics performing what are considered aerosol generating procedures (meaning a full air change is required between appointments) together with the constrained size of the buildings means that capacity would be reduced to 1 appointment per hour. At Townlands that timescale is reduced to 15 to 20 minutes meaning 3 to 4 times as many patients can be seen. These considerations are even more important considering the backlog that has built up as a result of the pandemic.

In our meeting with Ms Lloyd we were very keen to receive assurances that there would be adequate capacity with the remaining clinic at the RBH to ensure those who would prefer to be seen in Reading will be able to. The hospital's view is that a combination of expanded use of remote appointments together with an analysis of where patients who use this service live means they are confident they will be able to accommodate all who want to be seen at the RBH.

Another matter that we sought reassurance on is that a permanent decision on the location of these services has not been made. The RBH has a 12 month lease on the part of the Townlands building it will be using. Over this time there will be further evaluation and engagement on whether this should become a permanent move. We will press for a full and meaningful public consultation to take place before a permanent decision is made. We will also be keeping a close eye on the matter to ensure that the assurances around the capacity of the RBH clinic to meet demand are met.

Regarding your question about impacts on employment it should be borne in mind that the plan is for some of the outpatient clinics, as opposed to the whole department, to be temporarily moved to the Townlands site. We are not sighted on the full detail of the staffing structures and arrangements for this proposal and any arrangements for staff to work from alternative sites will be undertaken in line with their NHS employment arrangements and contracts. However, the RBH have confirmed that this change will not lead to any redundancies and travel time to the Townlands site has been factored into staff work plans.

As to your question about the costs for public transport links we're also pleased to hear that the RBH are in discussion with Reading Busses about transport provision to make visiting Townlands in Henley easier for patients. We will continue to press for further details of their plans.

PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 2

Jan Trchalik to ask the Leader of the Council:

Pension Investments

I understand that the LPP (Local Pensions Partnership) - of which the Berkshire Pension Fund (BPF) is a part - has developed a responsible investing dashboard, so that we can easily review what percentage of the fund is invested in fossil fuel extractive industries (among other things).

When will the results of this dashboard be published and made available for public scrutiny?

The next meeting of the BPF is on 21<sup>st</sup> September: would Councillor Lovelock, RBC's representative on the committee, be willing to ask a question about this at the meeting and report back with an answer?

REPLY by Councillor Brock (Leader of the Council):

The Royal Berkshire Pension Fund is administered by the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead and not Reading Borough Council. Council officers are happy to pursue a response and forward this to you, but staff at the Royal Borough were unable to provide a response by today and are awaiting, as I understand things, further information from LPP. Alternatively, you may wish to consider asking the question directly to Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council as the administering authority.

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

24 AUGUST 2020

### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:

#### Insulating Homes in Reading

7,290 of our Reading households live in fuel poverty. This is where people in our communities don't have enough money to heat their home. In some parts of the town it is as high as 30% of households. My Green Party colleagues and I are very concerned about this. Insulating homes is a great way to bring down fuel bills, cut carbon emissions and create jobs. Most council homes have decent levels of insulation. The problem is most severe in the private sector. What plans are there to insulate more homes in Reading, especially in the private sector, ready for the coming winter?

REPLY by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Housing):

The Council recognises the issues related to fuel poverty and the impact on households. Each time the Winter Watch Officer visits to assist a vulnerable household struggling in fuel poverty he will consider a variety of ways to help the residents stay safe and warm. The first is to install basic energy efficient measures to help maximise the levels of heating throughout the dwelling and provide easy to follow advice and guidance to getting the most from their energy. This includes installing radiator reflectors on radiators on outside walls and draught proofing around windows and doors to help reduce unnecessary heat loss. He will also discuss cheaper ways to pay for energy and the importance of switching to cheaper tariffs and applying for the £140 Warm homes discount payment.

The other is to review the amount of loft and cavity wall insulation installed and to assess whether the household would qualify for the ECO scheme. To qualify the resident must own or rent the property and be on means tested benefits i.e. Universal credit, tax credits or child benefit. If the household does qualify then their details are passed on to a Green energy company to carry out further assessments and arrange for the installations to be carried out.

With larger scale works such as replacement boilers the Private Sector Housing Team will look to provide grant assistance to ensure vulnerable families have heating and hot water.

In the private rented sector landlords and agents have been provided with information on the Minimum Energy Efficiency Scheme (MEES) as part of the Private Sector Housing Teams Landlord Focus Newsletter.

A large percentage of the properties in the private rented sector visited by both the Winter Watch Scheme and the Private Sector Housing Team have already made use of the ECO funding for loft and cavity wall insulation.

This important work will continue alongside which the Winter Watch Scheme, Private Sector Housing Team and Rent Guarantee Schemes will promote government backed schemes to help increase energy efficient levels on older dwellings across the Borough.

This year the Council will be applying to the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery scheme to add capacity to the Winter Watch Scheme but also to focus on some other property upgrade schemes which will help to tackle fuel poverty cross tenure. The Council also plans to upscale these projects next financial year when the Chancellor has announced a further round of funding through the scheme.

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

24 AUGUST 2020

### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport:

#### Wokingham Road Pay & Display

Green councillors have supported pay-and-display in the Wokingham Road local shopping area opposite Alfred Sutton school only if it has a free initial period. We believe that this would help tackle some of the parking problems in the area. Can the lead councillor confirm what the council's plans are for pay-and-display in this area, when it will be going live, and if there will be an initial free period?

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

I thank Cllr White for his question.

The proposal to introduce pay and display at the Wokingham Road local shops was advertised and objections considered at the March 2018 meeting of the Traffic Management Sub-committee (TMSC).

At that time, it was agreed by all members of the sub-committee to implement the plans as advertised without a free period and, consequently, the equipment ordered and installed does not allow for a free period and will have to be reconfigured.

However, since then I have asked officers to re-evaluate the proposals and reconsider the tariff not only here in the Wokingham Road local area, but also along the Oxford Road corridor and the implications for other local centres.

Officers commenced work which has not yet been completed, due in part to supporting our response to COVID and other demands on officer time such as the Active Travel funding.

I am keen to see a different offer either in tariff or a free period. As the scheme was previously approved it will need agreement by TMSC for any change and the subsequent re-advertising of any change.

As we start to emerge from the COVID restrictions the Council wishes to ensure support for the economic vitality of our local centres and a report will be presented to TMSC later this year. Only once TMSC has discussed this again, and if necessary agreed any changes to the charging structure, will the pay and display be introduced.