

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL – 12 OCTOBER 2023

The following questions have been received under Standing Order 13.1. The draft replies, which are subject to amendment, are set out below.

“Councillors are thanked for their questions.”

1. Question from Councillor Kevin Davis

“What discretionary services are we not currently consulting on and why are we not?”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“Whilst the Council launched various service-specific consultations on 2 October 2023, the Council is also inviting comments on the entirety of its Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), including the savings proposals for all services. The service-specific consultations seek to understand the impacts and alternative options in respect of the proposals to remove or reduce direct services to residents.

During the consultation period there are also discussions with affected groups. Any and all feedback on the proposals we are having to make in an attempt to balance the budget is welcome.”

2. Question from Councillor Kevin Davis

“What discretionary services are being cut without consultation even occurring?”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“As described in my response to the previous question, there is the opportunity for residents and stakeholders to give their views on all proposed budget cuts through the Medium-Term Financial Strategy survey.

Service change proposals are in the MTFS and feedback on any of those proposals is welcome.”

3. Question from Councillor Kevin Davis

“The Portfolio holder has in the past stressed that a key exit route from the Council's financial difficulties lays with an improved local economic landscape. Now that this Council gave the CEO permission on 28 September to proceed with cuts to staffing budgets in discretionary roles, to what extent had the business community been consulted on regarding the closure of the Business Liaison function and what impact will closing this vital function have on the economic landscape?”

Reply from Councillor Dale Roberts

“As described in the response to the previous question, there is the opportunity for staff, residents and stakeholders (including businesses) to give their views on all proposed budget cuts through the Medium-Term Financial Strategy survey and through internal consultation with staff teams.

I have had conversations with the Chambers of Commerce relating to changes proposed and required as part of the MTFS.

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Business Liaison and economic development activity is not solely undertaken from within the Business Liaison Service and therefore there will be a continuation of some activity and attention through other functions and services of the Council.

Discussions are taking place with the County, who have the primary responsibility for Economic Development, relating to its role and support to the Woking area as part of the County's responsibility and taking on LEP functions.

Furthermore we are exploring the opportunity within external funding (UKSPF) to support a transition from the current to new arrangements."

4. Question from Councillor Kevin Davis

"At the Council meeting on 28 September, we were told in a supplementary answer that the Eastwood Centre breaks even and so whilst a discretionary service isn't costing the Council Tax payer anything. May we see a full evidential breakdown of the operational running costs since the centre opened, the portion related to the pools and what the capital depreciation and interest costs are and projected for the MTFs period?"

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

"Some of the accounts are commercially sensitive to protect and ensure a fair procurement process for future tenders of the leisure contract.

However, the headline figures for Eastwood Leisure Centre are as follows:

Eastwood Total Income = £1.4 million

Eastwood Total Operating Costs = £1.3 million

Therefore, there is a small surplus of circa £100,000 for the running of the Eastwood Leisure Centre which excludes any future capital investment costs relating to the maintenance of the building."

5. Question from Councillor Kevin Davis

"What is the income generated by Pool in the Park?"

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

"Pool in the Park generates £2.02 million income and costs £2.47 million to operate, creating a loss of circa £450,000. This excludes any capital investment costs and interest and financing charges."

6. Question from Councillor Kevin Davis

"Why has the Council and Mountjoy Ltd agreed to mutually terminate responsive repairs, void refurbishments and gas servicing, is there a cost saving to the new providers undertaking these functions and what is the current status?"

Reply from Councillor Ian Johnson

"Mountjoy sought to terminate due to concerns relating to the commercial viability of the contract in general. Whilst not fully quantifiable, early termination does provide an opportunity for the Council to review the service offer in order to increase the potential of making financial efficiencies and to improve the customer experience. For example, we will be looking to split out gas servicing and repairs from general repairs to ensure that we have specialist trades working on our homes. In addition, the void contractors we will

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use exclusively from October are operating on a lower percentage uplift against the contract rates than Mountjoy.”

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