

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 11 JULY 2017

4. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The following questions have been submitted by members of the public in accordance with Procedure Rule 10:-

i. from Mr Beaman of Farnham

"Revenue from Waverley's car parking charges is significantly greater than allocated costs which provides substantial surplus revenue to enable other essential public services to continue to be provided despite reductions in central government grants. WBC is currently proposing to introduce car park charges for certain, but not all, holders of Blue Badges and since the car parks themselves already yield a substantial surplus for what purpose(s) would any additional car park revenue from holders of Blue Badges be used for?"

Answer

"Thank you for your question Mr Beaman. In February the Council set its budget for 2017/18 against a backdrop of unprecedented financial pressure arising from cuts in government grant. The Council had some difficult decisions to take to protect vital services to Waverley's residents. One of those decisions was to introduce means tested parking permits for blue badge holders in Waverley's car parks which means that those blue badge holders who can afford to, will now need to pay to park. This generates additional income for the Council which, along with the other car park income, helps pay for important environmental services in the Borough such as street cleaning, community transport, open spaces and management of the countryside and woodlands. This is a perfectly legitimate use of car park revenues and I'm sure you would agree that its services like these that residents really value and help make Waverley such a lovely place to live."

ii. from Steve Cosser, Chairman of the Farncombe Initiative

"Given

1. The disproportionate and adverse impacts the lack of public toilet facilities have on vulnerable groups such as the elderly, disabled and incontinent and the failure of the Council to act lawfully by considering the detailed impacts on these groups, as required by the Equalities legislation, at the time it took the decisions to close the toilets in Godalming and Farncombe;

2. The health and quality of lives impacts that toilet closures have on residents and visitors;

3. The failure of the Council to take account of the need for there to be publically available toilets so as to enable it to honour its commitment to the National Lottery from whom funding was received for the Philips memorial park which was conditional on increasing public access to the area;

4. The damage done to the significant work undertaken by other public authorities and community groups such as the Farncombe Initiative to encourage local people and visitors to visit and use the town and village centres in Godalming and Farncombe and to put on periodic events in Godalming Town centre attracting large numbers of residents and visitors where sufficient public toilet provision is essential;

will the Executive please agree to immediately reopen these toilets and undertake urgent discussion with Godalming Town Council and appropriate community groups with a view to finding an agreed way forward which enables the Council to then formally reconsider the matter in a way which has regard to its statutory obligations in respect of equalities and better meets the needs and aspirations of those it has been elected to represent?"

Answer

In February the Council set its budget for 2017/18 against a backdrop of unprecedented financial pressure arising from cuts in government grant. The Council had some difficult decisions to take to protect vital services to Waverley's residents. One of those decisions was to close the public toilets in Godalming and Haslemere subject to alternative provision being made available. There is therefore no budget provision for 2017/18 to reopen these toilets. The Godalming Town Clerk has approached Waverley to explore options for the future operation of the toilets by the Town Council and the Lead Member for the Environment is trying to arrange a meeting with the Town Councillors to pursue this. Alternative facilities are already available in Godalming at the Borough Hall and Café Mila.

iii. From Cllr Stefan Reynolds, Leader of Godalming Town Council

"In September and October 2016, when the prospect of the immediate closure of Farncombe toilets was planned, both Cllr Steve Cosser and I mooted the idea that Godalming Town Council would be interested in working with Waverley to consider the possibility of taking on the freeholds of Farncombe and Godalming toilets in order to redevelop both sites with a commercial solution which could provide an income to cover the cost of maintaining the provision of toilets on the same sites. The Waverley Portfolio Holder and officers seemed interested in the idea but said that this would be something that Waverley would take forward themselves. I am not sure if this has been done and a recent conversation with the Deputy Leader suggested that he was not aware either.

Could I therefore please ask the Leader to agree to formally open up discussions with Godalming Town Council on this basis, and to keep open both sites in the meantime”.

Answer

Waverley is open to proposals for commercial use of the building which might also provide an alternative public service or generate funding to support Waverley’s expenditure on local services. The Council is happy to discuss any such uses which the Town Council or others may come forward with.

iv. from Damian Wheeler

“Please could the public toilet in Station Road, Farncombe be re-opened again immediately for the use of the local community? I have been regularly using this toilet during the last six months and it is very frustrating that the facility is currently not available.

This public toilet has been open for many years and it is surprising that Waverley are considering closing this toilet and it indicates that local services are at there lowest ebb for decades. Other places such as Cranleigh, Farnham, Grayshott and Midhurst can maintain their toilet facilities, so why can't we in Farncombe.

The unisex toilet in Farncombe has worked well and can continue without any investment. Part of the problem has been that the toilet was only open five or six days each week and some people lost confidence that it would be open. In addition there have been three periods of at least a week each when the toilet door could not be locked from the inside due to a faulty lock. A new appropriate lock was fitted five days before closure. These two faults definitely reduced the usage of the unisex toilet.

The local community would be very grateful if the unisex toilet could be reinstated please.”

Answer

There is no budget provision for 2017/18 to reopen these toilets. The toilets in Cranleigh, Farnham, Grayshott and Midhurst are operated and paid for by the Town and Parish Councils not Waverley Borough Council.

v. from Joy Poulter of Godalming

“How have the alternative toilets been advertised to visitors and tourists to our town who incidentally we are trying to encourage?”

Answer

Alternative toilet provision in Godalming has been publicised by notices and plans indicating the location of the alternatives on the Crown Court Toilet gates, which have been renewed after they were vandalised recently.

vi. from John Petty

“The costs of maintaining the Farncombe public conveniences are quoted as the motivation for their closure. As far as I am aware, the Broadwater Park toilets, refurbished quite recently at not inconsiderable cost, are being kept open. These have to be serviced in a similar way to Farncombe. Please could I ask the Executive to provide a breakdown of the cost allocation, including staffing costs, and whether there is any possibility that the staff cleaning Broadwater could also, unless they have other duties, clean Farncombe?”

Answer

The cleaning of Broadwater Park Toilets costs £9,441 per year, which includes staffing, materials costs etc. The cleaning is arranged through our grounds maintenance contractor, Glendale, who provide grounds maintenance and also facilities maintenance services to the Council. There would be additional charges from the contractor if they were requested to clean and service the Farncombe Toilets and there is no longer any budget provision for this in 2017/18.

vii. from Martin Sandford of The Oval, Farncombe

“I am concerned about the closure of public toilets locally; in Godalming, because these are conveniences I have needed to use, and especially in Farncombe, because it is my local village and visitors have been deprived of this facility with no alternative provision.

Cost savings have been cited as the reason for closure and, superficially, these are equal to the outgoings against the facility. This, however, is a simplistic and somewhat naive assessment which does not take account of the costs of closure. Buildings absorb cost even when not in specific use. Closures reduce economy of scale so other related provisions start to cost more. (Ironically, individual facilities may cost less to operate by opening more of them.) New costs emerge such as street cleaning and hygiene where people, in desperation, relieve themselves on the streets. The vibrancy of a locality is compromised making it less attractive and ultimately impacting business rates.

Which costs of closure have been considered in the context of the public toilets in Godalming and Farncombe and what figures have been placed against these?”

Answer

As the number of public toilets managed by Waverley was already at a low level, benefits from economy of scale were already difficult to achieve. The low usage of the Farncombe toilets came with a cost of nearing £5 per use and approximately £50 per day, excluding the estimated cost required to refurbish the building and raise the aesthetic standard of the facilities. Occasional cleaning of the adjacent area to sanitize any external public use will be significantly less than the cost of cleansing the toilets themselves. The low level of usage and relatively small high street area that the public toilets supported, suggests that this is unlikely to be a great issue. In terms of the Godalming public toilets, alternate provision has been arranged within the high street area.

viii. From Sheila Smith of Farncombe

"I refer to the article on the front page of the Surrey Advertiser on 30 June 2017 which detailed a charitable organisation offering funding to pay for the reopening of the public toilets in Farncombe in return for permission to display a banner promoting its cause. Please could I ask the Executive whether they are intending to discuss this proposal with the charity?"

Answer

In February the Council set its budget for 2017/18 against a backdrop of unprecedented financial pressure arising from cuts in government grant. The Council had some difficult decisions to take to protect vital services to Waverley's residents. One of those decisions was to close the public conveniences in Godalming and Haslemere subject to alternative provision being available. There is no budget provision in 2017/18 for public conveniences and there are therefore no plans to reopen the toilet in Farncombe. It is considered very unlikely that the income from the display of the banner would be sufficient to cover the operating costs and there will be issues around advertising consent to address.

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