

## Councillors Written Questions and the Responses

### Full Council – 24 February 2021

(Questions in *italics and Answers in RED*)

#### **Questions to Councillor Lamb (The Leader of the Council) from Councillor Sudan**

*Crawley Borough Council joined the Greater Brighton Economic Board three years ago at the start of 2018. At the time, the leader expressed confidence that membership would be beneficial to Crawley residents. Could the Leader please tell me what the financial cost of Crawley Borough Council's membership of the Greater Brighton Economic Board has been so far, and what have been the benefits – financial or otherwise - to residents of this membership?*

Full Council voted to join the board in October 2017. At that time I set out a case for joining on the basis that we needed a strong sub-regional voice in order to secure investment for major infrastructure in our part of the country. With severe strain on key elements of our transport infrastructure, such as the Brighton Mainline and M23, there was a significant risk that the investment they need over coming years would instead go to those areas with a Metro Mayor, due to their lobbying position as a voice capable of speaking on behalf of the sub-region. Greater Brighton Economic Board, as a legal entity established as one of the original Devolution Deals, is essentially the only structure in our area capable of delivering this. The importance of such a voice has only grown over the following years.

Since then, joint-lobbying by the Greater Brighton Economic Board and other local agencies has secured the first stage of investment necessary to bring the Brighton Mainline junction improvements forward, our main goal in joining the board. This is critical, as these improvements will take over 20 years to deliver and without them it is projected that within a similar timeframe, trains from Brighton will have no spare capacity for any London-bound commuters from Three Bridges.

To achieve this, and other goals, the subscription to the board - : £17,478 for 2018-19, £18,755 for 2019-20 and £18,800 for 2020-21.

Other benefits these include:

- A Joint commitment to 10 Environmental pledges which in co-operation will dramatically drive down carbon emissions across the sub-region
- A Joint Energy and Water Plan for greater efficiency of use as part of climate change emergency agenda.
- A Digital Action Plan to drive roll out of digital infrastructure and growth in the Greater Brighton area
- An Inward Investment and Export Strategy to help attract business investment and promote Crawley as part of that

- A COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan – set of proposals to kick start Greater Brighton’s recovery, connecting into the council's own plans
- Opportunities for Crawley to participate in the Brighton Festival with events in the area going forward in the recovery phase (post COVID). These were planned in 2020 but were postponed due to Covid-19.
- Joint bidding for funding to Arts Council England to unlock resources to invest in cultural and events activities in Crawley.
- Support to attract greater university level programmes in Crawley working with Universities in Greater Brighton area (Sussex & Brighton) and Crawley College.
- A joint bid with the LEP, successfully shortlisted with Brighton & Hove Council to establish a Decarbonisation Academy in Crawley and Brighton – a series of new training programmes and interventions to upskill local residents in green construction skills.

**Questions to Councillor Lamb (The Leader of the Council) from Councillor Fiveash**

1. ***When your party took control in 2014 one of your election promises set out in your manifesto was to make the council more open and transparent.***

*Looking back at the constitution from 2014 I notice that the leader and cabinet could be asked to provide for scrutiny any document under their control or in their possession relating to council decision making, this could include documents sent and received in their private email accounts or by post to their address.*

*This was a simple way to ensure that all documents relating to council business and decision making would be made available for scrutiny and withholding them would be a breach of the constitution.*

*Since 2014 this requirement has been removed from the constitution.*

- i) *Would you agree that the effect of the removal of this aspect of the constitution is that the council has become less open and less transparent?*

*I am not aware of this process ever being used, nor of any request being refused since its removal, so it clearly hasn’t had any effect. The changes in the Constitution (agreed unanimously by the Full Council) which came into effect in April 2020 did not change the entitlement for Councillors, nor OSC members, to access decision-making documents and thus the level of openness and transparent remains the same. However, what the changes did do was to remove any ambiguity relating to this entitlement. Prior to April 2020 Councillors were entitled to any formal documents which relate to either a decision taken by the Cabinet or a Cabinet Member under delegated power. These entitlements did not and do not relate to Cabinet/Portfolio Briefings or internal Group communication.*

- ii) *Will you commit to ensuring the reinstatement and subscribe to the principle now that any document in your possession which relates to council business which you hold personally will be made available to councillors for scrutiny?*

The entitlement has not changed however, if it becomes apparent that this wording needs revisiting, I'm sure the Chair of the Governance Committee would be happy to re-examine it.

## **2. New Town Hall.**

*As you will be aware the local plan passed by your party specifies that a developer will be required to provide 40% of any development in the town as "affordable housing".*

- i) *Please provide the figures (both in numbers and as a percentage) of affordable homes being provided by the developer of the 150+ they intend to build on the Town Hall site.*

Of the residential development taking place on the Town Hall Site, 40% of the units will be affordable homes. The site as a whole provides 273 residential units, of which 109 will be affordable. Such sites are ordinarily exempt from the 40% requirement due to national rules around viability, but Crawley Borough Council remains committed to doing everything it can to ensure local residents have access to houses they can afford.

- ii) *What is the commercial value of the council owned land the developer intends to build luxury flats on?*

The response to this question contains exempt information and as such has not been included in this response. Councillor Fiveash has received a direct answer to this question, a copy of which will be included in the next Councillor's Information Bulletin as an exempt item for Councillors only.

- iii) *What is the commercial value of the developer owned land the council is currently building flats on?*

The response to this question contains exempt information and as such has not been included in this response. Councillor Fiveash has received a direct answer to this question, a copy of which will be included in the next Councillor's Information Bulletin as an exempt item for Councillors only.

## **3. Occupational Sick Pay, Housing Maintenance Contracts.**

*In 2019 the council agreed to fund occupational sick pay on its housing maintenance contracts after protests outside the town hall during 2018 and £100k was set aside to fund it.*

*The report indicated that this would now have to be rolled out across all council contracts as and when they come up for tender.*

*i) What has been the total cost of that to date?*

There has been no further roll out to other contracts across the council so there is no additional cost.

The housing maintenance contracts have a total cost for the rolling year of £157,112

*ii) Please provide the projected cost of this over the next ten years assuming that occupational sick pay will be funded by the council in the same way as on these contracts.*

As above the risk initially highlighted of this impacting on other Council contracts has not transpired.

The estimated total cost to the housing maintenance contracts across the 10 year period is £1.8m.

*Your register of interests shows that you declared an interest at three meetings as you are a member of Unite the Union when taking decisions on Occupational Sick Pay. Also I noted that you declared a donation from Unite the Union of £1500 in your election expenses for the December 2019 General Election.*

*iii) Why did you fail to declare the nature of your relationship at the time with the union which presents a clear pecuniary interest at any stage of this process?*

During my time on this authority and West Sussex County Council I have consistently supported efforts to improve working conditions, both for those living in the town and those employed by local authorities, as part of a life-long commitment to the trade union movement. At no point has any quid-pro-quo relationship ever been discussed or even hinted at, nor would I ever be part of such an arrangement.

The donation you refer to relates to the notional value of office space made available for the Labour Party during the 2019 General Election campaign by the national party's largest single donor, the same office space as was made available to Crawley Labour during the 2017 and 2015 General Elections under different candidates, in addition to similar arrangements in place for countless other constituency Labour parties across Great Britain during election campaigns. Conversations between the party and Unite around the use of this space only took place after the 2019 General Election had been

called and my campaign was not in receipt of any financial support (notional or otherwise) from Unite from my selection as a candidate until this point.

Consequently, there was never any pecuniary interest to declare. I fully kept to the Code of Conduct by declaring an interest at every meeting where the matter was discussed, as I was required to do having been a member of Unite (or Amicus as it was) for years before I joined the council.

### Questions to Councillor Irvine (Cabinet Member for Housing) from Councillor Fiveash

1. *Please provide the balance of the HRA on or around April 30<sup>th</sup> 2014?*

The HRA balance was £3,198,000 which is an acceptable level for audit.

In addition there is a Major Repairs Reserve which is used to fund the HRA capital programme, the balance was £17,439,000.

2. *Please provide the current balance of the HRA?*

As at 31st December (quarter 3 reporting to Cabinet) HRA remained at £3,198,000 and the MRR to fund the HRA capital programme was projected to be £21,527,636

3. *Please provide the amount spent by the HRA on housing between April 2014 and present?*

£361,615,000

2020-21 figures are based on the latest projection (Q3) for the full financial year.

Year	Spend (£000's)
2014-15	43,709
2015-16	48,352
2016-17	43,994
2017-18	50,239
2018-19	64,689
2019-20	59,243
2020-21	51,389

4. *How much has been come out of the HRA since 2014 which has not been spent on housing? (Please include the value of any asset which may have been removed from the control of the HRA, any loans from the HRA that are unrelated to housing and any investment spending which is not directly related to housing)*

The HRA is a ringfenced account and expenditure is only on housing related costs therefore zero.

5. *The New Town Hall.*

- i) *How much is the HRA investing in the new town hall (please include any loans from the HRA)?*

No HRA funds are being used for the new Town Hall development scheme. £10.92m is being used from general funds towards the cost of providing 109 affordable homes across the whole site.

- ii) *Please provide the total cost (or total projected cost) of the as yet unnamed development next to the town hall (the former car park site currently in development) and the number of housing units that will be available on its completion.*

The total cost of enabling to CBC is £7,780,798 for 91 units on the former car park. This is through the use of the general fund, not the HRA. This will be run by A2 Dominion, a Registered Social Housing provider. They too will also have a budget for the scheme.

6. *It is being suggested that there are a number of council owned properties which are overdue maintenance and repairs, if this is correct;*

- i) *Please state how many properties are overdue maintenance works?*

The last reporting period for the Local Authority Housing Statistical return (2019/20) showed that the capital investment maintenance programme had improved 355 dwellings, at an average cost of £7,900 per dwelling. There has been an increase in refusals to the capital upgrade programme during the Covid-19 pandemic, and we are currently only pursuing programmed works which are subject to statutory compliance, or have other health and safety considerations. We therefore estimate that we will have 300 properties that will have outstanding capital maintenance works at the end of this financial year consisting of kitchens and bathroom renewal, plastering, and rewires that are considered non-urgent, and where the tenant has made a specific request that the work is delayed due to covid concerns.

As a result of the two major storms at the beginning of 2020 and then as a consequence of completing repairs in line with the latest government Covid guidelines, there has been a build-up of responsive repairs. At the end of January 2021 there were 1,411 responsive repairs ordered and not yet complete, against a normal total of around 1000. Of these 335 have been requested for more than 3 months with the oldest jobs being predominantly roofing jobs resulting from the storms.

- ii) *Of those properties what is the average amount of time these works are overdue?*

It is not possible to calculate an average amount of time outstanding. Of the 1,411 jobs awaiting completion, 563 jobs had only been requested through January and will be completed to their requested appointment date. A significant amount of the aged WIP (predominantly roofing) is currently awaiting a run of dry weather in order to complete the works.

7. *Please provide the total cost of the Bridgefield House development and the number of housing units on that site.*

98 units cost is £22,488,696.96