

Questions from members of the public

For Full Council on Wednesday 23 February 2022

Question 1

From Terry Cload

“The Pantiles is Royal Tunbridge Wells greatest tourist attraction. The public toilets closed several years ago. When will the replacement facilities be open?”

Question 2

From Shadi Rogers

“Does the Conservative administration believe that the plans for the old cinema site being brought forward for luxury retirement housing with no proportion of genuinely affordable housing represents the best we can do for those Tunbridge Wells residents who are struggling to afford to own or rent a home of their own? What social value does this development really provide for the Borough and its residents?”

Question 3

From James Tansley

“At the meeting of full Council on 21 April 2021, the Portfolio holder for Finance and Governance said he was “not aware” of any breaches by Council officials and Councillors of the fifth of the Nolan principles of Public Life, which states that: ‘Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing’. Yet even as he was speaking, the Council was refusing to answer Freedom of Inquest request FO9726, an action which the information Commissioner judged to be in contravention of the Freedom of Information Act. What action is the Portfolio holder taking to make himself better

aware that the Council is not wrongly withholding other information from the residents of the borough?"

Question 4

From Christopher Gerry

"Did the council adopt the Marmot review proposals in 2010 (Fair Society, Healthy Lives) as 75 per cent of other councils did?"

If so what are the health outcomes related to alignment of council policy with improving health outcomes for Tunbridge Wells residents?"

If the Marmot review was not adopted, what health improvements have we seen for Tunbridge Wells residents in terms of life expectancy, years spent in good health and per cent of residents living in relative and absolute poverty since 2010?"

Question 5

From Shadi Rogers

"In a recent Facebook post replying to a resident on 26 December 2021, the Tunbridge Wells Conservatives account stated that affordable housing needs were being met in the Borough because 100 flats on Knights Park, Sherwood ward were being provided by a housing association for £77,000. Given this is the cost of a 25% share of a 2bed property at a market value of £308,00, does the Portfolio Holder believe this is an affordable home for low income residents on a minimum wage in the Borough?"

Question 6

From James Tansley

"Between May 2019 and September 2021, the Council made payments to Eddie Lee for consultancy work relating to the ticketing system at the Assembly Hall Theatre. Please can the Council state Whether this contract went through the Council's normal tendering process, who authorised it and why it was not included on the Council's contracts register?"

Question 7

From James Tansley

“In response to Freedom of Information request FO9823, the Council said that, instead of spending £97,219.73 on 20 June 2018 for external training as stated on its website (to a supplier whose name it had redacted), it had in fact spent only £300. What was the reason this expenditure was overstated (by 32,307%), what steps has the Council taken to ensure that similar errors have not been made and how confident can residents be that other financial information published by the Council is accurate?”

Question 8

From James Tansley

“The 2020/21 budget stated: “Directors/ Heads of Services and Portfolio Holders have been busy trying to identify further efficiency options to reduce the cost of their services and to increase income”. No information on any savings was provided.

The 2021/22 budget stated: “Directors/Heads of Services and Portfolio Holders have been busy trying to identify further efficiency options to reduce the cost of their services and to increase income. These discussions continue”. No information on any savings was provided.

The draft 2022/23 budget presented to Cabinet in July stated: “Directors/ Heads of Services and Portfolio Holders have been busy trying to identify further efficiency options to reduce the cost of their services and to increase income. These are still in the discussion stage”. No information on any savings was provided.

The latest version of the 2022/23 budget states: “Directors/Heads of Services and Portfolio Holders have been busy trying to identify further efficiency options” and then goes on to say, without providing any information on savings realised, that “the scope for further savings has been exhausted”.

Why has the Council failed to identify any efficiency savings in the last three years, and on what basis does it conclude the scope for further savings has been exhausted?”

Question 9

From James Tansley

“Given that, in FY 2020/21, salary scales for NHS front line staff increased on average by 2.95% (and less than 2% for those earning over £80,000), that the UK

economy shrank by 6.1%, and that inflation in the year to March 2021 was 0.7%, please can you explain why the Council's Director of Finance received a 17.6% increase in his total remuneration (to £148,972) last financial year?"

Question 10

From James Tansley

"In response to Freedom of Information request FO9823, the Council said that, instead of spending £97,219.73 on 20 June 2018 for external training as stated on its website (to a supplier whose name it had redacted), it had in fact spent only £300. What was the reason this expenditure was overstated (by 32,307%), what steps has the Council taken to ensure that similar errors have not been made and how confident can residents be that other financial information published by the Council is accurate?"