

Questions from members of the Public

For Ordinary Full Council on Wednesday 14 December 2022

Question 1

From: James Tansley

To: Cllr Chris Hall

“The Council claims it has a wealth of information on residents’ views on the way it spends their money from previous budget consultation exercises and surveys. Yet the most recent comprehensive consultation, according to an earlier draft of this year’s budget, was in 2015 i.e. pre-CoVid, pre-Brexit, pre-£8 million Amelia overspend and pre-£11 million Calverley Square debacle. Will the Council conduct a full and open consultation with local Council taxpayers before agreeing this year’s budget, in particular, around their desire to see any increase in Council Tax?”.

Question 2

From: David Scott

To: Cllr Chris Hall

“Will you please confirm that during 2022/3 Financial Year (post COVID year), Tunbridge Wells Borough Council income has recovered with income which was substantially confirmed in Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 reports (Q1 & Q2, 2022/3):

1. Extra income from existing car parking charges of approximately £300,000
2. Over £750,000 of investment income earned on the large cash reserves held by the Council
3. Increases in new Business Rates
4. Supported by post COVID income recovery from entertainment, (including the Assembly Hall, The Amelia Scott and likely income from the Ice Rink), and income from other services including garden brown bin collections, planning etc

Please confirm that these anticipated receipts were not included in the 2022/3 revenue budget due to the level of prudence in the budgetary system”.

Question 3

From: James Tansley

To: Cllr Chris Hall

The draft 2023/24 Budget Projection and Strategy presented to Cabinet earlier this month makes no reference to any plans to improve the efficiency of Council operations. Please can you provide details of the Council's target for efficiency savings next FY, and the value of efficiency savings achieved in the 2021/22, 2020/21 and 2019/20 FYo: Cllr ?".

Question 4

From: James Tansley

To: Cllr Pound

"How much has the Council so far spent on consultants in compiling the Local Plan?".

Question 5

From: James Tansley

To: Cllr Chris Hall

"According to the Council's budget figures, staff costs rose by 30.2% between the 2016/17 FY and the 2021/22 FY, which in real terms represents an increase of around 15%, significantly more than the increase in average real wages in the UK in that period (5.2%). Given this, the fact that the Council is facing a budget deficit of £1.376 million and the fact that local residents are facing a cost of living crisis, why does the latest draft of the 2023/24 budget propose increasing staff pay by over 7% in the coming year, costing an estimated £1.115 million

Question 6

From: James Tansley

To: Cllr Everitt

"According to the Council's Carbon Action Plan Progress report, despite spending significant amounts of taxpayers' money – just under £1.5 million - the Council has fallen seriously behind the carbon dioxide reduction targets set in its Corporate Carbon Descent Plan, and will not meet its zero emissions target for 2030 unless,

inter alia, it abandons waste collections (or else spends even more taxpayers' money on carbon credits). In light of this, will the Council abandon its virtue signalling climate action plans, and, instead, seek to reduce carbon emissions (and expenditure) through effective management (such as stopping subsidised parking for Councillors and officials - a perk that only incentivises car use)?

Question 7

From: James Tansley

To: Cllr Chapelard

According to the Autumn edition of Local, the Council's Town Hall Pravda, in response to a Council survey, fewer than 5% of respondents said that they wanted to be kept updated about events in the Borough by a leaflet (such as Local). In light of this, the environmental damage caused by printing and distributing Local, and the fact that Ministers have described Town Hall Pravdas as a "corrosive abuse of taxpayers' money", will the Council finally put an end to this unwanted and unnecessary propaganda sheet?

Question 8

From: James Tansley

To: Cllr Fitzsimmons

"In April, the then Portfolio holder for Culture Leisure and Tourism said that the council would work closely with Kent Cricket and Tunbridge Wells Cricket Club to enable County matches fixtures to be held at the Neville Ground in the summer of 2023. Yet, Kent County Cricket Club has now announced that the venue facilities are not considered to meet the necessary standards and will be playing no matches in Tunbridge Wells next season. How much will it cost to bring the facilities at the Neville Ground up to the standard required to bring first class cricket back to Tunbridge Wells?