

(1) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Planning and Highways by George Athorn:

“The post of Access Officer has been vacant since November 2004. The West Berkshire Disability Alliance believes that this position warrants a full time officer and the fact that the post was advertised as part time hindered the last round of recruiting. Does the Council have any plans to make the post full time?”

The Executive Member for Planning and Highways answered:

“No, we do not have any plans to make the post of Access Officer full-time.

By way of background, the current establishment within the Building Control Section of Planning and Transport Strategy consists of a part-time Access Officer and a part-time Access Advisor, together making one full-time employed post. The service has been delivered very effectively through these two positions, indeed only last week David Foster, the Access Advisor, won an award from the Education Business Partnership for his work raising awareness of disability issues with Secondary Schools. Unfortunately the Access Officer post became vacant last November.

The post has been advertised both internally within the Council and externally, and with some success as the post was offered to a suitable candidate, but unfortunately the individual chose to take another job and turned down the opportunity to work with us. Accordingly the post has again been advertised internally without success and is now to be advertised externally again. Should this again be unsuccessful, alternative options will be considered.”

(2) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Community Care by Peter Mason:

“It appears that some departments within the Council delay consultations with the voluntary sector to the point that contracts are let out and our views cannot be considered. Could you please advise what the Council’s policy is on such consultations?”

The Executive Member for Community Care answered:

“West Berkshire Council’s Compact with the VCSs recommends a 12 week time period to respond to documentary consultation. Where this is not possible because of, for example, external pressures and timescales placed upon the Council, we will endeavour to notify our partners with details as soon as is possible.

Consultation is taken very seriously by West Berkshire Council and it is explicitly cited as one of the ‘Guiding Principles’ by the new administration. The Council’s Consultation Policy is currently being updated and is due to be published, once approved, over the autumn months. This will address issues of timeliness and appropriateness of consultation across the Council.

We are also compiling a Calendar of planned consultations from across all departments and once validated, this will be published on the Council’s website so that the VCSs as well as all other partner organisations are aware of upcoming activities and can build these into their respective work schedules.”

Mr Mason asked the following supplementary question:

“The reason for my original question was the fact that we on the Access Panel look at all planning applications and also look at the highway matters as well. Unfortunately the timescale to let the Local Authority have our views on the last project that we were involved in had actually expired. My question is, is there basically any timescale that we have to operate within?”

The Executive Member for Community Care answered:

“Well, I have said Chairman, already in the answer to the first question that we are looking at the response period, perhaps we will need to look at it in more depth because it is a specific point you raised to something that’s happened in the past and I think I will need to look into that for you and give you a more detailed answer to that specific point.”

(3) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Planning and Highways by Mick Hutchins:

“Readibus runs a successful operation in the east of the District, which is a great help to those in that area who have difficulty accessing public transport. Unfortunately, they only have 2 buses operating out of Newbury to serve the

rest of the District. Would the Council consider supporting an expansion of the Readibus service based in Newbury.”

The Executive Member for Planning and Highways answered:

“At the moment we do not have any additional budgetary provision to expand the Readibus service based in Newbury.

West Berkshire Council already provides financial support to Readibus to the tune of £39,460 in this financial year, by way of an annual grant to assist in the provision of the services in the greater Newbury area. Some discussions have already taken place with Readibus regarding the possibility of additional vehicles to expand the service. However, it is understood that there is significant capacity on certain days with the existing vehicles.

Nonetheless I am quite prepared to have further discussions and consultations with you, Mr Hutchins, and with your colleagues on the Transport Action Group to investigate how the service can be improved.”

(4) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Community Care by John Holt:

“What formal arrangements are being considered to ensure that all the Councils in the Thames Valley can work together as one group to ensure sound implementation of the National Service Framework for Long Term Conditions?”

The Executive Member for Community Care answered:

“The Long Term Conditions National Service Framework sets out a strategic framework for the modernisation and the development of health and social care services for people with long-term conditions, such as those with multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease, acquired brain injury, stroke and similar. It requires PCTs, hospital trusts and partner social services departments to review their current arrangements, and agree a ten-year plan for improvement.

There are no formal arrangements for all of the health and social care partners within the Thames Valley to work together as one group to implement the NSF. This reflects the fact that the delivery of community-based services for this group of patients/service users is best developed and arranged locally. Therefore, arrangements are being made across the Berkshire health and social care economy to focus on reviewing current service patterns within the framework of the NSF, with a set of

recommendations as to the proposed way forward ready by the beginning of November of this year.”

Mr Holt asked the following supplementary question:

“Our understanding is that the new Network Board for Thames Valley is likely to be set up in the fairly immediate future. One member of that organisation is to be a representative of Community Care. Is the Council content to leave the representation on that body to the other Councils of Thames Valley?”

The Executive Member for Community Care answered:

“I think Mr Holt has got the advantage on me as to who is going to be on that and think we need to wait and see exactly who is going to be on it and then we can give him an answer to his question.”

(5) Question submitted to the Executive Member for Strategy and Performance by Peter Dolphin:

“The new Disability Discrimination Act 2005 places new duties and responsibilities on public bodies. It amends the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to cover the majority of functions of a public authority and now requires a public authority to promote disability equality. How is West Berkshire Council planning to meet these new requirements?”

The Executive Member for Strategy and Performance answered:

“As part of the Council’s equality scheme we have set up a three-year rolling programme of reviews. This meets the new anticipatory duty set out in the Disability Discrimination Act in which we review all our policies, practices, procedures and services to make sure they do not discriminate against disabled people and ensure that all our services are planned with disabled people’s needs fully considered in advance

The Council’s Equalities Working Group is revising our Equality Strategy and will publish a new Corporate Equalities Plan. This will include a revised equality scheme setting out how we will meet the duties of the DDA 2005, in particular the new duty to promote equality with regard to disabilities. Specific actions include: on-going consultation with the West Berkshire Disability Alliance; publishing a Disability Access Guide to West Berkshire; part-funding the introduction of RNIB React to Newbury and an audit of Council-owned property supported by a budget to ensure DDA compliance; and lastly, introduction of ‘*Valuing Difference*’, a four-year equalities training programme for all elected Members.”
