

**QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED UNDER THE PROVISIONS
OF FCR 12 OF THE CONSTITUTION**

QUESTION 1

Question from Councillor Julie Morris to the Chair of the Environment and Safe Communities Committee, Councillor Neil Dallen.

Can this Council please have an estimate of how many brown bins are being emptied without checks that the householder has paid for the service, since it is our understanding that a direct correlation or check on households paying for the service and bins being emptied has not been possible to date.

Reply from Councillor Neil Dallen:

At the end of June 2019 the Council had just over 11,900 garden waste recycling subscriptions. Such large numbers mean that it is not practical for our collectors to check against lists of subscribers each day.

In 2008/9 we trialled a system designed to send subscription data to terminals in our vehicles' cabs. But the technology proved not to be ready. Consequently, from time to time we separately check non-payers and remove not-paid-for bins.

Such exercises usually result in the removal of around 300 or so not-paid-for bins. But this is very resource-intensive, so is only done occasionally. The last time was late autumn 2018.

The Council has continued to look for systems that could help us. We have continued to look at in-cab terminals, and even at individual bin 'licences'. But until recently we have remained concerned by their efficacy and expense.

However, products continue to develop and improve, and we are pleased to advise that the Council has recently procured a comprehensive, new system for the management of all recycling and waste collections, including garden waste. It will also work across Streetcare and Grounds Maintenance departments, giving us the cost-effectiveness we have been seeking.

For garden waste, the new system will reliably send live subscriber information to our collection vehicles each day. We will be able to identify and leave not-paid-for bins. A live update to Operations and the Contact Centre will allow us to initiate a payment conversation with the resident, or arrange removal of the bin. This will very much simplify and regularise the process.

Officers are currently working with the system supplier to put the system in place, with go-live planned for later this year.

QUESTION 2

Question from Councillor Bernie Muir to the Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, Councillor Barry Nash.

Social Prescription is in its infancy but growing fast. It is a social imperative and to be successful involves all stakeholders, agencies and Councils at all levels. Can Council's afford NOT to engage in this radically better way of dealing with many of our residents issues. This involves enabling people in a planned way with an array of programmes and activities across a broad spectrum. At its best, it involves combining those that are enabled with those who have challenges of varying degrees. It proven to have outstanding outcomes and often at astonishing speed. Social prescription in many cases reverses the pill-popping culture, effectively combats social isolation and helps re-engage people with work, volunteering and much more. It is highly cost effective in both the short and long terms. However, it needs to be front and centre of policy and requires infrastructure.

What action is the Borough Council taking in FULLY supporting Social Prescription in both the short & long term and has this involved a detailed analysis of the cost of engaging and, more importantly, the significant extra costs of not engaging including evaluating the strategic contribution an optimally managed Wells Centre could make to achieving first rate Social Prescription in Epsom & Ewell.

Reply from Councillor Nash:

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has a proud reputation of providing for the needs of our residents and this includes supporting the social prescription service available to our local GPs. This gives GPs an alternative to a medical prescription, so that they can prescribe patients to non-medical services such as participation in activities at the Wellbeing Centre, Meals on Wheels, Telecare support, or just help in tackling loneliness.

Following the introduction of our successful social prescription service, local GPs through their Primary Care Network have recognised the value of our model of social prescription and have agreed to fund to extend the service, so we can retain our link worker for another year to work closely with those referred. We maintain records on all prescriptions made to us and we can use this to analyse how the service is benefiting the community.

Social Prescription is a key part of our emerging approach to improving the health and wellbeing of our residents and will be reflected in our developing Health and Wellbeing Strategy, for all who live in Epsom and Ewell.

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QUESTION 3

Question from Councillor Bernie Muir to the Chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, Councillor David Reeve.

In the next decade towns will be competing with each other for inward investment and to save their High Streets. A big part of this will be developing their brand, capitalising on their assets and, in particular, developing a clear identity, narrative and design policy.

In responses to surveys my fellow conservative Councillors there is a wide sweeping gripe that Epsom's image and identity has all but died and what is left is under threat. We need to create an agreed context Let's say was use our history as a signpost, using our Georgian back story in terms of the Derby, Epsom Salts and famous historical moments and personalities. It is worth noting that survey after survey across the UK shows that Georgian style is a great draw to brands, shoppers, visitors and businesses.

We need a plan and we need it fast. The 1970s was responsible for the calamitous destruction of local identities and in recent times great efforts have been made in successful towns to reverse this damage with such buildings being compelled to conform to new design policies when being redevelopment.

New businesses frequently choose locations where they can develop their brand along with the visible kudos that good planning offers.

The more attractive the High Street the more attracted Brands will be to come here. Our surveys show that those with significant spending power whilst wanting to as they feel development such as Station Approach, East Street and current proposals in the pipeline have devastated the character and nothing coherent has replaced the town they loved.

One person said "I like dinner suits and I like sportswear but they clearly don't work together even if they were their best of their respective genres." I totally agree.

Our Borough does not have a design policy and has removed height restrictions and therefore cannot turn plans down on these issues." Kit Malthouse, Minister for Housing is clear about 'Building Beautiful' as opposed to 'Ubiquitous Blandness' which is thankfully a thing of the past in many places. Coherent design can impact mental health. We must deal with this.

The Borough has stated that they do not want a Georgian Pastiche. I do not see what is wrong in taking control of our narrative and developing a clear style on which we can project our proud history and proudly market.

In the coming years, Epsom will be competing with surrounding towns who have already recognised the benefits of a coherent branding and the need to restore areas that suffered the excesses of poor 1970s design 'vandalism' through a 'building beautiful' and 'building to narrative' policy. If the committee concluded, for example, that there were strategic benefits to agreeing that Ewell Village, and the High Streets

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of Stoneleigh and Epsom, as well as other key areas, should have a Design Policy and a Height Restriction then it seems only sensible to consider setting up a Task Group that could develop a design policy that could contribute to the strong rebranding and market advantage?

Reply from Councillor Reeve:

Unfortunately despite the length of the text submitted, I have been unable to establish a question. There is only one question mark in the submitted text which appears at the end, but unfortunately does not follow a specific question.

However thank you for sharing your thoughts and the results of consultations by your fellow Conservative Councillors. I trust you have forwarded the details to this Council to inform the Future 40 Project where we are seeking information and ideas to promote Brand Epsom over the next 20 years.

Hopefully, my Chairman's Statement, issued with the Council Agenda, will provide further information on the planning position in the Borough and which will result in another Public Consultation in the Autumn/Winter.

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QUESTION 4

Question from Councillor Bernie Muir to the Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor Eber Kington.

In the spirit of accessibility, openness and transparency, what is the Council's position on Webcasting its Full Council and key Committee Meetings. Given that Boroughs such as Woking, Reigate & Banstead, Waverley, Elmbridge, Tandridge, Mole Valley and Guildford all do so and proved that it is very beneficial in a wide variety of ways, I think providing such a service to Epsom & Ewell Borough residents is the least our residents should be furnished with in the era of accessible communications. I know that many are keen to know what the Borough is planning to do regarding Webcasting.

Reply from Councillor Kington:

The Council's Service Delivery Plan (SDP) 2018/2019 set a requirement to review Council Chamber's audio visual infrastructure and, as part of a wider investigation of options, Officers have been looking at the cost of webcasting. Their research shows that adding fixed cameras to the Chamber will cost around £15,000 and the management of servicing costs for webcasting for, say, a 5 year period are around £43,000.

In line with the requirements of the SDP a full Report on all AV options across the Council's meeting rooms will come before a future Strategy and Resources Committee.

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QUESTION 5

Question from Councillor Bernie Muir to the Chair of the Environment and Safe Communities Committee and Community and Wellbeing Committee, Councillor Neil Dallen and Councillor Barry Nash.

In light of the fact that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men are subjected to varying degrees of domestic abuse and coercive control what is the Borough forward strategy in supporting the various agencies working in this area including contributing and participating with the IRIS programme. Domestic Abuse has a major impact on children growing up in such an environment and also has a major knock on effects in so many areas including housing.

Domestic Abuse is the intentional use of verbal, emotional, psychological, financial and physical abusive tactics and behaviours in order to maintain power and control over and manipulate a partner, ex-partner or family member.

It represents one quarter of all violent crime in the UK and is any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. It is the misuse of power and control by one person over another; a series of incidents and behaviours that usually escalate over time. This can only be fully tackled when all agencies work together, fully engaging to identify those with issues and offer solutions.

One such solution is IRIS (Identification and Referral to Improve Safety). IRIS is a general practice-based domestic violence and abuse (DVA) training support and referral programme that has been evaluated in a randomised controlled trial. Core areas of the programme are training and education, clinical enquiry, care pathways and an enhanced referral pathway to specialist domestic violence services. It is aimed at women who are experiencing DVA from a current partner, ex-partner or adult family member. IRIS also provides information and signposting for male victims and for perpetrators.

IRIS is a collaboration between primary care and third sector organisations specialising in DVA. NSDAS (North Surrey Domestic Abuse Service) is looking for Boroughs to engage in this programme.

What is the Committee's plan to support agencies dealing with Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control including engaging with the IRIS programme, given that there is much, at Borough level, that can be done to help address this problem that impacts such a vast proportion of the residents, requiring multi-agency support?

Reply from Councillor Nash:

The Council recognises the prevalence of domestic abuse within society and its devastating impact on all who experience it. Working with the North Surrey Domestic

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Abuse Service, Police and other organisations, the council wholeheartedly supports those who are affected by Domestic Abuse.

When we are alerted to incidents of domestic abuse, if appropriate our Housing Services team can offer security improvements to protect those remaining in the family home when a perpetrator leaves, through our Sanctuary Scheme. We provide safe accommodation for survivors fleeing abuse, so that they are out of reach of the perpetrator. The Council is an active member of the East Surrey Community Safety Partnership where domestic abuse is identified as a priority area. In addition, the Council will be considering the impact on survivors and their families of domestic abuse in developing the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy due to be considered by Community and Wellbeing Committee later this year.

The Council also continues to raise staff awareness about Domestic Abuse and we have just hosted a very successful two day "Ask Me" Domestic Abuse training session, given by Women's Aid.

It is important that tackling domestic abuse is mainstreamed and not dealt with in a silo or treated as an add on. This means that all agencies need to take ownership of their response to domestic abuse, which starts with timely reporting and referral. The IRIS computer system is used by GP practices to help Doctors report and manage cases of Domestic Abuse they see in their surgeries. The Council is pleased to hear that the East Surrey Community Safety Partnership is again approaching the Clinical Commissioning Group to fund IRIS in their GP surgeries.

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QUESTION 6

Question from Councillor Bernie Muir to the Chairman/Chair of the Environment and Safe Communities Committee, Licensing and Planning Policy Committee and Strategy & Resources Committee, Councillor Neil Dallen, Councillor David Reeve and Councillor Eber Kington.

Wild flowers, plants and fungi are the life support for all our wildlife and their colour and character light up our landscapes. Over 700 species of wild flower grow on the UK's road verges – nearly 45% of our total flora. And where wild flowers lead, wildlife follows... a multitude of bees, butterflies, birds and bugs. All enjoyed by 23 million road commuters in the UK.

However, our road verges are under considerable pressure. Priorities for safety and access, alongside budget constraints, a desire for 'neatness' and difficulties with the collection of litter and grass clippings all mean that enhancing their wildlife value is often low on the list.

The message is quite simple from those, like me, who are campaigning for policy change. The message is 'cut less, cut later' and adoption by councils at all levels and other highways authorities will significantly improve the health of our verges, publically owned land and awareness to change residents attitudes and behaviours. We want flowers to be allowed to flower so pollinators can work their magic and seeds can ripen and fall to the ground. In this way, the floral display will become better and better every year.

The aim is to sow indigenous wild flowers on publically owned lane (where appropriate all over the Borough, only cutting verges, banks & land at the end of the season and, in doing so, provide sustenance and habitats for our beleaguered bees, birds and other wild animals. This should also deliver long term monetary savings, as well as supporting traditional conservation and habitat restoration. And, just think how beautiful and uplifting it would be. Perhaps we could crowd fund it and enlist the help of volunteers. But without our help, this priceless natural heritage is in danger of being lost.

In light of widespread research would the respective Epsom & Ewell Committees agree to set up a task group to look in more detail into changing our policy regarding publically owned land and road verge management for wildlife, and to get councillors involved from across the political spectrum? We should also looked at public engagement methodologies. What a lovely way to get to know your community, your neighbours, get people active and help towards combatting loneliness. Social prescription in action. Let's do it here in Epsom.

Reply from Councillor Neil Dallen:

Firstly I would like to thank the questioner for her 300 plus word dissertation which I am sure everyone has enjoyed reading.

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After careful reading the question asked is –

“Would the respective Epsom & Ewell Committees agree to set up a task group to look in more detail into changing our policy regarding publically owned land and road verge management for wildlife, and to get councillors involved from across the political spectrum?”

The short answer is “No”.

The reasons are many and varied. The main ones are -

1. We already have a very comprehensive Biodiversity Action Plan which many voluntary groups assisted in producing and councillors were involved in agreeing.

This commits us to enhance the Borough’s biodiversity and, in that regard, it is important to note that we currently manage extensive areas for wild flowers with hay meadows in Horton Country Park, grazing reintroduced on Epsom Common and the managed chalk grassland on Juniper Hill on Epsom Downs.

Managing these areas is critical to conserving the Borough’s biodiversity.

This is very resource intensive and I know that our countryside team regard the management of these areas as a higher priority than new initiatives outside of our Biodiversity Action Plan.

2. A change to the management of verges would require investment in new machinery and changes to working practices.

Although there can be opportunities to enhance biodiversity, and possibly make long term savings as well, the measures necessary to achieve this require a significant change in approach.

Not all verges lend themselves to this style of management, there may be sightline / safety issues from long grass and road signs may also be obscured.

We also need to take into account our residents views and in suburban areas our residents prefer managed verges.

3. We partner with voluntary groups like the Lower Mole Project who have very experienced individuals who continue to input into our biodiversity work.

The current Working Group for the Biodiversity Action Plan meets several times a year and the individuals involved are committed to enhancing the Borough’s biodiversity.

The annual reports that describe progress across the Borough in enhancing biodiversity over the last decade can be found at <https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/residents/planning/biodiversity>.