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Simon Young, Solicitor
Head of Legal and Democratic Services



To: All Members of the Council

Dear Councillor

COUNCIL - TUESDAY, 13TH DECEMBER, 2016

Please find attached the following report for the meeting of the Council to be held on Tuesday, 13th December, 2016.

4. **QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS** (Pages 3 - 10)

To answer written questions from Councillors.

For further information, please contact Tim Richardson, tel: 01372 732122 or email: trichardson@epsom-ewell.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

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Head of Legal and Democratic Services

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QUESTION 1

Question from Councillor Alex Clarke to the Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor Eber Kington

When will there be an outline of the process, procedure and timeline for the replacement of the Chief Executive? Frances Rutter will be a tough act to follow therefore finding a successor as soon as possible to allow for a possible overlap/transition period would seem to be of best practice?

Reply:

In line with the Council's Constitution (Part 4 – Rules of Procedure, Section G – Officer Employment Procedure Rules 2.3) a panel of five members composed of the Chairman of the Strategy & Resources Committee and four other members (to include appropriate minority group representation) will be responsible for the recruitment and selection of the Chief Executive. Such a panel is ordinarily to be appointed by the Strategy & Resources Committee, but, on this occasion, in order to move matters along, we are proposing to ask Council to make the appointments this evening, hence the urgent item added to the agenda.

It is really important that expectations are set at this early stage to enable any recruitment process to be effective and successful. I am currently reviewing the role profile and person specification with the Vice Chairman of S&R and officers to ensure that expectations and requirements are clearly set prior to the recruitment process. Over the coming period the panel will agree what sort of candidate we are hoping to attract, what characteristics are important to us, what emphasis we place on specific experience and what expectations we have in terms of the process. This will allow time to pull together an appropriate advert, liaise with any specific recruitment agencies and start to pull together a recruitment schedule. I am meeting with Shona Mason, Head of HR & Organisational Development, and others on 15 December to move this forward.

I appreciate that you are keen to progress as soon as possible but placing an advert this close to Christmas may be counterproductive and lead us to extend the closing date further into January should we not have adequate interest. Placing an advert before the New Year may mean that we lose out on candidates who are focused elsewhere with the up and coming festivities. Therefore we will be preparing our campaign this side of Christmas with a launch date of early January.

QUESTION 2

Question from Councillor Tina Mountain to the Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor Eber Kington

The work on Plan E starts on 9 January. What provision has the Council put in place to support the shopkeepers and stall holders during this chaotic time?

Reply:

I am disappointed that Councillor Mountain has chosen to couch her question in such terms. I am sure that the up-coming Plan E work, for the Surrey County Council and Borough Council Officers involved, will be challenging during the construction, but also fulfilling when it has been completed. To label the construction period as chaotic even before it has started does not send out the right message to our residents or the workforce undertaking the work.

In regard to what is being put in place to support shopkeepers and stall holders, Officers of the Borough Council are working closely with Surrey County Council who are the principal partners in this important scheme. The expectation is that this substantial investment in the town centre will make it an even more vibrant place in which to do business and that the project will be of lasting benefit to the economy of the town. The Borough Council's Communications Team and Place Development Team are proactively working with their County colleagues to identify issues in advance and to manage the implementation in order to minimise any disruption.

The Borough's Town Centres Manager has also been actively working with the business community to alert them to the forthcoming works and to explain the proposals to them.

The County Council has recently appointed a Works Liaison Manager who will be the point of contact for the public, including the business community, during the execution of the works. Information is being disseminated through the County Council's own website which is to be up-dated regularly with the latest information. Any enquirers should visit the website in the first instance and this will contain contact details for the County Council in the first instance.

<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roads-and-transport-policies-plans-and-consultations/major-transport-projects/epsom-and-ewell-major-transport-schemes>

QUESTION 3

Question from Councillor Alex Clarke to the Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor Eber Kington

What effort is the council putting in to increase footfall in the Borough: to attract shoppers and merchants to our high streets?

Reply:

The national decline of town centres and high street retailers in the face of the boom in internet and mobile shopping is well known. Many have expressed

disappointment at the failure of the previous Conservative led Coalition government's high profile attempt to stem the flow of retailers and footfall from town centres through the Mary Portas Review, and I think we can all agree more needs to be done.

Unfortunately, in 2017 many of our hard pressed town centre businesses will be hit hard by the Conservative Government's business rate revaluation, which will come into effect from April next year. Increased business rates will make it harder for our businesses to compete with internet retailers of course, and we may find more struggling.

However, and whilst there is much gloom in many high streets across the country, I am sure all Members will join me in saying how pleasing it is to see so much development in Epsom town centre that will bring more footfall. For example, a new hotel and work starting on Ashley House, both of which will attract more people to our town.

In addition it is important not to overlook the hard work of the Borough Council in securing the funding for the Plan E road changes, which will help increase footfall across the town centre. Currently there is a great deal of footfall around the Ashley Centre and the market place, but it declines rapidly after the Spread Eagle and the north of the high street because the busy roads form a barrier in people's minds. Therefore, improving the junctions – making it easier to cross the roads – will mean people stay longer in the town centre and visit more shops and businesses. In addition, improving the public realm – paving, seating, and lightening – will make our town an even better place to visit, to eat and to shop. I am grateful to the Borough Council's Place Development Team for facilitating these important changes, along with the improvements to Derby Square, the work on which is expected to start very soon.

In addition, a great deal of work goes on behind the scenes by the Council to establish business need and development potential. Place Development convenes a number of meetings to bring together key partners to drive footfall. Alanna Coombes our Town Centre Manager, for example, convenes a meeting of Place Development team and the commercial agents in the town centre to understand what the drivers of growth are, and to share intelligence on businesses looking to come to the Borough. Understanding what is missing on the High Street – such as a book shop and gift shop – and contacting such businesses directly showing what units are currently available is a crucial part of this work.

The Town Centre Manager also chairs a regular meeting of people who put on markets and events in the Borough. It is attended by the Council's Market Manager, What's On in Epsom, The Best of Epsom & Ewell and the Ashley Centre. They coordinate and assist each other in putting on events and making them bigger and better through joint endeavour. This has helped to improve the offer in the town centre and the quality of the events held, such as the new Derby Festival, the Town Fayres, the Ashley Centre Light Switch On event and the Council's own Light Switch On event, which is so ably

managed by the Market Manager, Emily Harbrecht and which this year was compared expertly by our Waste Services Manager, Jon Sharp. These are members of staff who go above and beyond the call of duty so our residents can have fun and our businesses can benefit from the increased footfall.

This is an impressive effort by our officers and I am grateful to the Place Development staff and the Town Centre Manager for their work with developers and businesses to help facilitate these important footfall drivers, but also to the Environmental Health and Licensing teams for making the process as simple as can be.

Free parking on the Sundays in the run up to Christmas is another example of what the Council is doing to help drive footfall, along with free publicity through Borough Insight for Ewell Yule and Lights on Broadway. Further investment in Christmas Lights across the Borough has also helped make our centres more attractive to Christmas shoppers.

Importantly the Town Centre Manager has been supporting businesses in creating a Business Improvement District (BID). This has gained a great deal of support from businesses and has led to the creation of the Epsom Town Business Partnership which, I believe, has the drive and enthusiasm to create a BID in Epsom. A BID of course is something I believe will be of great benefit to the town centre – as demonstrated in Kingston and Guildford town centres for example - bringing in revenue to fund branding, marketing, more specialist markets and events and ways to attract further footfall and new businesses. Many say that if you want your town centre to really reach its potential then a BID is the only way to go.

But Epsom is just one of a number of our centres and I'd like to mention two others and how we have been working with them. Working with the traders associations in Stoneleigh Broadway and Ewell Village we assisted with an application for funding from Surrey County Council for small capital improvements under the Community Improvements Fund. Following traders meetings, walkabouts with traders and a survey the Town Centre Manager submitted two separate bids for funding. Unfortunately and disappointingly SCC did not award any funding to Stoneleigh. However the traders in Ewell Village secured funding for new planters, screening – and importantly new signage. In addition, I am also very pleased to report that the Town Centre Manager has been successful in gaining £12,000 – the highest amount possible – from Tesco's Bags of Help Fund which will see big improvements to the entrance to The Grove, including the replacement of the broken phone box with a traditional red one that'll be used as a children's micro library, stocked and managed by next door café, All Things Nice.

Another Borough Council initiative is the shop front improvement grant which has seen the transformation of buildings and which has greatly benefitted the surrounding businesses and made for more attractive centres.

Importantly the council has put in place Article 4 directions in town centres to stop offices being turned into apartments – so preventing the dormitory town

effect where town centres lose the office worker footfall. These Article 4 directions have also been put in place to protect shops being turned into more nail bars, estate agents, and coffee shops. You can have too much of a good thing.

Sustaining the good health of town centres is the result of good work of a number of players – central government, local government, and perhaps most importantly the people running our businesses or seeking to start up in our Borough. The Borough Council can help to create an environment for businesses to thrive and I'm proud of the work of the Council in doing so.

And if you want a hard evidence that these combined efforts are working then you only have you look at what is happening in our town centre right now: White Stuff and Pets at Home which have just opened in Epsom, Prezzo will be opening imminently, Kiko soon after Christmas, and Pret a Manger is expected to open early in the new year. These are new merchants bringing greater footfall, supported by the Council, and much needed by Epsom residents.

QUESTION 4

Question from Councillor Tina Mountain to the Chairman of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, Councillor Barry Nash

How many of the elderly residents of the Wells Estate are using the facilities at Longmead for their lunch and how much does it cost them both for transport and food?

Reply:

Meals and sandwiches consumed each day at the Longmead Centre are purchased across the counter and there is no data available regarding specific purchases from residents of the Wells Estate. The latest November 2016 revenue figures at the Longmead Centre confirm that 1,374 lunches and sandwiches were served compared to 942 lunches and sandwiches in the same period last year, which reflects an increase in membership. The current membership at the Longmead Centre at the end of November 2016 is 726, which is a significant increase as a result of new members joining from the Wells Centre. The price of a two course meal at the Longmead Centre is £4.40 per person and the average cost of a sandwich is £1.95 per person.

The Longmead Centre being centrally located in the Borough has good transport connections and is well placed to serve all residents, borough wide. Our residents access the Longmead Centre by foot, bus, car, dial-a-ride, or by utilising the RouteCall service. Transport costs vary dependent upon circumstances, such as free or subsidised bus passes within Surrey, as well as our RouteCall service, which costs £4.00 per person for a return journey, regardless of location within the Borough.

QUESTION 5

Question from Councillor Alex Clarke to the Chairman of the Environment Committee, Councillor John Beckett

How much is currently being spent on annual Civil Enforcement Officer Training, and what efforts are being made to make sure it is kept current and reflective of the evolving needs of this complex role?

Reply:

I thank Councillor Clarke for his question. When Officers are employed by the Council they are expected to hold an NVQ level 2 or equivalent qualification in Civil Enforcement so the cost to this Council is virtually zero other than the £24 for a DBS check.

The guidelines on enforcement may change slightly from borough to borough but the general principals and highway restrictions remain the same.

Much of the local knowledge required to undertake the role is provided in-house including the workings of the pay machines and barriers which are used in the various car parks. If manual handling training is required it is provided by Operational Services and Customer Service training by our own Customer Services team. Daily briefings are also undertaken to provide Officers with information of anything they need to be aware of within the Borough.

Although there is a limited budget for additional external training, it can be provided if and when necessary. One Officer recently attended a conflict management training course. First aid courses have also been discussed for officers.

QUESTION 6

Question from Councillor Alex Clarke to the Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor Eber Kington

In the interests of Open Democracy, and considering the usual dearth now of Press Attendance due to restructuring of the local papers, is not time to look again at live webcasting of council meetings to provide the public with the necessary information as to the process and thoughts of their local government representatives and officials?

Reply:

Webcasting is something kept under review and was last revisited when scoping the Modern.Gov project. At that time costs depended on a number of variables such as hardware required, number of meetings to be covered, contract duration, and whether payment was to be up front or annually. Whilst

research suggests that viewing statistics might be in excess of usual attendance in the public gallery, there is no indication to suggest that they would be sufficient to justify the investment of at least around £10,000-15,000 per year.

However, the recent introduction of Modern.Gov in itself has greatly improved access for residents of the Borough and members of the public to both Agendas and Minutes via the Modern.Gov App and our new website.

QUESTION 7

Question from Councillor Alex Clarke to the Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor Eber Kington

Can it please be explained fully the reasoning behind the cancellation of the previously scheduled Full Council Meeting, before the submission date for Questions, and especially in light of the subsequent Emergency Council Meeting?

Reply:

The decision to cancel the 15 October meeting of the Council was taken due to a lack of business and was discussed with group leaders at a regular Group Leaders' Meeting.

On 20th October an email was sent by Fiona Cotter to all members at the time setting out why it was necessary to call an extraordinary meeting.

The wording of that email is as follows: *"I have been asked to arrange this for Monday 21 November 2016. I am aware that we cancelled the meeting scheduled to be held on 18 October. However, I understand the matters to be considered on 21 November have only arisen recently and could not have been worked up in time to meet the statutory deadlines for the publication of paperwork for a meeting on 18."*

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