

Council
25 July 2023

QUESTION 1

Question from Councillor Alison Kelly to the Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, Councillor Clive Woodbridge.

Does this council work with local housing associations to consider leaving the carpets (subject to cleaning and inspection) so the residents can benefit from a better furnished house at the start of their tenancy, and are there any other white goods or items which could remain in the property when it changes hands? If not, is this something that we could discuss with housing associations?

Reply from Councillor Woodbridge:

The standard practice across the Housing Association sector is that new tenancies are often unfurnished and uncarpeted. Often the carpet from the previous tenancy is in such a poor condition that they would not be wanted by the new tenant moving in.

However, moving-in is an expensive process which impacts particularly on our homeless households. We recognise some residents will need help, so when a household is nominated for a tenancy, they will be asked if they need assistance with furniture and if so, a referral can be made to a furniture charity as well as to Surrey Crisis fund. Referrals can also be considered if white goods are needed, although this often depends on whether the charities have such items available.

For qualifying residents, the Council also provides financial support to help residents move into private rented sector properties, such as the Rent Deposit Scheme and the offer of providing a Bond Deposit, equivalent of up to one month's rent.

However, given the current crisis and in response to the Members question I have asked that officers write to all our local Housing Associations to ask them not to remove good quality and clean carpets/flooring during the voids process and for these then to be gifted to the incoming tenant. Hopefully, this will help our residents further during what is a very challenging time.

QUESTION 2

Question from Councillor James Lawrence to the Chair of the Standards and Constitution Committee, Councillor Liz Frost.

Whilst Chairpersons of policy committees can be approached to include items on agenda of their meetings, there is no specific provision in the Terms of Reference of policy committees to deal with issues affecting the wellbeing of local residents, specifically when the issue is an external influence in a geographical area which is affecting the quality of life of several residents. There is provision in the Council's Constitution for questions from the public, and petitions from the public, but would it be appropriate for the Standards & Constitution Committee to rethink the ToR of

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policy committees, or make provision for an emergency "wellbeing" item, so that such matters can be given more thorough and efficient consideration?

Reply from Councillor Frost:

I am grateful to Councillor Lawrence for this helpful suggestion and I will ensure that this is reported back to the Standards and Constitution Committee Member Working Group that was recently established to support the annual review of the Council's constitution. The Council takes the issue of wellbeing seriously as can be seen with reference to its 4-year plan for 2020-24 which details an ambition of delivering improved health and wellbeing outcomes through the Council's Health & Wellbeing Action Plan.

The Member Working Group have been provided a lengthy list of issues to address by the Standards and Constitution Committee, so it will advise the Committee at its earliest opportunity when it can address this suggestion and I will be happy to update Councillor Lawrence once that is decided. I have also discussed this with Councillor Woodbridge in his capacity of Chair of the Council's Community and Wellbeing Committee and he will be invited to take part in this discussion with the Member Working Group.

QUESTION 3

Question from Councillor Julie Morris to the Chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, Councillor Steven McCormick.

When can councillors expect a detailed briefing on changes to biodiversity as potentially affected by development, small or large, which are required by central government this year, including explanations of the 10% net gain in biodiversity which is expected from some developments, and will that include a briefing on implications for development of Green Belt land currently proposed within the draft Local Plan?

Reply from Councillor McCormick:

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to development that seeks to leave biodiversity in a measurably better state than before the development took place. BNG will be mandatory in Major planning applications submitted from November 2023 and in smaller applications submitted from April 2024, with the requirement to increase biodiversity by a minimum of 10% compared to the baseline.

We understand that the governments approach will be to require biodiversity improvements to take place within the application site, but that it will also be possible for developers to pay towards biodiversity off site, either through local schemes that increase biodiversity or through a national biodiversity credits scheme. However,

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although BNG is due to become mandatory from November, we are still awaiting secondary legislation and further guidance relating to how BNG is to be implemented and enforced, and this leaves some uncertainty, both for us as a Council and for developers preparing applications.

I am very keen for all Members to be briefed as soon as possible on this important change, and the implications for us both in terms of determining planning applications and implications for the Local Plan, and will ask officers to arrange briefings once further guidance has been produced by government.