



The Leader of the Council, Councillor Stuart Selleck, outlined the agenda for the meeting. The following Elmbridge Cabinet members were also in attendance:

- Councillor Mrs Janet Turner (Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture)
- Councillor Barry Fairbank (Portfolio Holder for Environment)
- Councillor Roy Green (Portfolio Holder for Housing)
- Councillor Andrew Davis (Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport)
- Councillor Mrs Mary Marshall (Portfolio Holder to Community and Corporate Development)
- Councillor Mrs Karen Randolph (Portfolio Holder for Planning Services)
- Councillor Chris Sadler (Portfolio Holder for Resources)
- Councillor Mrs Ruth Lyon (Portfolio Holder for Social Affairs)

The Leader of the Council gave a presentation on a review of the previous year and the priorities for the year ahead. A video of the presentation can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4dLixL1RaI>

The Council received 27 questions in advance of the meeting. You can watch the Cabinet answer these questions here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQfVbVocy-8>.

The below questions and answers are from those questions received from the public on the evening:

Question: 'Parents of Year 5 children at Claygate Primary School': Whilst we recognise that education is not the responsibility of Elmbridge Borough Council, as residents, we would like to ask for your comment. We understand that for the secondary school admission in 2019 there is effectively a shortage of places for between 60 -90 children within the Borough which obviously we are concerned about. What support can may be able to receive from our local Councillors to help us to try and deal with the situation to help our children find school places locally without them having to travel across the Borough by public transport and take very long journeys.

Answer:

Councillor Selleck explained that a large amount of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money is allocated to Surrey County Council for education. Councillor Selleck suggested that parents at Claygate Primary School approach Surrey County Council who can speak with Elmbridge regarding CIL funding.

Rachel Crossley, Chief of Staff, from Surrey County Council: Ahead of the meeting tonight, we received three questions relating to Claygate school places. School places have been increasing across Surrey to around 16,000 extra places over five years by 2018. This has been supported by our own capital programmes and support from district and boroughs as

mentioned by Councillor Selleck.

In Elmbridge, in terms of our primary places, we feel that we are in a good place with sufficient places going forward. For secondary schools, by 2020 we should have another eight forms coming on – six forms at the new free school in Walton and two forms at Cobham free school. In the future, although the numbers are going to go up in the next five years we should have a reasonable capacity at that point. However, as pointed out, the pressure is around the next two years. Currently, the focus is around 2018 admissions. We know preferences and people will receive confirmation of school places in March. We are confident about capacity for 2018 and will focus on meeting first preferences where possible. We have also started planning for 2019 as I know there is anxiety about this. The forecasting figures which some parents have seen do look like there is an issue but we also have to look at other factors, such as dropout rates and students going to the independent sector. Some choose to go out of county or move. We usually get a 6% drop out rate during the first week after an offer and usually end up with around 20% by start of the school term. Based on the similar forecast for 2019, we anticipate having enough capacity in local schools. As we get nearer, the forecast will be undertaken a further three times for 2019 admissions and will utilise the data from 2018 to assess further. If there is a need to look at additional classes, we will work with the Borough. As it stands, however, we are comfortable there will be capacity and we will continue to review this over next few months.

Question: Can the Chairman of the Council ask the auditors, Grant Thornton, to undertake a strategic review of the investment portfolio to assess the true value of that portfolio and the potential risk to the Council.

Answer:

Sarah Selvanathan, Strategic Director and Deputy Chief Executive: Every year Grant Thornton undertake Elmbridge Borough Council's year end audit and as part of that audit they will review the valuation of the Property portfolio. The Council uses reputable external valuers to undertake the valuations for our Investment property portfolio. The Council has been making property investments since 2012 and rely on external valuations and due diligence with every property purchased.

External Auditors have given us the assurance that they are satisfied with the valuations and that we have dealt with it correctly in our statement of accounts. The audit for the current year which will include any new property purchases made during this year will be completed in the summer with the audit report made available around June/July this year.

Question: What action is being taken in Cherry Orchard Road and Gardens, in West Molesey? This is plagued by an ever-increasing number of boats moored upstream, attendant vehicles blocking our roads, some as storage, a decrepit boat and trailer abandoned. This needs a concerted effort between Elmbridge, Surrey County Council, the Environment Agency, and Surrey Police to deal with it.

Answer:

Ray Lee, Strategic Director, Elmbridge Borough Council: We are aware of an increase in boats moored without permission along the River Thames. Within the Public Right of Navigation there is deemed a right for boat owners to stop on land, subject to the necessary landowners consent, for a reasonable period. The Borough follows the Environment Agency's policy that 24 hours is considered a reasonable time within normal navigation.

Boats are entitled to stay for longer however, provided they have the landowner's consent to do so.

The River has a complex range of land owners, and the law only allows the owners of the land that the boats are moored on to take action against an unauthorised mooring. This would include any potential byelaws which would only be effective on Elmbridge owned land. Land owners include the Environment Agency, Network Rail or in a minority of cases Elmbridge Borough Council. The landowner could consider applying to the Courts for a possession order, or other powers under their jurisdiction, to compel the boat owners to move their vessels. The sanctions for repeated trespass offences are increasingly stringent, so this is the most effective method for dealing with this issue, and is the Environment Agency's recommended approach.

Anyone who suspects a boat is moored to land without consent, should first contact the owner of that land to ensure that they are aware and can take appropriate action to resolve the matter, should they choose to do so.

Elmbridge Borough Council has no powers to move/evict boats which are not moored on Elmbridge owned land but continues to work with other agencies to try and resolve this issue. We are working closely with the EA who are taking action against a number of unauthorized moored boats on their land.

We are aware of the local issues to Cherry Orchard Road and have provided refuse bins to manage the build-up of refuse from the boats. Officers have also inspected the boat and trailer and confirm these have not been abandoned and as they are parked on Surrey County Council (SCC) highway and we have passed the details to SCC Highways to review.

Question: Back in August last year (2017) a number of residents were asked to attend focus groups regarding the vision and priorities for the Borough. Where are you in the process for processing that data, staff. From what we were asked to contribute is it going in to the 2018 /19 priorities, plus vision?

Answer:

Rob Moran, Chief Executive, Elmbridge Borough Council: It is critical that when we asked for people's opinions, we feedback. The results were reported in to the last Council and Cabinet meeting and we will circulate the report from our website to those who took part. We are currently developing the measures of success for our vision.

The link to the above-mentioned report can be found here:

<http://mygov.elmbridge.gov.uk/documents/s16555/Vision%20and%20Priorities%202018%20-%202023.pdf>

Question: A large number of students at Esher High School are living below the poverty line. I also volunteer at the food bank. I am concerned about the number of children living in that area who are relying on charity for their survival. Does the Council have an angle on that to support those people?

Answer:

Councillor Lyon: Agreed to look at the issues and discuss.

Councillor Green: We do work with local charities on this issue. People should have a decent place to live. This is the right of every citizen. It isn't good enough and something has to be done about it. We are aware and we are going to do our best.

Question: East Elmbridge Food Bank has clients from all over the Borough. One of the reasons for the need is that people are in debt. Esher Green Baptist Church in West Molesey now provides a debt counselling centre to help address root cause of poverty and make a difference. This has just opened.

This was a statement from a member of the public and did not require an answer.

Question: Weybridge Parking: What is the influence of Elmbridge Borough Council over Surrey County Council regarding on-street parking, for example on Minorca Road? I am concerned about safety.

Answer:

Councillor Davis: There are numerous roads across the Borough that are in the same situation. We have no legal position over Surrey County Council. Surrey did have three-year parking survey but a lot of people felt that if they missed the three-year period that they would have to wait another three years. This is not the case. We know that we can't have one size fits all across the Borough

At its December meeting, the Elmbridge Local Committee decided that from June 2018 the parking review process should continue to be carried out by a dedicated engineer, but that the whole Borough should be included in each review, rather than individual towns. This review will take place annually. It was felt that this would enable issues to be addressed more quickly than if areas were grouped into a two-year programme.

We will be working hard to resolve this situation over the next year to find solutions and common ground that work for both sides.

Question: What can be done about the 20% of children living below the poverty line? Do they get the care and attention that they deserve? How can we put people into poor housing? I suggest that the next meeting should focus on housing alone.

Answer:

Councillor Green: The Local Plan is looking at housing on the green belt. If we do go down that road, we will insist that low cost housing is provided. We won't give up our precious green belt to developers who wish to make millions. We need to provide social housing in the Borough. We are engaging with those who are homeless across the borough. We want to see more families living in accommodation.

Talking to our planners, they tell me that there are a vast number of sites in Elmbridge where developers have not taken up the option to build affordable housing. We want to see families living in decent accommodation and make a positive contribution to those who want to live in the Borough.

The Council has legal responsibilities to homeless households, although the level of

assistance owed will depend on the circumstances of each case. We will not have a duty to provide temporary accommodation for everybody who is homeless or at risk of homelessness. Our focus is on preventing homelessness wherever possible and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which comes into force from 1 April 2018 will increase our responsibilities in terms of supporting people at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage. Officers are working to be ready for these new changes.

The Council works in partnership with a range of agencies to help prevent homelessness in the first place, increase the supply of suitable accommodation for people who are or may become homeless and to provide support to people whilst they are homeless and / or those who might otherwise become homeless. More details on the range of services is available in the Council's Housing and Homelessness Strategy, which is on our website.

The Council has drawn up plans to spend around £800k to help reduce the need to use bed & breakfast and to meet our responsibilities under the new legislation. We are also progressing a number of projects to increase the supply of temporary accommodation for homeless households within the borough and to reduce the use of bed & breakfast, which usually involves placements out of borough.

The Council has limited tools and powers to shape the local housing market. The private-rented sector has grown significantly in Elmbridge over the last twenty years and it has advantages and disadvantages. For some, it offers choice and flexibility, in terms of where they live and how long for, especially where they're not at a stage where they want to commit to buying a home, whilst for others, we recognise that they would prefer the greater security and lower rents available in the social housing sector.

The private-rented sector is a key part of the local housing market and part of our role is to make sure that the housing stock within it is well managed and maintained and that rogue landlords are dealt with.

Longer-term, the review, consultation and adoption of a new Local Plan will inform the number, type and location of affordable homes to be delivered as part of a larger housing target. Realistically, due to the various constraints to housing delivery, such as strongly performing green belt, it is very unlikely that all the assessed need for affordable housing (and for market housing too) will be able to be met.

Councillor Randolph: There isn't a vast source of property anywhere. We are short of brownfield sites in comparison to the rest of the country and Surrey. We are looking to meet our needs with density projects, where we can put in cheaper houses. A fact that illustrates the problem is that in 2016/17 the net increase in the number of houses was 244 – of that 75% in council tax band G and H. That clearly indicates the problems that we have. Developers are coming and building big houses on large sites. We rely on planning permission. We do not build anything. Developers need to have the appetite to develop. We are trying to look at it in different ways. We do need more smaller units for those in lower income brackets. We can look at how those very large houses are used. We need to think differently. People cannot afford to move and therefore extend their homes.

Question: There needs to be a joined-up approach between Surrey County Council and Elmbridge as planning, traffic parking, density increase causes more traffic. These factors are intermittently related.

Answer:

Councillor Selleck: We work with the Surrey County Council on a number of planning matters.

Question: There are a number of priorities. How are we going to pay for it, everything from business masterclasses to water safety to social housing? How many projects can you take on and how many staff are you going to employ to do them? What is the priority?

Answer:

Councillor Selleck: We have to have a balanced budget and deliver on that within constraints. The Government has relaxed the rules and capped council tax rises from 2% to per year to 3%. We believe that by the internal efforts that we are making and looking at how we deliver our services that we can keep our share of the costs to residents as low as possible. In fact, I believe Elmbridge residents have seen the lowest council tax rise in Surrey. This is a tribute to members and officers. We need to look at activity that we can do better and more efficiently to get best value. For example, the joint waste contract has made dramatic savings. There has to be joined up thinking and writing between boroughs to help maintain services. We recognise that the government is not going to give us the money. We do not wish to pass on additional costs to residents.

We need to take control of our own destiny; for example, setting up a housing company.. With the CIL money we can help the infrastructure. It is a balancing act all of the time.

Question: On the Elmbridge Borough Council website, we would like a breakdown of who does what, what departments we have and how that money is spent.

Answer:

Councillor Sadler stated that the headline numbers about spending are available on the Elmbridge Website:
http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/_resources/assets/attachment/full/0/3253.pdf

Councillor Green: At the moment we don't build social housing but we hope to change that by setting up a housing company. When people put in a planning app for a number of house we insist that they make 40% of those houses available for affordable housing. If they say that they cannot do that they have to pay a sum of money that goes into to our Housing Enabling Fund. At the moment, this is about ten million pounds. We have used this fund over the past few years to assist housing associations in building properties. For example, recently one association was able to put 5 social houses for temporary accommodation into a development using this funding. The money in a way has come from developments. We are setting up our own company, subject to the next council meeting. We think we have the right formula and are determined to get on the right road.

Question: I am concerned over the level of care taken with appointments to outside bodies. I have identified three elements which are essential to filling a position, which I would recommend are given due consideration.

Answer:

Councillor Marshall: When a representative is appointed to an outside body by the Council, it is a matter for the individual outside body concerned to identify any specific skills or requirements necessary for the position. The performance of any representatives on outside bodies, whether Council or other appointments, rests with the outside body concerned. Any issues relating to such matters should be addressed to the relevant outside body in the first instance, for them to consider in line with their relevant Constitutional provisions.

The Council did undertake a Member review during the 2016/17 municipal year. This review sought to ascertain whether the existing Council appointments to various bodies were still required, and to seek updated information in respect of such appointments. The review sought clarification on a number of aspects including whether any specific background knowledge or understanding was required, whether the appointed person was required to be an elected Member, the capacity in which they would serve, and matters relating to the technicality of the role.

The result was that Members who had been appointed to outside bodies were asked to submit feedback during the period 2016/17. The feedback gave other Members a better idea of the activities of those organisations, provided information to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that could be useful when appointing to external organisations in the future, and enabled the Committee to assess potential opportunities and barriers to future engagement between the organisation and the Council.

Question: Will the new housing company be able to do something about the old Esher and Molesey Police Stations?

Answer:

Councillor Green: It is out of our hands as the Police own the property. We are looking at all properties that we could convert into housing which is why we bought the office block in Thames Ditton. We can look at those two properties and see what figures come out of it. We can't always pay as much as developers will pay. We will look into this and see what happens

Councillor Randolph: The old police station at Esher has been purchased and I understand that there is planning permission for the Molesey site.

Question: The problem in Walton Town Centre is that youngsters have nowhere to go in the evening. There is a youth club but it isn't open during the weekend – where can children go?

Answer:

Councillor Marshall: The Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) will address rowdy and inconsiderate behaviour following a number of reports since January 2017. We will raise awareness of the PSPO with schools to explain how it will work. The restrictions will be in place between 3pm to 3am restriction. There is a youth centre in Walton but it is not open on a Friday night. This is run by Surrey County Council.

The Elmbridge Community and Safety Partnership paid for a youth outreach bus (Lifetrain)

for the summer holidays in 2017.

There is an excellent youth club at Hershams, this isn't run by the County Council. Claygate Youth Club is run by volunteers. Perhaps an initiative could be explored for Walton.

Question: Walton Police Station is now a block of retirement apartments. If you walk down Walton High Street there is another block and opposite that another block which was built on previous industrial site. If we are so desperate for social housing, these three sites would appear to fit the bill completely. Why has social housing not been considered? Or if it has been considered why has it been turned down? Why are getting a plethora of retirement apartments when there is so much need for social housing?

Answer:

Councillor Green: The three developments you mention went through in the previous administration.

Councillor Randolph: We do not build houses and are looking to set up a housing company. We are reliant of the applications that come in to use and if the criteria is met we cannot refuse. We are hoping to change the balance with new local plan. However, developers are only going to be interested in areas where they can make money and this is a major issue.

Councillor Davis: Stated that planning is central to the way we integrate our infrastructure and that Elmbridge is the recipients of applications. Residents may wish to see the planning process by going to a planning meeting to see the decision making:

<http://mygov.elmbridge.gov.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1>

Question: Air quality monitor at Hampton Court. How do we improve air quality in the Borough?

Answer:

Cllr Fairbank: stated that there is a lot of data regarding air quality on the Elmbridge Borough Council website: <http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/pollution/local-air-quality/>

We work within in the Borough and with other nearby authorities to develop our policies relating to air quality.

Residents Panel – join

The Residents' Panel is made up of local residents. We ask their views on the Council's services two to three times a year.

Sign up to the Residents Panel online: <http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/council/my-elmbridge-residents-panel/>

The meeting concluded at 21.08pm

