

CABINET – 28 MARCH 2019
QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Agenda item 5 refers

1. **Mr Hugh Hoad to Councillor Mark Ingall, Leader of the Council**

At the Council meeting on 28 February 2019, the Opposition proposed their Alternative Budget for 2019/20. This included that the Council should encourage paperless billing of Council Tax. In the discussion that followed you said this was not possible to do because of some Act of Parliament.

In the paperwork I received for 2019/20 Council Tax Bill there was a statement that one could receive a paperless bill.

Can one receive a paperless bill?

Reply from Councillor Mark Ingall, Leader of the Council

Yes, it is possible for residents to move to paperless billing for their Council Tax thus avoiding the need to print and post paper bills to households. To be able to do this however residents liable for council tax must first sign up to the Council's online account facility via the Council's website to access their Council Tax bill online. The annual bill or any subsequent revised bills issued during the year will be posted to their online account and the resident will be advised via an e mail alert that their bill is ready to view. If a customer has registered for an on line account and paperless billing then they still have the right to receive a paper copy of the bill should they require one.

As part of the legal recovery processes, if a customer is registered online for paperless billing but has failed to access their on line bill then the Council must ensure that a paper copy of the bill has been sent to the resident prior to commencement of legal recovery action.

Supplementary Question by Mr Hugh Hoad to Councillor Mark Ingall, Leader of the Council

Will the Council consider offering a slight discount a Council Tax for those who receive a paperless bill?

Supplementary Reply from Councillor Mark Ingall, Leader of the Council

I am aware of the discussions that have taken place at the Housing Standards Board and the Council will consider all options.

2. **Mrs Nicola Purse to Councillor Mike Danvers, Portfolio Holder for Resources**

I understand the Council holds several funds for Church Langley left by the developers. Can you tell me how much that is and the purpose of the funds?

Reply from Councillor Mike Danvers, Portfolio Holder for Resources

Yes, the Council does hold a number of funds which were established using payments made to the Council. These stem from a collection of various planning and individual estate grounds maintenance agreements negotiated with the 15 or so separate house builders and the master planner involved in the planning and delivery of the Church Langley development. The major element of the Infrastructure Funds represent a fixed purpose trust fund attached to a covenant for the Council to undertake specified landscaping maintenance for an indefinite time period.

The Infrastructure Fund has been the subject of previous reviews involving Council Officers and Church Langley Councillors. As a result of those reviews it was agreed that the infrastructure agreement exists to cover the woodland, footpaths, play areas and associated landscaped areas. This would be to ensure that the woodland is managed in accordance with good practices, to keep landscaped areas mowed and free from rubbish and weeds, and at least once every planting season, replace diseased or dead shrubs, plants or trees with similar ones (but can be substituted, for example, on health and safety grounds), to maintain footpaths or play areas for which any machinery or apparatus on the same should be maintained for 15 years.

As at the 31 March 2018 the balance of the relevant funds remained at approximately £430,000 and is openly reported within the Council's annual accounts and the annual budget reports as part of the disclosure of information relating to its reserves. Also, there is approximately £70,000 for recreation facilities which could be spent. There had been expressions of interest for community facilities and these plans need to be developed so that this money can be spent.

Further work has been ongoing since last autumn with Council Officers and local ward Councillors to identify an updated programme of works for grounds maintenance across the Church Langley area for which the funding will be used in subsequent years. A major issue with this project has been the identification of land ownership which is very problematic. Some of the areas where grounds maintenance issues are frequently reported are actually still either in the ownership of developers or are actually residents' responsibilities. In order to maintain the funds in perpetuity, it will be

necessary to carefully profile expenditure so that adequate balances remain across a protracted timescale. If, for example, the total balance were anticipated to remain available to support the Council's maintenance work for a period of 50 years, then the scope for annual expenditure stands at £13,300 per annum (with variations dependent upon interest rate and inflationary movements).

Supplementary Question by Mrs Nicola Purse to Councillor Mike Danvers, Portfolio Holder for Resources

Please could you give a time funds will be released and works will take place?

Supplementary Reply from Councillor Mike Danvers, Portfolio Holder for Resources

I have been involved with the discussions surrounding the funds and had worked with the Social Club to develop plans. The local ward Councillors needed to help establish the work programme.