

**Council**  
**14 December 2022**  
**Item 7 - Questions from Members of the Public**

**The following questions have been submitted in accordance with Part 4 Section E of the Council's Constitution**

**1. Mr Bain has asked the following question of the Finance & Customer Services Portfolio Holder**

“Can the Council fully publish the briefing papers given to Councillors in 2016 and thereafter to support the acquisition of the Mall and the House of Fraser store so that residents might understand the reasoning for such acquisitions with the accompanying borrowing proposals and furthermore does the Council accept that by not funding the acquisitions with secure long term debt to match the nature of the assets has resulted in significantly larger overall debt interest payments”.

**The Finance & Customer Services Portfolio Holder has provided the following response:**

I can confirm that the Council will review the ‘exempt’ papers at the earliest opportunity, with a view to making them available for disclosure, if possible.

The Council does not accept the second point raised by Mr Bain. It is in fact the reverse of the situation stated in his question, whereas the Council has been able to borrow at extremely low short term interest rates over the past six years and has successfully rolled over the lower rate loans thereby saving the Council significant money in interest costs.

The Council, following the guidance in the CIPFA Treasury and Prudential Codes, does not always borrow at the time of acquisition of asset. This decision is based on need and cashflow; which means that the Council will assess borrowing need based on the total capital financing requirement, and thus hold a mix of long term, short term and internal debt. The security for any borrowing is set against the revenues of the Council and is not held against any particular asset. Therefore the Council will apply a notional ‘hurdle’ rate on any acquisition that ensures the asset will achieve a return in excess of the relevant Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) rate at the time, plus the element for capital repayment over the life of the asset (minimum revenue provision).

**2. Ms Sherard-Smith has asked the following question of the Chairman of the Planning Applications Committee**

“Does SHBC consider they have all the knowledge, skill and competence to make a balanced judgement on each and every planning application for installations and upgrades of telecommunications towers, masts, and poles that emit radio-frequency radiation; taking into account 'all material considerations' as stated in many regulations for planning and for public

service? These would include health, environment, sustainability, visual amenity, appropriateness of the site and location, the needs and desires of the local community, and the claimed service provision or improvement by the applicant.“

**The Chairman of the Planning Applications Committee has provided the following response:**

I can confirm that Surrey Heath Borough Council's Planning Service does have the appropriate knowledge and skills to assess planning applications. All Planning Officers involved in determining planning applications in Surrey Heath Borough Council are Chartered Planners having undergone rigorous post-graduate professional training and development underpinned by the professional membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and overseen by the National Planning Policy Framework.

The question relating to mobile phone masts indicates a potential misunderstanding about the role of local planning authorities in relation to this type of infrastructure. Mobile phone operators have extensive permitted development rights granted through the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) 2015 (as amended). This means that telecommunications companies in this country have significant scope to install new telecommunications infrastructure or upgrade existing infrastructure without requiring approval from the Local Planning Authority. They are, however, required to notify the Council if they intend to install infrastructure in areas where they have not previously done so. There is very limited scope therefore, for local planning authorities to intervene in the installation and upgrades of mobile phone masts. For example, in relation to health, all telecommunications companies are required to operate within the statutory guidelines set by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) as confirmed by the National Planning Policy Framework, and local authorities are not able to set alternative standards.