

**QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED OF EXECUTIVE  
COUNCILLORS AT THE COUNCIL EXECUTIVE  
MEETING 1<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2003  
(Agenda item 6)**

**1. Question from Councillor Colin Barrett**

The leisure centre operator is revising the swimming programme for Bath Sports and Leisure Centre. Local people have raised the following concerns:

Proposals to have adult only lane swimming on a Thursday will mean a lack of walking space in the shallow area of the pool due to the length of the lane reducing the area available widthways for young children and disabled people;

The standard temperature of 28 degrees will be too low for young children and disabled people.

Could the Executive Councillor give any assurances that the leisure operator and the Council will act on these concerns?

**Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Nicole O'Flaherty**

All "remedial swimmers" (those referred by a health professional) were contacted on 11th September with proposals to restrict pool usage to 2/3rd of the pool, during 9.00 and 12.30 and 3.00 and 4.30 on Thursdays. In addition it was proposed to reduce the pool temperature from 33 to 30 degrees and in school holidays the afternoon session would be suspended to cater for the huge demand for family swimming. It was proposed to implement these proposals on 9th October.

It is clear that the proposals have prompted a healthy local response and I have therefore asked our leisure partners, Aquaterra, to consult those affected more widely before seeking authorisation for such changes. Our new partnership is in its 3rd month and we need to work together to ensure that the council's priorities are integrated within Aqua Terra's philosophy. I believe that Aqua Terra and the Council have similar aims and that is to ensure that the pool is made available to the widest section of the community as possible and that all factors of the community have access to the pool. Our first Partnership Board meeting takes place early in October and an agenda item will address any proposed operating changes and how they should be introduced in a way which safeguards community interests.

We were impressed with Aqua Terra's proposals regarding community access in their bid and our preference is to ensure that there is a significant uptake of the remedial and other community based sessions so that greater health benefits are achieved and full pool usage is justified.

I propose making a further announcement after consultation is complete.

### **Supplementary question**

Will these services be continued for these people in the future?

### **Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Nicole O'Flaherty**

I re-iterate my comments above and would remind the Member that this was a private firm, not the Council. The Council has requested Aquaterra to re-think the approach to consultation.

### **2. Question from Councillor Charles Gerrish**

The Executive Councillor responsible for Economic Development indicated in September that the Council was planning to hold talks with Jobcentreplus about the future of local Jobcentres in Bath and North East Somerset.

Could the Executive Councillor give an update on the outcome of these meetings?

### **Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Colin Darracott**

Officers from the Council's Sustainability and Economic Development Service and Customer Service, Libraries and Information, met with officers from JobCentre Plus on 4th September 2003 to discuss the proposed changes .

The proposal aims to develop a service based around open client contact and investment in IT to assist delivery of services, traditionally delivered through JobCentre Plus offices.

The idea is to reduce the need for clients to visit offices where this is possible by setting up a central call centre to deal with, for example, new registrations and to use IT and other information provision channels to assist those clients needing less attention to manage their way through the system, or to self manage their way through a period of temporary unemployment.

This will, in theory, pave the way for one to one assistance to be given to clients needing more hands-on help.

The decision to take forward this approach has been taken at Ministerial level as part of a 3 phase national roll out programme. Consultation will only address detailed or logistical issues at this stage.

Whilst withdrawing the service from Keynsham and Midsomer Norton, JobCentre Plus are keen to maintain an IT based outlet in both of these towns and are working with the Customer Service, Libraries and Information team to achieve this.

As part of the proposed change, the existing JobCentre Plus office, Strahan House and the Social Security office, Kingsmead House, will close and merge in new offices at Somerset House. These changes are expected to take place from April 2004.

Job Seekers will still be required to 'sign on' at Bath on a regular basis, however, a service already exists to visit people when there are circumstances that make it difficult to do this and this service may be expanded.

### **3. Question from Councillor Leila Wishart**

In agenda item 12, a public convenience at Rainbow Woods is cited for closure. It has facilities for disabled people and is sited in the countryside close to Rainbow Woods and is an excellent resource for the many walkers using the woods. It is sited on the very busy North Road in an area where public loo's are few and far between. This is a relatively new building.

What consultation has been undertaken with local residents on this closure?

Why has Rainbow Woods been selected for closure?

### **Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Rosemary Todd**

#### **"What consultation has been undertaken with local residents on this closure?"**

In December 2000, 280 leaflets seeking the views of local residents were delivered to properties close to the Rainbow Woods public conveniences. The leaflets sought the views of residents on the closure or retention of the toilets.

102 (36%) leaflets were returned and of these:-

51 (50%) preferred closure

51 (50%) preferred retention

Cllr Roger Symonds conducted a users survey early 2001.

It is understood that a questionnaire was placed in the local post office. The response to this showed a greater percentage preferring retention. Cllr Symond's survey did show a greater number wanting the toilets to be retained.

#### **"Why has Rainbow Woods been selected for closure?"**

- i) It is in fair condition.
- ii) Drug abuse and anti social activities at site.
- iii) Not a critical mass of people requiring use of this site.

#### **4. Question from Councillor Sarah Webb**

Agenda item 12 of the Executive agenda considers the closure of selected public conveniences in Bath and North East Somerset.

Three of these public conveniences closures are in the ward that I represent.

What consultation was undertaken with ward members in respect to these proposed closures?

#### **Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Rosemary Todd**

##### Lansdown Road

Included in the 29th March 2001 report to PT&E which reported back on a 380 leaflet drop on which Ward Members were fully consulted. Ward member objection to siting of new facility at various locations in the Kingsmead Square area.

##### Seven Dials, Monmouth Street

Resolved by PT&E Nov 2001 to close and replace with a fully automatic facility in the Kingsmead Square area of the city.  
Fully consulted with Ward members at time.

##### Henrietta Park

Only officer consultation to date.

#### **Supplementary question**

Where exactly are people supposed to go if there are no toilets in these sites?

#### **Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Rosemary Todd**

The distribution of toilets over the area will be the subject of a review under the third phase of the programme.

#### **5. Question from Councillor Chris Watt**

Further to my statement made on 3rd September in respect of the River Somer, I would like to ask the following.

I have asked these questions privately to the Executive Councillor on September 4th, but as at September 25th, had not received an answer.

1. You referred to the action plan that I proposed by stating that Direct Services were investigating a number of potential measures to improve the

environment of the river. I would like to know what time scale there is for this, and also in which forum it will be discussed and consulted upon?

2. Are any dates scheduled for the weeds to be cleared, since I do not believe this task has been completed even once out of the two times to which you referred in your statement?

Could I receive some clarification on when the flow of the river was last reviewed in partnership with the Environment Agency?

### **Answer to be given by Executive Councillor Rosemary Todd**

I apologise to Councillor Watt for not having replied earlier to his questions, to which I have now responded privately. The delay was due to trying to establish the current position with the Environment Agency.

- 1) The written application containing a proposed action plan has now been commented on by the Environment Agency, as no major work can be carried out on the river without their approval. They are suggesting that silt be removed by controlling the flow of the water. The proposed next step is to arrange a site meeting with interested parties (including Ward Councillors) to consider the various options now suggested.
- 2) The weeds and scrub which have accumulated over the past few years will be cleared during the next month. An annual inspection will then be programmed and any work carried out as necessary.
- 3) The flow regime of the River Somer was last reviewed in liaison with the Environment Agency approximately three years ago. Whilst the review mainly focused on flooding events which affected a number of commercial premises in the High Street, consideration was also given to problems associated with low flow conditions. Flows in the High Street are influenced by two controlling mechanisms. The primary control is located at the head of the flood relief tunnel where excess flows are diverted into the tunnel during storm conditions. All normal and dry weather flows are allowed to continue on the original river route. The secondary control is adjacent to The Island in the form of an adjustable penstock. The opening setting of the penstock is critical to flood protection of property in the High Street. Unfortunately, the correct setting is rather narrow and, although sufficient to allow the passage of normal flows, becomes easily blocked with trash and debris. Having identified this problem, regular inspections are now undertaken and appropriate maintenance works undertaken to ensure flows are not obstructed. Although the penstock is an Environment Agency facility, it has been agreed with them that this Council is better placed to assess local flow conditions and carry out adjustments as necessary.