



Local Liberal Democrat Councillors have demanded action from Conservative-run Surrey Heath Borough Council as the crisis in the planning department continues to affect residents and business alike.

After making two of its senior officers redundant last year, the Department has suffered from staff shortages and an increasing workload. Recruitment has been difficult as there is a shortage of suitable qualified candidates, and Surrey Heath is not seen as an attractive destination.

The inability of the Department to meet national targets has drawn the attention of Government. One consequence has been that grants tied to good performance have been restricted, with Surrey Heath receiving only around £115,000 this year as compared with the £560,000 received by neighbouring authorities like Rushmoor and Hart.

The Council has started to spend what grant it gets on consultancy support to try and clear its current backlog. Lib Dems regard this as too little to late.

Meanwhile, the responsible Executive member, Conservative Cllr Terry King is quoted in the Camberley News as it being “impossible to predict when the situation would improve”, and “it’s not our fault”. You are in charge Cllr King – so whose fault is it? Why can’t you even tell us when things will get better?

Recent announcements by the Council suggest that the new Contact Centre will address the issues. However, Planning is not due to be covered by the Contact Centre until Spring 2006, and will not undertake any of the substantial amount of specialist “back office” work which is the required to clear the backlog.

It has also recently been revealed that income from planning applications will be over £150,000 more than originally expected. The Council’s Executive proposes to spend only £60,000 of this on addressing the staff resource issues that this increased volume has brought.

Lib Dem Councillor **David Whitcroft** said: *”The current situation is entirely the result of poor management and direction by the current Conservative administration. On behalf of the residents of Surrey Heath, I call on the Executive to return the other £90,000 to the Planning Department to help them resolve this situation”.*

Hospital Parking

Frimley Park Hospital continues to cause problems for the residential areas that surround it. The Parkside Estate to the north-east, Gilbert Road to the south-west and roads around The Grove are all affected by Hospital staff who do not or cannot park in the Hospital’s car parks.

Lib Dem Councillor **Bob Smith** said: *“Frimley Park offers a high quality of medical care. But it is also the largest employer in the area, and must be mindful of its local impact.*

“Parking issues are not problems that the hospital can or should attempt to solve by itself. They must be addressed by Surrey County Council (SCC) & the Hospital working together. But to date we have seen little evidence of action by SCC:

- *We were told the problem would be addressed by the studies about the Toshiba roundabout*
- *We were later told that specific studies would be commissioned to address the issues*
- *The latest we hear that we must wait for “Decriminalisation Parking Enforcement”*

*“The common theme is that each was going to solve the problem in six months time. I suggest that residents affected need to speak with one voice to maintain pressure on these issues, and would suggest anyone interested contact **George Daghish** in Partridge Close.”*

George Daghish represents residents around The Grove who are concerned with hospital parking. He has recently submitted a petition with over 200 signatures to the County Council, and is himself currently carrying out some traffic modelling studies. He would welcome contact from other residents affected by hospital parking overspill to gather information and to coordinate action. He can be reached on **01276 26942** or on email at george@daghish57.freereserve.co.uk.

