



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 1 November 2006

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Sutton

To: The Leader

"Can the Leader advise me of any progress in the Whiteley School negotiations? Is Hampshire County Council actively exploring the possibility of the Whiteley North site as an alternative to building on the Meadowside Recreation Centre?"

Reply

"The County Council has now commissioned a full technical appraisal into the feasibility of using the land to the north of Whiteley as a site for the new school. The City Council has been asking for this to be done for over a year and it should demonstrate once and for all whether the site is suitable.

I do not have a timetable for completion of the study but we will examine its content carefully before considering any response.

Meanwhile, the Council's position on the use of land at Meadowside remains unchanged."



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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Wagner

To: The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Sport

“Would the Portfolio Holder please tell us if steps have been taken to put the Winchester in Bloom group on a proper financial footing similar to the arrangements for the other In Bloom groups in this district and in the County at large?”

Reply

“Across the County there are a wide variety of funding and management arrangements for In Bloom activities which enable these activities to take place. Within the Winchester District the only other In Bloom scheme is at Bishop’s Waltham and does not receive any direct financial support from the City Council and is instead organised and funded through the Parish Council.

As far as the Winchester scheme is concerned, I am pleased to report that discussions have recently been held with the In Bloom group regarding the arrangements for 2007 onwards. Following these discussions it is proposed that the City Council will be responsible for the sale of floral decorations to local businesses from 2007 onwards and the In Bloom Group will run the annual competition and awards ceremony with support from the Grounds Maintenance budget.

The separation of these 2 functions will help play to the strengths of each organisation whilst ensuring overall expenditure for the In Bloom project is kept within budget levels. The Group have confirmed that they see the changes as a welcome development and will help to protect the future of the scheme within the City.

I am also pleased to report that arrangements are in hand to enable watering of the baskets during 2007 onwards, using rain water collected from Bar End depot buildings, which will help to ensure that the scheme is made as sustainable as is possible.”



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Cooper

To: The Leader

“Does the Leader have any comment to make on the news (Monday) of progress in identifying the preferred site for the southern Park & Ride Project?”

Reply

“We have been in close liaison with the County Council throughout the consultation process on the options for the location of the south of Winchester park and ride project. I am pleased at the extent of the dialogue and the way in which they have listened to the views expressed locally.

A report on the County Council's preferred site will be considered shortly and will be followed by a planning application in the Spring. The report will be in the public domain shortly.”



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Spender

To: The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Sport.

“With the forthcoming departure of the Museums Service from the Hyde Historic Resources Centre, will the Portfolio Holder detail the measures that will be taken to ensure:

- a) The safe re-location of the Museum collections currently held at Hyde?
- b) Continuing access to these collections for researchers and interested members of the public?
- c) Continuing access to the expertise of members of the Museum Service staff for researchers and interested members of the public?

Further, will the Portfolio Holder explain the timetable for the move and what plans are in place to minimise disruption to this important service?”

Reply

“The move of staff and collections from Hyde is an integral part of the process of consolidating the Council’s office accommodation but we recognise the importance of ensuring the integrity of the service in the future. The City Council’s space within the new Discovery Centre in Jewry Street will provide a better location for temporary exhibitions than is available at Hyde and it will be fully accessible – which Hyde is not.

Museums staff will be located with their colleagues within the Cultural Services team within the West Wing of the Guildhall. They will be available for pre-booked meetings and consultations as at present, with the advantage of a seven day reception service at the adjacent Guildhall for the collection and return of loan boxes which is not possible at present.

As reported to the last meeting of Cabinet, the process of looking carefully at what material should not be retained within the museums collection has begun and will be conducted systematically on the basis of agreed policy and in accordance with good professional practice.

Details of the new storage accommodation for the collection, including costs for specialist removal companies and the installation of appropriate environmental controls, are being worked out and a detailed report will be made to Cabinet shortly.

Included within this will be provision for curators, researchers and other members of the public to have access to artifacts and work on them as required. The 'pot washing' facility for volunteers which has been popular at Hyde will also be maintained. In addition, the most regularly used items from Hyde will be transferred to the gallery space in the Guildhall to ensure easy public access.

There will be a cost to making provision for these arrangements which will be met from the capital programme. It will be a one-off cost to obtain long term savings. There is no detailed timetable as yet but it is hoped that the vacation of Hyde can be completed by the end of the financial year, with the establishment of the new resources centre in the Guildhall once the gallery becomes vacant at the end of July. During that process there is bound to be some disruption to normal activities and to the ambition of museums targets in the 2007/08 cultural services business plan. Officers will prioritise work plans to minimise the interruption to key public-facing services."



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Wagner

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Safety

“Can the Portfolio Holder explain what measures are to be taken, including making available additional resources, to improve this Council’s preparedness in relation to Emergency Planning?”

Reply

“The City Council has an Emergency Response Plan to perform its function as a Category 1 responder (as defined by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004) to deal with a wide range of emergency incidents, including major incidents.

The Plan has been developed so that it meets the requirements of the City Council, but is also part of a recognised multi-agency integrated response system, particularly with a common command and control structure.

In the majority of incidents the Police will take the lead role, but they may request assistance from other agencies including the City Council as required. In many cases the recovery from an incident will be responsibility of the City Council.

In common with all other Districts in Hampshire, the City has entered into a Service Level Agreement with the County Council to assist in the delivery of the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act. This allows the City to call upon the considerable resources and expertise that are at the County’s disposal. A payment is made annually to the County for this service and, in addition, a proportion of the time of the Principal Committee Administrator is allocated to act as a liaison officer with the County.

Major tasks to improve preparedness required by the Act include:

1. Increased co-operation and information sharing between responders.

Through the County the City is represented on the Local Resilience Forum, the principal mechanism for multi-agency cooperation between Category 1 responders. It also participates in multi-agency exercises.

2. A duty to assess risks.

As part of the Service Level Agreement the County will be undertaking a local risk assessment of the District. This will complement the completed Community Risk Register that is held by the Local Resilience Forum.

3. To have and maintain Plans to respond to an emergency, including training and awareness.

The County is near to completing a new Emergency Response Plan on behalf of the City, which is prepared in accordance of the requirements of the new Act. Once prepared a programme of training and awareness will be carried out, which will include Members.

4. To have Business Continuity Plans.

The preparation of Business Continuity Plans falls outside of the Service Level Agreement with the County. An internal project, led by the Head of Revenues, to prepare Business Continuity Plans for the City Council has been completed. The outcomes will be reported to Cabinet on the 15 November and to Principal Scrutiny Committee on the 4 December 2006 – Report CAB1344 refers.

5. To communicate with the public.

The County will take the lead on warning and informing the public in the event of an emergency. A Media Plan for Major Incidents has been prepared on behalf of the Local Resilience Forum and involved the Council's Corporate Communications Team in its production. The new Emergency Response Plan also has a section dealing with the City's communications in an emergency.

6. To provide business continuity advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations.

The County has appointed a Business Continuity specialist to promote this area of work to local businesses and voluntary organisations.

In addition to the above, the Council has prepared a number of individual Plans, such as those for the Communities Environment Division and Flood Plans. A Community/Parish Emergency Plan template has also been prepared to enable community support, self-help and resilience when faced with an emergency situation."



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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Evans

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities

"Will the Portfolio Holder please tell me what progress is being made on the new Knowle Community Building and whether the Portfolio Holder is recommending to Cabinet financial support for the project"

Reply

"Following approval by Cabinet in April to investigate further the provision of a new community building in Knowle part funded by the City Council, initial discussions with the developer have taken place, draft plans have been drawn up and soundings taken from local residents. Detailed investigations remain ongoing to clarify the full financial implications for the City Council and the proposed operational arrangements for any new facility. Subject to the results of these enquiries and the Council's own budget consideration process which is currently underway, I hope to be in a position to bring a detailed report to Cabinet early next year."



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Jackson

To: The Leader

“What progress has been made towards reversing the decision to reverse the traffic flow in Parchment Street from North>South to South>North ie. reverting to a North>South flow?”

Reply

“The decision to reverse the direction of flow in Parchment Street was made by the previous administration in Cabinet in January 2006. The recommendations agreed did not include any proposal to review that decision since there had been an extended trial period during which all the implications could be determined.

Although differences of opinion still exist about the merits of the scheme we do not propose at present to make any further changes unless they are shown to be beneficial as part of the Winchester Access Plan. Work on this will begin early next year and will involve Members of both the City Council and County Council as well as public consultation, during which residents and traders will be involved.”



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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Wagner

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Safety

“Would the Portfolio Holder tell us if his administration has given any consideration to using the Council’s influence to promote a national ban of the private sale and use of fireworks?”

Reply

“This is not an issue which has been considered as a priority for the City Council since our principal involvement with fireworks used by the public is in relation to the prevention of noise nuisances. We also work proactively with our partners on the Community Safety Partnership in order to promote a zero tolerance approach to firework related crime and anti-social behaviour.

The main aim of a national ban on private use of fireworks is likely to be public safety which is an issue for both the fire service and trading standards staff at Hampshire County Council who control the sale and use of fireworks and are therefore the most appropriate agencies for push for such a ban.”



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QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Learney

To: The Leader

“Would the Leader please tell Council which is the true reason for Councillor Lipscomb’s resignation from Cabinet, the explanation given by the Leader in his email to members or the one Councillor Lipscomb has given to the press?”

Reply

“I do not consider there to be any difference between the two accounts except that Cllr Lipscomb gave more details of the background to his decision.”



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QUESTION 10

From: Councillor Bennetts

To: The Leader

“I was concerned to read Cllr Lipscomb's criticisms about the Council on the front page of the Hampshire Chronicle last week. Could the Leader please inform me whether he is satisfied that the protocol regarding complaints as per 1.6 in the Protocol for Member/Officer Relations was followed in this instance?”

Reply

“I have discussed this matter with the Chief Executive. His advice is that Councillor Lipscomb's comments refer to perceived failings in process and are not intended to be read as criticism of officers individually or collectively. On that basis, they do not breach the Member/Officer Protocol.”



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QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Cooper

To: The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources

“Can the Director of Finance give an accurate estimate of how many small businesses in the Winchester District are entitled to claim Business Rate Relief for 2006/07 and the percentage that have done so by 30 September (the mid point of this financial year)?

Reply

“As at 30 October there were 821 ratepayers receiving small business rate relief. The exact number of ratepayers entitled to receive relief cannot be provided as one of the criteria for relief is based on the total rateable value of all properties occupied by the ratepayer not just those within the District.

At the end of September an exercise was carried out to encourage take up of this relief. 769 forms were issued to potential applicants who were not in receipt of relief or had not previously been refused relief. Other ratepayers whose properties were exempt or who were receiving empty property rate relief or mandatory rate relief were also excluded.

To date 124 forms have been returned. 71 ratepayers have been awarded relief. These cases are mainly in respect of properties that were not in the rating list as at 1 April 2005 but were brought in to the list during the year so could not qualify for relief until 2006/07. Some of the returned forms have not yet been processed.”



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QUESTION 12

From: Councillor Wagner

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Safety

“Can the Portfolio Holder please explain why the results of the Sustainability CPA Review, conducted last municipal year, have not been publicised by the Council and what measures are in place to those results together with the Inspector’s Report with the Council and the public?”

Reply

“The Council had its Sustainable Environment range of services inspected by the Audit Commission in 2005 which resulted in a draft report being prepared early in 2006.

The Council had concerns over aspects of the investigation and findings and following discussion with the Commission it was agreed that the draft report would not be published and a second, light touch investigation be undertaken by a different inspector.

This second review was concluded in April this year and finally reported in August with an improved second judgement to the effect that the Council had promising prospects for improving its performance in respect of its environmental work.

The Commission decided that it would not produce a press release given the time that had elapsed. The Council has been considering the findings and a report recommending an action plan to tackle the Recommendations is planned for the November Cabinet meeting.”



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QUESTION 13

From: Councillor Beveridge

To: The Leader

“On 21 August Cabinet approved the submission of The Statement of Community Involvement to the Secretary of State. Can the Leader confirm that planning development control officers are now requiring applicants for planning permission to comply with the requirements in the Statement to consult and involve the community before submitting their applications?”

Reply

“The Statement of Community Involvement was ‘submitted’ to the Secretary of State on 31st August but has not yet been formally adopted. It states at paragraph 5.25 that

‘For small scale or minor applications, it may be sufficient to rely on neighbour notification and other means of attracting local attention such as site notices, the Council’s website,More significant planning proposals, which are likely to give rise to degrees of controversy, are located on sensitive sites, or are of a significant scale, will require more extensive community consultation and involvement. In such cases, consultation should be undertaken by the prospective applicant before an application is made.’

The SCI expects all applicants to carry out pre-application discussions and early community involvement, appropriate to the scale and nature of the proposed development, and to provide evidence of this with an application. Planning officers are applying this now and the SCI has been well publicised to parish councils and other interested groups. At this stage, in advance of statutory adoption of the SCI, the weight that can be accorded to it is more limited, but increases as the SCI progresses through the stages of the adoption process.

However, nothing in legislation appears to make a failure to comply with the content of the SCI a material reason for the refusal of an application. Applicants cannot therefore be said to be required to comply with it any more than local residents or others can be required to participate in the consultation process if they do not wish to do so.”