



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 29 September 2010

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Wood

To: The Leader

“Have the City Council the right to withdraw from the Silver Hill agreement originally with Thornfield without paying a penalty and if not now, when will that option materialise if wanted?”

Reply

“The Development Agreement with Thornfield Properties contains standard provisions allowing termination if there is a breach of good faith by either party. Those provisions could have application in a number of circumstances, including those where either party failed to take any steps to progress its obligations for financial reasons. The administrators of the Thornfield companies have been aware from the outset that the Council would consider steps to terminate the agreement if there were no evidence that a positive outcome might be achieved. However, discussions with at least one credible interested party have demonstrated substantial progress and it is in the interests of all concerned that these be allowed to reach a conclusion. It is not possible to give further detail in public at this stage for reasons of commercial confidentiality but a report will be brought to Cabinet as soon as possible.”



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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

“Could the Portfolio Holder expand upon her answer to my question asked at the Social Issues Scrutiny Panel on the 15 July 2010 about the delivery of affordable housing where she previously stated ‘she and officers would do all that they could to ensure that the Council would achieve or exceed its target (100 affordable homes completion)’ and give some specific details of what this Council is doing to meet this very important target?”

Reply

“I am pleased to advise Members that 60 affordable homes have been completed this financial year and a further 91 are forecast to be complete by April 2011. As a result the total number of completions at the end of this financial year has been amended to 151, the reason for the variance has primarily been an additional 44 properties for rent and shared ownership at Knowle Village funded via A2 Housing and Homes and Community Agency. Due to delays in obtaining planning permission for the housing the HCA would not commit to funding the development, however, limited funding has subsequently been made available and this supported by a large amount of subsidy from A2 has enabled additional affordable housing to be provided.

Work is also progressing on 4 urban capacity sites on Council owned land that should see planning applications made before the end of the financial year, this will support the completion target for 2011/12.”



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Stallard

To: The Leader

“Now that the major restoration and refurbishment of The Guildhall is well underway, with improved heating, air conditioning and other energy efficient measures in place, would the Portfolio Holder, advise members which of the other Council owned, publicly accessed buildings, now remains as the least energy efficient?”

Reply

“Of the principal Council buildings, the latest DEC certificates have just been issued and the following ratings have been determined:

Guildhall 42 (50 last year) B rating
Meadowside 57 (57 last year) C rating
River Park 71 (69 last year) C rating
West Wing 86 (100 last year) D rating
City Offices 121 (124 last year) E rating

With the exception of River Park the energy consumption has reduced over the previous year. The least efficient building remains the City Offices and significant improvements in energy efficiency can only be achieved as part of a comprehensive refurbishment of the building involving, roofing, window replacement, the installation of insulated cladding, the replacement of the heating pipe work and other mechanical and electrical plant excluding the boilers.

With future staffing levels being closely scrutinised a review of office space requirements is anticipated and this may identify opportunities for the refurbishment of parts of the City Offices to allow shared occupation with partner organisations.”



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Nelmes

To: The Portfolio Holder for Economic Prosperity

“Now that the Guildhall Café has been opened in its new location for some time can the Portfolio Holder please give some indication how it has been received by the public generally? Can we also have some indication whether profits are increasing under the new management?”

Reply

“eighteen71 has now been open for almost 3 months and set out below is the current sales excluding VAT for this period in comparison with the two preceding years

Financials:-

Jul – Sept 2010	Guildhall	£45734.35
Jul – Sept 2009	Fosters	£30719.63
Jul – Sept 2008	Fosters	£38853.00

When we set out with this venture our estimated revenue stream for this area was marked out as best or worst case scenarios

Best case	£24999.99
Worst case	£15000.00

It must be remembered that during this period commercial business levels of the venue have been substantially reduced to enable the building works to the hall and conference chamber to be undertaken. The current business is largely passing trade and when the building works are completed it is anticipated that further business will be generated for the café and take away.

The items on our menus are currently priced in accordance with market practice and having regard to the prices charged by local competitors.

Once the new server has been installed for the point of sale system it will be possible to provide detailed analysis of sales including items sold and the individual profitability, this will also enable the loyalty card system to be launched.

The general feedback from clients is very good with many favorable comments about the design, ambience and friendly staff. As a dedicated client base is being established customer satisfaction will be further gauged by allowing for regular customer input as to menu items etc. The feedback gained so far will be used as a testimonial for the website which is currently being created.”



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Beckett

To: The Leader

“In her recent press interview, Councillor Learney spoke of ‘up to 70’ redundancies. Can she tell the Council over what period these will occur, and advise us of her estimated cost to the reserves of the associated settlements?”

Reply

“To deal with the major financial challenges the Council faces in the coming years, I anticipate that the Council will have to make many savings. That includes a reduction of around 15% in our biggest single item of expenditure, the salary bill. A reduction of that magnitude is equivalent to around 70 posts, which we expect will be lost in the next three years.

I did not say I expected us to have to make 70 redundancies. Many posts will be lost through natural wastage: retirement or resignation. Where there are redundancies the cost will depend on the posts identified and the age and length of service of the individual concerned. As the Member knows, our rule of thumb has been that we seek a payback on redundancy costs of two years in most cases. We will always seek to ensure any such costs are affordable in the wider context of the budget.

As Members will know, I propose to make provision of £200,000 for ten redundancies which may, subject to consultation, be made before the end of the year. As officers consider and advise further on future options, so we will look to make appropriate provision in the 2011/12 budget for costs, but it is clearly not possible at present to be specific.”



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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Pearson

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Could the Portfolio Holder say when the kerbside collection of Organic Kitchen Waste will be introduced?”

Reply

“The new contract for waste and recycling services which commences on 1st October 2011 is now out to tender. The contract is to be let in partnership with East Hants District Council to obtain financial and operational efficiencies available through joint working.

The tender documents include a requirement to price for the collection of food waste from households as an option and contractors have been requested to submit a method statement as to how this could be achieved. Enquiries are also being made through Hampshire County Council (the Waste Disposal Authority) as to the methods of disposal that would be available should the Council wish to proceed once the costs are known.

A full options report will be submitted to Cabinet once tender information is available so that it can be determined whether to include food waste collection in the new contract.”



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Prowse

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

“Can I ask the Portfolio Holder for Communities, what response she has had from tenants groups to the consultation on Estate Improvements?”

Reply

“I can confirm that officers have had a very positive response from tenant groups, with 12 groups submitting specific proposals for improvements to estates in their area. The feasibility of over 40 proposals (including those received from Councillors and Officers), is currently being reviewed by myself and the Head of Landlord Services. We will be responding to all groups providing initial feedback on proposals in October.”



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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Godfrey

To: The Leader

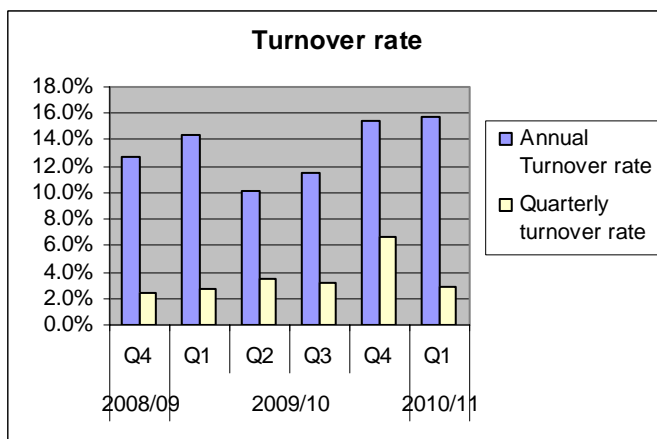
“Would the Portfolio Holder please advise me what number of staff have left the Council since 1 April 2010, with separate figures for each month showing the headcount and Full Time Equivalent quantity?”

Reply

“Unfortunately the data for the turnover rate graph for Personnel Committee (PER178) was not picked up correctly within Excel which resulted in Q4 figures being shown in Q1.

Please find the amended graph below which will be circulated.”

Turnover	April	May	June	July	Aug
Number leavers - annual (6a)	82	84	87	89	82
Number leavers - quarter	16			To date 11	
number leavers - monthly (6b)	2	8	6	6	5
Annual Turnover rate	14.7%	15.1%	15.7%	16.0%	14.9%
Quarterly turnover rate	2.9%			To date 4%	
Monthly turnover rate	0.4%	1.5%	1.1%	1.1%	0.9%
Leavers - Permanent staff (6c)	2	6	5	6	2
Leavers - Temporary staff (6d)	0	2	1	0	5
Headcount	2	8	6	6	7
FTE	1.16	6.76	3.47	4.51	4.37





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QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Mather

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“How will the annual cleaning and maintenance costs of the public conveniences be shared under this administration?”

Reply

“Currently the annual share of public conveniences cleaning and maintenance costs is as follows.

The total cost for running public conveniences for 2010/11 is £288,688 of which £50,000 is met by the Town Account and £10,000 by the parishes of Alresford, Bishops Waltham, Demand and Wickham. This was the split agreed by the previous administration. The remaining £228, 688 is met through the General Fund.

All Council expenditure will be reviewed as part of the budget setting process for 2011/12 but at this stage of the budget process I do not anticipate that the proportion of costs allocated will change unless there is an agreed change in management arrangements.”



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QUESTION 10

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Winchester and the Surrounds

“Could the Portfolio Holder advise me what the legal status of Hammonds Passage is (it links the High Street to St Clements Street) and if it is Highway land why is it that there are refuse bins positioned permanently in the passage?”

Reply

“Hammonds Passage is an adopted highway maintained at the public expense. A recent inspection of the passage revealed the presence of three trade refuse bins which appear to be used by adjacent commercial premises.

Problems do from time to time arise from waste being bins stored on the public highway and where this occurs the Council works with the proprietors of the premises concerned to try and resolve the issue.

Arrangements will be made for the premises concerned to be visited by officers and the waste storage facilities assessed. The legal position relating storage of these bins in the passage will be investigated and sensible steps taken to resolve the problem.”



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QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Pearson

To: The Leader

“An objective of this Council under the Licensing Act 2003 was 'the protection of children from harm'. Could the Portfolio Holder say when this Council will require the 'relevant Area Child Protection Teams' to make comments on not only new Licensing applications but also on those Licences that are under review?”

Reply

“The Council acts as Licensing Authority under the Licensing Act 2003. Part of these functions includes considering applications for new licences and reviews of existing licences.

Applicants are required to send copies of their applications to the statutory 'Responsible Authorities' one of which is the body which represents those responsible for matters relating to the protection of children from harm and which is recognised by the licensing authority as being competent to advise on such matters.

With effect from 1 September, the body recognised by the City Council for this purpose is the Safeguarding Unit, part of Hampshire County Council (previously the Child Protection Referral and Assessment Team had carried out this role). The Unit will therefore receive copies of all applications for new licences, as well as the review of existing ones. Licensing Officers have met with staff from the Unit and discussed the Unit's new role as a Responsible Authority.

The Licensing Authority is required to consider applications on their own merits, taking into account whatever relevant representations it receives from Responsible Authorities. It is a matter for each responsible authority to consider each application which is sent to it, and decide whether or not to make a representation. As the body charged with determining applications, it would be inappropriate for the City Council as Licensing Authority to solicit responses from responsible authorities, either generally or on specific applications. The Council cannot therefore require the Safeguarding Unit to make comments on either new or review applications.”



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QUESTION 12

From: Councillor Stallard

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

“Would the Portfolio Holder please confirm what progress has been made to promote the objectives of the Olympic Action Plan, particularly to encourage village and parish opportunities in preparation for the Olympics 2012?”

Reply

“Members will be aware that the City Council adopted a strategic framework in June 2008 designed to ensure that our residents, businesses and visitors are able to make the most of the opportunities presented by the London Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012. The Framework is designed to catalyse projects and initiatives which support existing community outcomes, and not to generate a programme of work in its own right.

The last year has seen good progress on 2012 activity, including the launch of the Winchester 2012 website in March. This is updated weekly with national and local 2012 news and events, ranging from the current drive to recruit ‘Gamesmaker’ volunteers for 2012 to listings for Winchester’s annual Cultural Olympiad Open Weekend or advice to businesses who wish to be considered for procurement opportunities arising from the Games.

The Winchester 2012 Framework was refreshed in August 2010, and an officer working group convened to assess progress against it. This group includes the Hampshire 2012 Co-ordinator who has stated that, in terms of 2012 plans, Winchester is ‘ahead of the game’ compared to other Hampshire councils.

Officers have just secured funding for six young people in the area to be recruited to ‘Future Jobs Fund’ posts as ‘Winchester 2012 Assistants’. These young people will help staff to deliver initiatives across the five themes of the framework, which are sport, arts/heritage, ‘in your neighbourhood’, at work, and ‘making the District a greener place’.

One project which will benefit from the help of these assistants is the 'Winchester District Torch Relay', which is designed to encourage walking, jogging and cycling in every parish in the District. This was proposed following a Council visit to the Olympic park in March this year, hosted by officers of Hackney London Borough Council who hold Beacon status for their 2012 programme. In addition, a schools programme called 'Personal Best' will seek to engage children across the District in physical activity and has already been piloted during 2010 with an enthusiastic response. Officers are currently submitting grant applications to secure funding for both projects to ensure their delivery in spring/summer 2012.

A presentation about Winchester's 2012 activities has been prepared for the November meeting of the Local Economy Scrutiny Panel. For more information visit www.winchester2012.co.uk or contact Eloise Appleby eappleby@winchester.gov.uk 01962 848 181."



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QUESTION 13

From: Councillor Beckett

To: The Leader

“At the Cabinet meeting on the 15 September, Councillor Learney made reference to forthcoming changes to our scrutiny system. Can she tell the Council what these changes are, and when she will be able to put detailed proposals before Members for discussion?”

Reply

“I regard effective Scrutiny as an important role for Members, and a vital check on the Council's actions. It is important that time spent scrutinising is used well, and that we ensure we get value for money from the resources we invest in Scrutiny – whether member or officer time or the cost of convening meetings.

As I said at Cabinet, I have asked officers to consider how we can further improve our Scrutiny system, and have discussed with them some options. I propose to bring forward a paper for wider discussion shortly.”



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QUESTION 14

From: Councillor Wood

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Can the Portfolio Holder say when the Parking Restriction Order for St Georges Street will be implemented? To restrict loading in this road between noon and 2pm will considerably help traffic flow in the City Centre and reduce Carbon Emissions.”

Reply

“A proposal to consider introducing further restrictions on loading over the lunchtime period on St Georges Street is contained within the current 2010/11 Traffic Regulation Order programme. Loading is currently banned during the morning and evening peak periods.

It is planned to undertake informal consultation with shops and businesses on this proposal in the New Year.”



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QUESTION 15

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Winchester and the Surrounds

“Could the Portfolio Holder advise me who owns the figure of a Black Swan on the Black Swan building on the corner of the High Street and Southgate Street and whether he feels that the current state of the figure is something he is comfortable with?”

Reply

“The City Council own the freehold of the Black Swan Building and the site was let for development on a 99 year ground lease from 29/09/1934 at a fixed rent for the remainder of the term of £550 per annum.

The lease clearly indicates that the Tenant is to keep the buildings and all the additions thereto both inside and outside in repair and to paint the exterior of the property once every four years.

The lease also indicates that the Tenant is not to make any alteration or additions to the premises without the consent of the Landlord.

The Estates database indicates that the first and second floors of the property were partly assigned to Eastleigh Housing Association and at present they are held by Atlantic Housing Association.

The Housing Association have been asked to investigate the condition of the Black Swan and to advise whether it can be repaired.”



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QUESTION 16

From: Councillor Pearson

To: The Leader

“The post of Energy Manager was put in this year's budget. Could the Leader say what progress has been made in making this appointment?”

Reply

“The budget was approved for an Asset/Energy Surveyor in February. The post was not actually put on to the establishment until the restructure of Landlord Services and Corporate Property Management by Personnel Committee and Cabinet which was approved in June. Recruitment was however delayed while the Estates Department reviewed options in view of the current budget situation. That process has come to a conclusion and the recruitment process will commence in October.”



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QUESTION 17

From: Councillor Wood

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

“Is the Portfolio Holder for Housing happy at the way Hampshire Home Choice is working?”

Reply

“The Council’s choice based lettings scheme, Hampshire Home Choice (HHC), was launched in April 2009 in partnership with East Hampshire District Council and Havant Borough Council. An Annual Report reviewing the first operating year was presented to the Council’s Cabinet on the 9th July 2010 which (amongst other facts) showed that 1005 households had been housed of which 147 had been from outside their own District. In addition high levels of customer satisfaction were recorded with many respondents strongly agreeing that HHC does make it easier to select where they want to live.

The Hampshire Home Choice Annual Review 2009 – 2010 is available on line at <http://www.hampshirehomechoice.org.uk/Data/ASPPages/1/30.aspx>

The HHC scheme is scheduled to expand to include Test Valley Borough Council in April 2011, this will expand choice for customers and allow further efficiency savings to be made by combining administrative functions. The risks of expanding the partnership were identified by Officers which included the possibility of Winchester households being denied opportunities to access affordable housing. We will continually monitor the allocation of properties to ensure that does not happen and that there is a fair distribution of allocated properties between LA’s.”



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QUESTION 18

From: Councillor Pearson

To: The Portfolio Holder for Rural Areas and Market Towns

“Could the Portfolio Holder list the last fifteen Portfolio connected meetings that she has attended?”

Reply

“I can confirm that my last 15 related Portfolio meetings up until Council are as follows below. I have not included informal discussions which could also be called meetings but only those with a pre-planned and distributed agenda. Equally I have not included other corporate and full Cabinet related meetings which are also connected to my portfolio:

1. A meeting with senior offices and executive members to discuss the WCC PUSH Economic Strategy response.
2. A meeting to discuss the possibility of extending the Broadband possibilities to the rural parts of the District.
3. A meeting with the Leader to discuss Rural Issues.
4. A meeting with executive HCC/WCC Councillors and Officers to discuss The Rural and Local Economy.
5. HARA Board meeting.
6. Capital Programme Review meeting to discuss budget items.
7. A meeting with Portfolio Holder for Economic Prosperity to discuss Market Towns and Rural Economy.
8. An Executive Meeting of the South Downs Joint Committee (in Ford, West Sussex).

9. The Woodland Classroom Launch of the Sustainability Centre at East Meon in my role as WCC representative on Fieldfare Leader Action Group.

10. Meeting to discuss WCC support for voluntary sector.

11. A meeting to discuss a review of provision of Local Offices across District.

12. A meeting to discuss how to re-consult on LDF Core Strategy and use of 'Blueprint' in Market Towns and rural Areas.

13. A meeting with officers and Portfolio Holder for Winchester and Surrounds to discuss progress and content of Community/Parish Plans.

14. Economic prosperity Change Planning meeting.

15. Fareham SDA Master Planning Workshop (1 day).

For further information:

3 other external meetings in my diary during the above period were postponed to later dates

I attended a 4 day course at Planning Summer School in York where I chose workshops on rural related issues.

I am attending the CABE Rural Masterplanning Fund Project tomorrow (Thurs) morning."