



COUNCIL MEETING – 3 November 2010

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Godfrey

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Could the Portfolio Holder advise which individuals and organisations outside Winchester City Council were approached for comment on the proposed imposition of Sunday parking charges before the decision was made?”

Reply

“The introduction of Sunday parking charges requires formal consultation and this provides the opportunity for individuals and organisations to make their comments. It would not have been correct procedure to consult externally before Cabinet had considered the matter. To make business organisations aware of the forthcoming Cabinet report a letter was sent to the following on 5 October 2010 asking that they disseminate it throughout their membership:

- Winchester BID
- Hampshire Chamber of Commerce
- Federation of Small Businesses

Following the Cabinet meeting on 13th October the required statutory notices have been placed at all parking locations affected by the proposed changes and in the local press. This provides the opportunity for representations to be made. We have also requested face to face meetings with business representatives and other interested groups before the end of the consultation period, and have responded to a number of written representations and enquiries.

Cabinet (Parking and Traffic) Committee will consider all comments received at its meeting on 1 December 2010.”



Winchester
City Council

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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Prowse

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

"What is the City Council's response to the proposal by Hampshire County Council to reduce, by merger, the Road Safety Councils?"

Reply

"As a result of budget pressures and reductions in the road safety grant the County Council has been examining the role and function of the local road safety councils.

HCC is thereby proposing that the work of road safety councils become more aligned to the County Council's Highway Areas, operating in a similar way to the Hampshire Action Teams with local input maintained.

There are currently 11 separate Road Safety Councils (RSCs) which meet typically every 4 months. It is proposed to have 3 areas (the Winchester RSC will be incorporated into the Central Hampshire group - Winchester, Test Valley and New Forest). This will mean that officers will have to attend fewer meetings whilst still addressing important safety issues. It is proposed that the current cycle of local road safety council meetings for 2010/11 will continue with the change to be implemented from June 2011.

The proposed changes to the RSCs throughout Hampshire are designed to rationalise the current arrangements and are expected to generate cost savings for the Council. These changes should also benefit partner organizations involved as well as provide increased opportunities to share in best practice with neighbouring Authorities. It is not anticipated that the proposed changes will have any detrimental affect on casualty reduction within the District."



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Wood

To: The Leader

“Has either the Leader or Officers received any advice as to whether Thornfield are legally in breach of their agreement with this Council over Silver Hill. If Thornfield are in breach, can she confirm that the Administration’s current policy of doing nothing will not in any way jeopardise the Council’s position, were the Council to choose to withdraw?”

Reply

“Should the Council wish to consider terminating the Agreement, given the passage of time, we would first seek legal advice on the case we have for doing so. However, the process of bringing such a scheme out of administration successfully requires time and patience. To seek to bring the agreement to an end at this point, when the Administrator is in active discussions with an interested party, would serve no purpose. It would mean beginning the development process again in accordance with EU procurement rules, a process that would take years and require financial resources that the Council does not have. Counsel’s advice has been obtained on the procurement issues and confirms that this would be the case.

If some Members no longer believe that the regeneration of a run down part of Winchester, the provision of new affordable housing, of a much needed new bus station and an improvement in Winchester’s retail environment are objectives worth pursuing then they may wish to suggest terminating the agreement. My view is that it is better for a credible new institution to take the scheme forward, and my job is to ensure the Council’s and the community’s interests are secured. Nothing can guarantee that the development will happen but the real ‘do nothing’ option is to give up the effort.

A full report will be made to Cabinet and Principal Scrutiny Committee shortly on the proposals for any new development partner to take the scheme on and in relation to any decisions required by the Council.”



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Clear

To: The Portfolio Holder for Economic and Prosperity Portfolio Holder

“Could the Portfolio Holder please inform the Council on the progress of success being made regarding the Art Market?”

Reply

“The Art market commenced in June 2010 and has been held subsequently on the third Sunday of each month. There has been a steady increase in stalls since the market commenced and following its expansion into the High Street both the numbers of stalls and pedestrian footfall has greatly increased.

Number of stalls:

| | |
|--------|----------------------------|
| June | 20 |
| July | 34 |
| August | 54 (Move into High Street) |
| Sept | 65 |
| Oct | 69 |

The market is currently being capped at 70 stalls to maintain a sustainable market environment. There is currently waiting list of approx 35 additional stallholders and it is hoped that the market will continue to develop into a regional attraction benefiting both artists and city centre retailers.

A Market will be held during November and two in December, following which there will be a winter break of two months, with the market reopening in March 2011.

The success has been achieved by a combination of factors including unfulfilled demand from Artists for low cost space to showcase their work, the use of the lower end of the High Street for stalls, the enthusiasm of Southern Market Traders Ltd, the new Market Managers and the Estates team supported by a range of Council staff.”



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Lipscomb

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Will the Portfolio Holder say how she discharges her responsibilities in terms of ensuring that her title is translated into visible reality? Will she say why the good work done under the previous administration to identify and address, for example, the poor and dirty condition of Friarsgate Car Park appears to have lapsed during her time in office, to the extent that the entry to the car park had again become festooned with black cobwebs and soot by the time that I alerted Officers on 18th September?”

Will she say what steps she has taken to introduce a programme of routine pro-active maintenance in the areas under her control?”

Reply

“Friarsgate car park is cleaned under contract by Serco and this includes daily sweeping and a more thorough monthly clean including removal of cobwebs. The monitoring of this contract is undertaken by the Environment team who seek to ensure that a high level of cleaning is maintained, and always respond positively to comments passed to them by Members or public. I can report that the car park has now benefited from a recent thorough cleaning including the removal of cob webs.”



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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Mitchell

To: The Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Resources

“Could the Portfolio Holder tell me how many householders in the Winchester District will be affected by the reduction in Housing Benefit?

Could the Portfolio Holder tell me what are the estimated range of the reductions?”

Reply

In July 2010 the DWP provided some information on the impacts of the changes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to be introduced in 2011/12.

The DWP based the analysis on customer caseload for LHA claimants as at March 2010. They calculated entitlement under the proposed measures, assuming no changes to claims.

Estimated number of LHA recipients losing or notionally losing

| | Shared room | 1 bed | 2 bed | 3 bed | 4 bed | 5 bed | Total |
|------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Winchester | - | 270 (100%) | 190 (100%) | 70 (100%) | 10 (100%) | - | 540 |

Estimated average loss per loser or notional loser (£/week)

| | Shared room | 1 bed | 2 bed | 3 bed | 4 bed | 5 bed |
|------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Winchester | - | 11 | 14 | 17 | 14 | - |



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Coates

To: The Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Resources

“Could the Portfolio Holder confirm the following:

- a) The maximum monthly rate for Local Housing Allowance for Winchester, Eastleigh and Southampton Districts for 1 bed, 2 bed, 3 bed, 4 bed or more properties.
- b) That LHA will only be paid at the rate appropriate for the families need - not paid at a higher rate for under occupiers.
- c) That all LHA claimants, whether on the maximum LHA or not, will have to make a personal contribution to their rent from their other resources/benefits.
- d) That Council Tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit will similiarly have to make a personal contribution to their rent.”

Reply

“a) The weekly LHA rates for the Broad Rental Market Areas (BRMA’s) requested for November 2010 are -

| | 1 Room | 1 Bed | 2 Bed | 3 Bed | 4 Bed | 5 Bed |
|--------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Portsmouth | £67.50 | £115.07 | £143.84 | £172.60 | £230.14 | £322.19 |
| Southampton | £69.96 | £120.82 | £155.34 | £182.96 | £264.66 | £336.46 |
| Winchester | £80.55 | £155.34 | £184.11 | £230.14 | £310.68 | £379.73 |

- b) This is correct. LHA is only paid at the level relevant to the families need. The £15 top up that is currently available will be abolished from April 2011.
- c) This is not correct. If a customer’s rent is the same as or below the LHA level the LHA will meet their full rent (less any ineligible service charges).
- d) This is not correct. LHA only applies to tenants who rent in the private sector. Council tenants and tenants of registered social landlords are not currently affected.”



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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“In light of the proposed increase in the cost of licences for the 10 spaces in Barfield Close behind 33 to 57 Bar End Road, could the Portfolio Holder explain what she believes the term fairness means and how can she justify a 400% increase in the cost of the licence since 2004?”

Reply

“Fairness in this case, means not charging one group of residents a rent which is substantially less than others are charged for similar facilities elsewhere in the City. The Council has listened to the concerns of local residents about the increase in parking rents by agreeing to spread the increased charges over five years.

In 2004, the rent charged for parking spaces at the rear of 33 to 57 Bar End Road was £150 pa plus VAT. In 2007, the rent rose to £200 pa plus VAT. By agreeing to spread the proposed increase in the rent paid on the parking spaces over five years, the rent will have risen to £400 a year plus VAT by 2014. The rent the Council receives will therefore have risen 166% over ten years.”



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QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Achwal

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“When will the direction signs for the new Park and Ride be installed on the M3 Motorway?”

Reply

“Any new signs on the M3 have to be agreed by the Highways Agency. Both Hampshire County Council and Winchester City Council officers have been pressing for additional signs to be erected on the M3 to direct traffic to the park and ride sites.

The Highways Agency has agreed to consider signing the park and ride sites but only as part of a comprehensive signing review and strategy for the M3 around Winchester. The Highways Agency are concerned that there are too many signs on the M3 around Winchester and that additional signs can only be added as part of an overall review and rationalisation of signing along this section of the M3. An initial meeting has taken place to discuss a review of signing and to consider how park and ride signing can be incorporated into the overall signing strategy. A further meeting will be held next week which will hopefully finalise the proposals.”



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QUESTION 10

From: Councillor Beckett

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Is the Portfolio Holder able to tell the Council at what stage in the work of planning the installation of photo voltaic cells in Council houses, accurate information on the projected savings in carbon emissions will be available?”

Reply

“Work is well underway to assess the suitability of all Council house roofs for the installation of photo voltaic panels. From this, an overall capacity can be determined. Further information on projected savings in carbon emissions will be included in a report to Cabinet in December 2010.”



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QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Leader

“How many complaints have been made to the Standards Committee by members of the public during the past year?

What has been the approximate cost to the Council in the administration of these complaints over the same period?

What is the cost of dealing with an individual complaint?”

Reply

“In the 2009/10 Municipal Year, a total of 6 complainants made 20 complaints against 12 Parish Councillors and 1 City Councillor, requiring 10 Standards Sub Committee meetings to process the business (some complainants made complaints under more than one paragraph of the Code of Conduct and made allegations against more than one Councillor)

For the 2010/11 Municipal Year (to date), a total of 3 complainants have made 6 complaints against 4 Parish and 2 City Councillors, requiring 3 Standards Sub Committee meetings to process the business (again, some complainants made complaints on more than one paragraph of the Code of Conduct and made allegations against more than one Councillor).

One full investigation and hearing was also undertaken in July 2010 arising from a 2009/10 case.

Regarding costs, initial assessment or review of complaints incurs an average of around £1,500 expenditure in officer time, meeting room hire etc for each Sub Committee meeting. If the Monitoring Officer is required, in addition, to undertake a full investigation, the cost of this is around £10,000 per case.

Therefore the 2009/10 approximate cost was £20,000 and 2010/11 (to date) is £9,500.”



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QUESTION 12

From: Councillor Jackson

To: The Portfolio Holder for Winchester and Surrounds

"At what stage will the re-furbishment of Winchester's High Street be considered to be completed?"

What are the plans for final 'tweaks' (such as the unfinished bases of half of the cycle racks in Market Street)?

How does the total cost measure against budget?"

Reply

"The work in the High Street is nearing completion. A 'snagging' report is currently being written to set out the various outstanding issues and how they will be addressed. Any additional works identified are planned to be completed before 16 November 2010. Some outstanding works on the pedestrian finger post signing will be completed over the next four weeks.

Following this, a 12 month maintenance period will commence whereby the contractor can be asked to remedy any faults which occur. At the end of the maintenance period the final payment will be released and the contractor's involvement will then end.

The total project (ongoing) cost has been carefully managed and is within the budget allocation."



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QUESTION 13

From: Councillor Pearson

To: The Portfolio Holder for Economic Prosperity

“Could the Portfolio Holder explain the link between Localism and the Community Strategy?”

Reply

“A Decentralisation and Localism Bill is expected to be introduced into parliament towards the end of this year. Changes in favour of a more localist approach should give greater power to councils and local communities over decisions which affect them.

The Community Strategy is designed to reflect the outcomes which are most important to local people. The consultation over the summer period saw more than 200 responses from people living and working in the Winchester District, and the priorities identified for the next three years are those which were felt by them to be both urgent and important for local residents. My colleagues and I look forward to working with parishes and Ward Members to find solutions to these issues, particularly in terms of local access to services, providing services for older people and reducing our carbon footprint.

As Members will know, our Community Strategy this time identifies two specific areas of the District - Stanmore and Winnall – as ‘priority neighbourhoods’, providing a more ‘localist’ approach than ever before in terms of focussing the efforts of the Local Strategic Partnership in these locations.

The Strategy is wholly in keeping with a localist agenda and sets out to create dynamic local communities, ‘mobilising people to take action, creating opportunities for them to get involved in their communities and helping them to develop solutions to local issues’.”



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QUESTION 14

From: Councillor Wood

To: The Leader

“I read in the Hampshire Chronicle that it has been decided not to use the Serco yard for affordable Housing and instead try to obtain a rent for a commercial letting. It was said that it was not viable to decontaminate the land. Can the Leader tell us how much this decontamination was estimated to cost?”

Reply

“As part of the proposals to re-tender the Grounds and Cleansing Services, new arrangements have been proposed to meet the property requirements of these contracts. Following the expiry of the contracts, the Bar End Depot will be surplus to current requirements and Cabinet has therefore authorised the Head of Estates to investigate ways of maximizing the value of the land. As part of the site disposal investigation, the Head of Estates will be engaging consultants to undertake a detailed environmental study of the property.

Policy E2 of the District Local Plan (2006) requires that the Bar End Depot site should continue to be used for employment purposes unless it could be demonstrated that the need for an alternative use was greater, or the continuation of such a use would have an impact on the local environment or transport. Planning policy would not support the use of the land for residential purposes.

The property has been used as a Council depot for many decades and as a result of its use by refuse freighters and as a base for grounds, highways and building maintenance, there will be a range of contaminants on the site. In similar circumstances elsewhere, land used for comparable uses has been contaminated by a range of pollutants such as polyaromatic hydrocarbons, hydrocarbons, mineral oils, heavy metals, deleterious building materials and plastics. The cost of remediating land contaminated in such a way can run into the hundreds of thousands of pounds, hence the need to undertake a detailed environmental survey.

Consultants will be appointed to carry out an environmental study of the land in the coming months, but as this work is intrusive in nature, it will have to be undertaken at times convenient for the existing contractor SERCO. The outcome of the survey will take several months to complete, due to the need for chemical analysis of soil samples and a detailed report on the findings will be prepared for Cabinet in due course.”



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QUESTION 15

From: Councillor Lipscomb

To: The Leader

“Will the Leader agree with me that Councils have a moral duty to enhance, where possible, the employment prospects of disadvantaged persons resident in their areas? Assuming that she does, will she ensure that no contract is let for cleaning of the Guildhall, City Offices or other accommodation within our ownership without the contractor formally undertaking to employ a specified minimum number of persons with learning difficulties and/or persons with (appropriate) disabilities, who are resident in the Winchester District?

Will the Leader say how many such disadvantaged persons are presently employed on cleaning contracts let by the Council?

Will the Leader further undertake to promote this principle through the HLOWLA network and by liaising with the charitable sector, e.g. MENCAP, who provide ready trained individuals for such employment?

Reply

“There used to be a statutory requirement to employ 3% of registered disabled persons, which was removed by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as it was considered that the quota system was not achieving its objectives and was unnecessary with the introduction of the anti-discrimination provisions included in the 1995 Act. In addition, all of the existing staff employed on the cleaning contracts would transfer across to the new contractor under the TUPE regulations and any quota requirement could not be met unless and until there had been turnover of staff. For these reasons, it would therefore not be advisable to include in the specification a quota of jobs to be made available to persons with disabilities.

It would be possible to impose the same requirements as the Council follows i.e. a guarantee of interview for disabled people who meet the minimum job requirements. It is also proposed that the contractors be put in touch with the appropriate local groups to encourage recruitment for these jobs.”



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QUESTION 16

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Leader

“Could the Leader explain why it was possible to re-develop the UBM Ford Motor Company garage site in Hyde Street for housing (Silchester Place), yet it is considered too difficult to consider the same for the Bar End Depot because of land contamination issues and if the Council is not going to release this land for much needed affordable housing, where does the Leader feel new affordable housing can be provided, particularly as we have barred the delivery of 800 affordable homes on the ‘Barton Farm’ site?”

Reply

“In considering planning applications and the future use of its own land, the Council must have regard to the planning policies applying at the time. Current planning policies contained in the District Local Plan Review 2006 seek to resist the loss of employment sites to other uses, unless there are particular problems with retaining them. The planning policy background that was applying at the time of the Hyde Street application would have been taken into account in determining that application.

The Council has policies to maximize the provision of affordable housing and is in the process of improving these through the emerging Local Development Framework Core Strategy. The associated ‘Blueprint’ consultation is aimed at identifying local housing needs, including affordable housing, and will help in determining the level of housing development needed in the Core Strategy, following the abolition of the South East Plan. I would expect the need for affordable housing to feature strongly in the responses to Blueprint and this should, therefore, be taken into account in establishing new local housing targets.”



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QUESTION 17

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Portfolio Holder for Economic Prosperity

“In the light of the recent Gold and Silver awards to the Tourist Information Centre and Tourism Digital Marketing, is there an intention to make any sort of formal recognition to the members of staff responsible for this prestigious achievement, possibly in monetary terms?”

Reply

“We are delighted that our tourism team has once again been successful in the regional tourism excellence awards. This year has also seen a Hantsweb award for the Visit Winchester website, and short-listing for a global Travolution award for best use of social media (won on the night by the Bahamas Tourist Office). Staff not only enjoy the spirit of friendly competition and the additional challenge this provides to improve services, but also have the opportunity to attend the award ceremonies for a fun night out with colleagues. With financial support from two of our tourism suppliers, we were able to take a party of five tourism staff to the regional awards at Mercedes-Benz world in Weybridge.

When Winchester Tourist Information Centre won the national gold medal in 2006, the tourism team was treated to a special reception by the Mayor at Abbey House. They would not expect special recognition for regional wins, although the Chief Executive and Corporate Director (Governance) congratulated staff in person the morning after the ceremony and staff have certainly appreciated the many messages of congratulation from Members, colleagues and stakeholders across the District. The news was also disseminated in City Voice and made page 2 of the Hampshire Chronicle.

All staff understand that financial rewards are simply not viable at the present time, nor have they traditionally been part of the culture we operate. However, I would certainly encourage my fellow Members to pay a visit to the tourist information centre, if you have not already done so, and offer your congratulations in person.”



Winchester
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QUESTION 18

From: Councillor Wood

To: The Leader

“Would the Leader care to comment on Serco’s proposal to request their local suppliers to reduce their bills by 2.5% and how she suggests that local firms react to this when providing services to Serco on the Councils behalf?”

Reply

“Serco’s proposal to request their local suppliers to reduce their bills by 2.5% has been withdrawn.”