



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 2 November 2011

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Evans

To: The Leader

“As Wickham Ward will be most affected by the proposed North Fareham Strategic Development Area (SDA), and as Cabinet has now decided that the Winchester City Council representative on the Fareham Borough Council SDA Strategic Liason Group shall no longer be a Wickham Ward Councillor, would the Leader please inform me how information given to our representative at these meetings will be communicated to the local Ward Councillor and vice-versa?”

Reply

“At Cabinet on 15 June 2011, Councillor Learney spoke on behalf of Councillor Evans regarding the previous meeting’s appointment of Councillor Cooper as the Council’s representative on the North of Fareham Strategic Development Area (SDA) Community Liaison Group. She requested that as the Ward Members for Wickham, Councillors Evans and Clear be briefed after Liaison Group meetings.

At the meeting, Councillor Cooper agreed to do this. It is his intention that ahead of any future meeting of the North of Fareham SDA Community Group he will meet with/communicate with Councillors Evans and Clear to review agenda items and will report back to them any matters of particular interest to Wickham Ward Members. The Group is also an open forum and anyone can attend.”



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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Banister

To: The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Landlord Services

“In the light of steep rises in energy costs, what is the City Council doing to help its tenants reduce their heating bills this Winter?”

Reply

“The Council has invested heavily in improving the energy efficiency of its housing stock for many years. Overall, the Council’s homes are in the top 25% ‘most energy efficient’ council homes in the Country and have an energy efficiency rating well above the average for private homes in Winchester.

This year, the Council is investing over £1m on improving heating systems and insulation in its housing.

I am concerned about the impact of increasing bills for our tenants, although in light of the many pressures facing the council’s Housing Revenue Account, scope for further investment is limited. Officers are exploring opportunities to secure additional grant funding for energy efficiency projects, although it is unlikely that this will have an impact on bills this winter.

However, I have even greater concern for those residents in the private sector who live in properties with inadequate levels of insulation. The City Council work with a number of agencies to promote schemes such as Insulate Hampshire and Heatseekers which are making a real difference in improving the energy efficiency of housing throughout the district.”



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Enforcement

“Could the Portfolio Holder advise me of the Health and Safety requirements for the erection of scaffolding on the public Highway (particularly the pedestrianised section of the Winchester High Street) and does she share my great concern that on Sunday 30 October 2011 the firm who erected the scaffolding against 111/112 High Street took no measures to restrict pedestrians from walking in very close proximity to the area when the scaffolding was being assembled nor were the operatives wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment (hard hat, protective footwear or high visibility jacket).

Could the Portfolio Holder also advise me who would have assessed and taken responsibility for the method statement for the work and the appropriate risk assessment? Also if a member of the public or employee of the scaffolding firm were to be injured by a falling coupling or scaffolding pole, who would be responsible?

Reply

“The responsibility for the safe erection of scaffolding lies with the scaffolding company concerned. The company is subject to legal duties and obligations both to its own workforce and members of the public. The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for enforcement. Erection of scaffolding on the highway is subject to a licence issued by the County Council and this requires the licence holder to proceed in a safe manner with all due precautions. We will inform the County Council that it has been reported to us that there may have been breaches of the terms for the licence in this case.”



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Leader

“Would the Leader agree that Questions at the start of each Council meeting are an essential element of the Democratic Process in holding the Administration to account, with relevant supplementary questions being particularly important?”

If he agrees, then would he recommend to the Mayor that the current allocation of 30 minutes time for questions be increased to a minimum of 45 minutes, with no specific time limit imposed on the time allowed for a relevant supplementary question?”

Reply

“I agree that Questions at the start of each Council Meeting are an important element in holding the Administration to account. I know that is also the view of the Mayor.

However, this is only one method available to Members. Others, include:

- The question section at the beginning of each item coming before Council for debate and decision.
- Portfolio Holders attending The Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Informal Scrutiny Groups to answer questions.
- Members attending Cabinet or Cabinet Committees to express their views on issues and to raise questions of portfolio holders.
- Consultation on Portfolio Holder Decision Notices where 5 members can ask that the matter be dealt with at a Cabinet Meeting where they would have the opportunity to raise the profile of an issue.
- Members' rights to ask for a report on a matter to go to Cabinet.
- The Member “Call For Action” where an individual Member can require a matter to be dealt with through the scrutiny process.
- The ability to raise issues with Portfolio Holders at an early stage which may obviate the need for some of the processes outlined above.

I am satisfied, therefore, that there are a range of options open to Members to hold the Administration to account. I do not agree that any changes are needed to the Council Procedure Rules on Council Questions. It is right that the Mayor should be able to exercise discretion, as he does, to manage that item in the same way as other Council business, to ensure the overall effective working of the meeting. Indeed, Members may wish to consider whether some of the other methods of holding the Administration to account would be more effective in some instances.”



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Clear

To: The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Landlord Services

“Wickham is soon to complete its second exception site development of affordable houses. Would the Portfolio Holder reassure me that following the completion of these 20 houses that 20 Wickham families currently without satisfactory housing will benefit from the new homes?”

Reply

“The 20 units are due to be completed late spring 2012.

8 units are scheduled to be sold to the Wickham Community Land Trust as intermediate rent/shared ownership. The remaining 12 units will be for rent through Hyde Housing Association.

The section 106 contains the usual local connection criteria. The priority for selection is as follows:

Eligible Persons shall be selected in the following order of priority:

- (i) Applicants who meet and have met the strong local connection criteria set out above for at least 3 years to the Parish of Wickham
- (ii) Applicants who meet and have met the strong local connection criteria set out above for at least 1 year to the Parish of Wickham
- (iii) Applicants who meet and have met the strong local connection criteria set out above for at least 3 years to the Parishes of Shedfield, Soberton and Newtown, Boarhunt, Swanmore, Bishops Waltham or Curdrige
- (iv) Applicants who meet and have met the strong local connection criteria set out above for at least 1 year to the Parishes of Shedfield, Soberton and Newtown, Boarhunt, Swanmore, Bishops Waltham or Curdrige
- (vii) Anyone with a strong local connection with any Rural Village

These criteria will apply to all 20 units of accommodation.

Additionally allocation policies are also being considered by the Informal Scrutiny Group (Application and Weight of Local Criteria in the Allocation of Housing) that would allow up to 50% of any vacancies created in the Council stock by households moving into the exception scheme being let to local households as well.”



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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Hiscock

To: The Leader

“How much notice did the Leader have of Eric Pickles announcement on 30 September this year that he was offering incentives to councils to re-introduce weekly waste collections?”

Reply

“The City Council was unaware that this announcement was due to be made following a decision several months previously by the Government not to proceed with reinstatement of weekly collections.

The City Council has just signed a joint refuse and recycling contract in partnership with East Hampshire District Council based on the current alternate bin collection method which has proved successful for both authorities. The current methodology achieves recycling rates of around 40%. Any changes to this contract are likely to prove expensive and could have a detrimental affect on our recycling rates.

We have no immediate plans to reinstate weekly collections. Any future decision would have to be agreed with our partners at East Hampshire, be cost effective and maintain or improve future recycling rates.”



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Landlord Services

“Could the Portfolio Holder advise me of the number of ‘affordable homes’ built in the Winchester Town area over the last 10 years?”

Reply

“332 affordable homes have been built in the Winchester Town area between financial years 2003/4 and 2010/11.”



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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport

“Is the Portfolio Holder satisfied with the efficiency of the new refuse collection services?”

If there have been problems with the new service, is the East Hampshire or Winchester City Council responsible?”

Reply

“The change to new collection rounds for the refuse and recycling collection service which is an integral part of the new contract with Biffa was risk assessed as likely to cause some disruption to service delivery and it is therefore not a surprise that this has been the case. New crews are working new rounds and most householders have different bin collection days and it would have been unrealistic not to have expected some problems.

Staff from the Joint Client Team from both Councils are working hard to ensure that Biffa resolves these problems with the aim of ensuring collection arrangements settle into a satisfactory pattern within the next fortnight. Biffa management is engaged at a very senior level in achieving this and they are in no doubt about the Councils expectations. In the meantime additional resources have been drafted in to our Customer Service Centre to improve our customer response and resolve outstanding complaints.

The efficiency of the new service arrangements cannot be judged in the transitional period but I expect our contractor to deliver the service as set out in our specification.

In response to the final part of Cllr Cook’s question I feel sure that he will appreciate that when you deliver a service in partnership you work with your partners.”



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QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport

“Could the Portfolio Holder advise me on the measures open to the Local Authority to control the number of pigeons in the City Centre (should it wish to) and also whether she feels that the number of pigeons is on the increase?”

Reply

“There are various methods employed to control pigeon populations, which broadly vary between culling measures and preventative measures, both of which can vary in success and both tend to be labour intensive and expensive.

However the culling of wild birds including pigeons is prohibited under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, unless in the case of pigeons and other stipulated birds, it can be demonstrated that the cull is required to prevent the spread of disease. In such circumstances the ‘appropriate authority’ Natural England has issued a General Licence covering England, allowing persons authorised under the Act to cull the pigeons.

It is my understanding that currently Winchester City Council does not have any persons authorised under the Act to cull pigeons and notwithstanding this, it is difficult to demonstrate the need to cull to prevent the spread of disease in all but the most extreme circumstances.

Where it can be demonstrated that a local pigeon population needs to be culled to prevent the spread of disease and ‘authorised’ persons are employed to do so, then it can be done through controlled shoots or through trapping and subsequent dispatch. The former comes with the associated issues of the use of ballistics in public places in terms of safety and negative public reaction. Furthermore it is often only marginally successful insofar as pigeons will fly off once alarmed. The latter method of trapping is labour intensive as the traps have to be checked daily. It also relies upon the chosen location, often a roof top, being safe to access and with the permission of the building owner. There are also issues of pigeons being ‘cage shy’ especially

where they contain trapped pigeons, again bringing into question the efficacy of the method.

Pigeons tend to be highly habitual, so will return to the same roosting spot unless it is made very difficult for them to do so. So in terms of preventative 'anti roosting' measures, these include the use of spikes and netting, the responsibility for which and associated installation costs thereof, are usually borne by the building owner. Such measures are often only employed where there is a localised problem and not as a measure to dissuade wider pigeon populations, albeit one usually goes with the other.

Trends in local pigeon populations are unknown, for as you might imagine establishing such data is prohibitively difficult, however anecdotally Serco only took a handful of pigeon complaints during the last four years. I am therefore not in a position to confidently say whether local pigeon populations are decreasing, increasing or static."