



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 7 January 2015

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Johnston

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Wellbeing

“I am advised that due to various safety issues and the intervention of the NHS CVQ service the service at the Kings Worthy branch surgery has closed indefinitely. The reason being that the surgery is housed in a converted flat that fails to comply with disabled access internally and externally and some issues with Fire and Electrical safety. It need not be emphasised the impact on vulnerable members of the communities who will now have make two bus journeys to visit the surgery.

Friarsgate are tenants of WCC and the tenant is responsible for the cost of repairs and alterations and will need planning permission and amendment to the existing lease, that has one year to run. I understand that the practice have asked for help with the cost. Is the Portfolio Holder considering this?”

Reply

“The Kings Worthy branch surgery is operated by the Friarsgate GP Practice and utilises a building leased on a commercial basis from the City Council. The practice has identified a number of improvements needed to the premises, but were not initially aware that these were the responsibility of the tenant. The City Council has been in discussion with the practice about how this situation could be resolved for some weeks and was under the impression that the dialogue was continuing. We were not notified that the practice intended to stop using the premises.

Officers are meeting with the representatives of the practice to try to reach agreement about how the situation can be resolved as a matter of urgency.”



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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Laming

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Transport

“The decision by the County Council to cut funding for local bus services and change the operation of some services has left residents of Oliver's Battery with just 3 buses a day on 3 days a week which no longer go to the local supermarket and doctor's surgery. For the ill a trip to the doctors now involves a change of bus in the centre of town to reach the other side or a car journey through the increasingly hazardous Oliver's Battery Road junction.

Oliver's Battery is not the only area affected. The cuts to services are being felt throughout the district making it harder not only for our residents to reach essential services but in many cases access work.

What action has the Portfolio Holder taken to make the County Council provide much needed public transport for the people of our district?

Reply

“Supporting bus services by providing subsidies is a matter for the County Council and they consulted on proposed budget reductions of £1.5 million in March last year.

As I have mentioned before members were informed and invited to reply to the County Council direct and a response was also sent from the City Council by means of a Portfolio Decision Notice in June 2015 in which concerns were raised about the impact the cuts in bus services would have commenting that they are potentially a major blow to local communities and appear inconsistent with the transport policies we share with the County Council which are aimed at reducing dependence on the car as a mode of transport. We also said that we should be moving towards a situation where those who do not have a car, whether through necessity or choice, have the alternative of using readily accessible public transport.

Ultimately Hampshire had to make difficult decisions which will unavoidably impact on local communities where services have been reduced.

The Council does however continue to financially support initiatives like Dial-a-Ride which provides transport to some of the least mobile members of our communities and this service has not been affected by the recent budget cuts.”



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Ruffell

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Wellbeing

"Will the recent fall in value of some recyclable materials make recycling economically unsustainable in the future?"

Reply

"It is normal for there to be trends in the level of income received from recycling materials as a result of market forces which are increasingly affected by global factors such as oil prices and overseas markets. The current low level in the value of materials is therefore unlikely to continue forever and is monitored closely through our involvement in the Project Integra Partnership. This partnership also helps the City Council secure the best price for any materials by controlling the quality and format collected and securing sustainable markets for its sale.

Ultimately, it must be remembered that recycling materials are not collected solely for commercial reasons but more for their contribution towards the overall environmental agenda. It does so as part of the waste hierarchy which forms part of the City Council's shared Waste Minimisation Plan which has disposal as the last resort for materials which have alternative uses.

The City Council is also governed by National targets for recycling which if not met could result in fines from the EU which the Government have indicated they would pass on to Local Authorities.

It is important to continue to monitor trends in the value of materials and to implement actions to counter any reductions by increasing the amount captured. The City Council will be playing an active role in this area through its proposed Great Waste initiative for 2015, further details of which will be available as part of a proposed Member Briefing in February."



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Evans

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Wellbeing

“How does the Portfolio Holder ensure that the 2015 recycling/waste collection calendar was delivered to all households in the District?”

Reply

“There are 2 methods of checking calendar distribution.

Firstly, returns are provided by Biffa for the completion of the calendar distribution using the original planned programme in order to monitor progress.

Secondly, Contract Monitoring Officers carry out ad hoc checks of areas and also closely monitor any complaints received to see if any patterns emerge where distribution problems may have occurred.

Calendar distribution is always a logistical challenge with over 50,000 properties to be visited within a relatively short period of time. This year the process was considered to have gone well overall with only 162 requests for replacements received. 2 requests for large print version of the calendar were also received.

Where distribution problems were identified in specific areas prompt action was taken to address the issue with replacement calendars delivered by Contract Monitoring Officers. The facility to download the calendars from the web is also available and used by some residents.

Finally, officers also monitor trends in the number of reports of missed collections between October and December. This year there were 50 less reports for this period than in 2013 which supports the view that overall calendar distribution worked well during this year as households were aware of the collection changes advertised on the new calendar for Christmas & New Year.”



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Gottlieb

To: The Leader

“I have previously advised that the multiplicity of applications relating to Silver Hill has given Henderson options, the practical effect of which is that in the event they are unable to secure a tenant for the proposed department store they will want to pursue the S73 application scheme (ref: 14/01912/FUL), which was also approved on December 11th, by itself.

For its part the Council has stated, and has accepted assurances from Henderson, that the scheme will only be built as a complete package, ie with block B configured as per the so-called ‘drop in’ application (ref: 14/01913/FUL).

This commitment is enshrined in the (draft) Section 106 Agreement.

However, given that the new Section 106 Agreement makes null and void the previous Section 106 Agreement (dated January 2009) will the Leader please provide unequivocal confirmation that, for the duration of this Administration and, if re-elected, the duration of the next Administration, the Council will not consent to this commitment being changed or relaxed in any way, either by way of an amendment to the Section 106 Agreement (when completed) or by any other form of agreement?”

Reply

“Cllr Gottlieb is aware of the distinction between the executive function of the Council which is controlled by the political leadership and the Council’s function as local planning authority which is a regulatory matter subject to the non-political judgement of elected Members and the various rights of determination and appeal for any applicant provided by planning law.

It would be quite wrong for me or any other elected Member to pre-judge an entirely hypothetical planning scenario by making categorical statements which would amount to political interference in the independent planning process.”



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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Clear

To: The Portfolio Holder for Built Environment

“The Denmead content of the Local Plan Part 2 closely relates to the Neighbourhood Plan. Were the Denmead Neighbourhood Plan to fail to secure endorsement at referendum, what would the implications be on the LPP2 and what precautions could be taken to avoid risk to Winchester District as a whole?”

Reply

“The content of the draft Local Plan Part 2 reflects the content of the Denmead Neighbourhood Plan that was submitted for examination in September 2014. The report of the person appointed to examine the Denmead Neighbourhood Plan recommends various changes to the Plan and this is being reported to Cabinet on 14 January 2015 (see report CAB2641). If agreed by Cabinet, a referendum would be held on the Neighbourhood Plan in early March 2015.

The timescale set out above enables the referendum to be held at the earliest realistic opportunity, given the need to prepare the necessary documentation and give adequate notice. It provides the opportunity to include proposals for Denmead, if necessary, at the next stage of the Local Plan Part 2 (‘Pre-Submission’), which is due to be published in June/July 2015.”



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Read

To: The Portfolio Holder for Business Services

"Could the Portfolio Holder please confirm how the refurbishment of Avalon House is progressing and when will it be completed and the property handed over?"

Reply

"Work on the refurbishment of Avalon House will be completed in the next two weeks. The Council has undertaken the refurbishment of the building to Category A office standard and is completing the fitting out of the building at the expense of the tenant Southern Health NHS Trust. The premises are being refurbished to a high standard and considerable effort has been put into making the building energy efficient through the use of insulation, LED lighting throughout and air source heat pumps to provide heating and cooling.

The building will be used by Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust as a hub for a range of community health services. The services are being brought together under one roof for the first time in Winchester, giving patients a new, attractive and centrally-located environment in which to receive care.

Services are currently based in various locations across and around the city, including the old Friarsgate Medical Centre and St Waleric, in Park Rd. The Trust also hopes that bringing services together will lead to more joined-up working between different healthcare teams, and make things more straightforward for people who have a number of health needs. It is anticipated that the new centre, which will continue to be called Avalon House, will open in February."



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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Portfolio Holder for Business Services

“Has the Council got a standard in terms of the time allowed for the answering of correspondence, either letters or emails, from members of the public or Councillors?

If so, what is the current standard?”

Reply

“By letter

We aim to respond to your letter within 10 working days, if your query requires more detailed research we will acknowledge your letter and respond fully to you within 20 working days.

By email, SMS text, online

We will acknowledge that we have received your messages sent to our published addresses or numbers within 24 hours and aim to reply fully within 10 working days.

If we are experiencing high workloads, or your enquiry requires more detailed research before it can be fully answered the acknowledgement will give an indication of when you can expect to hear from us and will include a contact telephone number if your enquiry is urgent.

Officers endeavour to meet these targets, but there are inevitably instances where a more complex answer can take longer, or where sheer pressure of work means that dealing with a question is not top priority for the team in question. In those circumstances I would expect the correspondent to be advised of any delays, but we must accept that whilst we are facing growing demands with fewer resources we cannot always achieve the turn-around we would like.”



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QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Pines

To: The Portfolio Holder for Business Services

“Reports CAB2601 (9 Jan, '14), CAB2441HD (17 Jan '13), CAB2631HSG (4 Dec '13) gradually develop the application for funding, the development of the site, working with partners etc., for this scheme.

But the papers, above, do not indicate how the Business Plan will work or what work has been done on it. Additionally a major problem seems to be looming – CAB2631HSG (24 Nov '14) clearly notes the complete loss of the supported people programme to the tune of £605,000.

Bearing in mind the recent bombshell to hit elderly peoples' service, could the Portfolio Holder say whether the business case for the long term running of this development still stands, whether the scheme will be insulated by the County Council from the loss of support noted by the removal of Supported People funding, or whether rent levels will have to bear the extra costs associated with care provision, and whether such increased rent levels will be directed only at residents of this scheme or spread over all of housing's tenants?”

Reply

“The financial viability of the Council's extra care scheme is constantly updated and reviewed to ensure it meets the viability criteria for Council new homes (as set out in the Development Strategy). The scheme viability is affected by a number of factors but essentially it is determined by the overall costs of the scheme, both in revenue and capital, being met by the income over a 30 year period. The latest appraisal of the Extra Care scheme meets the viability criteria as set out in the Development Strategy.

The final viability assessment will be only be completed when build Tenders are returned, at this stage the information will be reported to Cabinet for approval to proceed with the scheme. The current development timetable indicates that this will be in July 2015.

The Extra Care scheme will be owned and managed by the City Council who will provide the housing management and repair services as with all the Council's housing stock. The care services to individual residents will be provided by Hampshire County Council and based on those individuals specific needs, the County Council is supportive of the approach of providing extra care accommodation to meet the needs of the elderly and have committed over £1M to support the provision of Day Care facilities within the project. The provision of care services are not affected by the recent changes in the Supporting People programme.

Under the Council's current policy for new build properties the rent charged will reflect the scheme development costs and will not be pooled across the stock, it is worth noting that the scheme has Government funding of £1.8M where there is an expectation that rents will be charged at 80% of market levels (i.e. an Affordable Rent)."



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QUESTION 10

From: Councillor Scott

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing Services

“Can the Portfolio Holder tell me the number of houses bought under ‘Right To Buy Scheme’ in Stanmore and how many have been offered back to the Council when sold on again, and what percentage has become HMO's?”

Reply

“The ‘Right to Buy’ process first began in the 1980s and since that time, the City Council has sold an estimated 700 homes in Stanmore.

Whilst owners had an obligation to offer the property back to the Council when they first sold it on (if within 10 years of the initial purchase), the Council was not in a position to take advantage of this until 2012. Many such offers were made although records have not been maintained on this as the Council response was always the same.

Information is not held on which specific properties sold through the Right to Buy process have since been converted for use as a House in Multiple Occupation.”



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QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Gemmell

To: The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Organisational Development

"Could the Portfolio Holder outline the proposals for the 15/16 budget that are currently being consulted on and what feedback has so far been received?"

Reply

"The proposals for the 2015/16 General Fund budget are contained in Cabinet report CAB2629, which was considered by the Cabinet on 3 December 2014 and by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8 December 2014. Consultation was also held with the business community and parish and town councils during December.

The feedback received has been positive and there have been no proposals received for any changes to be made (more detail can be found in the minutes of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting)."



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QUESTION 12

From: Councillor Thompson

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing Services

"Four years ago solar panels were fitted onto a council house in Cromwell Road Stanmore, as a pilot scheme prior to rolling out a programme across suitable council house roofs. What data has been collected and when can we expect to see the results?"

Reply

"Solar panels were fitted to the above property and to a large communal housing scheme in the city and continue to offer benefits to the tenants of those properties.

Council officers have not continued to record data from these specific properties (although meter readings can be taken at any time). More relevant data is available from national sources. The cost effectiveness of domestic solar power systems has improved significantly since that time, with capital costs now being much lower and productivity of panels is constantly improving.

The issue for the Council in determining whether to invest in solar power remains the access to capital funding to finance installations. With existing Housing capital resources fully committed towards maintenance and New Build programmes and limited by the Council's Housing Debt cap, investment in new schemes could only be achieved at the expense of existing initiatives."



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QUESTION 13

From: Councillor J Berry

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Wellbeing

“In light of the increasing awareness of the importance of trees, when will the Council be updating and adopting a tree strategy for Winchester?”

Reply

“This work is underway and our intended approach to dealing with trees in relation to development is set out in our emerging Local Plan Part 2 which includes specific policies which cover landscape impact and draft High Quality Places Supplementary Planning Document which includes a specific section relating to trees. Following adoption of Local Plan Part 2, which should occur in 2016, the inclusion of these policies would enable us to produce more detailed guidance as necessary in the form of a Supplementary Planning Document.

Furthermore, in relation to managing the Council’s own trees, a draft Management Plan has now been developed and is being reviewed independently before being finalised.”



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QUESTION 14

From: Councillor Weir

To: The Leader

“In view of the programme of major projects and other developments in the pipeline, what steps will the Council take in 2015 to rebuild trust and confidence in the public consultation process among residents of Winchester?”

Reply

“The Council has an ambitious programme of major projects seeking to enhance the District’s facilities, meet identified needs and deliver the Community Strategy objectives. With such projects there will inevitably be some level of concern and objection and we have tried hard to consult and engage on these projects as they have progressed.

The Council has a good track record on consultation and much of the protest in recent months has not been because we did not consult. Rather it reflects the fact that some were only too well aware of what was proposed, they simply didn’t agree. However, there is always scope to improve consultation and communications. As a first step, I will be setting up a Cabinet Sub-Committee for Major Projects. That will consider all aspects of the Council’s non-housing major projects, including consultation and engagement, which will be discussed in a public forum. Cabinet (Housing) Committee will continue to deal with their projects.

I have also asked Officers to review our approach to consultation, building upon the work of the Informal Scrutiny Group which met last year. This will draw on our own best practice and that of others to inform how we consult and engage on major projects in the future.

We have made or are planning a number of improvements designed to improve awareness of and confidence in our consultation work. These include: drawing attention to consultations for our followers on Twitter and Facebook, increased efforts in publicity to explain where changes have been made to projects as a result of consultation, and bringing together all new consultations in an easy-to-use section on the website.

I believe strongly that the Council needs to set out its overall vision for the district’s future, and how we meet the many challenges facing our communities. Our major projects will help to deliver the wider vision, creating new jobs, better housing and providing income to support services to the public. This vision will need to be communicated effectively and I will be embarking on some work to do just that.”



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QUESTION 15

From: Councillor Pearson

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Transport

"What is the present capacity of Winchester's Park and Ride? How many P&R will shortly come on line; what capacity do they have? Will this increased capacity of P&R facilities more than compensate for the loss of commuter parking in the Winchester Town Centre?"

Reply

"The present car parking capacity of the park and ride car parks is 1650 spaces. An additional 200 spaces will become available at Pitt Manor, off Romsey Road as part of the Pitt Manor Development, hopefully in the first half of 2015.

The capacity of the park and ride is also determined by the number of seats available on the buses serving the park and ride sites and this is currently under review following a consultation undertaken last year.

There is currently a level of unused car parking space at the park and ride sites which provides important capacity for events such as the Christmas Markets and the Hat Fair.

The impact on car parking availability of major projects in Winchester Town is currently being considered in terms of how this will be managed in the short term. Maximising the use of the park and ride service will be an important part of that process which will involve promotion and working with visitors and businesses to encourage use of the park and ride. The implementation of the Council's car parking strategy through promoting the three ring approach with short stay parking in the centre, cheaper longer stay parking further out and park and ride on the periphery of the Town forming the cheapest parking provision will be continued."



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QUESTION 16

From: Councillor Learney

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Wellbeing

“What was the anticipated volume of textiles collected and income to the Council and charities arising from the changes in textile recycling arrangements?

What has been the actual impact?”

Reply

“Since the contract commenced in 2014 the tonnages of textiles and shoes from each of the sites have been monitored on a monthly basis and the total collected is similar to that previously collected by the charities. This is pleasing and demonstrates public acceptance of the new scheme.

Forecasted income, however, will not be as anticipated because of a number of factors including a drop in the value of the textiles collected due to global market conditions. The predicted annual income has therefore been recalculated based on these factors. We are investigating options for expanding the network of sites in order to increase the volume of textiles being recycled which will produce more income to offset lower market prices.

At present we hope to avoid any significant reduction in the contribution we can make to the charities concerned and any reduction will only be proportionate to the change in market prices –something they would have been affected by under their previous contract arrangements.

Options for the allocation of income received during the 2015/16 financial year will be considered in the next few months as set out in PHD 567.”



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QUESTION 17

From: Councillor Jeffs

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Transport

"As the Friarsgate car park is becoming unsafe to use it was said it might close by last Christmas. This has not happened. So what is the timescale for closure and what contingency plans will be put in place to accommodate the displaced cars?"

Reply

"The Council is likely to close the car park within the next month or so. However if, having taken advice from our structural engineers, it is feasible to continue to use part of the building, albeit with further reduced capacity, we will consider whether it would be worth while keeping the car park open longer bearing in mind anticipated changes to car park capacity in the city centre over the next few years. However it's worth noting that Friarsgate only provides 133 spaces and is not usually full except in the lead up to Christmas or during special events.

The overall impact on car parking availability of major projects in Winchester Town is currently being considered in terms of how this will be managed in the short term. This will involve maximising the use of park and ride, where there is capacity available for example, and looking at ways of changing how other car parks is currently used by drivers. The approach we are developing to managing parking provision in the centre does not therefore rely on keeping parking available at Friarsgate."



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QUESTION 18

From: Councillor Laming

To: The Portfolio Holder for Built Environment

“Following reductions in personnel, members have seen a deterioration in service provided by the Planning department. With over 4 weeks being taken for initial processing of applications, we are seeing a reduced time for consultation in some cases. This is a particular problem for applications such as those for phone masts where there are statutory limitations on timescales.

Is the portfolio holder looking to improve this current situation?”

Reply

“It is acknowledged that there have been some delays experienced in the registration and validation of planning applications by the Business Support Team but you can be assured that there has been no deterioration in the service provided by our planning officers. The delays in the administration within the Business Support Team has been caused by a number of factors including high workloads, staff turnover and absence but the level of resource allocated to the handling applications has not been reduced. These delays have impacted on the time available for planning officers to deal with cases and, in the one instance you make reference to caused a particular issue with the public consultation period. Hence the action taken to make sure all ward members and parish council were notified.

The problem has been recognised and steps are already being taken to improve the performance of the Business Support Team in this area, the staff absence within the team has been resolved with the team now back to full strength and the team management are continuing to work to improve performance and resume normal service.

Despite the delays in registration and validation, planning performance has held up reasonably well and case officers have managed delays by liaising with applicants and their agents and where necessary agreed extensions of time.”



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QUESTION 19

From: Councillor Evans

To: The Portfolio Holder for Built Environment

“Could the Portfolio Holder please give me an update on the progress of allocating Traveller/gypsy sites for the Local Plan?”

Reply

“The work that was undertaken as part of drafting the Local Plan included considering whether suitable sites could be identified to meet travellers’ needs. It did not prove possible to identify sufficient sites in the draft Local Plan and consultants have been commissioned, jointly with East Hampshire District Council and the South Downs National Park Authority, to assess potential sites.

Unfortunately the work has been delayed and the draft consultants report has not yet been received. This is due to a combination of factors including the larger than expected number of potential sites needing to be assessed, changes in personal at the consultancy, and delays in receiving advice from specialist consultees in the local authorities. These issues are being addressed and the expectation is that a draft report will be available in February 2015. This will enable its recommendations to be publicised and site allocations/policies to be developed for inclusion in the next consultation version of the Local Plan (due to be published in June/July 2015).”



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QUESTION 20

From: Councillor Scott

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing Services

“In the light of many new housing developments coming forward with ‘affordable housing’ as part of the scheme ie; Barton Farm and Pitt Manor, and the City Council's New Homes Delivery developments like the New Queen Head site in Stanmore coming through, can the Portfolio Holder reassure residents on the housing waiting list that they will be able to afford the rents?”

Reply

“The rent charged for developments undertaken by Registered Providers (RP’s) such as Barton Farm and Pitt Manor and funded via the national Affordable Housing Programme are set an affordable rent, which is defined by the Government as 80% of the local market level. The Council works with RP’s to ensure that rents are kept below this level especially larger family homes, additionally RP’s carefully assess the households ability to afford the rent before offering them the tenancy.

With regard to Council’s new homes programme rents are currently calculated based on the actual scheme costs, the rent that is set at a level that allows the scheme to break even over a 30 year period. In practice this has resulted in rents being charged between 57% and 70% of market value. At the lower end of the scale this relates favorably to existing Council rents.

The Council’s rent policy for its new homes programme is currently subject to review through the Housing Rents Informal Policy Group.”