

## **CABINET MEETING – 19 JUNE 2017**

### **AGENDA ITEM 3 – PUBLIC QUESTION TIME – ORDER IN WHICH THE CHAIRMAN OF CABINET WILL INVITE QUESTIONS BELOW RECEIVED IN WRITING IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING**

1. From Mr Akira to the Leader of the Council - Councillor Mrs Brown
2. Councillor Dendle to the Leader of the Council - Councillor Mrs Brown
3. Councillor Dendle to the Deputy Leader of the Council - Councillor Wensley
4. Councillor Dendle to the Leader of the Council - Councillor Mrs Brown

### **THE FULL DETAIL OF THE QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED IS DETAILED BELOW**

**NOTE:** The Chairman will:

- invite questions from members of the public who have submitted in writing their questions in line with the Council's Constitution;
- explain that the questions received will be answered by the appropriate Members of the Cabinet
- confirm that Public Question Time allows Members of the public to ask one question at a time
- state that questions will be invited in the order in which they have been received and that if there is time remaining from the 15 minutes allowed for Public Question Time, questioners will be allowed to ask a supplementary question.

### **QUESTION ONE**

**From Mr Akira to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown**

#### **Question**

Does Arun District Council consider the proposal of a Speakers Corner in Littlehampton to allow people the opportunity to express their opinions a viable enhancement to town affairs & advancement of democratic process?'

#### **Response**

Thank you for your question. I remember attending the Hyde Park Speakers Corner in London, on several occasions, and enjoyed listening to the speakers and debates. This has been checked with West Sussex County Council who confirmed that there is no requirement for licensing/permission from them for something like this.

Arun District Council licensing team has said the same.

Clearly if the events caused any kind of public nuisance then that becomes a police matter, but having a discussion/debate in public on a small scale would not

require a licence or permission and will also not require authority from this council meeting.

## **QUESTION TWO**

### **From Councillor Dendle to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown**

#### **Question**

You confirmed at the Overview Select Committee in a question put by Councillor Dingemans that you had no Contingency plans for an increase in housing in the Local Plan. If housing numbers substantially increase to more than 1200 per annum which I believe they might during the local plan inspection and bearing in mind you kept in position Councillor Bower in position when many thought he should go, will you take personal responsibility for that outcome?

#### **Response**

The reason why the Chairman of Overview Select Committee was informed that there wasn't a contingency plan to provide additional housing should the Local Plan Inspector consider more housing was necessary was because of a combination of factors.

Firstly, the Council has always determined the proposed level of housing according to the evidence available, whether that is the Objectively Assessed Needs assessment or other documents such as the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment. As you will be aware the required provision that the Council must seek to accommodate has increased rapidly in recent years.

Secondly, the Council is required to establish whether it can assist neighbouring Councils with their housing provision under the terms of the Duty to Co-Operate legislation.

Indeed the work this council has undertaken with other Councils in the area on strategic planning matters was recognised for its excellence by the Royal Town Planning Institute. Cllr Bower was chairman of relevant Strategic Planning Board at that time and the work he put into that was recognised as leading the way forward for other Councils and much admired by the Councils in our duty to cooperate area.

The cumulative effect of these factors has accounted for all of the strategic sites that had been identified as being potentially suitable for development. Furthermore, the Inspector would quite reasonably say that if we did have reserve sites, shouldn't these be brought forward to meet, either the 1250 homes that are still required to be identified on small sites as part of our current plans, or make a larger contribution to the needs of our neighbours.

I'm not sure if that is what you are suggesting - that Arun should be providing for even more housing? In reality we don't believe the evidence is there to support the provision of even more housing in Arun above what is currently planned for

and even the development industry recognise that they will collectively find it challenging to maintain the proposed delivery rates.

### **Supplementary Question**

I have asked if you are personally responsible and ask again for a 'yes' or 'no' answer to my initial question.

### **Supplementary Response**

Full Council took a vote on this, which included you, Councillor Dendle, and so the responsibility is shared with the whole of the Council.

## **QUESTION THREE**

### **From Councillor Dendle to the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Wensley**

#### **Question**

I note that in a recent write off of Sundry debts which were handled by an Individual Cabinet Member Decision. On enquiring with Officers it has become apparent that the policy for writing off sundry debts has not changed in over 9 years (a very long time), in fact the last time there was a review is when I held the position and I stood down in 2010! What efforts have you made to ensure officers innovate and improve the collection of outstanding debts?

#### **Response**

The policy and procedures for writing off debts was actually last reviewed in 2014.

I am satisfied that before any considering writing off any debt the procedure is followed. As a result, every debtor has received an invoice, reminder, final notice, a letter proposing legal action, legal action and a judgement against the individual.

Unfortunately, the issue of a County Court judgement does not necessarily mean payment is made and writing off the debt is always a last resort. The enforcement options we consider include

- a) An attachment of earnings (i.e. taken from the customers wages) IF they have a job.
- b) Seizure and selling of goods by an enforcement officer (Bailiff)
- c) A charge against their property if they are a house owner
- d) The use of the high Court sheriffs to obtain a payment arrangement or seize goods for sale

In many cases however the individuals have NO assets or NO job and the chances of success through enforcement is consequently sometimes very low.

To put the situation in perspective it is worth noting that in the year 2016 to 2017 the total amount of invoices raised was £6.110 million of which the total collected **to date** is £5.726m.

To answer the question about what action I am taking to ensure officers innovate and improve the collection of outstanding debts. Working with officers we are always seeking to improve but the total of write offs in 2016/17 amounted to £28,480 which equates to 0.47% of the total debt. This is a record that in my view is an enormous credit to the officers involved and one that many commercial companies and utilities would view with envy.

#### **QUESTION FOUR**

##### **From Councillor Dendle to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown**

###### **Question**

Officer pay has now been stagnate for over 5 years, many employees have become de-moralised by this situation, do you think it is time to give our employees an increase linked to Consumers prices index?

###### **Response**

Pay awards are considered annually by national negotiations with Trade Unions for all posts except that of the Chief Executive. The LGA (*Local Government Association*), of which we are a member, negotiates pay awards on behalf of the Council.

As a result, a 1% increase was agreed from April 2017. Officers also have annual spine point awards, unless they are on the maximum for their grade. With regard to the minimum wage, the Council is legally compliant.

To move to Local Pay could be viewed as undermining national negotiations. In addition, the national pay spine is currently under review in order to remain legally compliant with the National Living Wage.

Options are being developed with the working group and trade unions nationally and final proposals will form the basis to seek an agreement between the Employers and Trade Unions in due course.

It is anticipated that this review will result in increased costs to the pay bill and we would therefore not want to consider moving away from national negotiations while this work is ongoing and the impact of this review on the pay bill is unknown.

The outcome of the review is likely to be known in July 2017, and we will respond accordingly.

I know the difficulties our staff are having during this period of restraint. Despite this national issue, our staff work really hard to provide excellent services for the public.

Our Council performance, particularly our high public satisfaction results, confirms their hard work. In our residents' Spring Survey 2017, 73% are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the quality of our work. I would like to thank Arun District Council staff for their continued commitment to the Arun community.