

CABINET MEETING – 15 OCTOBER 2018

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

1. Questions 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 15 to From Mel Saunders to the Leader of the Council - Councillor Mrs Brown
2. Questions 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14 – 18 From Janis Bryan 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 or the Chairman of the Overview Select Committee
- confirm that Public Question Time allows Members of the public to ask one question at a time and that a maximum of one minute is allowed for each question.
- 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.

NOTE: In the absence of Mrs Bryan, the Chairman confirmed that the responses to her questions, as outlined below, would be sent to her in writing. In view of the number of questions submitted from Mr Saunders, Mrs Bryan's questions were circulated to the meeting but were not read out at the meeting.

QUESTION ONE

From Mel Saunders to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

What regular financial contribution did ADC make to the visitor experience as we believe that £20,000 of ADC funding was recently given to Look & Sea before its collapse?

Response

Arun was responsible for the establishment and original funding of the Look & Sea facility. With the exception of an annual grant for the Visitor Information Centre the expectation at the outset was that the trustees would and should have been able to operate a financial viable business which included the provision of the visitor centre. Indeed, given the Look & Sea has existed for over 15 years without a subsidy it is assumed that until recently the business was viable. The Council provided the additional £20,000 after a request from the trustees. The Council is clearly disappointed that despite this support the trustees were unable to operate a viable business.

QUESTION TWO

From Janis Bryan to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

If the Harbour Lights Café has been unable to balance its books, what possible confidence do you have than an enlarged restaurant over the whole building will be any more successful? Harbour Lights and the struggling West Beach Café already show how difficult it is to make money from catering businesses especially when the trade is likely to be seasonal, as it certainly is in Littlehampton.

Response

The Council has not had the opportunity to review the accounts and therefore it would be pure speculation to suggest why the business failed. However, what I can say is that almost within 24 hours of the news breaking of the businesses' closure, the Council was approached by various parties interested in running the facility. This doesn't appear to suggest that there is a lack of interest in running the facility. Subsequent specialist commercial advice has also indicated this to be the case.

QUESTION THREE

From Mel Saunders to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

What consideration has been made on keeping the tower and visitor centre open?

Response

It has been discussed and I am sure it will be debated again here tonight. Ultimately Cabinet will need to take a decision which it considers is best for residents of Arun as a whole.

QUESTION FOUR

From Janis Bryan to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

What steps have you taken, if any, to evaluate customer satisfaction around the excellent Tourist Information Centre?

Response

The unfortunate closure of the Look & Sea gives us an opportunity to explore different ways of getting information to visitors. I am sure those who used the Visitor Information Centre found the service helpful. However, that doesn't mean that this is the approach we should necessarily follow going forward.

QUESTION FIVE

From Mel Saunders to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

What does the cost/benefit analysis of the visiting school's spend in the Town show?

Response

This question presupposes that visiting schools will no longer visit the town. There is no evidence to suggest that the number of school visits will decline. What the recommendations in the report suggest is that material is created that can be used as an education resource which is not a fixed point. There is already an excellent museum in the town and I am sure they would welcome the extra footfall.

QUESTION SIX

From Janis Bryan to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

What leads you to think that tourism services hived off to local business partners plus an electronic offer will be more acceptable to the visiting public than the chance to speak to a trained tourism officer of their team at a central location? I can assure you that older visitors to the Town and people with physical impairments will not enjoy traipsing around the Town in search of a business that might or might not have the answer to a tourism question.

Response

The delivery of tourism services like many services changes with the times. I acknowledge that there will always be those who will want to ask someone in person but there are now many who are content to find out information from mobile devices.

QUESTION SEVEN

From Mel Saunders to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

What is the expected revenue loss to the Pier Road and other business (eg 3000 odd cod and chips and ice creams per annum)?

Response

I am unclear as to the purpose of your question. For example, some might argue that the closure of the Look & Sea would mean that visitors might seek out alternative establishments to buy food, which would obviously benefit those establishments along Pier Road. However, I believe those people would be in the minority and most want to see the café reopen as soon as possible.

QUESTION EIGHT

From Janis Bryan to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

If the tourism function is downgraded to a few computer screens and the chance to wander around Littlehampton in the rain to find information, will the business partners to whom the service is hived off be subject to any tourism quality standards or monitoring?

Response

At this time the report is seeking support for the principle of an alternative arrangement. The Council has yet to determine the exact form that any alternative arrangements might take.

QUESTION NINE

From Mel Saunders to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

Will the Council explain the latest auditor's reports on the two businesses?

Response

As far as I am aware the Council has not seen any such reports, but even if we had I believe that's more appropriate for those in control of the businesses to comment upon.

QUESTION TEN

From Janis Bryan to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

Who will service the machine supplying the electronic tourism offer and how will they be protected against vandalism?

Response

Your question assumes that an interactive screen will be provided. Whilst, this is a possibility, it is unlikely. Any provision is likely to be internet based.

QUESTION ELEVEN

From Mel Saunders to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

Has the option of leasing Harbour Lights and retaining visitor experience by selecting a caterer who would embrace the visitor experience as a separate entity been considered?

Response

It has but it is considered that requiring a leasee to provide the visitor experience would significantly reduce the number of potential operators who would turn their current interest into a firm bid to operate the facility.

QUESTION TWELVE

From Janis Bryan to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

Who will service the machine supplying the electronic tourism offer and how will they be protected against vandalism?

Response

Please see the response for Question 10.

QUESTION THIRTEEN

From Mel Saunders to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

Who is to fund the authorship and production of the Littlehampton Education material?

Response

Details of how the education material will be created and delivered will be determined once a decision is made tonight. In terms of funding it is proposed to use some of the £16k the Council set aside previously to subsidise the VIC.

QUESTION FOURTEEN

From Janis Bryan to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

The facilities at the Look & Sea have been a fantastic resource for local groups and individuals to use. I have attended beach warden training there; a maritime conference; and a celebration of the life of a dear friend. How will one business operating that restaurant over all floors be able to accommodate all those activities, or will alternative floor-space be made available for local groups to access elsewhere?

Response

Until we see the proposals of those who are submitting a tender we won't know exactly what they propose to deliver and how. There are many other places in the town who could offer similar meeting spaces.

QUESTION FIFTEEN

From Mel Saunders to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

Who will pay to devise, design, and launch and maintain the Littlehampton e-visitor information application?

Response

There are already several different platforms available such as Sussex by the Sea and Visit Littlehampton. Depending on the decision tonight, discussions will take place to determine how these might be enhanced.

QUESTION SIXTEEN

From Janis Bryan to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

Will the viewing platforms still be available to the public, or will people have to sit down to a meal before being allowed access?

Response

This will be a matter to discuss with any proposed operator of the facility.

QUESTION SEVENTEEN

From Janis Bryan to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

Since money has already been granted to the Tourist Information Centre for this financial year, why is it not allowed to stay open and provide a useful service until further notice? Visitors are still trying to use it.

Response

All the elements of the overall facility were operated by Look & Sea Ltd which as we know went into administration and has now folded. The sum of money available to run the VIC is considered insufficient to reopen this service. Furthermore, given the focus is on getting the café operational again, the Council doesn't wish to create any additional uncertainties and the sharing of utilities between the various parts falls into that area of risk.

QUESTION EIGHTEEN

From Janis Bryan to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

Does Arun District Council have a Tourism Policy? If so, where was it indicated that the Tourist Centre would abruptly close?

The Look & Sea has been a brilliant undertaking which I have gladly introduced guests and visitors to over the years. It seems as if it is being downgraded to simply a feeding stop, with barely the scantest regard for its educational function and the needs of tourists, and without considering whether the public want to see the changes that are being considered by the Cabinet.

Response

The Council hasn't sought this outcome. Indeed it provided £20,000 last December to help with the funding of the enterprise, a point that often gets forgotten. The Council finds itself in a position where it is left picking up the pieces from the inability of the trustees to run a viable business. The Council is keen that a new operator is in place as soon as possible because at present an empty building is of no benefit to anyone. The report that will be considered shortly considers that a single use for the whole building would be the most appropriate way of proceeding. This is what we will shortly be debating.