

SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING – 18 JUNE 2014

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. First Question from Mr Coster to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown
2. Second Question from Mr Coster 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. Chairman will explain that the questions received will be answered by the appropriate Members of the Cabinet or the Chairman of the Overview Select Committee. Chairman to 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. Chairman is to state that questions will be invited in the order in which they have been received.

QUESTION ONE

From Mr Coster to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

Reference the proposed Bognor Regis regeneration plans, in November 2013 you stated that St Modwen believed it could achieve pre-lets by "early 2014". As we are now MID 2014, has a cinema operator been signed up yet and also have any tenants for the bars and restaurants been signed up? If any have been, can you please tell us who they are? Or if they have not, why not?

You also stated that St Modwen would be required to undertake further public consultation. How is all this to be fitted in prior to their planning application deadline which you stated as 31st December 2014? Or are you planning to extend their deadline yet again? And can you also please confirm that Arun District Council is not considering any form of new subsidy to these proposals in any form, financial, property or otherwise?

Response

Thank you Mr Coster for your question. The St Modwen proposal, as you know, is both large and complex. The Council must ensure it gets the best arrangement it can for the District and, therefore, such matters cannot be rushed. When there is something to be reported to Council, it will be, not before. When the matter is reported to Council, timescales will be clarified then. Similarly with regard to any financial agreement.

Supplementary Question

Can you please answer my question which has a cinema operator been signed up and if there are tenants, who are they and if this is not the case, why has this not been achieved?

Response to Supplementary Question

It is for St Modwen to sign up the pre-lets and I repeat that when the Council has matters ready to be reported on, then they will be and at the earliest opportunity.

QUESTION TWO

From Mr Coster to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown

Question

Reference your Corporate Peer Challenge, which is supposed to independently assess Arun's performance, how can this have any value whatsoever when you manipulate who the Peer Challenge team speak to and who they don't? I queried the value of this operation with the LGA and was told that they have no control over who they interview as to Arun District Council's performance, as the interviewees are selected by yourselves.

Unsurprisingly, although they were supposed to be interviewing residents about your performance, the largest residents group in the largest town in the district, namely Bognor Regis Civic Society, was conveniently ignored, probably in favour of the Arun-instigated Brighter Bognor, with a membership of two. Or maybe the Arun-instigated and funded Town Centre Traders whose Facebook page shows a membership of three. This seems to be yet another Arun-manipulated sham to falsely make yourselves look good. Please explain why you excluded the Civic Society from this procedure.

Response

The Peer Challenge is a voluntary process. One that I am pleased we decided to partake in to help improve the Council and to learn from the experience of others. As the report to be discussed later will confirm, the Peer Team spoke to more than 60 people, including staff, Councillors, external partners and local residents. They collectively spent 220 hours to determine their findings, the equivalent of one person spending more than 6 weeks in Arun District Council!

The key partners included the University of Chichester, the Police, Age UK, Chichester District Council, Horsham District Council and West Sussex County Council. The team met with 11 members of the public through our Wavelength Panel. They also met 14 council tenants.

No pre-briefings or instructions were given to any partners, stakeholders, Councillors or member of staff and all direct responses were retained confidentially by the LGA Peer Review Team. That is, nobody was prepared to answer any questions in a particular way. All of the external contacts were identified as people who came into contact with the Council on a very regular basis and would, therefore, have a better understanding of the focus of the review – Customer Access. We knew from the outset that the outcome of the Review would be a public document and we voluntarily brought in an experienced LGA Review Team to tell us how we are doing and where we can improve.

In terms of numbers, I do not know the exact number of members the Civic Society has but the Bognor Observer regularly notes 25 to 30 people attending your monthly meetings. In comparison, Arun District Council deals with most of its many partners directly, on almost a daily or weekly basis. Our Wavelength Panel geographically represents the adult population of the whole District. They are recruited by an independent market research agency. The research company contacted a 'representative' 18,000 plus households and individuals on the Panel are recruited from those contacts. We have 4,500 tenants who, again, select their own representatives on their association. On this basis, the Civic Society was not selected.

Supplementary Question

The number of people attending Civic Society meetings is irrelevant as the Society has a membership of up to 250 people with around 1,000 people being registered on our circulation list. On this basis I believe that the Society did qualify to be interviewed by the Peer Review Team and so I ask you again why the Society was excluded from taking part in the Peer Review challenge?

Response to Supplementary Question

I congratulate your Society on achieving its membership numbers but reiterate what I confirmed earlier as part of my response in that all of the external contacts interviewed had been identified as people who the Council came into contact with on a very regular basis and so they would have a better understanding of the focus of the review which was customer access.