

FULL COUNCIL MEETING – 5 NOVEMBER 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 **CABINET MEMBER VERSION**

1. From Mr Chester 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 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 Chester to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Brown (the Committee Manager read out the question to the meeting in the absence of Mr Chester

In the recent job advertisement for the post of members' communications officer a part of the job description reads 'to minimise the impact of difficult or sensitive decisions which could affect the reputation of the Council.'

What safeguards are put in place to balance this with the requirement in the Council's constitution that 'all officers must treat political groups and individual members in a fair and even handed manner. Officers must maintain political neutrality and members must respect this'?

Response

The wording in the advertisement expresses one of the skills candidates should be able to demonstrate. Local Authorities like many other public bodies have on occasions the role of dealing with difficult and/or sensitive decisions. How that information is given to the public is important so that the communication is clear, factual and timely.

Full Council sets the policies, strategies and budget for the Council's future work. Officers provide information to enable Elected Members to make informed decisions on matters that comprise the subsequent business of the Council. This information is generally provided in the form of reports or briefing notes to the Councillors. Those reports set out the officer advice on the subject in hand, the suggested recommendations for a way forward with the reasons why based on professional guidance and technical restraints. There is then a separate section in the report where the other options for Council or, its delegated decision makers, to take into account in reaching a decision. Officers take no part in party politics or political meetings.

As Mr Chester was not present at the meeting to hear the response, it was agreed that the Committee Manager would email this to him.