

FULL COUNCIL MEETING – 11 JANUARY 2017

**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. From Mr Dixon to the Leader of the Council - Councillor Mrs Brown
2. From Mr Chester to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Infrastructure
- Councillor Bower
3. Mr Walter to the Leader of the Council – Councillor Mrs Brown
4. From Mr Dixon to the Leader of the Council - Councillor Mrs Brown
5. 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;
- 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.

QUESTION ONE

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

Question

Do you agree with me that keeping an underperforming cabinet member in office constitutes weak leadership?

Response

Yes and I am so grateful that I don't have an under-performing Cabinet Member.

QUESTION TWO

From Mr Chester to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Infrastructure, Councillor Bower

Question

In March 2004 Arun Cabinet considered the Total Access Demand scheme from WSCC designed to obtain payments from developers to offset inadequate parking provision. It decided not to sign up but resolved to review the decision in six months based on the experience of other Districts. In an FOI response I have been told no details of any review or report have been located? Did the review happen?

Response

Thank you for your question.

Officers of the Council undertook a search of what records remain for that period but could find no record of a review. That is not to say that one didn't take place but equally there are no records to say that one did take place. Officers and myself recall that informal discussions regarding this issue did take place between 2009 and 2010, however there are no records of these discussions and no formal review was undertaken.

Between 2005 and now the Council has secured a total of approximately £13 m in highway contributions in addition to a number of high profile road improvements including the Bersted and Felpham relief roads, Angmering Bypass and the soon to be constructed A284 improvements here in Littlehampton and the A259 improvements between Angmering and Ferring.

The Council approach has always been to work with the County Council to address specific highway issues rather than secure contributions to a generic highway fund as this provides for a clearer relationship between development and the highway problem it can help to solve.

QUESTION THREE

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

Question

In connection with the proposal to award the Chief Executive Officer a pay increase significantly above inflation, does the Leader of the Council

- Accept that the achievement of targets and objectives by the Chief Executive Officer was not done without the hard work and commitment of the whole of the Council workforce
- Confirm that nonetheless the Council has refused to support reasonable pay claims on behalf of the rest of the workforce
- Understand the anger of staff when they feel undervalued by their employer, despite the Council's expressed views that they do value staff
- Reject Councillor Chapman's statement that staff receive increments annually and accept that more than 2/3rds of staff currently receive no incremental progression, and that the purpose of incremental progression is in any event intended to commence staff at below the rate for the job, with full rate for the job only paid at the top of the pay scale
- Understand that part-time staff on minimum wage rates employed by the contractor who provides cleaning services to the Council will in many cases receive a total wage less than the pay increase awarded to the Chief Executive
- And explain how the Government which she supports can maintain that we are all in this together, when clearly we aren't.

Response

In responding to the question from Mr Walter I would like to point out that the recommendation on remuneration for the Chief Executive is the result of an agreed and transparent process as set out in the Constitution which was previously approved by Full Council.

I fully recognise that the achievements of the Council and therefore the Chief Executive would not have all happened without the hard work and commitment of the Council workforce. However, it is important to acknowledge the strategic role and effective leadership needed by those who manage the organisation at the most senior level, specifically the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive is the head of paid service and most senior officer who ultimately is held to account

by Members and others for the strategic direction and performance of the Council. I am sure that most people recognise how difficult it is to balance the needs and expectations of staff, Members, the local community, partners and others, with ever decreasing resources. In addition the Chief Executive has the unique officer role within the Council of taking personal responsibility for not only his own actions, but those of everybody who works for the Council. I am not a Member of the Chief Executive Remuneration Committee, but I understand that the individual and unique nature of this role was a key factor in the recommendation of the Chief Executive Remuneration Committee.

Arun District Council remains part of the national pay negotiating machinery for Local Government staff. This Council, along with all other Councils who accept the national pay negotiations, is consulted by the national employers representatives during these negotiations when the National Employers are considering what offer they will be making to the staff side. We do respond when asked, on what is considered affordable based on the Councils current Medium Term Financial Forecast. We fully value the contribution of our staff, but like other public sector organisations we are constrained by the available funding to the Council and have to live within our means. To do otherwise, would in my opinion seriously undermine the sustainability of our future staffing structure and potentially place more staff at risk of redundancy than we might otherwise have to do. I am sure that this is not something Unison would wish to see occur locally.

The statement by a Member at the Chief Executive Remuneration Committee meeting about incremental progression was made. The Council budgets for progression to the top of grade for all staff. I most certainly do not accept that the long standing principle of short incremental salary scales are a means to pay below the full rate for the job. Indeed in agreement with Unison over many years the evaluation of jobs and the shortening of the number of increments in each grade has been accepted nationally. The implementation of equal pay audits and job evaluation over more than a decade ago has ensured that there is no age discrimination caused by longer grade increments. This accepted principle of incremental progression attempts to ensure that whilst a newly appointed member of staff is paid the basic 'rate for the job', incremental progression ensures that there will be limited recognition over a short number of years as they gain experience. Due to the relatively low turnover of staff in the last few years I agree that that around two thirds of our staff are currently at the top of their scale.

What our contractors decide to pay their staff is a matter for each of them, not the Council. I am however advised that the office cleaning contractor pays an hourly rate of £7.20/hour which is the National Living Wage. This service went through a competitive tendering exercise and each bidder made their own judgement on what level to pitch their hourly rate so that they could recruit and retain sufficient experienced staff to perform to the contractual obligations set by this Council.

Finally, yes, I do support the Prime Minister's intention to make this country a fairer and more inclusive place to live. I am sure that in due course the Prime Minister will bring forward a variety of proposals setting out how she intends to deliver change and how we all can support and contribute this Government's objective.

QUESTION FOUR

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

Question

I understand that the Chief Executive of Arun District Council has been recommended for a near 6% salary increase by Councillors, at a time when salary reviews for his own staff are pegged at much lower levels and council services face huge cuts. Wage levels across the district are abysmal.

If we measure earnings by place of work i.e. for those working in the district but not necessarily living in the district, the gross weekly pay figure for full time workers is £415.20. Source: Nomis.

Arun has the lowest average wage in West Sussex; Adur £470.30, Crawley £595.10, Horsham £520.60, Mid Sussex £501.30, Chichester £506.90, and Worthing £452.70.

The South East average is 36% higher than Arun, at £566.00.

The Great Britain average is 30% higher than Arun, at £540.20.

Arun is the second worst in the entire south east region after Thanet with £414.50. That makes Arun 66th out of 67 local authorities.

The low wage levels explain, in part, why something like 27% of Arun people have to out-commute each day to find better paid employment.

Running a Council is not just about imposing cuts and suppressing staff wages, it's also about setting out a strategy to address the problems we face.

Does the Council have a credible strategy to drive up wage levels across the district? If so, what is it? ... and where can we the public read it?

If not, then will the Council lead by example and reject this pay increase – at least until such time as it has developed a credible earnings strategy for the entire district?

Response

Workplace earnings in Arun are considered low when compared to our regional neighbours. This is primarily because our key business sectors of Tourism, Health & Care and Horticulture, usually offer lower wages and on less favourable terms and conditions. Our other key / growth sector of knowledge based manufacturing offers better rates of pay and is a sector that we wish to encourage and develop. The Council is keen to encourage higher value jobs to the area and we were delighted when Rolls Royce Motor Cars opened their new Technology and Logistics Centre at Enterprise Bognor Regis earlier this year.

The Council has two key strategy documents that guide our economic growth proposals. The 'Open for Business' document that sets out Arun's vision to improve the local economy and the Arun Place Plan. Both documents are available on the Arun District Council Website. The objectives of the Arun Place Plan which has been agreed by this Council is to clearly identify the Arun economic growth offer, to deliver higher GVA, jobs, homes and employment space. We are developing a joint approach between education and skill providers and industry employers to establish gaps in skills and develop an approach to grow priority sectors such as digital, creative, IT and advanced manufacturing/engineering, tourism and healthcare.

We recognise that there are high levels of out-commuting of skilled working age residents. Arun has a relatively high proportion of 'professional and managerial' people living in the District who are attracted to live here because of the better quality housing stock and lower house prices but often continue to work in the higher paid urban centres such as Brighton and Crawley. We clearly wish to support inward investment and the development and creation of higher value jobs, which we hope will alleviate the out-commuting problems.

Whilst we are working really hard with West Sussex County Council and other partners including the LEP to improve our economic growth offer, research from the University of Chichester has found that the Southern rail strikes have cost the UK hundreds of millions of pounds and has had a big impact on this area. This is extremely worrying and the findings of their report calculated the huge economic cost to the thousands of commuters who were delayed or missed getting to work altogether and put the impact on the economy at about £11M for every day. We need this dispute to be resolved quickly as it is affecting business opportunities in the District and the County and may be influencing companies not to invest.

The Council cannot dictate the level of earnings locally but can influence and encourage higher value jobs and employers coming into area. We can do this by creating the right conditions for businesses to expand and relocate by providing high quality and readily available employment sites such as Enterprise Bognor Regis, to support their future business growth plans and a workforce that meets their needs and this is what we are already doing and will continue to do.

QUESTION FIVE

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

Question

Motions for debate are the only clearly defined opportunity for opposition members to have items of concern discussed. How can it be right to allow properly submitted motions to be refused consideration if the Chief Executive and Chairman consider an agenda 'full'?

Response

Thank you for your question.

The recommendation put forward by the Constitutional Review Task and Finish Working Party was proposed to enable, when appropriate, priority be given to dealing with the business on the Agenda for a meeting where the Agenda is full, or the meeting is subject specific and the Motion on Notice is in the view of the Chairman of the Council to be not urgent or does not relate to the specific business on the agenda for the meeting.

The proposals give the Chairman the authority to decide if a Motion should or should not be accepted for a particular meeting of the Council. The Motion will still be considered but at a later date.