

COUNCIL MEETING – 11 MAY 2022

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 14.3

**Q1 Councillor Coster to the Chair of the Policy & Finance Committee,
Councillor Gunner**

Q1 I would like to know your own personal view, as Chair of Policy and Finance, and the view of your Conservative Group who usually vote *en bloc*, Cllr Gunner, on the item in the 17 March 2022 Housing and Wellbeing meeting re the approval of the increased budget for the proposed new Integrated Housing Management system. For the record ALL the committee members who are in your group – five of them - voted in favour of a budget increase from £600,000 to £1.2 million. But what about you Cllr Gunner, as Chair of Policy and Finance, are you in favour of the scheme and its budget increase, and are ALL the members of your group in favour of it? And if you personally are in favour of it please tell me your reasons why. But if you and/or your group are not in favour of it, what action will you take?

Please don't tell me you don't know, or say you are only the Leader and it is the committee that decides. It's your job to know, and you are paid public money to know, £6038 as Leader, not to mention £5004 as Policy and Finance Committee Chair and £1651 as Economy Committee Vice Chair, all of them special responsibility allowances, plus £5631 basic allowance - £18,324 in total. So, failing to provide a proper answer to the question is not an option, and I should be grateful for a clear answer now.

A1 I am in favour and I believe a cross party group of Councillors did vote in favour at that meeting and at no point was there any direction from me or Councillor Pendleton to vote in favour of this. As a council we are here to deliver public services including to our thousands of tenants in our council owned properties. The previous Liberal Democrat independent cabinet approved the scheme but now we have had a chance to look at it and as it is reported in a report going to the Housing & Wellbeing Committee next week, the original budget did not meet the aspirations of this council or its residents. The new system, which is needed, will deliver real and tangible improvements for the residents working on areas such as the speed of repairs, housing swaps and rent recovery. This is not just a technical item in terms of money, it is how we deliver what is right for the council and right for its residents and so I am happy to support it.

Supp

Q Thank you for your response and for confirming that you are in favour of the proposal. It is clear that some, or if not all, of your Conservative Group are in favour of this proposal. The figure has doubled from the original estimate of £600,000 to £1.2 m and even more with no objection from anybody, yet although you are so enthusiastic about it all you all originally voted against it. What is going on, please explain. At Full Council on 13 January when the estimated cost was £600k, all your Group present, twenty of them in a recorded vote, voted *en bloc*, what is going on?

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A I am not entirely clear what I am being asked. In terms of what is going on, I have just explained what is going on. Clearly there were concerns from the then opposition, when you were in Cabinet, some of those concerns have been realised in the report, but ultimately what we need to do is to have an IT system that delivers for residents. I mentioned in my previous answer, we supported because we want to ensure that we are delivering for residents and I understand in the coming weeks this will be going out for consultation with residents about what their concerns are and how the IT system can better deliver on those concerns.

Q2 Councillor Coster to the Chair of the Economy Committee, Councillor Cooper

Q2 I am pleased to note from your Economy Committee meeting on 29 March that you are addressing the matter of installing additional beach huts in the Arun District to provide much needed income for the Council. 17 are proposed at Littlehampton, I understand, although I also understand from an officer's report that we have a waiting list of over 200 people.

For 17 huts, from the officer's report it appears that the cost per hut is some £10,921, although it also indicates that they would be cheaper if ordered in greater numbers. Can you please tell me how much per hut it would be if we ordered 50 of them? Please ignore any re-design issues for the moment, and just focus on the regular basic huts.

Also, can you please tell me when those 17 huts are likely to be installed and providing income? I appreciate that there are accessibility and re-design issues to be dealt with, not to mention planning consent, but would they, say, be providing income by the beginning of the 2023 season? Or would it be later than that and, if so, when?

And finally, I am given to understand that there are many further potential sites for beach huts in the District. How many have been identified and for how many huts, what steps have been taken to exploit them, and when, as a rough estimate, could they be in place and providing income?

And please don't try to excuse yourself by saying you're only the Chairman. For that honour you receive a special responsibility allowance of £5004 on top of your regular allowance of £5631 – some £10,635 of public money, so it's your job to know the answers and to be ensuring that your committee is addressing the right issues in a proper manner. I should therefore be grateful if you would provide clear answers.

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A2 I thank Cllr Coster for his question. The Councillor's insistence that the question is answered by the Chair of the committee at a full Council meeting is a failure on his part to appreciate how the committee system works. This is understandable as we are still in transition.

Beach Huts comes under the terms of reference of the Economy committee. The role of the economy committee is to performance manage the work relating to the beach huts. Therefore, I will ask officers to submit a progress report to the Economy committee and to incorporate answers to your questions.

Supp

Q Thank you for your response Councillor Cooper and you say that your Committee does performance manage this work and so why is it taking you so long to bring this matter before your Committee and get it moving. It is a complete lack of performance which you admit this is what you and your Committee are supposed to be managing. Are you aware that this delay has cost the council over £100,000. I could explain why this is, but it is quite clear to me that the Chair will not allow me to do so. The fact remains that because you failed to bring this before the Committee, for 10 months you have failed to address the issue to get these beach huts on site within a reasonable period of time, you have failed to bring this before your Committee about the further 50 sites that are available and could have been up and running by now but now will not be up and running until 2024. That has cost the council in revenue of £100,000 and more. Why has this delay been so long to get this issue moving?

Supp

A Responding to concerns of delay, I can tell you now that the workload that officers are under delivering what you see as minor and trivial is not the case. Our officers are under extreme workloads and that includes delivering what you would see as a minor thing such as beach huts and revenue for this council. They move forward at pace, and we support them. The pace may seem slow to you, but they are under enormous pressure. You may not like that but if you came to the understanding of where we are you would appreciate that a little but more. This is my answer.

Q3 **Councillor Coster to the Chair of the Environment Committee, Councillor Edwards**

Q3 Re the Place St Maur, Bognor Regis. When the improvement works on this site commenced, we were given to understand that the intention was that the completed site would be ready by Easter this year.

However, there is clearly still some way to go with this as it still looks like a building site, which is a shame for holidaymakers visiting so far. Please can you tell us all when the works will be finally completed.

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In addition, it was understood that sufficiently powerful electrical supply would be built in to power the Christmas Ice Rink, as it was felt that our carbon neutrality policy did not fit well with encouraging the use of the Ice Rink's powerful and polluting diesel generators there. Has that supply been installed, and if not, why not?

A3 I thank Councillor Coster for his question. The Councillor's insistence that the question is answered by me at a full Council meeting is a failure on his part to appreciate how the committee system works. This is understandable as we are still in transition.

The Place St Maur comes under the terms of reference of the Environment Committee. The role of the Environment committee is to performance manage the work relating to this project. Therefore, I will ask officers to submit a progress report to the Environment Committee and to incorporate answers to your questions.

Supp

Q The task for Councillor Edwards and his Committee is to performance manage the work of the Committee and this demonstrates a failure on his part to understand the term performance and the word manage. He does not seem to know when this will be completed as he has not said and cannot provide any detail at all about the electricity supply provided for the ice rink. Proper detailed answers are required for my two questions or if he cannot respond can he provide us with an explanation as to why he should continue in his post as Chair of this Committee when he plainly has so little grasp on what it should be doing.

Supp

A I have answered your question. Although you may not like the answer it is that the Environment Committee will receive a report from Officers detailing the answers to your question.

Q4 **Councillor Coster to Chair of the Environment Committee, Councillor Edwards regarding the ecological considerations and to the Chair of the Planning Policy Committee, Councillor Bower regarding the planning considerations**

Q4 Natural England has previously advised 32 LPAs that, where protected sites are in unfavourable condition due to excess nutrients, development should only go ahead if it will not cause additional pollution to sites. In March 2022, Natural England advised a further 42 Local Planning Authorities that their areas are covered by this advice.

The advice from Natural England means that new residential development must achieve 'nutrient neutrality'. It has had a significant negative impact on the number of homes granted planning permission in areas already affected.

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In Arun we have protected sites, notably Pagham Harbour, where the Southern Water WWTW is known to have been frequently discharging untreated effluent into the ecosystem, and there are similar problems in other parts of our District.

Have we been in touch with Natural England for their advice as to whether we should put the brakes on development where problems are known to exist? Or if we have not, what steps are we currently taking to ensure that we are achieving nutrient neutrality throughout the District, and if we have none in hand, what steps are we taking to ensure that we will be achieving nutrient neutrality as soon as possible?

A4 Councillor Edwards responded as Chair of the Environment Committee.

The Councillor will be aware that each planning application is considered on its merits and that Natural England is a statutory consultee who is expected to give advice on a site by site basis. As you will know the general advice given by Natural England is good guidance to developers to know which of their sites are likely to comply with Natural England Advice.

Supp

Q I thank for Councillor Edwards for the response, but it makes little sense as he aware NE is a statutory consultee to all planning authorities, including all those advised of the problems that exist so this is a red herring because NE is talking to all Local Authorities. With the well known waste water discharge and consequential pollution at Pagham Harbour and two other authorities are being advised by NE being Chichester District Council and the South Downs National Park, both discharge water through our district and so I am surprised that Councillor Edwards is not treating this matter with the seriousness it deserves. I am asking Councillor Edwards, in conjunction with Councillor Bower, as Chair of the Planning Policy Committee, if they will both immediately commit to getting in touch with NE for an urgent detailed assessment and commitment to an assessment of all current development sites to establish if work should stop until nutrient neutrality has been achieved.

Supp

A I have already answered your repeat question and I have nothing further to add.