

COUNCIL MEETING – 19 SEPTEMBER 2018

Question 1 to be put to Councillor Ross by Councillor Cenci

Councillor Cenci: At the South West Area Committee meeting 12th July, the Leader of the Council stated that he had only just been advised of drug and knife problems in Grebe Close area, despite incidents being reported to both the police and council for several years. Could the Portfolio Holder advise if he, at least, was aware of these issues at that time on 12th July?

Councillor Ross: Thank you for the questions Councillor Cenci. I wasn't aware then, but I am aware of the case now and as you may not know there was meeting of residents held on 27th July along with our MP Sandy Martin, the police and councillors. An action plan was put in place. A number of issues have now been dealt with, some obviously I can't mention in a public meeting but am willing to discuss with you afterwards. And there are other measures being taken by the council itself.

Councillor Cenci: If that is the case then would the portfolio holder tell us why, (1) he wasn't, he doesn't think he was advised of these problems as they have been reported for several years to the council and (2) what he will do about it in future to ensure that he is always kept up to date.

Councillor Ross: Thank you Councillor Cenci. If we look at just at the tenancy support and enforcement team, as this obviously was involving council housing, we're currently dealing with over 50 cases of anti-social behaviour across the town varying from alleged drug dealing (and the word "alleged" obviously is quite important here) to noise and harassment. Cases would not be routinely escalated to myself, or either of the housing portfolio holder, or the leader or even the ward councillors unless there was specific reason that they believed this issue needed to be dealt with by them.

We're only informed that when there are major issues or long term ones. I think some times we're actually not aware of how many issues our officers deal with, brilliantly in most cases, especially to around social behaviour and other offences in the town. Thank you.

Question 2 to be put to Councillor Jones by Councillor Lockington

Councillor Lockington: Given that the Head of Development was authorised to refuse planning permission in the event that the legal agreement on the land north & south of the railway between Westerfield Road & Henley Road has not been completed within the period of 6 months, or any other such agreed timescales, as the requirements necessary to make the development acceptable has not been secured through a S106 agreement Planning Obligation. Could the Portfolio holder for planning outline how close the planning application are to be agreed in time or might it be refused?

Councillor Jones: I'm going to read this out and happy to answer supplementary questions, so The Ipswich Garden Suburb project is clearly a key component of future delivery of housing in Ipswich and it's obviously enormous. We have over a 1,000 houses to the north of the railway line with Crest, and over 800 in the one south – the CBRE one - so it is enormous and it's obvious complex because they are all knitted together in one, essentially.

So our officers are continuing to work with the developers and the county council towards issuing approvals for the two IGS Ipswich Garden Suburb applications, and whilst approvals have not yet been issued, they're continuing to discuss and are moving towards a conclusion though sadly I can't give you the likely date, Councillor Lockington.

It should be noted that the resolutions that we made in the planning committee did not require the head of development to refuse the applications after six months, I am told here, and I've no reason to believe it's not the case.

Councillor Lockington: What has been, or will be the most difficult legal agreement to agree on through the S106 obligations?

Councillor Jones: What will be the most difficult? Well I suppose the obvious one to go to is any affordable housing and in a way that rests in the lap of national policy and what we're able, under the procedures we're obliged to follow, to get, so if I could say we would get 20% I'd be overjoyed. I'd be overjoyed at the minute to get 5%, so I'd say affordable housing.

Question 3 to be put to Councillor Ross by Councillor Pope

Councillor Pope: What is the mean time that those phoning the Council's main number are kept on hold and what is the longest, both over the past 12 months?

Councillor Ross: Thank you for the question Councillor Pope. As you'll know, I'm very proud of the actual team and do sort of push that all councillors spend a bit of time there and you can see the sort of calls they take.

In answer to your question the average time over the last 12 months is 3 minutes and 37 seconds, although in the month just gone (August) its down to 2 minutes 39 seconds.

The maximum time is just under 42 minutes, which occurred in May 2018.

Councillor Pope: Is 42 minutes acceptable, given that many of the people phoning that line are on low incomes and possibly on "pay as you go" phones and they're being charged for that amount of time?

Councillor Ross: As you can see by the average time of 3 minutes and 37 seconds, 41 minutes and a few seconds is actually quite exceptional and obviously a number of calls like that and our average wouldn't be a low as it is. But there will be issues and concerns and we're pushing teams when we have. Obviously we've had the move from the Customer Service Centre to Grafton, we've had some sickness issues which have affected many departments in the summer and obviously the main two issues we've had is the implementation of Universal Credit and the Homeless Reduction Act, which has caused more work for our team but with a lot of training, dedicated work, we've still kept the average time below 4 minutes which I think is something to be very proud of. Thank you.

Mayor (Councillor Riley): Question 4 was to be a question from Councillor Phillips to Councillor Rudkin. Councillor Rudkin has not yet appeared. Councillor Ellesmere is this something you might be able to reply, or is this something that might be dealt better by a written response?

Councillor Ellesmere: Can I suggest we wait to see whether Councillor Rudkin turns up before the end of the Questions, and if she's not here, it's a written response.

Mayor (Councillor Riley): Are you happy with that? Thank you.

Question 5 to be put to Councillor MacDonald by Councillor Cenci

Councillor Cenci: What is the average time it takes to carry out repairs for each of the urgent and non-urgent requests in Ipswich Borough Council homes, from the date of the request to commencement of repairs, & what is the longest time for both over the past 12 months?

Councillor MacDonald: Thank you madam Mayor and thank you for your question Councillor Cenci. The Council undertook nearly 20,000 repairs in the last financial year. 98% were completed on time and the key reasons for those outside the target time include access denied to the property, customer requesting appointments beyond the target completion date and a lack of specialist parts or materials.

And I have many statistics, but I'll just take you through urgent and planned. So an urgent repair is defined as being within 5 working days and the average is 4.5 days and the longest was 28 days, and that one is listed because of a supplier shortage of joinery components. And for planned works the target is 60 days and we do that in an average of 32.9 days and in that case the longest was 69 days – and in that case it was because the works was phased due to health and safety reasons.

Question 6 to be put to Councillor M Cook by Councillor Xhaferaj

Councillor Xhaferaj: I note from the Council's new People Strategy, that it encourages employees to join a recognised Trade Union. Please advise what the Council is doing to encourage staff to join, is there a cost to the Council & how is this promoted to new starters in their induction?

Councillor M Cook: Yes, thank you for the question councillor. First of all the council provides access to all employees - via the IBC Intranet - to the Unison website which gives the details of member benefits and a mechanism for joining. We also have on our own website and on the Intranet, a Union overview that details the unions that are recognised at IBC, who the representatives and contacts are and so on, and that's under the staff benefits section.

With the payroll, we provide an option for employees to pay their subs directly to the union of their choice by way of a monthly deduction to their salary, and we engage regularly with unions and enable promotional advertising to be displayed on notice boards and so on around the buildings and we also enable unions to conduct promotional recruitment sessions onsite.

In terms of the promotion of union membership at induction sessions that you specifically asked about, up until now we haven't seen union representatives at those sessions, although leaflets and printed materials from the unions are available to be distributed there.

In terms of the cost to the council, as far as the promotional activities go, there are no specific costs, although of course subsequently if a member of staff signs up to a union, there are some ongoing costs although these are typically fixed in terms of union facility time and so on and so forth. I would say that I don't think there is anything different here today, to how it was 10 years ago under the previous administration or probably even before that. There's nothing new here, there's nothing changed, even though it's referred to in the People Strategy, it's kind of a long standing policy of the council.

But the other thing that I'm sorry you didn't ask about in the question was what the benefits to the council of having an engaged workforce who are members of recognised trade unions are and I think that the engagement that we get with unions in terms of consultation on strategies and so on, is a benefit and I think we should recognise that, although it seems some on the otherside there don't want to hear that. Thank you.

Councillor Xhaferaj: Does the portfolio holder agree with me that it would be unfair for the council to indirectly fund one political party over another?

Mayor Councillor Riley: Councillor Cook, are you happy to reply?

Councillor Cook: Yes, thank you madam Mayor. I think as people are muttering murmuring it doesn't seem to be related to the question. We're talking about trade unions here, not political parties, and there surely is a distinction there.

Mayor (Councillor Riley): Councillor Rudkin do you want to answer question 4 or would you like a few more minutes to gather yourself? Okay, so question 4 is Councillor Phillips to Councillor Rudkin.

Question 4 to be put to Councillor Rudkin by Councillor Phillips

Councillor Phillips: How do you rate the success of the i-cards free pilot for young people in the summer? Have you ascertained a likely cost of the scheme and are there any learning points that you have determined if a similar scheme runs in the future?

Councillor Rudkin: My apologies, madam Mayor for not being here exactly on time.

We think that the summer i-card offer was a success. There are approximately 13,000 i-cards issued and the visitor numbers at the centres increased by approximately 13% as a comparison with the same period last year.

You'll appreciate that a lot of work is still being done to finalise the costs for the offer, as the school holidays carried on until only two weeks ago. And those costs will be finalised as part of the usual monthly budgeting monitoring in October.

There were lots of learning points, and indeed one of the things that we might want to look at is how many people do take them up now, and going on into October. Obviously we can't comment on things that haven't happened yet, but some of that learning will come this half-term coming, the February half-term. The February half-term is normally the one in which we have the most usage so it'll be interesting to see what happens in October and then again in February.

In particular we want to know what our customers think, and whether their habits changed frankly, so again that's an ongoing piece of work and we'll be doing that, and we want to learn from staff as well as to what they thought was successful and where they thought the issues were.

Some of the longer term examples that we've already identified would be an increase already that we've had in those subscriptions and I hear that Ravenswood Community Primary School have told parents that they will fund a 3-months extension of the card for their pupils if they want to continue participating, which is really interesting, and we're wanting to explore this further, if other schools are interested, and we're talking to the county council about those children who are not in formal school settings as well.

Councillor Phillips: As in the first quarter there was a £40,000 shortfall because of in i-cards income, are you concerned that that might be continuing into the second quarter, and will this have an impact? And secondly, would you agree wherever a learning point be at the Crown Pools where there are lots of regular customers, i.e. adults complaining that some of the young people who were there were there for unlimited periods of time so in other

words would you consider putting on time restrictions for the youngsters for those sessions?.

Councillor Rudkin: Thank You. I think there will be a cost but I think we think that that cost was worth it because it wasn't a cost that didn't provide anything, it was clearly, hopefully changed the lives of some young people in our town who've had access to facilities they wouldn't have had.

And for your second supplementary question, yes, indeed we might consider looking at timings. One of the things that we learnt this summer was that in fact that the younger demographic was using the pool later in the day than we had thought. We thought that they might all go there at 9 O'clock. It seems they like to lie in bed a bit longer and they weren't turning up until later in the day. So there's definitely, perhaps the capacity to offer the kind of traditional lane-swimming option earlier in the morning, but again that's something we need to look at and we can look at when those peaks and troughs were of people using the pool.

In particular it was very hot so there was one Friday, which I think was the hottest Friday since Fridays were recorded and lots of people had gone there later in the afternoon, basically they had wilted all day and had gone to the pool later, so again there are things that we can learn about weather, and what people's habits are, when weather changes people's behaviours . . . but yes we'll look at all of that.

Question 7 to be put to Councillor Meudec by Councillor Fisher

Councillor Fisher: Would the Portfolio Holder agree that the only reason a funding request should not make it to the Area Committee meeting is if the request were not eligible & that any other reason would be a breach of the Council's Constitution?

Councillor Meudec: I'm not sure I do agree.

It is important to understand the process applied for funding applications.

Prior to any application for funding being considered at an Area Committee there is, in accordance, with the Area Committee Funding Guidance agreed by each Area Committee at the beginning of a municipal year, a Stage 1 process whereby applications are checked and reviewed against eligibility criteria to ensure that they are in line with the priorities of the relevant Area Committee and the Council.

So firstly a group must complete an application form which can be done on line, and all the information is available on line for every group to submit an application, and they must accompany various documents. I will not itemise it. If you want to look, you can look online for this.

The application is also checked to ensure that the projects or services address at least one of the priorities outlined in the relevant Area Action Plan and do benefit a significant number of local people living in one of the five Areas of Ipswich, and the following undertake this process, which are: Area Committee Chair; myself as the Portfolio Holder; Head of Service; Community Engagement Officers; Legal and Finance Officers; and for larger grants, Chief Operating Officer.

Now, there are of course occasions on which these requirements are not met and so applications do not make it past stage 1. The Council's Community Engagement Officers will often assist groups making requests which fall short of the requirements but some times this is not possible (in every case anyway).

So Area Committees obviously have finite budgets, and so the Chair of each area committee is empowered to delay consideration of an application until funds are available – for instance there's very little point in putting an application for let's say £6,000 before a committee which only has £5,000 available - that's just a pure example.

Alternatively there may be other funding available which is more appropriate and in some cases applicants may be signposted and assisted to access other available funding.

Finally, an application would not proceed to Committee if the applicant decides against proceeding with it. For instance they might withdraw it because they do not wish to progress with the project or they just realise that their project may not meet the eligibility criteria or they have secured funding

via other sources or they have applied too late to secure funding, so I hope that's quite exhaustive, but I've tried to be as, you know, elaborate as possible.

Councillor Fisher: Does the portfolio holder agree with all the recommendations made by the Internal Audit Team regarding the Area Committees, and will she ensure that the deadline set will be met.

Mayor (Councillor Riley): Councillor Fisher can you please repeat that.

Councillor Fisher: Yes. Does the portfolio holder agree with all the recommendations made by the Internal Audit Team regarding Area Committees, and will she ensure the deadline set will all be met.

Councillor Meudec: I have explained that quite a few people are involved with it, so I'm quite happy with the process. Deadline being met – well it depends. Usually an application could actually be late because there's a missing document from the group, so that can happen. There could be other things, however, we as the officers . . .

Mayor (Councillor Riley): Councillor Meudec I think the question's slightly different I think to how you were answering.

Councillor Cook: Point of Order madam Mayor. Fulfilling the timetable set is surely a matter for the Audit Committee of which I'm Chair and which the councillor who asked the question is a member of and it's up to us to make sure they are held to account and he knows where we were at a meeting last night where we actually had that report that we specifically questioned those and the council's internal auditor is under no misapprehensions that we will call officers in to Audit if necessary. It seems to me a pointless question.

Councillor Meudec: Can I add something as well, is I'm not in the Committee of Audit so you know, sorry about this and I do apologise for misunderstanding your question.

Councillor Fisher: I'm more than happy to receive a written response to the supplementary.

Mayor (Councillor Riley): Okay, Councillor Meudec are you happy to deal with it in that way?

Councillor Fisher: And I can send it to her.

Mayor (Councillor Riley): So you're going to send the supplementary question in writing and have a written response.

Question 8 to be put to Councillor Barber by Councillor Harsant

Councillor Harsant: As Chair of our Area Committee, have you at any time stopped an eligible funding request coming to Committee and if so for what reasons?

Councillor Barber: Thank you Councillor Harsant.

I refer to the response given by the Portfolio Holder in relation to the application process and the importance of the Stage 1 process, which is conducted to ensure that all applications considered by the Area Committee meet the Area Committee priorities and eligibility criteria.

I am satisfied that the process has been correctly applied in the Area Committee I chair.

Councillor Harsant: Well I was going to ask about one matter in particular and perhaps I can still ask it Councillor Barber? Can you confirm that you and Councillor Darwin met with a representative from Student Life Magazine on the 8th August last who were looking for funding for their second film project put together by students and to be called "Speak Up Speak Out". It's an anti-bullying campaign film and fits nicely with their last project which was regarding mental health problems.

Mayor Councillor Riley: Is there an actual question, please?

Councillor Harsant: Yes, it's now coming. At that meeting they were told that they could not get funding from the Area Committee but then a few days later received funding from the local labour county councillor through her locality budget. What were the reasons for them being denied funding?

Councillor Barber: Councillor Harsant I think I will have to respond to you in writing with that because you are referring to things and I would like to actually have the bid in front of me before I respond to you on that so I don't make a mistake in my response to you.

Mayor Councillor Riley: Councillor Hall has sent his apologies for this meeting so a written response to Question 9 will be provided.

Question 10 to be put to Councillor Darwin by Councillor Carnall

Councillor Carnall: As Chair of the North East Area Committee have you at any time stopped an eligible funding request coming to Committee and if so for what reasons?

Councillor Darwin: I refer to the response given by the Portfolio Holder in relation to the application process and the importance of the Stage 1 process which is conducted to ensure that all applications considered by the Area Committee meet the Area Committee priorities and the eligibility criteria.

I am satisfied that the process has been correctly applied in the Area Committee I chair.

Councillor Carnall: Thank you madam Mayor but the answer tends to be not a surprise. Would Councillor Darwin please outline what action is taken to ensure that all grants to voluntary organisations approved by the North East Area Committee are recorded properly and only spent for the purposes approved by the committee.

Councillor Darwin: Thank you Councillor Carnall. As you're aware, we have community engagement officials who monitor the spending of grants given and we hear back from them at Area Committee often, with updates.

Mayor Councillor Riley: I'm told we only have 5 minutes left of the normal 30 minutes for questions, so I'm assuming, does anybody have any objections to us continuing or do you require an extension? Continue, fine.

Question 11 to be put to Councillor Gibbs by Councillor Reynolds

Councillor Reynolds: As Chair of our Area Committee have you at any time stopped any eligible funding requests coming to Committee and if so for what reason?

Councillor Gibbs: Thank you Councillor Reynolds for the question.

I refer to the response given by the Portfolio Holder in relation to the application process and the importance of the Stage 1 process which is conducted to ensure that all applications considered by the Area Committee meet the Area Committee priorities and the eligibility criteria.

I am satisfied that the process has been correctly applied in the Area Committee I chair.

Councillor Reynolds: Would Councillor Gibbs agree that in the best interest of good governance any meeting they hold with an applicant for funding should actually be recorded and made available to the public at that meeting as to the reasons why that funding request was not brought forward, because at the moment all we see is a hand off exercise that's pre-determined.

Councillor Gibbs: Thank you madam Mayor and thank you for that supplementary question. I understand that's not part of the procedure but if Councillor Reynolds is happy to write to me I will respond accordingly.

Mayor Councillor Riley: Question number 12, Councillor Wright has sent his apologies for the meeting so a written response will be provided.

Question 13 to be put to Councillor Smart by Councillor Reynolds

Councillor Reynolds: We have had several complaints come through about weeds growing in the footpaths and kerbside. Does the maintenance contract IBC have with SCC cover this and could the work not be completed at the same time that we cut the grass?

Councillor Smart: Firstly on the issue about the number of complaints, yes, we have had a few complaints; several have been made to me. We do obviously have a problem that many of our footpaths in the borough are deteriorating as a result of lack of maintenance and these have holes and cracks into which weeds can establish themselves and is very difficult to clear out. And this particular year because we've had this 58 days of drought, it's reduced the effectiveness of the weedkiller we use. This is because the weedkiller is a systemic product and requires the weeds to be absorbing moisture into the root system at the time of the application.

As far as the maintenance contract IBC has, Ipswich Borough Council does have a service level agreement with Suffolk County Council that includes the chemical treatment of street channels and footways. This service level agreement covers the application of an approved chemical during spring and autumn.

As to the suggestion as to whether this work could be completed at the same time as the grass cutting, it's one of these cases of the simple things you see are all complicated. Whilst this could be undertaken at the same time as cutting the grass this would not be cost-effective for various reasons and these include:

- Firstly, there are many more roads with footpaths that don't have grass verges than there are footpaths with verges, so you'd be sending people on mowers down streets that don't have any grass on them just to get to the weeds.
- The second thing is that it's not as straightforward as it may seem for the operative cutting the grass to apply a chemical treatment. The treatment application equipment would need to be stored on the mower and the operative would need to put on the Protective Equipment necessary before spraying each time, and these are regulations which you might be familiar with the control of substances harmful to health.
- The other issue is that the weather (believe it or not) affects the application of chemical treatment. For example grass can be cut when it is drizzling with rain and when the wind exceeds 6mph, but in both those events we cannot apply chemical treatment, and therefore it is more efficient to undertake this twice each year with a resource that is dedicated to the activity with the correct equipment and which can be

deployed to other tasks when it isn't possible to apply the chemical treatment.

Now I said that we have had difficulties this year because of the drought and so forth, and I have circulated to councillors further details about the equipment that we've had to try and tackle some of the weeds, the stubborn weeds by physical means as well as chemical and I hope that brings all members up to date.

Question 14 to be put to Councillor Jones by Councillor Phillips

Councillor Phillips: Following the Council's decision to reduce the number of Planning Site Notices placed near applicants' properties, since the new arrangements were put in place, please advise how many planning application sites have still had planning site notices posted nearby; and how many have not, because of the new guidelines?

Councillor Jones: The answer to the first half of your question is 220, and the answer to the second half of your question is 160.

Councillor Phillips: Thanks for that very helpful information, Councillor Jones. Has the change in the amount of publicity which is given to planning applications resulted in complaints you're aware of and if so how many?

Councillor Jones: I'm aware of no complaints and in fact our officers report that they do not think there's been any significant reduction in representations made on household planning applications which have not had site notices. I actually think this is a non-issue and it's working perfectly well.

Question 15 to be put to Councillor MacDonald by Councillor Shaw

Councillor Shaw: Could the Portfolio Holder tell me what plans the Council has to mark World Mental Health Day in October?

Councillor MacDonald: Thank you Councillor Shaw for your question. As part of World Mental Health Week I can confirm that the Council will be officially signing up to the Time to Change Employer Pledge on 10th October – which is World Mental Health Day.

All Councillors will be welcome to join the Chief Executive and take part in the signing and related photo-shoot. It is at 9am on the 10th October at Grafton House in reception, so please mark that in your diaries. I know the Leader is planning on attending.

There will be various activities going on throughout the day. Unions, Suffolk MIND and other local wellbeing/mental health agencies will also be invited to attend. A proposed timetable for the day's events will be published next week for staff and lots of staff communications will be going out to promote this in the weeks running up to the event.

Throughout the week people will be encouraged to blog about their experiences of mental health. There also will be 'Working Well' mental health-focused training sessions aimed at employees and managers which will be rolled out in throughout September to December with a big focus on these during World Mental Health Week; corporately, Operations Managers are being asked to encourage their teams to attend these sessions and I am sure Councillors could attend too. The details are currently on posters in the toilets in Grafton House!