

Public Document Pack

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Legal & Democratic Services

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30 July 2020

Dear Councillor

THE COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 16TH JULY, 2020

SUPPLEMENTARY PACK: PUBLIC AND COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Please find enclosed, for consideration at the next meeting of the The Council taking place on Thursday, 16th July, 2020, the following matters that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda No Item

4. **Questions from Members of the Public (Pages 1 - 2)**

Questions and Answers sheet attached

5. **Questions from Members of the Council (Pages 3 - 6)**

Questions and Answers sheet attached

Robert Harris
Principal Democratic Services Officer

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Questions from Members of the Public

4

Council – 16th July 2020

Question 1 from Mr Michael Smith to the Leader of the Council

Question

As a resident on Queensway Estate, I have been patiently waiting for 6 years now, but there is still no visible evidence on the ground that any regeneration work has actually started. Can you assure me that there won't be any further delays to the Better Queensway project as I want to move into my new home as soon as possible?

Answer

Thank you for your question and your patience in waiting for this scheme to get off the ground.

To commence a project such as this, the largest of its kind in modern times in Southend, a significant amount of preparatory work has to be undertaken to ensure that a project of such scale can be delivered and that the risks involved are understood and addressed. Following a robust procurement process a preferred bidder, Swan Housing, was chosen in February last year as the Council's partner to deliver a viable Scheme.

The Council and Swan have been working in partnership over the past 16 months to progress the project. This has included extensive consultation with residents and stakeholders to help inform the scheme. Work to develop this will continue with the phases of the project but the next step is agreement of the final proposals, being discussed later this evening, which is a requirement of the partnership before a planning application can be submitted. In this case it's intended to be a hybrid application which will be outline for the whole site and detailed for the highway and then to be followed by an application for the first phase of housing later this year. This is a significant milestone in the progression of the scheme.

Once these proposals are agreed it can then continue on its challenging timetable and the residents will be kept updated and consulted in this regard.

My Cabinet colleagues and I are committed to getting this scheme off the ground without further delay and, if Council agrees, we will be in a position to start works on site in the early part of next year.

Question 2 from Mr Ian Ward to the Leader of the Council

Question

As an elderly leaseholder, and veteran of all the BQ meetings, I am concerned about my investment, financial and emotional, in the Queensway Estate. Can you assure me that my personal estate is going to survive continued delays in the Better Queensway development?

Secondly, I am concerned that the Government grant will be forfeit if Southend Council doesn't start building soon, and that will mean years of wrangling all for nothing. How do you answer that?

Answer

Thank you for your question and showing such an interest in this once in a lifetime project and showing your support in attending all the meetings. The interests of existing tenants and leaseholders will remain at the heart of the scheme.

The Government, through their Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) has pledged £15Million pounds towards this scheme which is, in the main, to deliver the road infrastructure. This grant is tied to timescales which are directly linked to the speedy delivery of the scheme. These funds, in bringing the underpass up to grade will significantly offset the future costs of maintaining the underpass currently considered to be many millions of pounds in the coming years that the Council would not otherwise, in these challenging times, have to spend.

The Administration is committed to ensuring this funding is not lost through any further delay and that this fantastic scheme, including the additional 100 affordable homes at social rent secured by the Administration, bringing the total number of affordable homes to 612, is delivered.

QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Council Meeting – 16th July 2020

5

Question 1 from Councillor Ayles to the Leader of the Council

Question

Could someone explain why Councillors are not being issued with printers?

Answer

It is noted (and resolved) that in minute 274 (Cabinet, 22/9/15) where there was a discussion on Digital Strategy and paperless, it was stated that the Council must be prepared to look at going paperless. A requirement to achieve this ambition was to have the right technology in place, with training for both Councillors and officers. In the meantime it was confirmed that there would be no change to the provision of printers provided to Councillors. Where there are outstanding requests, this will be honoured and printers will be supplied.

As part of the response to the Council's commitment to the Climate Emergency, the council is seeking to reduce print and paper usage across the board. We are encouraging council staff to consider their paper and print consumption and would ask Councillors to do the same.

As part of the Southend 2050 refresh and the Covid-19, 6 Recovery Priorities that underpin the work, specifically 'How the council learns and recovers as an organisation,' we would like to use technology that we have embraced so well, to strengthen our understanding of our technology and phase out the provision and replacement of home printers and ink.

This does affect the printed packs associated with committees.

Question 2 from Councillor Ayles to the Leader of the Council

Question

In the current Council practice only groups, that is a group of members register as a group, are taken into account when dealing with proportionality on committees and working parties. Any members who are not in a group are not allowed to form an understanding so that those

non group members may have proportionally on committees. For example there could be 8 non aligned members and a group of 6, the group of 6 would be allowed proportionate 6/50 on committees but the 8 would not be allowed 8/50.

Would the leader be prepared to re correct this unfair to residents unbalance of democracy?

Answer

The rules governing places on committees are set out in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government (Political Groups) Regulations 1990 made under that Act. Essentially the law requires that seats on committees (and sub-committees) must be allocated on a political proportional basis between the political groups on the Council.

The Regulations deal with the treatment of Councillors who do not belong to a political group on the Council. If, following the completion of the calculations on committee places, there are any seats remaining unallocated to a political group after applying the proportionality principles in the 1989 Act, then the Council must allocate those seats to a Councillor who is not a member of a political group.

The last review of committee proportionality took place immediately after the May elections in 2019. The calculations resulted in Councillor Ayles being entitled to the three unallocated seats, but he decided to decline the offer of the seats which were then reallocated to the political groups.

The political proportionality rules do not apply to working parties, but the principles are applied by convention in allocating places on those bodies.

I would add that a review of political proportionality can only take place in prescribed circumstances in accordance with the Regulations, which include the formation of a new political group comprising two or more councillors.

Question 3 from Cllr Keith Evans to the Leader of the Council

Question

Has the policy changed regarding the provision of printers supplied to councillors?

Answer

I would refer you to my response to Councillor Aylen's question.

Question 4 from Cllr Keith Evans to the Leader of the Council

Question

Why does the current democratic process not give an equitable standing for representation on committees and working parties for non aligned Councillors?

Answer

I would refer you to my response to Councillor Aylen's question.

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