

Council – Thursday 2nd March 2023

Public Questions

1. Question from Mr Andrew Brookes to the Leader of the Council (Cllr George)

Question

Could the Leader grace me with a simple request by doing a simple Structured Query Language (SQL) to clarify how many families in the Kursaal ward are on incomes of 1800 or less and thus qualify for Council Tax reduction but are not receiving it?

Answer

Unfortunately, I am unable to provide you with the answer you seek as the Council will not hold the details of the income of any of its residents until such time as they apply for a Council Tax Reduction award. If a person applies for a reduction in Council Tax and their circumstances mean they are qualified for an entitlement, then this will be granted. However please note that entitlement is based on several factors. Including, but not limited to, who is in the household, ages, and relationships, how much income and what type of income the household has, how much and what type of capital the household has.

In summary, I am unable to provide you with a definitive answer, Mr Brookes, as there is no figure of income that automatically qualifies a person for entitlement.

2. Question from Mr Andrew Brookes to the Leader of the Council (Cllr George)

Question

I understand the Council is moving the bulk of its computer architecture to the cloud, so for the remaining physical PC's when will the Council stop helping propagate the monopoly which produces Windows and get better value for money and be more ethical by using Linux?

Answer

Our key drivers for moving to the cloud are efficiency, value and savings. As we progress through this programme of work to move to the cloud, we constantly seek opportunities to save costs and add value. Microsoft underpins a lot of the technology already in use in the Council and a move to Linux would be a much longer-term move, as any move to Linux in the short term would still incur Microsoft licensing as well as the added costs of moving the estate to Linux and securing it.

3. Question from Mr Paul Mardon to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Culture and Tourism (Cllr Mulroney)

Question

There have been many debates in Council chambers over the past few months about the Made from this Land project which has seen local artist Emma Edmondson connect with many local community groups and make over 500 bricks by hand from locally dug clay with more than 100 residents, myself included, over the past two years. This project celebrates the rich industrial heritage of Southend alongside endangered artisan craft techniques and traditional bricklaying techniques.

The last phase of the project is the construction and installation of a walking sculpture trail commemorating the brickmaking industry of this area, but this has now apparently been brought into question by some councillors. The whole 'Made from this Land' project has been through all the correct processes and planning permissions so why do some councillors choose to ignore its engagement with the local community and its due process to challenge this installation and thereby jeopardise this celebration of our local heritage and history?

Answer

The issue of the installation of the project markers has been conflated out of all proportion into not just a planning matter.

The planning side of the proposals has seen three applications for the marker installations granted, one determined by officers, the others approved by councillors. It is the third which has caused the controversy despite its approval by a sizable majority. All objections were taken into account. Development Control Committee's duty is to judge planning applications on their merits and it is not there to arbitrate on matters of

taste. Yet a councillor sought to do this in what was a very unpleasant manner. There were no valid reasons to refuse the planning permission hence the large majority approval.

However, the rumpus caused has given the opportunity to other Opposition members (some of whom voted for the approval) to call into question the veracity of the system of selection of public art.

In a way this is nothing against Ms Edmundson's project, but it is being used as an opportunity to call into a question a system which has worked well for years under all different administrations without problem. And I am deeply sorry that something so worthwhile in terms of the arts and the heritage of this great city has been denigrated in this way.

I am hopeful that this is purely a matter of procedure and not trying to instil any form of censorship due to the unmerited and frankly ridiculous references to 'phallic symbols'. We only have to look around the whole of the country for obelisks marking great events or patrons, post boxes and even garden wall piers, even if it were not part of the artistic culture of the world to reflect life in all its forms.

The planning permission granted stands and cannot be expunged from the records and is implementable within 3 years. The highways department has confirmed they are happy with the location on a very wide pavement. I am confident it will attract passing interest and for those interested in the heritage trail. But I anticipate this would be no more than people popping to that corner to post a letter.

We should be supporting the heritage of this city not hiding it away and we should be supporting all art forms for the betterment of our culture.