

COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 12

QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

Mr David Turver asked:

Can you please share with the public the results of the investigation carried out by the external consultants into the £1.1m adverse variance on the Waste Contract?

Councillor Radley responded:

We have had to wait much longer than we would have hoped for BDBC to release to us their financial figures which we needed to resolve this discrepancy. Having received this data I am personally content that there are absolutely no hidden issues or matters of concern. However, a member of the public has raised a formal (and in my opinion ill founded) objection to Hart's end of year accounts which means that our auditors are required to take a detailed review of Hart's financial statement. This is a formal process and much as I would like to give Mr Turver the comfort he seeks and to lay this matter firmly to rest, it is inappropriate to do so until Ernest & Young have completed their audit and submitted their report. I am confident that the auditors will find no issues nor that Hart residents will be out of pocket in relation to the variance Mr Turver cites.

Mr Turver asked a supplementary question:

Should it be officers or executive members who take responsibility for this mess and do the decent thing and resign?

Councillor Radley responded:

The variance is a matter of mechanical accounting. As I stated I am certain there is no issues of concern or matters hidden. Residents of the district will not be out of pocket. This is simply accountancy balancing of books.

Mr Turver asked a second question:

Now that the Garden Community project has been postponed, how much has the project cost so far this financial year; what spending commitments are remaining and what is the expected full year outturn?

Councillor Radley responded:

The decision on the future of the project will be made based upon the outcome of the business case analysis currently being drawn up for review by Cabinet. The expenditure in this year-to-date has been £81k to the nearest thousand pounds.

Mr Turver asked a supplementary question:

That's over £0.5m spent since FY18/19; what tangible deliverables have been produced with all money and what will you allow Hart taxpayers to see?

Councillor Radley responded:

A wide variety of studies and consultations have been undertaken that will be considered in any review of the Local Plan and lead to a stronger Local Plan.

Mr Turver asked a third question:

FY2018/19 started with zero budget for the New Settlement, in November 2018 £50K was approved, that was overspent by December and overall £90K was spent in the year. In FY20/21, the budget started at £167K, rose to £500K, fell to £68.6K (2 x £34.3K half year budget) and eventually fell to zero. Overall £283K was transferred from reserves to cover the expenditure. Do you agree that the Audit Committee should subject the New Settlement to an internal audit to learn the lessons of proper budgeting and financial control for other projects?

Councillor Axam responded:

Whilst we don't recognise all the numbers quoted in your question, I can tell you that this matter will be discussed at the next audit committee who will decide how to proceed.