

## **COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 12**

### **QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC**

Mr. David Turver was unable to be present at the meeting. His questions were read out by the Chairman, **Councillor Simon Ambler**.

**Mr David Turver** had asked:

Hart needs a revised Local Plan in place by five years from adoption, which is April 2025. Various steps will need to be completed such as Examination and various consultations. The Council will also need to find sites to meet the housing delivery test and make adjustments resulting from new household projections due to be published in 2023. The Inspector also said that "appropriate and proportionate area/site assessments [and] viability testing would need to be done in an impartial manner". Can you sketch out the broad activities and timelines required to meet the April 2025 deadline?

**Councillor Cockarill** responded:

There is a confusion in the wording used by Government in this area which unfortunately leads to misinterpretations. The law does not require new Local Plans to be in place within 5 years of adoption, only that a Local Plan is assessed to see whether it requires updating. The Government guidance uses the words "assessment" and "review" in a loose manner, leading to the incorrect assumption that we need a new Local Plan by 2025.

There are, however, a number of factors which might affect the relevance of some of our current policies. For instance, the current Local Plan was adopted prior to Hart's Climate Emergency Declaration, so there may be a need to revise the some of the policies relating to the environment and climate change.

Therefore, we have decided to undertake an assessment of our current Local Plan, taking into account such things as the Climate Emergency Declaration and of course the emerging planning White Paper and subsequent guidance, to see which, if any, of our policies need updating.

Based upon the outcome of that assessment, which we expect will be in about a year's time, Cabinet will then be asked to consider what next steps need to be taken. This could be no action necessary, update some of our existing policies, or possibly start work on a whole new Local Plan.

**Mr David Turver** had asked:

At the September Council meeting we were promised that the Shapley Heath survey results were going to be published "in full" (subject to GDPR check) "shortly". Most reasonable people would have expected "shortly" to mean within a couple of weeks. They are still being kept secret, with a vague commitment to publish sometime in the New Year. Can you give a precise deadline for when these important results will be made available to the taxpayers of Hart who paid for the survey?

**Councillor Cockarill** responded:

The necessary work to allow us to release the survey is almost complete, and we expect to be able to publish these on 13<sup>th</sup> December, subject to the results of the outstanding surveys being returned prior to that date.

**Mr David Turver** had asked:

Back in September we were promised a "a business case for the cost benefit analysis of starting to commence the preparation for the next local plan review". Subsequent papers have been notable because they contained no costs and no benefits of stopping Shapley Heath and changing course. Are we to assume that all of the FY21/22 budget for Shapley Heath has been spent already, despite the project being terminated early, and so no savings will be made, or is this just another example of weak financial controls?

**Councillor Radley** responded:

I can assure Mr Turver that I am confident that there are no examples of weak financial controls at Hart; and I doubt very much that he is aware of any either. Yet another disingenuous phrasing of a question.

The 21/22 budgeted figure for expenditure on the research into the potential for a New Settlement is £156,938.

Actual expenditure excluding recharges at the 31<sup>st</sup> October was £92,503.24.

The forecast full year expenditure through to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 is £135,388.

**Mr David Turver** had asked:

As you know, Hart is facing a significant structural budget deficit for the foreseeable future. The Level 1 and Level 2 savings identified so far do not fill the financial black hole. Nearby East Hampshire and Havant councils get along fine with just one CEO and senior management team shared between them. Yet Hart, one of the smallest local authorities in the country, has two CEOs. What actions are you taking to ensure this shameful waste of taxpayers' money does not continue?

**Councillor Neighbour** responded:

Members may recall that on the retirement of the previous Chief Executive the senior leadership team of Hart District Council was changed from a Chief Executive and two Corporate Directors to two Joint Chief Executives which save £80k per year.

The Senior management costs at the two authorities highlighted cost £2m each whereas at Hart it is £1.4m. There are 2 Councils smaller than Hart in Hampshire, and 64 that are smaller nationally according to 2019 figures.

Costs per head in Hart per person are £13.80 per head, in East Hampshire & Havant it is £16.43 and in Basingstoke it is £22.72 (where Senior Management includes all staff being paid more than £50k). The challenge of the budget deficit is noted, and we will not stand still. We always look at the management structure in place to ensure it is fit for purpose and are currently content that this is the case.