

**HART DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**FULL COUNCIL MEETING 26 JANUARY 2023**

**COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 14 - QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

**Councillor Southern**

**Question 1:**

In view of the fundamental change to working practices with officers at Hart now largely working from home, has any assessment relating to the productivity of its staff been made since this has become the norm?

**Response from Cllr Neighbour, Leader of the Council**

*I think at the outset I would wish to correct Cllr Southern in that it is not right to say Hart officers are now largely working from home. It depends on the role and the needs of the service. A number of officers work almost entirely from the office, the countryside rangers and parking teams as well as various front line or support staff are always in the office. All officers are contactable by telephone or on Teams. Everyone now has greater accessibility to officers than before the pandemic.*

*The issue of performance is an interesting one because there is no data or evidence to say that within Hart performance has significantly dropped. It does not follow that by simply having choice in the way that one works this leads to performance loss. We'd only do a performance review if we felt it necessary and that there was evidence to support the need for a review.*

*If Cllr Southern was on Overview and Scrutiny Committee he would be aware that Service Panels meet each quarter to review the performance of the three services which is clearly linked to productivity and the March O&S will have the updates from third quarter service panels. Cabinet also receives performance information (Mr Grist's report). Nothing that has been scrutinised over the past few years suggests a systemic drop in performance.*

*Part of our success has been the strengthening of our performance management regime when we introduced agile working - including more frequent 121's with staff, more regular team meetings, more formalised management arrangements by both Leadership and Management Teams. The findings from the staff survey around wellbeing/recruitment demonstrates the success of our current working arrangements.*

*In my view hybrid working has increased the flexibility of staff to meet the needs of residents, and the evening appointments with Housing customers is a good example - working around clients' own working hours.*

*Also, the environmental benefits cannot be underestimated. The Council has declared a climate emergency. There is absolutely no purpose in insisting on a 9-5 culture that arbitrarily requires officers to get into their cars to needlessly drive to work when they can readily save the travel time and work both flexibly and more importantly, productively, from home.*

**Supplementary Question:**

Do you not think it wise to benchmark the effectiveness of our staff and the processes we have in place for managing them against the best practice in the private sector for performance management?

Response from Cllr Neighbour, Leader of the Council

No.

**Question 2:**

Why were the green bins in Hartley Wintney not emptied on the 3rd January with no prior warning and why also not on the 17th January? The frost was inferred as a reason in this latter case, but again, no prior warning was given that the bins would not be emptied when frosts occur. However, the black bins were emptied so there does not appear to be a reason for not emptying the green bins as well.

Response from Cllr Oliver, Portfolio Holder for Environment

*Thank you for your questions Cllr Southern.*

*However, I am slightly bemused by your first one concerning non collection of Green Waste on 3rd January in Hartley Wintney. Since the start of the Green Waste service in 2004 it has always been the case that no collections are made over the 2 week Christmas/New Year period to allow crews to concentrate on the excess volumes of general waste and recycling that occurs at this time. This is widely advertised on the website, downloadable collection calendars, Hart news , waste service resident terms and conditions, etc. I find it astonishing that you are unaware of this information as a member of this Council, although I am pleased to say i am unaware of any other of our 11,403 customers raising a complaint on this topic. Therefore, to give Cllr Southern the optimum warning I can confirm that there will be no Green Waste collections in Hartley Wintney or any other site in Hart between 23rd December 2023 and the 7th January 2024.*

*On your second point on the non collection of Green Waste on the 17th January. The waste team were not expecting the severity or extent of the freezing conditions on Monday the 16th January. Not only were the waste vehicle tipping mechanisms frozen after being unused for 48hrs over the weekend but when the first vehicles were released over 80% of the green waste bins were frozen and unable to be emptied. The reason why black and recyclable blue bins were able to continue to be collected when tipping mechanisms were defrosted was that their contents do not freeze solid as the majority of damp green waste containers. The decision was taken*

*not to attempt collections until the majority of bins were able to be emptied, which was later that day. This had the effect of delaying all green waste collections across Hart. Crews were issued with Hoes in an attempt to help release green waste and this was partially successful in most cases. The delays in collections was posted on the website and media channels during the 16th January as soon as the issue was identified. The reason was not implied (as stated in your question) as due to freezing weather but was clearly stated as the reason with residents being asked to leave bins out for collection. The crews worked tirelessly that week to catch up and completed all round collections by the the end of Saturday 21st January. I would suspect the Hartley Wintney bins were collected around the 19th January. We are also talking to the vehicle suppliers (Eagle) and escalated to senior management in Serco to understand how we can protect the vehicles/lubricants to prevent cold weather causing these problems again. We are not able to keep vehicles under cover as we have no facilities of this scale.*

**Supplementary Question:**

What key performance indicators did you establish with Serco, what penalties were set out in the contract and have they been undertaken?

Response from Cllr Oliver, Portfolio Holder for Environment

*The contract was signed by Cllr Forster. Correction (following Cllr Forster's comment below), the contract was negotiated by Cllr Forster and I signed it just as I took over as Portfolio Holder for Environment. I will check the records to ensure that information is correct and provide a written response to Cllr Southern.*

*In the past, there have been issues with not meeting performance indicators mainly due to staff shortages, but since November Serco have been within tolerance levels allowed in the KPIs, up until the bad weather on 16<sup>th</sup> January. Until that time, all bins have been emptied on their allocated day.*

Statement from Cllr Forster

The statement that I signed the contract is untrue, it was signed by Cllr Oliver.

**Councillor Dorn**

The Cabinet Member for Place will be aware of the continuing misery suffered by residents in Long Sutton due to the overly extended completion of the 5 modern new build homes at Wingates Lane by ME Developments Ltd. This has included clay-soaked run-off from the "Big Meadow" into residents' gardens, a huge pile of spoil from the digging of foundations and a sewage system that appears not to be working. This is compounded by the developer not yet paying their S106 Affordable Housing contribution which was due after occupation of the 3rd house back in Sept 2021. At that time, the Big Meadow should have been laid out as a recreational space to be transferred to the Parish Council. With the 5th house close to completion, can we be assured that this Council will take all necessary actions to secure rapid, effective and robust measures to successfully complete this

development in its entirety, in compliance with the planning permission that was granted and the S106 planning obligations that were agreed by the developer in a reasonable timescale with the benefits promised to the residents of Long Sutton?

Response from Councillor Cockarill, Portfolio Holder for Place

*I know this particular site has been the cause of frustration for local residents and I am keen to see the situation resolved as soon as possible.*

*The delays on this site are down to the developer's failure to comply with their planning and legal obligations. Our planning enforcement team took the developer to the High Court in December to obtain an Injunction against them, in respect of the outstanding affordable housing contribution debt. Our building control, planning and legal teams are continuing to work together to ensure the developer meets their planning and legal obligations on this site in a timely and responsible manner.*

*This Administration will always seek to ensure that developers fulfil their planning and legal obligations to the Council and local residents. Members will know that it is highly unusual for us to take enforcement proceedings to the High Court. The fact that we have done so in this instance shows, I think, the seriousness with which the Council takes the developer's failures to comply with their obligations on this site.*

*I will, of course, ensure that Cllrs Dorn, Kennet and Hale as ward members are kept informed of progress by officers, and further updates will be reported to the planning enforcement sub-committee as appropriate.*

**Supplementary Question:**

In appreciating that there will be limitations in what we can do, how will we avoid issues like this in the future?

Response from Cllr Cockarill, Portfolio Holder for Place

*I have in the past felt that the legal agreements have been weak and need to be strengthened, and that members should have more sight of the S106 agreements. Members only hear about the problems as they occur. We need to work proactively with planning officers to understand the issues so that the planning committee will be in a better position to help solve them when they arise in the future.*