

Council Meeting on 7th December 2022

Agenda Item No 8

Questions by Members to Full Council under Procedure rule 9.2

Question 1: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Chair of Council from Councillor Paul Millar

Is he concerned by the number of sitting Councillors - of all colours - who have announced they are standing down at the next local elections or are unsure of whether to commit, the potential very high turnover of Councillors this creates, the likelihood of uncontested seats, and does he think this reflects to any extent on any cultural issues within the authority (e.g. culture of fear, toxic atmosphere, invoking disciplinary procedures to seek to punish and 'cancel' rather than provide adequate training), or is the low morale I see around me in my head - and is this all just a coincidence?

Answer:

Experience suggests that at this time of the year, some 5 months before the next set of scheduled elections, there is a lot of uncertainty as to whether existing councillors will or will not stand for re-election. Quite often, the final decision is not made until a few days before the close of nominations! On a more general note, we have seen a large turnover of existing councillors in the previous elections in 2015 and 2019 but I accept the reasons may be different from time to time. There is a lot going on in this country at the moment so we do live in 'interesting times'.

Question 2: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Coast, County & Environment from Councillor Bruce De Saram

Two questions on the Memorial Plaque bench policy around costs as follows:

1. Looking at the costs illustrated below. Is this a realistic and reasonable cost? I fully understand that prices go up with inflation. Given that such benches are designed to commemorate the loss of loved ones within our community.
2. Can this charge be reviewed for 2023? Since as it says in the Council Plan "*Looking ahead the challenge is to get the balance right between the cost to residents and businesses and the benefits provided in terms of the quality of our environment, the health and wellbeing of residents and the strength and resilience of our local economy*".

2022-2023 prices

- New seat (including plaque and concrete base) costs £1664.00 for a 15-year lease.
- Renewing a lease for a further 10 years costs £832.00
- Adopting an existing bench for a 15-year lease costs £554.00
- Any additional plaques cost £84.00 (for the remainder of the lease).

Memorial plaques/seats requested for a cemetery will be subject to VAT.

Answer:

We believe the charge level is appropriate as the cost of the bench, plaque and installation alone is around £1000 depending on site conditions. The £1000 cost doesn't allow for any administration, maintenance and cleaning over the 15 year lifespan. So one can see that the additional £664 is very reasonable to cover the site and maintenance for this length of time.

Prior to 2020 we undertook some benchmarking to set the current pricing structure. We compare reasonably with other councils and crematoria, with others charging a similar amount for shorter time spans. We have around 1000 memorial benches in the district with many popular locations such as seafronts already full and steady interest in this service.

Question 3: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Jess Bailey

In the Standards Committee Meeting of 27th July 2022, there was reference to interim legal costs for an investigation being £44,000. Please could the Leader confirm the total costs.

The Leader recently asked Simon Jupp, MP, and Richard Foord, MP to support the 'Theresa Villiers amendment', which sought to end the flawed imposition of housing targets on EDDC, and other local authorities, by central government. Would the Leader advise what response he has received from Simon Jupp and Richard Foord.

Answer:

£79,140 incurred across financial years 20/21, 21/22 and 22/23.

I wrote to Richard Foord MP and to Simon Jupp MP on Tuesday 29th November 2022 asking them to consider endorsing the "Theresa Villiers" amendment NC21 to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill due to come before the House of Commons imminently. I copied members of Council and SMT for their information. Neither MP had any advance notification that I would be writing.

That evening, Mr Foord replied:

"I have yet to take soundings from Mid Devon District Council, but am minded to vote against the Bill in its unamended form. I have yet to decide which amendments I might support and will take the comments below from you and your EDDC colleagues into account. Thank you for your steer. Best regards, Richard."

Mr Jupp has not yet replied.