

Meeting on 9th December 2020

Agenda Item No 8

Questions by Members to Full Council under Procedure rule 9.2

Question 1: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader from Councillor John Loudoun

In this most challenging of years, what does the Leader think have been this Council's greatest 2020 achievements, and does he have a seasonal message that he would like to make?"

Answer:

I'd like to thank Cllr Loudoun for this question as it enables us to reflect on the very many positive achievements in East Devon's hard-working district council this year.

Firstly, of course, we would all wish to recognise the successful efforts of our officers across all of the council's activities in the most serious public health emergency since the flu pandemic after WW1. The services our residents so value have been kept ticking over by the extraordinary skill and graft of our employees across the board in making sure this happens. Added to this, the work we have been asked to do by government and the resultant great demands in helping individuals and businesses alike should be an occasion of great pride for staff, officers and members. Thank you to you all.

Secondly, the unlooked for silver lining of the crisis has been democratic involvement. This council has wholly embraced the digital meeting form, and participation and engagement of members in a multiplicity of committees and panels can only have deepened a sense of understanding and co-operation from those of all political allegiances. Again, this has been very resource intensive and involved an up-skilling of many officers. As we come to the close of the year, most of us are getting zoom-weary. But after a couple of weeks off over the festive season I hope we all meet again and appreciate that what has been something of a novelty is now a key enabling feature of local and national democracy for decades to come.

Thirdly, speaking personally, I was elected on a manifesto which included addressing the democratic deficit of the former GESP process, now resolved, and concerns about S106, where a thorough and helpful SWAP report is ready to come before Audit and Governance in the coming weeks. I am also very pleased to hear so many knowledgeable and constructive points being made in debate in all aspects of the council's work, and glad to see the respect between officers and members on display for the public to see.

As we move into a new year we have new or refreshed hopes. Our strategic planning is now clearly focussed only on the public interest. In the welfare of our citizens, we must double down on understanding how the pandemic will be affecting our district's jobs and poverty. Much work is already underway - and this is difficult and challenging - but there is no doubt that the dynamism we react with now will affect people's real lives.

Finally, to address Cllr Loudoun's kind request for a seasonal message I am not sure how much festive platitudes from political figures are really appreciated by the public. However,

knowing of the great devotion of him and fellow rockers such as Cllr Thomas for music's hall of fame I refer him to the last ten minutes of my favourite seasonal film, Elf. "The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear."

Question 2: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Coast, Country & Environment from Councillor Paul Millar

Can he share the letter from the Council sent to the UK government urging them to introduce legislation to limit the maximum noise levels of fireworks to 90 decibels for those sold to the public for private displays as agreed at February Council, and to share any response from the UK government to the letter.

Answer:

Unfortunately it appears that this part of the motion was overlooked as we entered the Covid pandemic.

Question 3: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities from Councillor Paul Millar

What steps is she taking to (a) reduce the number of complaints to EDDC's Housing Repairs regarding the speed of vital repairs and (b) ensure reports of problems and complaints are speedily responded to.

Answer:

We have traditionally had a very low incidence of complaints in relation housing repairs. Dissatisfaction did increase after a successful mobilisation of the new contract, primarily as a result of under resourcing, staffing movement, and work scheduling errors.

Over the last six months complaints have reduced consistent with the measures we jointly agreed with our contractor/partner in an Improvement Plan. We saw a change in Contract Manager in the contractor's team as part of the improvement journey, which has been a key factor in improving performance. Our contractor has also appointed a Customer Relations Officer and we have changed the job of one of our managers into a Housing Business & Customer Improvement Manager.

We are monitoring the agreed Key Performance Indicators closely and there are monthly operational meetings between client and contractor to manage workflow.

Our Business and Customer Improvement Manager coordinates all informal complaints that are received for works carried out to our properties, both reactive and planned. These complaints are analysed and responded to in a timely manner.

During our regular meetings (monthly Operational Meeting and quarterly Core Group Meeting) with our Senior Management and Contractors we discuss complaints and to review 'lessons learnt' from these complaints; by doing this we are trying to ensure that the same issues do not recur.

A detailed performance and improvement position was reported to the HRB on 17th September 2020, together with details of KPIs for the contract.

We have dealt with 10 stage 1 formal complaints this financial year relating to works to tenants homes.

Question 4: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities from Councillor Paul Millar

On average for the month of lockdown, (a) how long were Council tenants waiting on hold to report problems that required action from the Housing Repairs Team and the contractor Ian Williams Ltd, (b) can she provide a full breakdown of how many calls on were received per day, and (c) the percentage of those calls that were answered.

Answer:

Question (a)

During the months April, May and June we had a full lockdown. Tenants average telephone hold times were as follows:

April – 1 Minute 15 Seconds

May – 1 Minute 10 seconds

June – 2 Minutes 4 seconds

Albeit these calls were not exclusive in highlighting problems, but reporting repairs and emergency works needed.

Ian Williams average hold times were as follows:

April – 0 Minute 0.4 Seconds

May – 0 Minute 0.04 seconds

June – 0 Minutes 0.08 seconds

Questions (b) and (c)

We have a full sheet analysing the call numbers for the Housing Repair Team throughout the lockdown period. The key call statistics are shown below:

April – 419 Calls accepted (Missed calls – 19) 95.5% answered

May – 973 Calls accepted (Missed calls – 31) 97% answered

June – 1,197 Calls accepted (Missed calls – 45) 96.5% answered

Rather than providing the daily calls, we have provided the figures over the full lockdown period, as the question is unclear and does not specify which month of lockdown.

We operate a real time dashboard that provides visibility of call handling and call waiting times. The team manager uses this to manage performance.

Question 5: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities from Councillor Paul Millar

Of the thousands of calls made to the EDDC Housing Repairs line, does the Housing Service hold any data on how many of these calls were complaining about the quality and/or speed of service from the current contractor.

Answer:

As indicated above - 10 formal stage 1 complaints. We also measure tenant satisfaction and the last report showed this was at 100% of tenants surveyed, although we are not relying on this indicator alone as a gauge of the service quality.

We analyse complaints in the manner that is highlighted above, during the earlier months of the year, January and February, Ian William's hub calls were taking an average of 7.21 minutes to be answered. This has been rectified, our Housing Business and Customer Improvement Manager has set up monthly meetings with the hub to ensure business is running smoothly and all issues are resolved. The hub have also changed their telephone lines, which gives a better/quicker pick up time. This has made a considerable, noticeable difference, with average waiting times now 33 seconds, they have also changed their structure of the team's having a scheduling team and a planning team.

Whilst our Housing Business and Customer Improvement Manager has monthly call, one of our Repair Advisors have a catch up call every week to give a proactive response. All legitimate complaints are monitored and recorded on our KPI's as highlighted above.

Question 6: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities from Councillor Paul Millar

What was the rationale for meetings of the Poverty Working Panel held in private, and what message does this send to the many charities and members of the public who would benefit from being involved in and listening to our discussions?

Answer:

I had envisaged that private meetings would facilitate more frank and honest debate particularly given that outside bodies (such as DWP and CAB) will be involved. There may also be discussion on sensitive and personal issues and it might be inappropriate for those to be held in public. However, I do appreciate that these issues can be managed and that no doubt there will be interest from outside the Council. I can therefore reassure the Council that the future meetings of the Poverty Panel will be held in public.

Question 7: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services from Councillor Paul Millar

What is her assessment of the recent significant password data breach for Members, what steps is she taking to ensure that the appropriate safeguards are introduced to prevent the same or similar situation from happening again, and when will Cabinet receive a report.

Answer:

Whilst I recognise that this is a serious matter, I have been sufficiently reassured such that in my view the actual risk of anything untoward having occurred is extremely low. Quick and

early responsive action was taken to rectify the issue – acknowledged by the ICO – and I understand that the issue is very specific and, as such, is highly unlikely to result in any wider implications for the rest of the Council's systems. The investigation report from Strata, which will come to Cabinet in the near future, will address this and I have been reassured that the Council's Data Protection Officer will be ensuring that the recommendations and any mitigation actions identified are appropriate and that they will be implemented

Question 8: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Policy Coordination & Regional Engagement from Councillor Paul Millar

What regional bodies has he been in contact with since his appointment and with what outcome, and what policies has he coordinated between the various portfolio holders.

Answer:

Regional Engagement – my role has involved conversing with various Officers, Portfolio Holders and external partners outside of formal meetings. It is often, as Councillor Millar will appreciate, the building of personal relationships built upon mutual interest, trust and confidence that can work to the advantage of all the parties involved. I hope that I can utilise this approach whilst I am Portfolio Holder to the best interests of this Council, its Members and residents. Thus far my key objective has been to support and work with the Leader in taking this approach forward with such key partners as one has within, say, the Heart of the South West and the South West Councils.

Policy Co-ordination – work undertaken in this regard has come in the form of trying to liaise with specific Portfolio Holders, such as Councillor Millar will recall I did on a number of occasions on a range of subject matters with the Portfolio Holder for Democracy & Transparency when he held the post, through to working alongside the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services in helping to deliver this Administration's Statement of Intent.

Question 9: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets from Councillor Paul Millar

What assessment does he make of the government's messaging prior to lockdown and Tier 2 announcement what impact is this having on businesses and jobs in East Devon.

Answer:

We have not made an assessment of the governments messaging on movement into tier 2. There is easily accessible advice on the government website and from all media outlets. We provide advice and guidance to local business on restrictions applicable in East Devon.

Question 10: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets from Councillor Paul Millar

In what ways do increasing car parking charges for residents in Towns and High Street car parks within the District contribute towards the Council's inclusive growth and poverty agenda.

Answer:

The proposal to increase car parking charges proposed last year was based around increasing income to deliver on climate change ambitions. The TaFF convened to explore car parking issues will be reporting to the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 10 December. Government have advised that car parks should not be used as 'cash cows' to finance other council services so car parking charges need to take account of a number of factors including the needs of local business, town centre economies, motorists, tourism etc.

Question 11: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader from Councillor Peter Faithfull

Please advise me -

- (a) how many times the Members Advisory Panel or its predecessor met with developers over the period of 2018, 2019 and 2020? and
- (b) How many planning applications or proposals were dealt with by the Panel in those periods?

Answer:

- (a) The Members Advisory Panel was convened 4 times in 2018, twice in 2019 and 3 times so far in 2020. There are no more meetings planned for this year.
- (b) The panel has only heard a presentation on one development site at each meeting during that period although that proposal may come forward as multiple planning applications. In some cases the panel will meet on more than one occasion to consider the same development where the developer wishes to present a revised proposal following an earlier presentation. Over the last 3 years, therefore, Member Advisory Panels have considered a total of 6 different development projects.

I'd like to thank Cllr Faithfull for these questions and trust that all members welcome the amended protocol for Member Advisory Panels which involves an officer taking minutes, agreed by the chair of the panel, and subsequently available in the public domain if an application or applications come forward.

Question 12: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets Leader from Councillor Helen Parr

At the Asset Management Forum meeting 1 December, during a debate about the Community Asset Transfer Policy, it was interesting to hear the following response from the Portfolio Holder to a point about car park revenue, and the asset value of the Council's car parks, "If in 10 years there are no cars a car park is useless & we'll be stuck with a piece of land".

What plans is Cllr Haywood making for replacing the revenue stream which may be lost to the Council if as he envisages our car parks become redundant?

Answer:

The Council's car parking assets currently deliver a revenue stream of around £2.3m to our general fund. I have no immediate plans for replacing that revenue from other sources. If in the future it is entirely predictable that we may start to see significant changes in the ways in which people choose to move around, perhaps with more reliance on active travel options, public transport and shared vehicle options and at that stage we may well need to review

how we are using these car park assets and to consider alternative uses for the land, either in part of as a whole. In the interim it is also possible that an investment in electric vehicle charging infrastructure in the near future may begin to deliver revenue back to the Council at some stage over the next few years.

Question 13: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities from Councillor Phil Twiss

Following the recent rough sleeper debate at EDDC, including updating the Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2023 approved at the Cabinet meeting on October 28th 2020 how much additional government funding has this council secured to resolve this clearly identified issue in the district, given Exeter City Council by comparison obtained £440,000 in September for a fund EDDC didn't apply to for support?

Notes

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-allocated-for-3-300-new-homes-for-rough-sleepers>

Answer:

EDDC did not bid through the Next Steps programme, a funding stream that is separate to the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding which we bid for each year. This year we have secured joint funding with Mid Devon of £230k through the RSI towards tackling rough sleeping.

The Next Steps funding was mainly focused on capital projects, whereby all projects have to be completed by the end of March 2021, and this largely favoured the Local Authorities with higher rough sleeper numbers. Demand and need has to be demonstrated in the bids, hence the bids from areas who have much higher rough sleeper numbers.

The properties we have purchased over the last couple of years, specifically being used to tackle homelessness, have greatly assisted in keeping rough sleeper numbers lower in East Devon. It was considered we did not have the need to make a substantial bid in this round.

Question 14: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Democracy and Transparency from Councillor Andrew Moulding

At the recent meeting of the Asset Management Forum held on 1st December 2020, the head of service announced that a document had been sent by e-mail to members of the Asset Management Forum. This document was referred to during the meeting, but it had not been sent to other councillors attending the meeting. How were all members of the meeting expected to be properly informed?

Answer:

It is understood that Cllr Moulding is referring to the Property Matters Newsletter. This has only been prepared a handful of times and previously was included on the agenda for AMF. Given that this was the first meeting of the newly comprised AMF it was provided solely to the members of the AMF by way of background to help them understand the work of the team and was not directly relevant to any item on the agenda and other than a reference to having

been provided, did not generate any discussion. However, I expect going forward this will be included on the agenda as before but in the meantime I am aware that the Newsletter has been circulated to all members.

Question 15: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Action from Councillor Andrew Moulding

Could the Portfolio Holder for Climate Action underline the proposed roll-out of the installation of electric charging points throughout East Devon?

Answer:

The first phase of electric charging points for East Devon is already underway. Charge points are already in place at Blackdown House, Manstone Depot in Sidmouth and Camperdown Terrace Depot in Exmouth. Officers are still working in collaboration with Devon County Council and this project is set to deliver charge points in public car parks in Exmouth, Sidmouth, Honiton and Seaton early in 2021. The car parks TAFF is due to discuss the extent to which this Council wishes to invest in further charging infrastructure and how it will fund this investment. The recommendations from the TAFF to Scrutiny Committee will in turn shape the speed at which we then proceed.

Question 16: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning from Councillor Andrew Moulding

Following the withdrawal from GESP, could the Portfolio Holder give me a projection of the council's Five Year Land Supply?

Answer:

A detailed housing monitoring update report was presented to Strategic Planning Committee on the 20th October and showed that the Council is currently projecting a 5.73 year housing land supply. The report noted that this is a declining position. Aside from future projections being difficult to make due to the impact of Covid-19 on the housing market, it is also the case that if a developer chose to contest the 5 year housing land supply position an Inspector may reach a different view.

The Council's withdrawal from GESP has no immediate impact on the housing land supply position as sites can only be included where they are considered to be deliverable. To be considered deliverable, sites for housing should be available now, offer a suitable location for development now, and be achievable with a realistic prospect that housing will be delivered on the site within five years. As a result none of the sites being considered through GESP had been included in our housing land supply calculations. Sites will now be assessed and brought forward through the new Local Plan following full and proper engagement with Members and the community.

Question 17: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Assets from Councillor Andrew Moulding

I note that £50,000 has been allocated to assist the Economic Development Team to work with our key coastal and market towns. How exactly is that funding going to be used?

Answer:

A report will be coming to Cabinet in February 2021 setting out the resources that can be marshalled to support economic recovery. This follows on from the papers already considered by Cabinet on economic recovery in October and November of this year. It is expected that the February report will align with the themes in the Team Devon Business and Economic Recovery Prospectus (Place/People/Business) and will cover both the resources that the Council can make available, including from the business rate retention pilot from which the £50,000 is drawn, and from external funding sources.

Question 18: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Andrew Moulding

Would the Leader of the Council attend a meeting of residents of Cranbrook to explain why they will not be receiving an early delivery of the anticipated supermarket?

Answer:

Thank you, Cllr Moulding for this question. It will have been noted from our Statement of Intent ahead of the Council Plan Review 2021-23 at Cabinet on 2nd December that as an administration it is a central priority for us to do all we can to help the people, council and members of Cranbrook deliver the community they have been promised.

In that context I will take this opportunity of Cllr Moulding's question to explain to the people of Cranbrook why they haven't received a town centre yet. The key reason for this is that the former Conservative administration made one of the biggest mistakes in modern council times when it chose a commercial model for the new town. Their council made the critical error of working with house builders and not town builders.

Not only has this led to significant reduction in overall infrastructure being delivered, it has led us to the position we are in. This was the inevitable consequence of our Conservative colleagues being prepared to accept the delivery of a town centre not fit for purpose to save face.

In stark contrast, this administration is pushing for a town centre fit for years to come.

Since the last Strategic Planning Committee meeting where the last offer from the Consortium was rejected a much-improved offer has now been tabled. Thank you to Ed Freeman, Thea Billeter and the Cranbrook team for their negotiations on this. The council will still need to heavily fund the acquisition of land but that is a commitment this administration is willing to make.

There is, of course, nothing to stop the Consortium bringing forward the supermarket proposal right away but the Consortium's negotiations have sought to tie the proposal into an MOU to try and force the council's position. Short-sighted decisions of the Conservative administration led inevitably to this.

Now, whilst we still are living with the headache of the former administrations' decisions - and the Section 106 funding proposed will be less than half of what was originally envisaged - the

Strategic Planning Committee finally has a viable option on whether to take this renewed offer or to continue to back the SPD. I look forward to the debate on the 15th.

The delivery of a town centre for Cranbrook and a revised offer from the East Devon New Community Partners is to be considered by Strategic Planning Committee on the 15th December. The revised offer, if agreed, is proposed to ensure the delivery of the supermarket to a clear timetable. We should therefore await the outcome of this meeting to see how we decide to proceed on this issue.

Naturally, having already initiated dialogue with Cranbrook ward members, and having studied the many issues concerned with our officers, when there is a good moment to meet a wider section of the people of Cranbrook I would be delighted to attend.

Question 19: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Assets from Councillor Marcus Hartnell

With the imminent arrival of mass-vaccinations and the prospect of our lives returning to near normality, what are your main priorities for 2021 to help kick start the local economy?

Answer:

Our immediate priority is to deploy the business grants that are being made available to respond to the periods of local and national restrictions. A report will be coming to Cabinet in February 2021 setting out the resources that can be marshalled to support economic recovery going forward. This follows on from the papers already considered by Cabinet on economic recovery in October and November of this year. It is expected that the February report will align with the themes in the Team Devon Business and Economic Recovery Prospectus (Place/People/Business) and will cover both the resources that the Council can make available as well as considering external funding sources including successor funds to European Structural Funds in a post-Brexit environment.

Question 20: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Assets from Councillor Marcus Hartnell

I am sure you will join me in welcoming the recent announcement that the new owners of Flybe have applied for an operating licence. What plans are there to engage with the new owners to help secure local jobs and restore vital connectivity for residents and businesses?

Answer:

It is indeed encouraging news that Thyme Opco, as owners of the Flybe brand, have applied to the Civil Aviation Authority for an Airline Operator's Certificate. We continue to engage regularly with Exeter Airport and related stakeholders such as Exeter Aerospace to move forward the package of support agreed by Cabinet in September of this year to support the Airport.

Question 21: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader from Councillor Mike Allen

How much in the way of funds and which council policies and services are available for those in deprivation?

Answer:

Thank you to Cllr Allen for this question and I hope he will respect that “deprivation” is a nebulous term. Therefore, the thrust of his question is very wide ranging and naturally involves very many services and Council policies. Given the level of detail which would be required in advance of this Council meeting and the short notice of the question I will liaise with Cllr Allen and the appropriate officers to provide information along the lines he has requested. Meanwhile, may I refer him to the questions he asked at October’s Council meeting where a large amount of information was provided.