

Meeting of Council on 8th December 2021

Agenda Item No 8

Questions by Members to Full Council under Procedure rule 9.2

Question 1: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities from Councillor Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities, how many of our Council homes in the District are currently empty?

Answer:

101 (as of 2nd December 2021)

Question 2: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning from Councillor Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, what timescales can he and his officers advise on a report as referred to the Overview Committee in relation to CIL/S106 policy?

Answer:

The Strategic Planning Committee have a number of key strategic issues to consider over the next couple of months namely progressing the new Local Plan and considering the main modifications to the Cranbrook Plan so that these can be consulted on and the plan can progress to adoption. These matters have to take priority. A report to consider the spend process for CIL and S106 monies will form part of the work programme for the committee moving forwards but it will not be possible for this matter to be considered until April next year at the earliest.

Question 3: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Chair of Council from Councillor Paul Millar

To ask the Chair of Council, what timescales can he advise on the Personnel Committee making an assessment so Overview can have regard to its view in formulating recommendations to Cabinet in relation to establishing a Public Register of Senior Officer Interests as endorsed cross-party at the last ordinary meeting of that Committee?

Answer:

The referral from the Overview Committee will be assessed by the Personnel Committee as part of the forward work plan for the Committee. It will be timetabled according to the existing work programme and officer capacity.

Question 4: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Democracy & Transparency from Councillor Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Democracy & Transparency, how many residents in total are signed up to our Residents Newsletter?

Answer:

The Residents Newsletter is currently sent to 11,640 recipients, in addition it is also sent to all Councillors, Parish Clerks and Media contacts. The newsletter is also promoted on the corporate social media channels and on the council website.

Question 5: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Finance from Councillor Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Finance, how much does a Council taxpayer (broken down band-by-band if possible) pay for the existence of all 60 Councillors (allowances, expenses, and other support such as Democratic Services and IT)

Answer:

The total expenditure budget for 2021/22 is £1,050,580.

Total Council Tax income for 2021/22 is £9,119,550 based on an annual Council Tax charge (Band D) of £151.78 a year (Band A Charge is £101.19, Band B £118.05, Band C £134.92, Band E £185.51, Band F £219.24, Band G £252.97, Band H £303.56).

Council Tax Income helps meet the net cost, after fees and charges, of running Council services and functions including the democratic representation costs identified above. Council Tax Income is not allocated to specific services/areas.

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

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities, what support is there for elderly and disabled Devon Home Choice customers seeking social housing in East Devon without access to the internet?

Answer:

People without access to the internet can register on Devon Home Choice either by completing and returning a paper application form or the application can be completed over the phone with a member of the Allocations team. Preference is with the applicant. Home visits by a member of the team to register applicants were

carried out pre-pandemic but have been pulled back now for obvious reasons, will resume in the future if and when deemed safe to do so.

Applicants without internet access or anybody to make bids on their behalf can be placed on autobid as and when properties they are eligible to bid for, and within their area of choice, become available. Any other queries and updates can be carried out over the phone.

Question 7: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Coast, Country & Environment from Cllr Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Coast, Country & Environment, with reference to EDDC's Licensing regime how many test purchases did this authority instigate in relation to sales of restricted products within the District in each of the last five years?

Answer:

Zero. Test purchases, may involve using an underage person or can involve adult operatives by covertly purporting to be a customer or purchaser, depending upon the nature of items for sale or the alleged service provided. The use of this tactic therefore comes with high legal responsibilities in terms of following relevant guidance and considering the justification and application of RIPA. An intelligence led need should be proportionate to the offence(s) indicated, for example where there are reports of underage sales, or an offer of unlicensed or illegal services or prohibited articles offered for sale from a particular premises where intelligence would justify use of the tactic. The South West Trading Standards authority co-ordinates test purchasing arrangements in Devon by conducting activities independently or with local authorities if the legal justification exists. The service is not aware of any circumstances which would satisfy this criteria having been met in the last 5 years.

Question 8: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Democracy & Transparency from Cllr Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Democracy & Transparency, if not in existence already, can we keep a tally on how many women have held Cabinet roles on this Council since executive arrangements were introduced (during the Blair government), party by party, and what was the ratio between men and women that have held senior Special Responsibility Allowance positions from the Conservative administration vis-a-vis the new one?

Answer:

Yes, provided the records go all the way back and are complete to enable this to be done.

Question 9: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Chair of Council from Cllr Paul Millar

To ask the Chair of Council, is he concerned about the tone and party political nature of the debate surrounding the issue of DBS checks, and the implications of harmfully false information made about Councillors on their safety and welfare?

Answer:

I do not intend to answer the question in this forum, as I believe a response could be considered to inappropriately draw the Chair into political debate.

Question 10: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Council & Corporate Coordination from Cllr Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Council & Corporate Coordination, with reference to the recent debate on a Locality Fund for individual Councillors, what examples of maladministration or corruption locally can he point to with reference to his stated anxieties about the process, and does he trust all Councillors in this authority to distribute funds appropriately?

Answer:

Councillor Millar refers to a discussion that took place at the last Community Grants Panel meeting. I sit on this Panel as an individual Member elected at Annual Council and not in my role as a Portfolio Holder. My comments in that discussion were therefore made as an individual Member and this process is therefore not an appropriate way to pursue anything I might have said at the Panel.

I would however point out that I did not reference “maladministration” nor “corruption” in that Panel discussion.

Question 11: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Chair of Council from Cllr Paul Millar

To ask the Chair of Council, what further protections has he considered in relation to Councillors following the murder of Sir David Amess and attack on a Councillor in Yorkshire (for being a Councillor), and have officers been briefed on ensuring all Councillors (regardless of party) are held in the highest regard by members of the public in performing public duties on such a low remuneration?

Answer:

The LGA has launched a series of webinars to help support councillors’ personal safety while carrying out everyday activities. Members were advised of the Personal safety webinars for councillors with the first being held on 10:30am – 12:00pm on 8 December. These webinars will provide an overview of personal safety as it applies

to councillor's everyday activities, including risk assessments and practical strategies for safe working.