

Council – 28 November 2018

Public questions:

1. From Michelle Dorrell to Councillor Ewart-James, Cabinet Member for Housing

Earlier this year, District Council publicly promised to review its current SWEP procedures to protect homeless people. Can I ask what has been the result of that review, how and when will it be made public; to ensure Folkestone doesn't add to the statistics of homelessness deaths across the country?

ANSWER:

The Council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is reviewed annually and aims to get rough sleepers off the streets during periods of below zero night-time temperatures, by providing emergency accommodation.

SWEP guidance issued by Homeless Link (with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) – advises to activate SWEP if weather is extreme or the temperature goes below zero on 3 consecutive nights – which is how the Council has run SWEP in previous years.

However, this year, the Council will pilot activating the SWEP if temperatures go below freezing on a single night or if there are extenuating circumstances (severe wind-chill factor, snow, rain, etc.).

The Council's Housing Options Team will continue to be responsible for checking the weather forecast every day before 11am, when severe weather is predicted. SWEP will continue to be monitored annually.

THERE WAS NO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION.

2. From Dr Geoff Burrell to Councillor Malcolm Dearden, Cabinet Member for Finance

The Princes Parade development is critically dependent on the availability of cash receipts from its own residential build programme. Those receipts will however fall substantially short of the needs of the project, due to under-estimation of the engineering difficulties and because Betteridge & Milsom have used Savills land valuation figures that are based on quite different assumptions. The level of debt will therefore be much larger than anticipated and will ramp up more rapidly due to a combination of later sales receipts and a greater need for up-front expenditure on external work.

Would Councillor Dearden please advise what levels of debt will be incurred and how the council intends to service that debt?

ANSWER:

Thank you Geoff for your question and by doing so giving the opportunity to respond positively and hopefully to give reassurance as to your evident concern as a professional person.

You are aware that the replacement of the over 50 year old Hythe Pool with a brand new state of the art recreation centre and new housing for the District is a large Construction Project and as such will need to be managed effectively to mitigate any identified risks or indeed those which are not yet known. I am pleased that you provide your expertise in scrutinising what we are doing and encourage you to continue to do so as I do with any other interested parties so that we can get the best and most cost effective benefits for the District and its residents well into the 21st Century.

You will be pleased to note that the Council, in fulfilling its duty of care and its responsibilities to the tax payer whilst also seeking to provide a facility of which we can be proud, has employed and will continue to do so appropriately relevant and qualified professional services and expertise to seek to ensure that risks incumbent upon such a project are minimised.

These key professional advisors who have appropriate professional indemnity and significant levels of expertise in the main can be summarised as follows.

- 1) Betteridge and Milsom.
Quantity Surveyors providing construction consultancy across the South East for over 30 years who have been responsible for the development of the initial viability cost appraisal and who are regulated by their professional body The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors.
- 2) Savills (UK) Ltd.
One of the World's leading property agents established for over 160 years who have provided valuation appraisals for the proposed residential / commercial land at both the Princes Parade and existing Pool site.
- 3) Idom Merebrook.
An experienced multi-disciplinary firm who have provided expert advice on the geo-environmental aspects of the project.
- 4) Hadron Consulting
Who have overseen and accepted responsibility for the delivery of a number of leisure projects across the United Kingdom and who are providing advice to the Council as to procurement and project management which will be reported to Council in due course.

Underpinning our endeavours is a cadre of experienced and conscientious officers together with proper scrutiny by Council procedures ensuring veracity of procedural decision making.

Both at Common Law and statutorily there are laid down parameters under which the Authority makes decisions and the Council has and continues to follow all these procedural requirements including within the context of your question the need to consult.

Based upon the information I have seen neither I nor officers who advise me can reconcile the scenario you describe with the advice that has been given and to which I allude to above. It is not the Council's aim to enter into any long term debt.

The formal business case for this project has yet to come to Cabinet and when it does it will be thoroughly examined and the officer corps will have commissioned and gathered the relevant information for consideration. As I have already indicated but it is worthy of repetition by way of emphasis the officer have a statutory duty and responsibility to provide full and proper advice without prejudicial bias and recognising the calibre of those officers I have every confidence that they will fulfil and deliver that responsibility conscientiously.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

I notice that you did not mention the debt. Will PWLB(Public works Loan Board), or other lenders, be content to provide a loan for Princes Parade?

ANSWER:

I do not envisage long term borrowing. The calculations you have used appear to show double counting of costs. I would be happy to consider this further if you provide details of the figures you used. The business case is expected to come before Cabinet in January, and Council in February.

I would be happy to look at your calculations if you provide the Officers with the detailed calculations and assumptions you have used.