

WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

The following questions listed on page 39 of the agenda have been received from Councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answers listed below:

(a) Councillor Hamilton

“There are many footpaths in Portslade, providing safe traffic free access to many parts. The path at the rear of High Close in Portslade was impassable, with brambles and nettles on both sides of the path meeting in the middle. It appears there is no programme for footpath clearance. Please could consideration be given to an annual maintenance programme?”

Reply from Councillor West, Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee.

“Many of the cities footpaths including the High close path referred to by Councillor Hamilton are on an annual cut. This cut has recently taken place in Portslade and most of the paths are now clear. By cutting in June and July paths tend to stay clear for the rest of the summer and through the winter although, as Councillor Hamilton has raised, the vegetation can get long prior to the cut. If we are aware of paths being impassable prior to the scheduled cut additional cuts can be made.”

(b) Councillor G. Theobald

“How much money was spent on agency staff between the start of the recent unofficial strike and subsequent work to rule by City Clean staff on 8th May, and the start of the official strike on 14th June?”

Reply from Councillor Littman, Deputy Chair (Finance) of the Policy & Resources Committee.

“The total spend on agency staff in Cityclean covering all services was £92,527.60. On average, over a 28 day period, the amount spent would be £52k to cover for normal absenteeism across all Cityclean services. Over the course of the unofficial industrial action, additional agency staff were deployed to collect refuse from households to try to minimise disruption to residents as far as possible.”

(c) Councillor Hyde

“Many councils operate corporate ‘customer charters’ which, amongst other things, specify how quickly telephone calls should be answered by staff. Does Brighton & Hove City Council have such a charter with a target time for staff to

answer telephone calls and, if so, how does the Planning Department perform against that target?"

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Chair of the Planning Committee.

"The Planning team uses the City Council's Customer Promise which states

- we will be easy to reach
- we will be clear and treat you with respect
- we will listen and get things done

The Customer Promise is a flexible statement that can be applied to customer services across different types of access channel and teams.

Services are expected to develop and adopt their own standards as part of their service planning that are specific and relevant to them. In response to our city's demographics we are seeing the number of incoming telephone calls going down as online services and self serve options increase.

The Planning service offers immediate guidance and advice on a daily basis through two enquiry lines and a face to face drop in service. This recognises that contact takes place in many ways.

Development Control, general enquiries on 292222 (which includes access to a free planning advice

Heritage enquiries on 292271 which includes free advice on conservation and heritage issues

Planning staff deal with upward of 50,000 calls a year and meet more than a 1,500 people a year through our drop in service and prior appointment.

Calls are also managed by individual officers to their direct extension numbers and email accounts. Voicemail is used to assist officers with managing call volumes.

Cllr Hyde will be aware that the cross party Planning Committee Member Working Group (2 Labour/2 Conservative/2 Green) has agreed at the request of the Development Control Service to work with them on establishing what appropriate service standards should be set. Setting these standards will also take into consideration the volume of customer contact taking place through emails as well as by telephone. For instance we know some of our customers will have preferred ways of making contact and we need to ensure we have standards for all of these."

(d) Councillor G. Theobald

"In the light of (a) the recent statement in the House of Commons by Local Government Minister, Brandon Lewis, about the unsuitability of Green Belt land for traveller sites and (b) the concerns that have been raised by experts about possible contamination of the drinking water aquifer, will the

Administration now be shelving its plans for a new permanent traveller site at Horsdean?"

Reply from Councillor West, Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee.

"The recent ministerial statement was about Green Belt land, not national parks. The NPPF does look to restrict development in areas such as national parks, but these designations are not a blanket ban. There are of course a number of communities living in towns and traveller sites within the national park (including the transit site already at Horsdean). The site selection process we have undertaken found Horsdean to be the most appropriate location in the city for the permanent Traveller site when compared against a whole range of criteria. BHCC has worked with landscape advisors who have a great deal of experience of working in the South Downs National Park to advise on how the scheme can be landscaped to both minimise its own impact and in fact improve on the existing impact of the transit site.

We are presently exploring the options to eliminate the potential for ground water contamination and will have this ready prior to the planning application being submitted to the National Park Authority - we are working with our hydrology experts and the Environment Agency on designing a solution.

There is an identified need for permanent Traveller pitches in the City, which the proposed Horsdean Permanent Traveller Site seeks to address. The absence of that provision currently contributes to the pressures we see with unauthorized encampments on sensitive sites in the city. Opposing the permanent site proposal will only prolong those impacts."

