

## **Questions for the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee 12 February 2015**

**Subject:** Council Policy - Openness and Transparency and Accountability

**Issue:** A Citizen's Question about the withdrawal of the facility for Citizens' Questions at Council Meetings.

**Preamble:** The following presentation and questions had been prepared for the January meeting, which was cancelled. Current casework precludes this citizen from attending on 12 February.

### **Summary:**

The facility for the standard agenda item 'Questions from Members of the Public' has been withdrawn from Area Housing Forum Meetings.

This removes the important elements of the much-publicised Council's claims to be Open, Transparent and Accountable.

In addition, the way in which the Council Policy change has been introduced has itself been shrouded by a lack of Openness, Transparency and Accountability.

What has happened is also contrary to what was understood to have been the expressed wishes of Elected Members when the format of Area Housing Forum Meetings was discussed.

This presentation raises questions for the Scrutiny Committee as indicators for an investigation into how this unacceptable situation has occurred and stresses that the Scrutiny Committee is not limited to the questions below, for which a written response would be appreciated.

### **Background:**

It has been accepted practice now for many years that Council Public Meetings include an agenda item for Questions from Members of the Public. This practice was also applied to the Housing Area Management Meetings, which later became the Area Housing Forums when the management of Council Housing went in-house.

The questions and their answers formed a part of the public record.

When discussing the terms of reference for these meetings, TARA representatives, Elected Members, and Council Officers, all agreed that Questions from Members of the Public was to be retained.

However, recently, the agenda item was removed from the Area Housing Forum Meetings.

When the Council was asked why the Agenda item for Questions from Members of the Public was removed, the answer was given to the effect the removal of the facility allowing members of the public to ask questions was to improve the management of the meeting.

In fact the Council's answer given is not true.

For many years this Council has had a policy whereby citizens can ask questions at public meetings.

The accepted practice has been that the questions would be answered if possible, or alternatively a written response provided.

If the questions specifically asked for information for which the Freedom of Information applied, then the principles of the FoIA were engaged.

On the basis of the principle that questions asked in public should also be answered in public, both the questions and their answers formed part of the public record.

The above arrangement has been operating for years, without any disruption to the management of Council meetings.

This accepted custom and practice has been adopted at all levels of Council meetings, from Full Council, at Cabinet, and even at these Scrutiny meetings.

The fact that years of custom and practice in this regard have been abandoned for Area Housing Forum Meetings is a dangerous step seen as a potential 'thin-end-of-the-wedge' that could be spread, not only throughout Council Housing meetings, but also throughout the entire Council.

Such would be contrary to Council policy, made all the worse by the manner in which the Policy change appears to have been introduced by back-door means and predicated upon a false statement.

### **Questions for this Scrutiny Meeting**

Would this Scrutiny Panel please discuss and arrange for appropriate advice when answering the following considerations, which in no way limit the scope of any investigation:

- 1 WHO first proposed that the agenda item 'Questions from Members of the Public' be removed from Area Housing Meetings – and WHY?
- 2 When was the removal of the item discussed – please provide the minutes of the meeting.

3 Who ( which Elected Member ) approved the removal of the agenda item from Area Housing Meetings?

4 Please provide the document signed by the appropriate Elected Member, and or Senior Council Officers, that approved the removal of the agenda item, along with any documents that purported to rationalise the decision to remove the agenda item.

5 Would the Scrutiny Committee please indicate whether it supports the removal of the agenda item, or not, and give reasons.

Thank you for your consideration.

martin brighton

**Additional Personal notes, for information only:**

Minutes have been issued falsely portraying me as repeatedly complaining, which is not my practice at meetings at which I am a member.

Not only must minutes now be changed, but also all those who receive copies of the minutes must be informed of the amendments.

This practice is but one way in which this citizen is being demonised.

Subject Access Requests: initial outcomes – by some council officers, supported by some elected members, there have been years of the creation and maintenance of the widely disseminated illusion of this citizen being some kind of three-headed-beast-of-the-devil, thereby whipping up corporate hysteria and paranoia against this citizen, to the extent that even people who do not know this citizen are negatively predisposed.

The material is highly inflammatory, deliberately and maliciously inaccurate beyond even rational fantasy, and clearly designed to widely incite hatred against this citizen.

There have been repeated attempts to have this citizen removed from council meetings, not just area housing forums, also based upon defamatory and libellous falsehoods, and contrary to Council Standing Orders and meeting Terms of Reference.

No action has at any time been taken against those council officers who have continued their ongoing obsessive vendetta against this citizen for years.

All of the above are carried out with the support of some elected members.

Please note that when the above issues are mentioned at meetings, the issues are never included in the minutes.

Regards, martin

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