

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

### **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.

### **RESPONSE**

This is the fourth time that Mr Brighton has asked these or similar questions. The other three occasions were as follows –

1. In an email to J Loveless on 8-12-14 (see Appendix 1 below)
2. At Full Council on 7-1-15 (see Appendix 2 below)
3. At Community Engagement Partnership Group on 19-2-15 when he was told by J Loveless that he had already been given answers to these questions

In my opinion the Council has already given an adequate series of replies to these questions and Mr Brighton should be told that there is nothing to add to previous replies.

## Appendix 1

On 8 Dec 2014 Mr Brighton sent this email to J Loveless –

I would be grateful for your advice:

Item 7 Paper F [Terms of reference of Local Area Housing Forums]

*"2.4 Members of the public can attend meetings as observers. They may not ask questions or take part in the meeting."*

It is accepted that members of the public can not ask questions during the meeting. However, the wording appears unclear. It is already established council policy that citizens have an agenda item at the start of each meeting to ask questions. Could you please confirm that this is still the case, as I may have some questions for the meeting?

On 18 Dec J Loveless replied to MB as follows –

Dear Mr Brighton,

Thank you for your email.

The Council's Constitution refers to citizens having the right to participate in question time at Council bodies and other such meetings. It is not the intention of the Constitution to be prescriptive on the matter of whether or not "other such meetings" includes bodies such as Local Area Housing Forums (LAHFs), and the Housing and Neighbourhoods Service has therefore exercised discretion on this matter and decided that members of the public may not ask questions or take part in LAHF meetings. LAHFS are different from Area Boards, with less decision-making and more consultation, and as they combine some of the functions of the Area Boards with the functions of the old Local Housing Forums there are time pressures. By removing time for public questions we are better able to manage the business of these meetings. I realise that you will be disappointed about this. However, as you know, there are other opportunities open to members of the public wishing to comment on and influence the delivery of our services, including contacting local Councillors and attending and asking questions at meetings of Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee and Full Council.

I appreciate that you would have liked a response before the 9 December meeting of the LAHF but unfortunately that was not possible.

I hope that this answers your query. If you wish to take the matter further please visit this webpage –

<https://www.sheffieldhomes.org.uk/myCommunity/HaveYourSay/ComplaintsPraiseAndSuggestions.aspx>

Yours sincerely,

**John Loveless**

## Appendix 2

At Full Council on 7 January MB asked questions and received answers. These were minuted as follows -

### 5.2.2 Public Questions Concerning Area Housing Forum Meetings and Housing and Neighbourhoods Advisory Panel (HANAP) Meetings

Mr Brighton asked the following questions concerning Openness and Accountability:

1. Why has the facility for citizens' questions been removed from Area Housing Forum Meetings?
2. At what meeting was this change to Council policy debated and approved by elected members?
3. At what meeting was the proposal to change the Council policy given prior consultation and consent from tenants?
4. Who authorised the change?
5. Why are citizens not allowed to attend HANAP meetings as observers, or ask Citizen's questions?
6. At what meeting was this change to Council policy debated and approved by elected members?
7. At what meeting was the proposal to change the Council policy given prior consultation and consent from tenants?
8. Who authorised the change?

Councillor Harry Harpham, the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods responded that the Area Housing Forum Meetings were not public meetings and there were therefore no public questions. Other meetings and fora did exist where people were encouraged to participate and ask questions. There had been no change in policy regarding the Area Housing Forum meetings. With regard to meetings of HANAP, there were no public questions at that particular body. This was to help manage time at those meetings. In relation to Mr Brighton's other questions, Councillor Harpham stated that there had not been any change in policy.