

CABINET – 10 APRIL 2014

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

WRITTEN RESPONSES

1.

Questioner: Ramesh Nadarajah

Asked of: Councillor Susan Hall, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Environment

Question: “The Whitchurch Playing Fields is being offered on a long lease for a free school. Why has the feasibility study showing the site can accommodate a school not been provided?”

Written Response: The Educational Funding Agency carried out the feasibility study and has confirmed to the council that they wish to acquire the site.

If Cabinet approves the grant of 125 year lease of the site for a Free School it will be subject to receipt of a satisfactory planning consent. The planning application will be subject to normal full statutory consultation.

2.

Questioner: Peter Karan, Whitchurch Consortium

Asked of: Councillor Susan Hall, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Environment

Question: “You were part of the cabinet that put the tender out in 2009 for organisations to bid to take over management of Whitchurch Playing Fields. As part of the consortium we have been patient for the last five years following all instructions and carrying out all studies requested by the council and being selected as “preferred bidders”. Why are you now offering the site for a free school, without even contacting us to inform us of this?”

Written Response: The Council appreciates that the Whitchurch Consortium has actively progressed the various stages of their bid in respect of the Whitchurch Playing Fields which culminated in the recommendations contained in the Cabinet report of November 2012. However as we discussed at our meeting in February 2014 it became apparent during the public enquiry in respect of the Town and Village Green Application that usage by local schools had been more extensive than previously appreciated. The result of this is that a disposal would require the consent of the Secretary of State for Education under section 77 of the

Schools Standards and Frameworks Act 1988 and priority would be given for a Free school if a requirement exists.

I explained at the meeting that the Council had been approached by EfA to consider a Free School on this site and that it was agreed that EfA would carry out a feasibility study.

The lease will be subject to a community use agreement in respect of the playing fields and proposed school facilities as per the draft Heads of Terms appended to the Cabinet report.

4.

Questioner: Lily Shinkwin

Asked of: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Adults and Housing

Question: “For someone who has been quoted many times in the press complaining about lack of public consultation regarding Whitchurch playing fields, why do you not have any complaints now when the grounds are being allocated for a free school with no public consultation at all, especially as it falls in your ward?”

Written Response: There is an identified need for additional school places in the borough which a Free School on this site would help fulfil.

Any decision to build a school will be subject to the grant of planning consent for which the normal full statutory consultation will be required.