

21 NOVEMBER 2023 EXECUTIVE, PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

Question 1 (Submitted by Mr Edmond Bain)

"Can the Leader of the Council advise me on how I (and others) might be given access to the Published Accounts of the Council for the years 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19 as it is clear from correspondence with the Council that this is being denied to me".

Answer

Firstly I would like to clarify that no-one has been denied access to the accounts. The Council has always followed paragraph 10(3) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, which states that,

"once the audited accounts have been published, an authority must:

- keep copies of the statement of accounts, narrative statement and annual governance statement for purchase by any person on payment of a reasonable sum."

The Council holds these accounts following the accepted practice for accounting records (and in accordance with HMRC direction) that we should hold for the current accounting year and the six previous.

Mr Bain has previously asked us to publish the sets of accounts he requires on our website. The Council had previously published online the accounts for the years he has requested, but when the Council refreshed its website, it only retained published accounts going back to 2018/19 as part of the overall approach to improving the performance and ease of navigation of the website. This also accorded with paragraph 10(3) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, which further states that, again once the audited accounts have been published, an authority must:

- ensure that those documents remain available for public access for a period of not less than five years beginning with the date on which those documents were first published in accordance with that paragraph.

Thus on our website we have the audited 2018/19 accounts and the draft 2019/20 accounts (pending BDO audit).

However, the finance service does still hold copies of the accounts he has mentioned (2015/16 through to 2017/18) and as per the guidance the Council can provide these. These can be made available on request to the Strategic Director Finance and Customer Services. This can either be in digital form (a 'pdf') free of charge, or in a paper copy for a nominal fee of £25 per set of accounts.

Question 2 (Submitted by Mr Edmond Bain)

"Can the Executive Committee confirm the wording of the Minutes for the Executive Meeting held on 9th November 2016 which states that in regard to the acquisition of the House of Fraser that the acquisition was being pursued for investment purposes and that it was noted that the proposed purchase was similar to that of the St George's Industrial Estate in March 2015". "If confirmed this will have an impact on the accounting treatment".

Answer

The relevant minute relating to property acquisition is currently exempt, and Council Officers will review whether it is able to be disclosed and put in the public domain and will respond to you within 7 days.

QUESTION 3 (Submitted by Mr Edmond Bain)

"Does the Leader of the Council share my concern that the indications are that BDO might be reduced to offering solely a disclaimed audit report rather than a qualified report (or better an unqualified report). Residents have been lead to believe that the gap between the Council and Auditor was narrowing focusing principally on two issues, the property valuations and debtors. A qualification might indicate the areas of concern, resulting in an element of reassurance to residents and others, and place a stake in the ground from which to move forward with the Draft Accounts for the subsequent years for absent this has the Council moved forward as hoped. It doesn't reflect well on either party".

Answer

As the member of the public has been advised, this question has not been accepted for consideration at the meeting, as it does not meet the requirement of Part 4 Section E of the Council's constitution for questions to be relevant to a matter included on the meeting's agenda.

It has been suggested that you instead ask this question to the Audit, Standards and Risk Committee at its meeting on 14 December 2023.