



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 15 July 2009

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Thompson

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing

"Could the Portfolio Holder tell me what is the average time taken, during the last year, to turn around a vacant Council house before it is re-let?"

Reply

"The average time taken to re-let vacant Council dwellings for 2008/09 was 42 days, compared to 53 days in 2007/08 and 82 days in 2006/07.

For "general needs" housing, the average last year was 26 days, although the average for sheltered housing was 56 days, resulting in the 42 day average overall. Further changes to the letting process have been made recently and improvements to this performance are anticipated for 2009/10.

Overall, at the end of March 2009, 1.4% of the Council's stock was empty, compared to a national average for Council landlords of 2.4%.

Letting sheltered housing has traditionally taken longer due to the lower number of applicants, who are more "selective" with offers that are made. The new Choice Based Lettings system should address this, as applicants select their preferred properties, rather than the Council offering empty properties that they consider may be suitable."



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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Learney

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment

“Will the Portfolio Holder explain why, during the Hat Fair, one of the City of Winchester’s major events and promoted widely through local schools, hundreds of families with children were left without access to toilet facilities in the centre of town after 9.00pm?

What action is he taking to ensure that all those visiting Winchester in the evening have access to a reasonable level of sanitary facilities?”

Reply

“I am aware of this situation which is regrettable. The public conveniences within the town centre are routinely closed at night in order to reduce the possibility of vandalism.

For special events it is possible for event organisers to request that facilities remain open for longer hours but on this occasion no request was received to do so. No doubt lessons will have been learned and for future such events it is hope that the public conveniences will be available.”



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Lipscomb

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Access

“Will the Portfolio Holder please say how many non-residential on-street parking spaces are available for blue badge disabled drivers in Winchester District, subdivided between Winchester Town and the rest of the District?

Will the Portfolio Holder recognise that those entitled to a Blue Badge are deserving of special consideration in view of the access difficulties which they daily face and that it is inappropriate to make any avoidable reduction in parking provision for them in key access areas, indeed that our policy should be at least to maintain the availability and ideally to increase it, including hours of operation? In that respect, will he say what increase has been made in the provision of non-residential blue badge parking spaces since May 2006 and what plans he may have for any future increase?”

Reply

“Winchester has 5 disabled parking spaces set aside in the Broadway, in addition there are 39 disabled bays in Winchester Town Centre car parks. In these car parks parking is free for blue badge holders but they need to adhere to time limits.

In addition there are 4 blue badge bays in New Alresford with 2 more being installed as part of the new car park being constructed at Perins School in Alresford, 4 in Bishops Waltham and 5 in Wickham car parks.

Badge holders may also park free of charge and without time limit in pay and display on street spaces such as those bays outside of the Guildhall and in The Square.

Badge holders may also park for up to 3 hours on-street on any yellow line where no loading ban is in place.

A number of other blue badge bays are also located within the pay on foot car parks in Winchester. However, due to the nature of the way these car parks are operated, payment needs to be made. The number of bays available in these areas are:

4 Chesil St MSCP

4 Middle Brook Street

6 The Brooks

In addition there are 9 Shopmobility bays available within the Brooks car park.

The only additional disabled non-residential spaces provided since May 2006 will be at the new car park in Alresford.

The availability and location of blue badge parking areas is kept under constant review and is a key consideration of any new project. An access audit is currently being undertaken in Winchester Town which will help to inform future provision as part of the Winchester Town Access Plan. A leaflet is currently under preparation which will provide advice and information on blue badge parking in Winchester.”



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Clear

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment

“Could the Portfolio Holder please clarify the difference between the Council’s original proposal regarding the contributions to the upkeep of public conveniences and the one outlined in the letter sent to all Parish Councils involved dated 22 May 2009? The amount quoted from each Parish Council per facility, especially Wickham, appears to be exactly the same.”

Reply

“The City Council has in my view been consistent in its position regarding the funding of public conveniences by Parish Councils throughout its discussions on 2009/10 budget. As early as March 2009, Parish Councils were advised of the expectation that a 50% contribution would have to be made towards the running costs of each facility, whilst the City Council would retain responsibility for maintenance costs. Parishes were asked to confirm that they would be willing to meet such costs.

Since then officers have been working hard to try and reduce overall running costs of each facility based on energy and water usage and this work continues.

The purpose of the letter dated 22 May was to provide final clarification of the financial contribution expected for the 2009/10 financial year and is consistent with previous indications.”



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Wright

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment

“As the Local Government Association seeks to influence the Council, would the Portfolio Holder agree that with regards to the graph below that statements within their leaflet ‘a climate of change – page 5’ are inaccurate and alarmist.

The Stern review assumes a rise in global temperatures, which there has not been and the statement ‘Without immediate action (reducing CO2 emissions) there is a real risk that we will reach a tipping point beyond which uncontrollable climate change will occur’ as there is no scientific agreement linking CO2 to global warming or climate change.

Global Monthly Mean Surface Temperature Change

Line plot of monthly mean global surface temperature anomaly. The black line shows meteorological stations only; red dots are the land-ocean temperature index.

(Last modified: 2009-06-09)

<http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/graphs/>

Reply

“The vast majority of the world’s scientific community agree that since the time of the Industrial Revolution, the Earth’s temperatures have been rising due to changing atmospheric chemistry, largely due to man-made emissions.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reviews and assesses the most recent scientific, technical and socio-economic information produced worldwide relevant to the understanding of climate change, with contributions from thousands of scientists from all over the world.

As scientific understanding of climate science has increased the IPCC has made increasingly more definitive statements on the human impact on climate.

Its objective is to provide rigorous and balanced scientific information to decision makers and the findings of its fourth assessment report show:

“Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level”

P30

and that:

“There is *very high confidence* that the global average net effect of human activities since 1750 has been one of warming”

IPCC Climate Change Synthesis report 2007 P37

http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr.pdf

Since the production of the IPCC report, new knowledge has emerged that furthers understanding of the impacts of human influence on the climate and the response options and approaches that are available to tackle this complex issue.

To bring this new knowledge together, in preparation for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009, the International Alliance of Research Universities organised an international scientific congress on climate change, Climate Change: Global Risks, Challenges and Decisions, which was held in Copenhagen from 10-12 March 2009. The information from this Congress has been brought together in a Synthesis Report.

One of the key messages from this report is that:

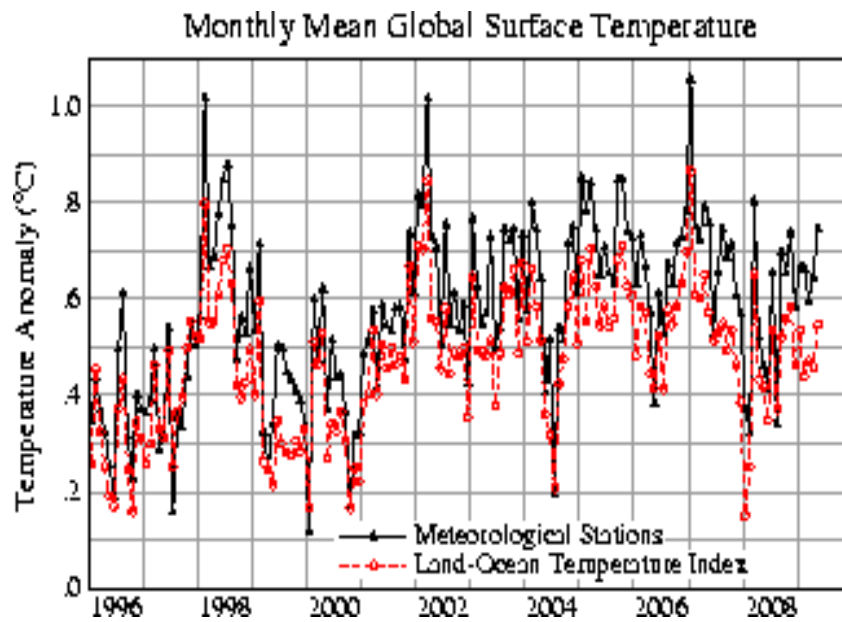
“Recent observations show that greenhouse gas emissions and many aspects of the climate are changing near the upper boundary of the IPCC range of projections. Many key climate indicators are already moving beyond the patterns of natural variability within which contemporary society and economy have developed and thrived. These indicators include global mean surface temperature, sea-level rise, global ocean temperature, Arctic sea ice extent, ocean acidification, and extreme climatic events. With unabated emissions, many trends in climate will likely accelerate, leading to an increasing risk of abrupt or irreversible climatic shifts.”

These findings suggest it is more vital than ever that we take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as individuals, as a council and as a district.

From time to time reports and books denying the science, to suggest that climate change is not man made, emerge. These claims are widely discredited as they are largely unsupported by or misrepresent the scientific evidence, but they do have the effect of raising doubts in the minds of people

thus delaying even further political or direct real action to combat this huge problem.

Having read the LGA document 'a climate of change' and bearing in mind it was written in 2007 from data in the previous decade I would not say that its conclusions are either 'inaccurate or alarmist'."





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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing

“Is the Portfolio Holder aware of the recent planning application for 13 dwellings in Chilbolton Avenue and that of a previous application on the adjoining site for 14 dwelling both by the same applicant? Does he share my concern and disappointment that as this authority is over reliant on commercial developments to provide affordable housing, as the owner has been quite legitimately able to avoid triggering the affordable housing requirement between these two adjoining sites this is a much needed opportunity for affordable housing missed?”

Reply

“Under the current local plan policy a requirement for affordable housing in Winchester is triggered by developments of 15 or more dwellings in accordance with national guidelines for urban schemes. In planning terms there is often nothing to prevent neighbouring sites from being developed separately and, if each proposal involves fewer than 15 units, there will be no affordable housing included. Permission can be refused for piecemeal development, where allowing a scheme on one site would prejudice the comprehensive redevelopment of a larger area of land, but this was not the case in relation to Kirtling House and The Gables, Chilbolton Avenue.

National guidance on thresholds has now been amended to allow them to be locally agreed, this opportunity is now being discussed through the Preferred Options process of the LDF which in future proposes affordable housing contributions from all sites.

The majority of recent new developments have come forward through developer-led commercial sites due in part to the buoyant local property market. The Council has recognised the need to be less reliant on commercial developments and has addressed this by increasing activity on rural and urban capacity sites within its ownership. Recent changes to the regulations permitting Council house building are also being explored to ensure the supply of affordable housing is being maximised within the District.”



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Worrall

To: The Leader

“Could the Portfolio Holder update Members on progress on the project to incorporate the Hockley viaduct into a new cycle way into Winchester?”

Reply

“The National Cycling Network (Route23) is designated to pass through Winchester. The City Council and County Council are currently working with Sustrans to determine the most suitable route. As part of this work consideration is being given as to whether the Hockley viaduct can form part of the route, including access onto it and any engineering measures that may be required to achieve this.

It is hoped that a report can be provided to Members setting out the outcome of those investigations towards the end of 2009.

A meeting with the Leader and Sustrans regarding possible use of the viaduct as part of the cycle route and its future maintenance and ownership will be held in September.

Funding for the cycle route and any necessary modifications to the viaduct to allow cyclists to access and use it will need to be considered as part of this process.”



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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Achwal

To: The Portfolio Holder for Performance and Organisational Development

“How many proxy votes were there for the Southern Parishes in the June 2009 elections?”

Reply

“The number of applications granted for proxies and postal proxies in the Southern Parishes County Electoral Division on 4 June 2009 were as follows:

	County Election	European Election
Proxy - Denmead	5	6
Proxy - Wickham	5	5
Postal Proxy - Denmead	2	6
Postal Proxy – Southwick and Widley	1	1
Proxy and Postal Proxy - Whiteley	Nil	Nil
Total	13	18

The fact that a proxy vote was granted does not necessarily mean that it was used.”



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QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Jackson

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment

“At a recent site meeting attended by me (Ward Councillor), the County Councillor, affected neighbours, one County Council officer and one City Council officer, it was agreed that a particular short footpath/alleyway could be cleared of overgrown vegetation and a long time accumulation of dead leaves, debris and litter if three different departments shared the job, as well as the neighbouring residents. Winchester City Council (WCC) would clean up fallen leaves and litter. Hampshire County Council (HCC) would cut back undergrowth and weeds and the HCC arboriculturalist would trim overhanging branches and shrubbery. (Private residents were obviously responsible for dealing with vegetation encroaching from their properties).

In this matter of partnership working, devolved responsibilities and devolved budgets

- 1) Is there a **detailed** Service Level Agreement which Councillors could consult to ascertain who takes responsibility for what?
- 2) If there is a SLA why does it appear to be not working in many instances similar to that described above?
- 3) To what extent does the Portfolio Holder believe that this type of arrangement (three operatives for one small job) constitutes efficient management of resources and represents best value for money?
- 4) What is the report-back mechanism to Councillors who have raised these matters to ensure that the work has been completed satisfactorily?
- 5) In other similar situations, but where both HCC and WCC deny they have ownership/jurisdiction/responsibility, how would the Portfolio Holder suggest that Councillors can best advise their aggrieved residents who are frustrated by the lack of maintenance where weeds in gutters are taller than knee high at this time of year?
- 6) What is the most efficient process by which Councillors can establish ownership of and responsibility for small pathways/strips of land?”

Reply

“It is difficult to reply to this question in detail without knowing the specific circumstances but, in general, responsibility for the maintenance of adopted alleyways rests with the County Council or the landowners if they are unadopted. For these reasons, there are no detailed Service Level Agreements with the County Council relating to this aspect and the County Council will take the lead on such matters. I am not clear as to why the City Council assisted in this case, but it may have been a gesture of goodwill to resolve a particular difficulty.

Litter is not routinely removed from alleyways at the rear of properties by the City Council, as most of these are privately owned.

If Councillors wish to establish the ownership of individual alleyways, they should approach the County Council in the first instance to establish if they are adopted. If not, then it is probable that they are in private ownership, but the only reliable means of checking this is a Land Registry search, although there is a charge for this service.”



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QUESTION 10

From: Councillor Huxstep

To: The Leader

“Will the Leader please report how the LEADER+ programme is progressing in respect of assisting our District’s rural economy?”

Reply

“LEADER funding is rural economy funding allocated to the Winchester and East Hampshire Districts (known as the ‘Fieldfare’ LEADER funding area) through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). In the local area, £2,025,000 was allocated to be spent by December 2013. The money is primarily for farmers and foresters, but can also be allocated to other businesses and projects benefiting the rural economy.

LEADER funding is given to projects who meet an RDPE measure and who satisfy one of five local themes. More information about these can be found using the quick reference guide at www.winchester.gov.uk/leaderfunding

To date, over 100 enquiries have been received for LEADER funding across the Fieldfare area. This has led to 20 full applications either received or in development, plus a further 40 Expressions of Interest. The first two LEADER funding awards, totaling £51,000, were made on 9th June 2009 – more information is available at

<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/media/PressReleases/NewsArticle.asp?id= SX9452-A784AE11>

As the funding covers both the East Hampshire and Winchester Districts, a protocol agreement between the two authorities was signed in March 2009. This agreement set out the plan to work collaboratively on the LEADER project. Both authorities accepted that every effort would be made to distribute LEADER funding equally across the two Districts. However, it is recognised that there may be a slight imbalance, due to the sorts of applicants and projects coming forward in each area. In reality, the first two projects which have been allocated funding fall within the East Hampshire area. The

projects expected at the next appraisal panel on 21 July 2009 include three applications from Winchester District and one application from East Hampshire. The LEADER funding Programme Manager, Ken Brown, is developing applications across both Districts and will soon be joined by a Programme Officer to undertake the claims process to SEEDA, and manage the strict project recording protocols required by SEEDA.

The Local Action Group (LAG) is the body which makes decisions on LEADER funding. Although this has representation from both East Hampshire and Winchester Councils, it is the LAG as a whole which makes funding decisions, not the individual local authorities. Winchester City Council is the accountable body for LEADER funding in the Fieldfare area, but has no greater decision-making power because of this role.

More information about LEADER funding in this area can be found at www.winchester.gov.uk/leaderfunding A presentation on LEADER funding is also expected at the forthcoming Local Economy Scrutiny Panel on 21 July.”



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QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Sanders

To: The Leader

“The revenue budget for 2009/10 contains a sum of £195,000 for wage inflation. Has the Leader had any contact with his fellow Council Leaders on the national negotiations surrounding this pay settlement, and can he update the Council on progress?”

Reply

“The 2009/10 budget assumed pay inflation of £195,000 for the General Fund and £48,000 for the Housing Revenue Account. The final settlement for 2008/09 will utilise £42,000 and £10,000 of this respectively, leaving £153,000 and £38,000 remaining budget in respect of assumed pay inflation.

The level of pay inflation is one of several key assumptions that have to be made at the time of setting the budget, and monitoring of the overall budget position is ongoing, as looking at any one factor in isolation can produce a distorted picture.

However, I can report that I have recently met with other Council Leaders and the consensus of opinion was that there should be no pay increases for 2009/10.”



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QUESTION 12

From: Councillor Lipscomb

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Safety

“Will the Portfolio Holder please say how many CCTV cameras there are in Winchester Town and the contiguous Parish areas, either under the Council's control or whose footage is accessible to the Council? Of the cameras in the ownership of the Council, how many of these have been authorised for installation since May 2006? Will he further say what is the 2009/10 budget for CCTV?”

Is the Portfolio Holder able to quantify the benefits to the public of Winchester of the CCTV cameras in tangible terms, e.g. by saying how many successful prosecutions have directly resulted from them?”

Reply

“There are 89 cameras situated within Winchester Town belonging to Winchester City Council (WCC) which are all directly controlled and viewed by the Winchester control room. In addition there are 3 cameras belonging to the City Council at Bishops Waltham.

The total number of images available is 125.

The CCTV room in addition has 3 permanent feeds from 3 Romanse cameras provided by a link from Hampshire County Council and 3 feeds from Network Rail at Winchester station. These cameras cannot be controlled by WCC operators, only viewed.

There are also 37 cameras in The Brooks shopping centre; these however are controlled by the Brooks Centre during the day. After 7pm, when the Brooks Centre is locked the City Council's Control Room monitor the 5 external street view cameras.

There is also a permanent feed of a WCC image to the Police control room at Netley.

The service also includes the monitoring of the Shopwatch and Pubwatch schemes, controls the entry and exit systems of barrier controlled car parks and the monitoring of help points.

The budget allocation for the financial year 2009/10 amounts to £240,987 inclusive of the monitoring contract, depreciation and management overheads.

No further cameras have been installed since May 2003; however pictures are now available back to the Winchester Control Room from Bishops Waltham.

For the year April 2008 to March 2009 there were 525 CCTV originated incidents resulting in 136 arrests.

As a breakdown for a typical month (January 2009)

Police originated incidents 24 with 13 arrests
Pubwatch 17 incidents 10 arrests
Shopwatch 20 incidents 15 arrests
CCTV 32 incidents 10 arrests

In all there were 105 incidents logged for the month which included alcohol exclusion zone offences, wanted persons sightings, begging, drunk persons, fire, public order, assault, concern for welfare, traffic offences, alarm activation, fighting, aggressive behavior, drugs, weapons and disturbances.

During the year Police visited the control room and collected 70 tapes as evidence for their enquiries.”



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QUESTION 13

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Leader

“Could the Leader advise me of the nature and substance of advice given by officers/professional advisers over consolidating the Council’s premises in one building and particularly why the Council left Avalon House? Could I also be advised of the amount of rent that the council was expecting to receive from letting out Avalon House and how long has the building been empty?

Could I also be advised of the current estimate of how much will it cost to bring the Avalon House up to a lettable state and when does the Portfolio Holder expect the building to be occupied?”

Reply

“To answer your question regarding the nature and substance of advice given by officers/professional advisers over consolidating the Council’s premises in one building, I would refer you to CAB753, CAB797 and CAB1192. The vision for the new office project was:

To create a high quality sustainable civic centre integrating with the Guildhall, bringing together all office staff in a central location providing excellent and flexible working conditions and facilities that promote good customer service.

The opportunity of occupying the West Wing of the Guildhall lead to a review of all of the Council’s office accommodation with a view to bringing forward the reduction of office locations and consolidation on the Guildhall-Colebrook Street Site (CAB1279) which lead to the decision to dispose of both Hyde Historic Resource Centre and Avalon House.

Avalon House has been empty since May 2007. However, everyone is aware of the collapse of the banks and the economic downturn since this time which has clearly affected our letting or disposal of this property. Nonetheless, a freehold bid has been seriously considered and at present the NHS remain interested in renting the property. The NHS is expected to commit to a lease

once they have their necessary approvals in place which is expected to be in three months. If they do not commit in three months, Estates aim to re-market Avalon House. Estates also advise that Avalon House has remained on the market whilst talks with the NHS have continued and there are already other interested parties.

To avoid any protracted negotiations again, if we are obliged to re-market, Estates have advised that it is essential to refurbish the property. Estates envisage costs to refurbish to a tenantable standard of up to £760,000 including fees and contingencies. They expect to re-let within one year from now and with rent-free incentives would still expect to achieve a rent in the region of £210,000 per annum. The current year's budget assumed part year rental income of £128,700, based on a full year assumption of £230,000 per annum.

However, notwithstanding market difficulties due to the global economic recession, I consider that the strategy of seeking to consolidate the Council's accommodation needs and disposing of surplus buildings is still the right approach."



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QUESTION 14

From: Councillor Worrall

To: The Portfolio Holder for Performance and Organisational Development

“Could the Portfolio Holder update members on progress relating to the management of sickness and absence within the Council, identifying performance by department? What plans are there to introduce revised targets in this area?”

Reply

“The sickness absence figures at outturn stood at 7.8 days per person, below the sickness absence target of 8 days. The continued work on absence management throughout the year has ensured that the figures have remained stable throughout the year with a gradual downward trend. Winchester City Council had the second lowest absence levels within the Region, which has an average of 8.99 days per person (local benchmarking information). The level of sickness absence within the public sector as a whole is 9.8 days per person and in the private sector 7.2 days (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development July 2008).

The Organisational Development Business Plan contains absence targets which aim to reduce sickness absence to an average of 7 days per person by 2012. Achieving these targets would set the Council on a comparable level with the private sector.

As a result of the reduction in sickness absence levels from 9.3 days in 2006/07 to the current levels, efficiency savings of approximately £90,000 have been achieved over the 2 year period. A further potential £30,000 can be identified as efficiency savings from staff with high levels of absence who have left the Council but who still show on the 12 month rolling absence reports.

Absence information, including information of cost of absence for each member of staff, continues to be produced on a Divisional basis ensuring that the profile of absence management remains high. Those staff identified with high levels of absence, using the Bradford Index as an indicator, are managed through the appropriate absence management process with a view to further reducing absence levels. A division ‘league table’ showing the average number of days absence per person by division, split by long and short term absence, is produced on a quarterly basis and discussed by CMT.”



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QUESTION 15

From: Councillor Huxstep

To: The Leader

“Will the Leader please state what advice he sought, if any, from the Director of Governance in respect of correcting misinformation promulgated by the Liberal Democrats, affecting the reputation of Conservative administrations, in the run-up to the recent County Council elections?”

Reply

“I have not sought advice from the Corporate Director (Governance) on this topic, nor would it be appropriate for me to do so. It is for political parties to seek advice from their own legal advisors if they have any concerns. The Returning Officer does not have a role in adjudicating between parties on statements made in election campaigns.”



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QUESTION 16

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Access

“Could the Portfolio Holder confirm to me precisely what legal measures were taken to ensure that the desired highways improvements could be carried out for Grange Road/Close, St Cross Road junction triggered by the Grange Close/Road development dating back to 2001? Is it now true that the County Council has no legal means of getting the developer to undertake any proposed work because the County has left it so long to decide what is actually required? If the City Council were in the same position as the developer would the City Council spend £100,000 when there was no legal obligation to do so?”

Reply

“Planning permission was granted for 37 dwellings at Grange Road subject to a legal agreement which required the developer to enter into a S278 agreement with Hampshire County Council for highway works. A S278 agreement, and further S106 agreement with the County Council, were duly completed. The S278 agreement was however time limited and has now expired.

It is understood that negotiations between the Highway Authority and developer are still continuing to try to ensure that appropriate highway works are completed. They have advised that there is still a legal basis for the County Council to pursue this matter with the developer but the details of this, and the exact nature of the latest highway discussions, are issues for the County Council to address.

The question of what the City Council would do, if in the same position as the developer, is not particularly pertinent given that the situation is on-going and the County Council is still endeavoring to resolve the matter. The behavior of this Council would of course depend upon the exact circumstances of the case.”