



**Winchester**  
City Council

**COUNCIL MEETING – 21 July 2010**

**Question under Council Procedure Rule 14**

**QUESTION 1**

From: Councillor Beckett

To: The Leader (As Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Resources)

“Does the Portfolio Holder have any plans to alter the Capital Programme for this financial year?”

**Reply**

“The Capital Programme is a working plan and as such is subject to ongoing monitoring and adaptation, within the parameters of the Financial Procedure Rules.

Since the budget was set in February there have already been changes in the form of a supplementary approval for the Guildhall, and the Council is being asked to approve the carry forward of unspent budgets from 2009/10.

As in previous years, an update of the Capital Programme will be presented with the annual review of the Capital Strategy to the Cabinet and Council in September.”



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**QUESTION 2**

From: Councillor Achwal

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“As a large majority of my residents, Whiteley Parish Council and businesses in Whiteley would like Yew Tree Drive opened to all traffic, could the Portfolio Holder please advise me what communications have taken place on this matter with Hampshire County Council and whether Winchester City Council will now urge HCC to make plans to open up this road?”

**Reply**

“The results of the survey recently conducted by Hampshire County Council do show that a majority of residents supported the suggestion of a trial opening of Yew Tree Drive to all traffic. We were surprised that the County Council’s recent press release suggested that there was no majority support for a trial opening and it is difficult to understand how they could arrive at this conclusion.

A trial would test the impact on the network and on the amenity of local residents. I would support the trial proceeding now because the purpose of a trial is to gain additional information and does not necessarily imply that permanent opening is the right solution.

However, work on transport issues by the consortium which is bringing forward proposals for the MDA north of Whiteley have not yet been concluded and may have implications in relation to Yew Tree Drive.

We understood from County Council officers that the County Council Executive Member has decided not to take any decision on the trial opening of Yew Tree Drive until he can consider whether transport planning for the proposed MDA raises any relevant issues. This would be sometime in the autumn. The County Council’s press release seems to give a different line and we have asked for clarification. I will be pressing for the views of Whiteley residents to be taken fully into account and for there to be no unnecessary delays to a trial opening of Yew Tree Drive.”



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**QUESTION 3**

From: Councillor Wood

To: The Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Resources

“When the administration looks at the Financial Strategy for 2011/12, will their approach be to look for staff cuts or reduction in services to the Council Tax payer?”

**Reply**

“The Financial Strategy sets out the parameters within which the Administration will make our budget proposals this autumn.

With the Coalition Government committed to significant reductions in public expenditure, the Council faces real financial challenges in the next few years. We cannot address those simply by the salami-slicing of budgets as in previous years. Instead, my Administration has instigated a fundamental review of the outcomes our communities want, and how best we and our partners can provide them with the reduced resources we will have available.

Councillor Wood will also be aware of the flexible approach that has been taken to managing vacancies and redeploying staff in recent years. The recently launched *1-Team* programme will allow us to reduce the pay-bill by matching staff and their skills with our priorities, whilst allowing us to take advantage of vacancies. I expect to be able to minimize the need for redundancies, although I am not ruling out there being some.”



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**QUESTION 4**

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“What is the process for assessing the amount of money that is required from Developers under the 106 agreements needed to fund such projects as road repairs and local infrastructure improvements made necessary as a consequence of the approved development?

What is the Officer and Member involvement in making these decisions?”

**Reply**

“The most common form of contributions (‘planning obligations’) under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act relate to the provision of highway infrastructure and of public open space. In both cases these contributions, where justified, are calculated on the basis of a transparent and publicly available formula in accordance with an adopted policy. The policy relating to highway contributions is the Hampshire County Council Transport Contributions Policy. The City Council has developed its own Open Space Strategy.

The formulae for calculating the level of contribution due in each case has regard to the nature and scale of the development. Open space contributions are sought in relation to residential development whilst transport contributions can be required for most forms of development where there would be an increase in traffic activity.

The levels of contributions are calculated by officers using the formulae and taking into account any factors specific to the application in question which may lead to an adjustment to the contribution sought from the developer. All planning obligations must meet statutory tests to be lawful and in some cases contributions will not be sought if those tests are not met. Members have no direct involvement in this part of the process. However, where a case is referred to the Planning Development Control Committee, financial contributions are identified in the officer’s recommendation and therefore form part of the committee’s decision.”



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**QUESTION 5**

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

“Does the Portfolio Holder share the opinion of the Hampshire County Councillor for the Itchen Valley Division expressed at the Barton Farm planning application meeting that the affordable homes needed by Winchester residents could be provided by the use of ‘brown field’ sites in Basingstoke and if this is the case how can these new homes be funded.

If however, the Portfolio Holder feels that this Authority should be providing homes for local families in the Winchester District how does she feel this can be achieved and where are these homes going to be built. Does the Portfolio Holder feel that with the changes proposed by the Coalition Government to ‘garden grabbing’ it will become less likely that sites will be brought forward where the affordable housing requirement threshold is met?”

**Reply**

“The ability to provide any form of housing is inextricably linked to the supply of land with planning permission for housing, be it small sites in rural areas or larger strategic developments, and to the prevailing economic conditions. It is a statement of the obvious that without planning permissions being granted or housing land being allocated we will not be able to meet the housing needs of our communities. It is also true that there is considerable pressure in some places to restrict new development or to see development take place elsewhere. It is right to be concerned about the environmental and social impacts and the infrastructure requirements of new development. But there is also some resistance to development based on a fear of change and a desire to maintain the status quo which is less altruistic.

We are committed to supporting affordable housing provision within the District. At least 100 new affordable homes will be provided this year and this represents a significant achievement in the current economic climate. But it falls well short of what is needed with current research suggesting a need of some 440 affordable per annum. For that reason we need to make provision

for some additional development in our new Local Development Framework (LDF).

It is important that new proposals are considered and brought forward in a planned way and with the support of the communities they will serve. That is at the heart of the Government's localism agenda. It represents a challenge to everyone to consider not only their own immediate self-interest but also the economic and social welfare of people who want new or different accommodation at the start of their adult lives, when they start a family and in retirement and old age. The LDF process is the correct mechanism for this as the Government has now stated. It will look at new ways of increasing affordable housing provision within overall housing supply including removing thresholds and increasing the proportion of affordable housing on market led sites in consultation with local people which will take some time to become policy given the regulatory requirements the LDF has to follow. In the meantime the adopted Local Plan and the Affordable Housing SPD will provide the policy framework for negotiating on individual sites.

A paper will be considered by Cabinet (Local Development Framework) Committee tomorrow outlining the recent changes to the Coalition Government's national planning policies, including that related to 'garden grabbing'.

Despite what may have been suggested in some parts of the media 'garden grabbing' has not been banned. The Coalition Government has removed gardens from the definition of brownfield development. However, in this District the planning approach is largely based around settlement boundaries and character policies. Consequently, the impact of the changes may be limited and it is recommended to Cabinet (Local Development Framework) Committee that in determining planning applications for housing, emphasis is placed on local character issues, in accordance with Local Plan policy, rather than resisting development for no other reason than because it is on garden land."



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**QUESTION 6**

From: Councillor Godfrey

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Does the Portfolio Holder welcome the changes made by the Coalition Government to PPS3 that are the subject of report CAB2037(LDF)?”

**Reply**

“Yes, I welcome the fact that the changes strengthen our ability to ensure that developments respect the character of the site and surrounding area. This will reinforce local design guidance where it exists and help us to give emphasis to design quality in our emerging policies.

However, it is important to realise that the changes do not amount to a ban on back garden development and, given the housing needs in Winchester District and the limited greenfield sites allocated, we agree that it should not be interpreted in this way.”



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**QUESTION 7**

From: Councillor Henry

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Could the Portfolio Holder please inform the council on the take up of use of the South Winchester Park and Ride Car Park compared to that forecast?”

**Reply**

“It is intended to bring a progress report to Cabinet in the autumn on the new Park and Ride services which will draw upon the results of a joint monitoring programme being undertaken between Hampshire County Council and Winchester City Council officers.

Since the new linked park and ride service begun on 19 April 2010 average daily ticket sales have increased to 763 during June 2010 from around 650. In addition to this figure a further 275 season tickets have been sold which brings the average daily figure to 1038. This does not include a further 150 – 200 users who are currently parking in a temporary HCC car park at Bar End. Until the use of HCCs temporary car park is resolved it is difficult to compare the numbers using the new South of Winchester site with those that were forecast to use it, as the scenario modeled did not allow for the temporary car park still being used. It is also still too early to establish the usage by Winchester University as this should be more marked when their new intake starts in October. A meeting is set up to discuss this with the University.

Bus journey times along Romsey Road are better than expected with very minimal delays as compared to conditions along Romsey Road prior to the opening of the South of Winchester Park and Ride. It is thought that this can be attributed to both a reduction in cars along Romsey Road e.g. hospital staff now parking at the Park and Ride and the effect of traffic control changes at the Chilbolton Avenue and Stanmore Lane Junctions. Overall the new linked service is working well.”





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**QUESTION 8**

From: Councillor Humby

To: The Portfolio Holder for Rural Areas and Market Towns

“Winchester City Council has been a notable success in the field of distributing LEADER funding. Given the uncertainty surrounding the future of SEEDA and its funding, can the Portfolio Holder give a brief update on the position?”

**Reply**

“Councillor Humby is a member of the Leader Action Group so is aware that Winchester City Council has a contract with SEEDA through Defra to deliver LEADER funding, worth £2,025,000 between December 2008 and December 2013. Although the regional development agencies are currently being wound up, there has to date been no amendment or re-negotiation to that contract reducing that funding that is available for the Fieldfare area, notwithstanding the explanation below. It is hoped that Defra will continue to deliver this funding in the future.

As of 22 June, The Fieldfare Local Action Group (LAG) had awarded their total grant budget for 2010/11 of £305,000. However, as one of the premier examples of a successful LAG in the South East (along with the WARR Partnership in East Sussex), an additional £150,000 has been allocated to the Fieldfare LAG by SEEDA, to spend within 2010/11. It is anticipated that this will be allocated over the August and October LAG appraisal panels.

Latest guidance from SEEDA with regards the 2011/12 financial year, is to allocate only up to 75% of the LAG’s grant budget for the time being (the total grant budget for that year stands at £327,000). This is to account for any reduction in funding allocated to the LEADER programme across the South East, should that situation happen. Following the results of the public spending review which are expected in October, it is hoped further news on this matter will be available.

The Fieldfare LAG continues to enjoy a strong relationship with the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) team at SEEDA. The LAG's comprehensive workshop sessions and one-to-one time spent with applications as they work through the application process, is seen as best practice in the region. Following the award of the additional £150,000, and being used as a best practice example at a recent South East LAGs meeting, we are reassured the Fieldfare programme is being delivered at a very high standard. I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate the team leading this project to such a high standard that they are considered one of the two most successful in the South East."



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**QUESTION 9**

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Leader

“In the light of the recent article in a local newspaper about the allegedly high salaries paid to senior Council Officers in Hampshire Local Authorities, would the Leader state how we compare against other Council pay scales?”

**Reply**

“The article comparing senior Council Officers’ remuneration quoted figures which were presented as “total salaries”. It has become clear the definition of total salary has been treated differently by different authorities and whilst some have provided the salary ranges for these posts, Winchester’s figures included actual salary point plus on costs such as employer pension and national insurance contributions. They thus show total employment cost to the Council rather than take home pay.

When Winchester last reviewed salary structures in 2000 the Council aimed to place itself in the median range of chief officer salaries for Hampshire Authority posts to maintain the ability to recruit and retain staff. On the basis of the figures quoted and comparing total salary it would seem that Winchester City Council is broadly maintaining its position in the job market place, although individual roles may vary.”



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**QUESTION 10**

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Leader

“Could the Leader advise me of the up to date position regarding the Silver Hill Development and when is the Council expecting to know better if and when the development will go ahead?”

**Reply**

“The relevant Thornfield companies are still in administration. The administrator is considering the interest expressed in acquiring the rights to the Silver Hill scheme – which is the only asset the companies have other than the freehold of the Friarsgate medical centre. The administrator has indicated that he wishes to conclude matters in the next few weeks. Given the complexity of these transactions it would be unwise to speculate about whether an offer will be made and accepted but there have been enquiries from a number of credible developers.

We have taken advice from our own external legal advisors and from leading Counsel so that we understand clearly our own position and will be able to respond quickly if and when the need arises.”



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**QUESTION 11**

From: Councillor Wood

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

“Is the Portfolio Holder happy with the development in Cross Border Lettings in Hampshire Home Choice, and if not, what will she do about it?”

**Reply**

“The Council’s choice based lettings scheme, Hampshire Home Choice (HHC), was launched in April 2009 in partnership with East Hampshire District Council and Havant Borough Council. An Annual Report reviewing the first operating year was presented to the Council’s Cabinet on 9 July 2010 which (amongst other facts) showed that 1005 households had been housed of which 147 had been from outside their own District. In addition, high levels of customer satisfaction were recorded with many respondents strongly agreeing that HHC does make it easier to select where they want to live.

In Winchester’s case 17% of our local vacancies were let to households from outside the District (as opposed to a sub-regional average of 14.5%), however, the vast majority went to 1 and 2 bedroom accommodation of which the sheltered accommodation was proving very difficult to let. With regard to 3 bed family accommodation, 6 families were housed from the other two LA areas however 6 Winchester families were accepted by them in return. Additional details of cross border moves can be found in Council Report CAB2030, Appendix, 1 Hampshire Home Choice Annual Review 2009 – 2010.

The HHC scheme is scheduled to expand to include Test Valley Borough Council in April 2011, this will expand choice for customers and allow further efficiency savings to be made by combining administrative functions. The risks of expanding the partnership were identified by Officers which included the possibility of Winchester households being denied opportunities to access affordable housing. We will continually monitor the allocation of properties to ensure that does not happen and that there is a fair distribution of allocated properties between LA’s.”



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**QUESTION 12**

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Has the Council any protocols in place which lay down any standards required of Officers in negotiating with applicants for planning permission, in terms that ensure that there can be no doubt about the impartiality and objectiveness of any recommendation that is subsequently made?”

**Reply**

“All officers involved in the handling of planning applications are bound by the Council Employees Code of Conduct.

The planning process frequently involves a case officer negotiating with an applicant or agent to try to secure changes to a scheme which may enable a favorable recommendation to be put forward. However, that officer will not make the final decision in relation to that proposal. The decision as to whether or not permission should be granted or recommended will be made by a Team Manager/Head of Division or by the Planning Development Control Committee.

Most officers dealing with planning applications are Chartered Town Planners and therefore they must also act in accordance with the Royal Town Planning Institute’s Code of Professional Conduct. If any person outside of the Council believes that an officer has not acted in accordance with the code they can make a complaint which would be investigated by the RTPi.”



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**QUESTION 13**

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

“Could the Portfolio Holder confirm the state of negotiations with Swaythling Housing over the transfer of land in North Hill Close to the Council so that a play area can be provided for local residents? Also, whether any progress has been made with either A2 Dominion or the MOD regarding the provision of a play area near to Erskine Road?”

**Reply**

**“North Hill Close**

It has been agreed with Radian Housing Association that for a play area to be built at North Hill Close the play area land must be transferred to the Council so that the Council could then build and maintain a play area on the land. The Council has contacted Radian Housing Association informing them that the Council will no longer require a commuted sum for maintenance along with the open space being transfer and Radian are now consulting their residents and Directors before beginning the legal transfer.

**MOD land at Erskine Road/Sparkford Road**

The MOD have been undertaking surveys of the open space land (traffic statement, bat survey etc) in preparation for a meeting with Planning at which they will set out their vision for developing the land for affordable housing. The extent of public open space provision that would be required as part of this development will become apparent at this meeting. The Council will only be able to provide a play area once land has been transferred to it.”



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**QUESTION 14**

From: Councillor Wood

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Will the Portfolio Holder join me in congratulating Hampshire County Council and the Winchester City Council Officers for their excellent work in mitigating the effects of the Andover Road Closure?”

**Reply**

“The joint working between Hampshire County Council and Winchester City Council officers and Members in relation to management, communication and publicity of the Andover Road Closure associated with Network Rail’s Bridge works should be commended and has shown that the preplanning work has mitigated the effects and ensured that the situation was tolerable for residents and businesses. It is however acknowledged that there were impacts on some businesses and residential streets and we thank those affected for their patience.”