



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 12 January 2011

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Wood

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Can the Portfolio Holder advise when the Parking Restriction Order planned for St Georges St will be progressed?”

Reply

“A proposal to consider introducing further restrictions on loading over the lunchtime period on St Georges Street is contained within the current 2010/11 Traffic Regulation Order programme. Loading is currently banned during the morning and evening peak periods.

This is currently being discussed with County Councillor Brian Collin, as the Hampshire County Council member responsible for this area, to decide if and when it should be taken forward. The next stage would be to undertake wider informal consultation including seeking shops and businesses views on this proposal.”



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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Further to my question asked at the Full Council meeting on 29 September 2010 regarding Hammonds Passage, is the Portfolio Holder aware that there are now thirteen waste bins left permanently on the public highway (Hammonds Passage) and does the Portfolio Holder still feel that no action should be taken against the business which controls these bins? Is the Portfolio Holder happy that all Winchester businesses can now assume that it is acceptable to leave their waste bins on the public highway?”

Reply

“The current situation in Hammonds Passage has been further compounded by the efforts being made by the company concerned to introduce trade waste recycling. Whilst such arrangements are desirable it can conflict with the need to keep obstructions on the public highway to a minimum, particularly when businesses operate from premises with limited storage space, as is the case in this instance.

Officers from the environmental health teams are still in discussions with the company concerned. They have advised that this is not an acceptable situation and that an alternative solution that meets the needs of the business and avoids bins being stored in the passage is required.

Should a suitable solution not be found then the Council will need to consider the legal options available to them to control the storage of commercial waste bins on pavement and highways. This includes liaising with Hampshire County Council as the Highways Authority who are responsible for ensuring that the public highways such as Hammonds Passage are kept clear of obstructions.”



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Hutchison

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“What are the current procedures for public accountability on the use of developers' contributions for highways and transport in the Winchester District?”

Reply

“The City Council has an agency agreement with the County Council to negotiate on its behalf for transport contributions from qualifying development in the District. The scale and nature of those contributions are defined by Hampshire County Council’s Contributions Policy. There is an agreed list of small scale schemes which may be funded by contributions from qualifying development which is available for public inspection. The implementation of these schemes is discussed on a regular basis between the City Council and the County Council.

Where contributions are agreed these are set out in Section 106 agreements between the Developer and the City Council (and the County Council itself for larger schemes). These are available for public inspection and set out details of the sums collected and the schemes which they will fund.

Transport contributions are paid to the County Council which is subject to audit and scrutiny as a public authority.”



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Pearce

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Could the Portfolio Holder please give the current situation regarding Concessionary Bus Passes before we hand over to Hampshire County Council? Also, how far have we progressed with the handover?”

Reply

“Following an extensive consultation exercise the County Council has published the draft rules of the scheme which will come into effect on 1 April 2011 under their administration and management. The draft scheme consists of:

- the statutory scheme (free bus travel between 09.30 and 23.00 weekdays and any time at weekends)
- companion passes for those assisting disabled pass holders
- pre 9.30am use for holders of disabled passes only
- tokens / travel vouchers option for disabled users only valid for use on defined community transport schemes, voluntary car schemes and taxis
- community transport (Dial-a-ride and call and go) half fare travel

The Government is currently making final arrangements for the reallocation of concessionary travel grant from District Councils to County Councils and has recently published details of the amounts to be transferred. The figures for Winchester City Council may be subject to slight amendment following final checking in response to the Government’s consultation. Once the final settlements are known the County Council will agree the final scheme to run from 1 April 2011.

Winchester City Council will administer and manage the scheme, including the issuing of passes, until hand over to ensure the smoothest possible transition. Over the next few months arrangements will be made to transfer information on concessionary travel pass holders to the County Council, meeting all data protection requirements.

The City Council will still have potential financial liabilities relating to claims from bus operators submitted whilst the scheme was under its control. Arrangements are being made with other Hampshire district councils to work together to secure specialist consultancy and legal support in order to be able to deal with these claims.”



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Beckett

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

“What progress has been made to implement the online publication of payments exceeding £500 for grants, goods, or services?”

Reply

“Winchester City Council now has all the payments for spend in 2009/10 published on the Spotlight on Spend website. This data is hosted by Spikes Cavell & Co. The information shown on the pages has been verified for correctness and suppliers within each category have been reviewed to remove the possibility of sensitive information being released with regards to personal names. Any personal information has been redacted/removed.

Additionally, a web page has been created on the Winchester City Council Website with regards to Transparency. A link has been established to the spotlight on spend website.

<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/CouncilAndDemocracy/Transparency/>

Future publication of 2010/11 data can be achieved using this same means, although we are also considering other options to determine the appropriate method of publication.”



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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Power

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Could the Leader please update us on the responses to Blueprint, plans for the next stage, and when we may expect to see the LDF based on the Blueprint responses?”

Reply

“The Blueprint exercise was very successful in engaging the community, including groups or individuals who have not previously responded to consultations on the Local Development Framework. Over 600 Blueprint packs were sent out during the consultation period and there were over 3000 ‘unique’ hits on the web site. 50 Blueprint events were held and Blueprint was ‘Tweeted’ to over 1000 followers.

Over 130 responses have been received to the Blueprint consultation, including 30 from Parish Councils. These are currently being analysed and it is expected that a summary of the responses will be reported to the Cabinet (LDF) Committee meetings to be held on 23 February and 1 April 2011. There are likely to be further discussions with groups in the larger settlements to follow up on responses, along with technical work to identify housing needs and any resulting changes to the development strategies and policies.

The overall programme is set out in paragraph 4.4 of report CAB2077 (see Item 6a). The Cabinet (LDF) will receive regular reports on progress and agree the details of the programme, but it is planned that the next stage of consultation on the LDF Core Strategy will be in July 2011.”



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Banister

To: The Portfolio Holder for Winchester and Surrounds

"All Councillors and the general public very much appreciate the high quality paving which has transformed Winchester High Street.

What is the current situation with regard to the proposed improvements to the Square?"

Reply

"The public exhibition on the enhancement proposals for The Square, including a possible part-time closure to traffic between 10:00am - 4:00pm and the 20 mph zone, was held at the Guildhall on 13 December from 10:00am - 7:00pm. The event was well publicised and attended by around 60 people. This followed a separate workshop for key stakeholders hosted at Winchester BID offices on 29 November, which was attended by around 40 representatives of businesses, residents and interest groups.

Generally, there is a very high level of support and enthusiasm for the overall scheme. There was a more mixed response in relation to the traffic management proposals.

Consideration is now being given to how the traffic management aspects of the scheme could be taken forward. Alongside this the engineering works for the enhancement scheme are being progressed to enable the final scheme and budget to be approved for a start of construction in May 2011."



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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Cooper

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

“Can the Leader give any reassurance that the level of core funding, currently provided to our key clients through the grants process, will be maintained at a level that will allow them to continue to operate and provide meaningful services for Winchester residents?”

Reply

“Key clients have received a letter suggesting that, subject to the budget process, they may face a 25% reduction in their funding from WCC over the next 3 years. This followed discussions with key clients as to the impact that reduced funding would have on the viability of their services.

Smaller grants will require key clients to reduce costs by possibly changing the way they work and, in the case of the 2 Citizens’ Advice Bureaux, working closer together to maintain service provision across the district within the funding available.

In order that this transition can be made with the minimum of disruption, key clients have received an informal indication that it is the aim of the Administration to maintain funding for 2011/12 at 2010/11 levels and to make the 25% reduction in the following 2 financial years if this would help them.

It must be emphasised that other funders are involved in supporting our key clients and that cuts from these other sources will also have an impact on their viability.

It is the Council’s firm intention to help key clients to continue to operate meaningful services and officers are working with them to achieve this.”



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QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Godfrey

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Could the Portfolio Holder please advise me what other response to the public consultation shaped the Cabinet’s decision to introduce charges for parking on Sundays, apart from that listed in CAB 2090TP?”

Reply

“Report CAB2090(TP) set out the responses received formally to the consultation exercise regarding parking charges and those were the ones taken into account when reaching the decision.”



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QUESTION 10

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Leader

“Would you consider that all the Local Authority provided services during the recent snow and freezing conditions were delivered entirely to your satisfaction?”

Reply

“The City Council has a Business Continuity Plan for just such events. In preparing that Plan all Teams have thought about how to/they ensure their service is resilient, and so able to cope with weather emergencies. Many staff can and did home-work on days when travel was difficult, so the impact of disruption was lessened.

I understand all Teams had at least some staff present in the office, with many individuals doing well to travel in difficult circumstances. Across the board the Council was able to maintain a good staff presence across all services, albeit that it is inevitable some appointments will have been rescheduled, and there will be inevitable backlogs of work in most areas.

I am pleased to be able to report our Customer Service Centre was fully staffed during the bad weather, so Members of the public were able to contact us, find out where services were affected and continue to transact business with us.

We endeavoured to undertake snow clearing and gritting in those areas for which the City Council is responsible, such as, parks, gardens and car parks, to make them as safe and usable as possible within the resources available. New arrangements in relation to the gritting routes for the park and ride buses helped to ensure that the services continued throughout the recent bad weather spell with limited disruption to users.

Contingency arrangements were brought into effect for the following services:

Refuse collections; delays arose due to vehicles being unable to collect for two days and this was further compounded by the programmed adjustments to collections over the Christmas and New Years Bank Holidays.

Priority was given to ensuring that refuse, recycling, trade waste and clinical waste collections were maintained as far as practical. For this purpose extra resources were brought in by Serco and garden waste collections suspended so that these resources could also be utilised for catching up missed collections.

All missed collections have now been dealt with, programmed collections are back on schedule and the collection of garden waste and Christmas trees is now progressing as programmed. I believe SERCO and Council staff did an excellent job in maintaining refuse services. It is unfortunate that a Government Minister chose to make blanket criticism of Councils without first checking how many councils, like Winchester, maintained services.

Street Cleansing: routine street cleansing and the collection of fly tipping was suspended except for the emptying of City and Town Centre Litter Bins and the staff and equipment diverted to gritting and salting of areas for which the Council are responsible.

Communications: where disruption to collections arose information was updated daily on the Council's Web site and Twitter. Also bulletins were sent to all Members and Parish Council's daily to keep them informed of any disruption to service affecting their areas and details of advice for the public. Coordination between our Environment Team, Contractors and Customer Services Team worked well.

Overall Serco did exceptionally well operating in very difficult circumstances and both our operations and client team worked closely to ensure that any disruption was kept to a minimum. I am sure Members will join me in thanking them.

Generally the public were understanding of the difficulties in maintaining services during this period of adverse weather and their help and co-operation in this matter was appreciated."



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QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Jackson

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

“What progress is being made with regard to shared IT services and what are the implications for our customers and residents who use the website and online access?”

Reply

“I am pleased to say that just last week the Leader of Test Valley and I agreed to appoint the Joint Head of IT for our two Councils. That follows the successful launch of the shared Service Desk in November of last year.

We have asked the appointee, Tony Fawcett - who some Members may recall, ran the service when Steria provided an IT managed service to the Council – for his ideas on the next steps in developing a shared service and will be discussing those further in the near future.

A shared IT service can provide a platform for greater service integration and efficiency for our two Councils. It can also offer the basis for improving customer service by making better use of our website, allowing more on-line transactions and so on. I see that improved access as a priority for the new team, and think the implications of this change can only be positive for our customers.”



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QUESTION 12

From: Councillor Wood

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

“What is the Portfolio Holders plan to deal with the problem of increasing Houses in Multiple Occupation in Stanmore and the resultant parking problems?”

Reply

“As set out in a Cabinet report for 19 January 2011 (CAB2093) we recognise the issues caused by increasing numbers of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) in Stanmore.

It is estimated that there are 302 HMO's in Stanmore occupied by both students and young single households. HMO's provide a valuable addition to the Districts housing stock, however, they do increase pressure on neighbourhoods as upwards of 3 households live in property designed for 1 household. This leads to pressure on car parking and potentially increased nuisance to neighbours.

Cabinet are considering on 19 January 2011 a consultation exercise with a view to control HMO's through an Additional Licensing Scheme (ALS). This will require all HMO's in the area to be licensed not just the ones covered by the current mandatory licensing scheme (properties with 3 floors or over and / or occupied by 5 or more households). An ALS can only be considered after a consultation exercise with local residents, landlords and other stakeholders.

Action is already being planned to tackle issues around parking, whether these are caused by multiple car owners in HMOs or indeed commuters using free roadside parking. The Head of Access and Infrastructure is intending to carry out informal consultation with residents of lower Stanmore early in 2011. This will probably be in the form of a letter and questionnaire/reply to establish whether there is sufficient support for the Council to pursue the introduction of additional waiting/parking restrictions and whether residents would want to be included in a permit parking scheme. A number of possible changes to the residents parking scheme are being explored.

Along side these initiatives, we are working closely with the University to provide additional purpose built accommodation to help 900 students move away from private renting.”



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QUESTION 13

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Could the Portfolio Holder advise me as to when the Council will be in a position to collect the Community Infrastructure Levy and pending the implementation of this new planning obligation, why can't the Council broaden its policy terms for the use of Open Space and Play Equipment monies collected by the section 106 agreement so that we can use these funds more effectively?”

Reply

“The previous Government introduced legislation enabling local authorities to implement the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). There are various requirements that have to be met before such a Levy could be introduced, including basing it on up to date development plan policies, producing a charging schedule and having the schedule examined and found ‘sound’ by an independent Inspector. Authorities would not be able to seek developer contributions on a regular basis once they adopt CIL, or beyond 4 years from the CIL Regulations (April 2010), whichever is sooner.

Consultation on these arrangements was ongoing at the time of the last General Election and the Coalition Government has recently responded to this. It has confirmed that CIL would be retained, but with some amendments to the examination process and adding a requirement for a proportion of funds to be available to local communities. The Government will revise the CIL Regulations but it is not yet known exactly what changes will be made or when.

Under the current CIL legislation and Regulations the City Council would need an up to date development plan document on which to base CIL and the intention is that this would be the LDF Core Strategy. The CIL charging schedule would then be produced alongside the latter stages of the Core Strategy so that CIL would be ready for introduction shortly afterwards. This programme may need to be reviewed when the changes to CIL Regulations become clearer, having regard to the 4-year deadline for S106 contributions to continue. Therefore, under the current legislation and Regulations, it will not be possible to introduce CIL for some time.

Nevertheless, the Core Strategy/CIL route is currently the best way to review and broaden the range of infrastructure and facilities to which new development is asked to contribute. The Council will be able to use S106 in the meantime but it will not be possible to make significant changes to the statutory policy requirements on which current contributions are based. With regard to contributions which have already been received, these are subject to the requirements of the legal agreements/obligations under which they were contributed, which set out how the funding is to be used. Where such agreements/obligations relate to open space funding, they are directly linked to the Open Space Strategy which is in force at the time of the proposed expenditure of the contributions which are collected. The Open Space Strategy is itself linked to saved policies in the Winchester District Local Plan Review, and is therefore limited to play and sports provision. It would not be possible to amend these saved policies other than by the Local Development Framework process, and it may therefore be more appropriate to seek to develop the CIL regime to take account of Members' aspirations for contributions to a wider set of facilities."



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QUESTION 14

From: Councillor Tait

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

“Could the Portfolio Holder explain why she has not supported the proposals for the refurbishment of the land fronting the Casson Block in St Georges Street and also explain what she feels the future of this building is?”

Reply

“The Casson Block and its immediate environs are not in disrepair, they were however built at a time when design and materials were not afforded the importance they are today. At the same time, the Council owns a number of buildings which require investment due to either obsolescence or physical decay and it is right that these issues are afforded the highest priority.

The Casson block frontage land cannot realistically be dealt with in isolation from the buildings and if a suitable opportunity for a more comprehensive redevelopment arises, the Council will investigate the options. In the meantime, it is right that the Council should focus its investment in property in areas where there is likely to be an appropriate financial return.”