



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 April 2011

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Coates

To: The Leader

“Could the Leader explain what actions have been taken in the past six weeks since the last Full Council Meeting to pursue the case of Former Tenant Debt which I raised at that meeting? If no action has been taken, at what point in the future will the Council be informed that action has been taken?”

Reply

“It is not appropriate to comment on specific cases, but in the last six weeks, 15 new cases have been referred to Legal Services, and the initial processing of these cases has begun, either carrying out searches or advising Landlord Services on recovery action. As well as these new cases, Legal Services has continued to deal with the existing caseload. Of the 78 cases referred to Legal Services in the 2010/11 financial year, all have been pursued in line with the current financial guidelines as regards debts owed to the Council. Legal Services currently has 44 cases, with 23 active cases on its debt collection system and the remainder awaiting tracing reports or other searches. All are being actively monitored and progressed. So far £1,414.25 has been collected on the 23 active debts, and 7 are awaiting bailiff action. Many of the former tenant debts are as a result of rent accrued after the death of the tenant, over the past financial year Legal Services has carried out 70 probate searches, to try and obtain money from the estates.”



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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Henry

To: The Leader

“Does the Leader share my concern that ministerial statements regarding Localism are at conflict with the locally held understanding of the term?”

Reply

“I was very pleased to hear of the Ministerial commitment to localism. The Deputy Prime Minister described the Government’s intention to lead ‘a power shift from central government to the people’ and promised the Government would be ‘stripping away much of the top-down bureaucracy that previous governments have put in place’. The Minister of State for Decentralisation, Greg Clark MP, spoke of an ‘opportunity to redress the balance’.

I think the people of Winchester expect Ministers to be as good as their word, and leave decisions about things that matter to Winchester with Winchester. It is unfortunate that some of the rhetoric from the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government shows worrying tendencies to re-centralisation. He has in turn tried to direct how we allocate budgets and impose planning targets by the back door. I will be encouraging the Deputy Prime Minister to remind Eric Pickles that a commitment to localism does not endorse control by stealth.”



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Cooper

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

“In light of the decisions at Council on 24 February, what action has been taken to expedite the implementation of changes to the 2011/12 Voluntary & Community Grants Schemes?

Specifically:

- a) Have all organisations/community groups who received revenue grants in 2010/11 (and were previously told not to apply for this year) and the 2 new groups added to the list, now been informed in writing that they will receive 2011/12 awards? Have they been invited to submit urgent applications? If not, why not?
- b) Has the resurrection of the previously suspended schemes for both ‘Community Capital Grants’ and ‘Community Chest Small Grants’ been advertised on the Winchester City Council Website (and elsewhere e.g. Parish Connect, Press). Have Voluntary & Community Groups been invited to apply for awards from both these schemes? If not, why not?”

Reply

- “a) All the organisations have now been written to with a copy of the application form. We expect to seek formal approval from Cabinet for awards to be made in May.
- b) The Community Capital Grants and Community Chest Small Grants schemes have not yet been advertised. We are simplifying the way that these schemes will be processed following changes in personnel made since the schemes were suspended last year, and to reflect our new commissioning approach. It is expected that announcements regarding the availability of grants will be made after the April Cabinet meeting when the new commissioning process has been approved.”



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Mason

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Having attended a seminar on the South Downs National Park, which is now up and running, could the Portfolio Holder advise me whether all is in place with regard to the new planning arrangements with Winchester City Council?”

Reply

“The Council has worked very hard with the National Park Authority (NPA) over the last 12 months, and alongside the 14 other councils in the Park, to ensure that everything was in place for 1 April which was the date when the NPA became the local planning authority. The Council is now delivering planning management services on behalf, the NPA in the 40% of our District which falls within the Park.

The formal S101 agreement, which set outs the detailed arrangements for the delivery of the planning service over the next 3 years, is nearing completion and should be signed off by all the councils and NPA very shortly.”



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Beckett

To: The Leader as Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Resources

“How many new (or existing) services for Winchester residents will be provided through the new ‘commissioning’ process in the first quarter of the financial year 2011/12?”

Reply

“In moving to a commissioning approach to services, the Council aims to ensure we identify need, allocate resources and select a provider best able to meet that need in an efficient and effective manner. Our existing service planning and budgetary process already include many elements of that approach as part of our annual planning cycle. Some service budgets already include allocations to ‘commission’ work – for example with the Chamber of Commerce or Hampshire Wildlife Trust.

For 2011/12 the Council will be developing this process further. The agreed Council Budget including three dedicated Commissioning Budgets (each of £50,000) and an allocation of £50,000 for awards to small community groups and rural businesses. These budgets will allow us to work alongside a range of community and voluntary bodies, as well as small businesses, to identify how best the priorities identified in the District’s sustainable Community Strategy can be tackled.

Council also agreed a programme of grants totalling £679,400. These will be awarded under service level agreements which ensure they are used to help meet needs identified by our local communities, rather than simply as baseline funding for recipient organisations – a key feature of a commissioning approach to resource allocation.

Importantly, these budgets are not allocated at the beginning of the year, but can be spent as and when the Council agrees with a provider a project or programme that can meet one of our priority needs – addressing community support in Stanmore or a project to support older people, for example. The

Council's recently adopted Change Plans provide the framework within which we will seek to commission work in the coming year, whether from the Commissioning Budgets or other existing resources. We hope partners will also commit resources to these important projects.

We are just at the beginning of the financial year, and it is not possible to predict precisely how these budgets will be spent over the next three months. The Commissioning Team is identifying early opportunities to pilot our approach to commissioning, which is the subject of a report to next week's Cabinet (CAB2153). As a matter of priority we are working with the voluntary and community sector, through Winchester Area Community Action, as well as other providers, to develop the projects which will help deliver the objectives set out in our Change Plans. At the appropriate time, formal Member authority will be sought for that spending, and all commissions awarded will be reported to Members.

As we learn from experience, so I anticipate that other budgets will be allocated through a more robust commissioning approach, and that in particular we will be developing a much greater diversity of providers. I have asked that we review the operation of commissioning later this year, to consider how it can assist in framing the 2012/13 Council Budget."



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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Johnston

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

“What concern does the Portfolio Holder have concerning the impact on residents of the forthcoming benefit changes?”

Reply

“My concern relates to the financial impact that the changes will have on benefit customers as all of the changes reduce the amount of benefit paid.

Housing and Council Tax Benefit

The level of non dependant deductions has increased significantly. This change was implemented for existing and new customers from 1 April. The level of deductions will continue to rise above inflation for a further three years.

Housing Benefit for private sector tenants excluding social housing.

The top up payment, up to £15 per week, has been removed. Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates have reduced. The maximum number of bedrooms that LHA can be based on has been reduced to four.

These changes apply to new customers from 1 April.

For existing customers, the changes will apply on the anniversary of their claims. LHA rates and 5 bedroom rates will be paid at existing levels for a period of up to nine months. This means that existing customers will be affected from January 2012.

A further change will be implemented from January 2012 for single customers under 35 years of age. The LHA rate for these customers will be limited to the shared room rate currently applicable to single under 25 year olds.

The Council will be able to support some claimants by awards of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). However, the ability to do this is very limited. In 2011/12 the Council may award £51,800 in DHP. Only £20,700 of this amount will be funded by Government subsidy and the Council would need to find additional resources to pay DHP in excess of the funded level.

There are approximately 700 private sector housing claimants currently. It is unclear at the present time how the private sector rental market will react to the LHA changes but it is likely that a significant number of claimants will be adversely affected by the changes.

The Council's Benefits and Homelessness Teams are working together to support those affected as far as possible."



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Godfrey

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“The Council's decision to implement the Conservative amendments to the Sunday Parking and other parking charges were to be made ‘as soon as practically possible’. Cabinet paper CAB2146 indicated that it would have been possible to implement these changes this month which would have meant that the public and business could benefit at the earliest opportunity. However, it seems that Cabinet have chosen to delay the implementation until after the Election. Can the Portfolio Holder confirm that, should they form an administration in the new municipal year, they will implement in full the Council's budget decisions at the earliest opportunity?”

Reply

“There are two ways of advertising changes to car parking charges – one is by statutory notice and is used to give advance notice of simple changes to pricing, the other is by variation order which gives notice of a change and invites those affected by it to comment. This is used when the change involves a modification to policy or involves a change which may have implications for users and businesses. The changes the Conservative amendment sought to reverse had been brought in by variation order and we were advised that to change them again would have to be by variation order. In addition the Conservative amendment introduced a new element to parking in the market towns, which had not been previously consulted on and which may have significant implications for patterns of usage.

Officers will collate responses to the advertised variation order and report them, together with recommendations, to the first available Cabinet meeting.”



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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Rutter

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Has there been any significant impact on the numbers of people coming into the City on Sundays following the introduction of Sunday parking charges?”

Reply

“Although we have no specific income figures for Sundays at this stage due to the nature in which cash is collected and accounted from off-street car parks, the indications are that car parks appear to be well used on Sundays since the introduction of charges and no significant issues have been reported in terms of impact of people parking on street to avoid the charges. The number of penalty charge notices issued in relation to on street parking offences has not increased since the introduction of Sunday car parking charges in the central car parks.

The outer car parks where Sunday car parking remains free are also being used and we have no reports of these being over loaded.

It is early days in terms of assessing the impact of Sunday charges particularly on income. Once we have a few more months data, we will be able to get a better idea of how this is affecting overall income levels, although other factors may be having an effect such as the recession.”



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QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Pearson

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“What action has been taken by the Portfolio Holder to implement the decision taken by Council on 24 February, regarding the ‘kerbside collection of glass’? For example, have Winchester City Council informed East Hampshire District Council of the decision?”

Reply

“Winchester City Council have informed East Hampshire District Council of the decision taken by the City Council on 24 February, relating to the kerbside collection of glass.”



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QUESTION 10

From: Councillor Mather

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“In the light of the decision taken by Council on the 24 February what steps have been taken to identify the sites for the new Community glass bins that the Council agreed to fund?”

Reply

“Officers have been fully committed to work on the arrangements for the new environmental services contract and have not looked into this matter yet. It was not entirely clear from the Council amendment what form these new ‘community glass bins’ were to take or what demand there would be for them. Cabinet will need to consider a report in due course.”



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QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Clear

To: The Portfolio Holder for Rural Areas and Market Towns

“Could the Portfolio Holder please inform me on what community consultation has taken place with residents of Winchester District from Fareham Borough Council, regarding the proposed Fareham SDA of 7,500 houses to be built right on the district boundary?”

Reply

“There are basic statutory requirements for consultation which local planning authorities must follow during the preparation of ‘Local Development Frameworks’. Each authority also produces a ‘Statement of Community Involvement’ (SCI) which provides further detail on that authority’s approach, although this need not go beyond the statutory requirements. Local authorities must consult with ‘specific consultees’, which include neighbouring Parish and District Councils.

So far as officers are aware, Fareham Borough Council has met the statutory requirements for consultation, but this will be one of the matters that the Inspector appointed to examine Fareham’s Core Strategy will consider. There is no specific statutory requirement as to how individual residents or non-statutory groups are consulted. As far as I am aware, the main additional form of consultation has been through the SDA Community Liaison Group, established in 2009, and a series of stakeholder workshops on the SDA, during 2009 and 2010.

While I am disappointed that consultation with communities and residents in Winchester District does not seem to have been particularly pro-active, it is ultimately for Fareham Borough Council to establish its consultation programme and to satisfy the Public Examination Inspector that this meets statutory and SCI requirements.”



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QUESTION 12

From: Councillor Stallard

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Now that planning permission for the further 2,550 residential dwellings at West of Waterlooville has been granted, and the Section 106 agreements are being drawn up, can the Portfolio Holder confirm what financial steps are being taken to compensate for the ongoing road disturbance and general inconvenience to residents of Denmead?”

Reply

“The provisions of the Section 106 agreement for the Newlands development will require either agreed works to be carried out or specific sums provided to satisfy the requirement for highway improvements as set out in the report considered by the meeting of planning committees on the 21 March 2011. These were negotiated by the planning authorities and Hampshire County Council based on the detailed assessments made of the impact of traffic from the development.

Residents, whether in Denmead or elsewhere, cannot be compensated for ‘general inconvenience’ but a sum has been provided that can be used to meet the cost of minor highway improvements which have not been foreseen but might arise as a consequence of the development.”



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QUESTION 13

From: Councillor Hutchison

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“What are the obstacles to the introduction of a 20mph speed limit in the residential areas of Winchester? And how best can those obstacles be overcome?”

Reply

“Hampshire County Council has now authorised the City Council to progress an initial proposal to introduce a 20mph limit for the area around The Square.

Meetings have taken place with the police and County Council officers to determine the best way to take this forward. Both are supportive of the initial scheme subject to agreeing the details.

It is intended to advertise this proposal in the next few months to seek views and potentially implement the scheme in November to coincide with the reopening of The Square after its refurbishment.

The signing of 20mph limits is a key component and can often be the most difficult aspect of such schemes. This is currently being carefully designed for the initial scheme for The Square and will be an important part of the consultation.

It is hoped that this initial scheme will help to identify and address potential concerns and therefore enable further 20mph limits to be progressed in the future.”



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QUESTION 14

From: Councillor Lipscomb

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

Play Area at Sutton Park development, Sutton Scotney

This site was completed and occupied in 2005. The Portfolio Holder may be aware from her Officers that there continue to be problems with compliance with the planning consent in respect of the safe and satisfactory operation of the children's play area, located at one end of the development and – *contrary to my strong advice at the time of pre-application discussion* – constructed over the sewage treatment plant and gas storage. Those failures have been the subject of periodic and vociferous complaints to Officers by local residents, Ward Members and the Parish Council, right up to the present time. We presently await, with perhaps understandably limited confidence, the outcome of the latest round.

In the hope of stimulating rapid progress towards an early resolution, will the Portfolio Holder please set out here, with key dates:-

1. the requirements of and attached to the planning consent for application 04/02241/FUL in relation to the construction, operation and management of the children's play area and associated services and facilities;
2. the problems that have been encountered;
3. the steps taken by the Council to remedy them (bearing in mind that responsibility rests with the developer for compliance and with the Council for original consent and enforcement);
4. the present position.

Will the Portfolio Holder agree to visit the site with local Members?"

Reply

“1. the requirements of and attached to the planning consent for application 04/02241/FUL in relation to the construction, operation and management of the children’s play area and associated services and facilities;

The requirement to provide a play facility formed part of the original permission granted March 2005. The development was approved subject to a s106 agreement which, amongst other things, included provision for a play area and public open space the details of which were to be agreed by the Council.

It was envisaged that, once provided on site by the developer, the legal liability for the management of the public open space would at some point pass to a private management company (Meadfleet) again with agreement of the Council.

The drainage of the development had not been finalized at the point permission was given but foul drainage was to be provided either by means of a sewage treatment plant located in the open area adjacent to Saddlers Close, or by connecting into a Southern Water sewer. A condition was imposed relating to the approval of the final drainage arrangements.

2 and 3. The problems that have been encountered and the steps taken by the Council to remedy them

When Sutton Park was built an on-site facility sewage treatment plant (STP) was provided as indicated on the site layout plans submitted at the application stage but the play area was not completed until April 2008. At this point the STP was working satisfactorily and Barratts had fulfilled the requirements of the s106 agreement regarding the provision of a play area.

In July 2009 the parish council raised concerns about Barratt’s maintenance of the play area, the continued inadequacies of the fence between the two sites and the safety of the hatches in the decking. The ward Councillor also raised safety concerns in view of smoking in proximity to the flogas tanks.

The Council approached Barratts about these issues who assured the community that the play area was safe. The hatches on the gas tanks were locked and all other manholes were covered. The HSE and RoSPA had confirmed that there was no risk from smoking on site.

In July 2009 there were problems with the STP. Repairs were carried out to the facility. It was at this point however that Barratt accepted there were residual issues regarding the adequacy of the STP.

The Council has also received complaints regarding odours emanating from the STP and these have been investigated by Environmental Protection. The odours did not constitute a nuisance, as they did not affect the inside of

properties in the vicinity of the STP, but were most prevalent around the play area.

In July 2010 in response to Council further complaints about maintenance of the play area Barratts confirmed that they were

“currently pricing a thorough overhaul of the effluent treatment plant which will involve extensive works. Upon completion of these works we will re-level and re-furbish the play area and replace the fence at the rear with concrete posts and gravel boards. At that time we shall inspect with Meadfleet and transfer not only the maintenance liability, but also the ownership of this land to Meadfleet.”

Meadfleet however have been unwilling to take legal transfer of the open space at Sutton Park and will not do so until it is entirely satisfied that the sewerage system is to the standard required. It will not resume responsibility for the system until that time.

4. The present position

Barratts have confirmed that the work to the treatment plant has now been completed, which has involved up-grading of the facility, and that they intend to have finished the other remedial work by Friday 28 April. Officers are monitoring this remedial work (landscaping and play area) and will ensure that it is to the standard required before arranging a joint inspection with Barratts and Meadfleet prior to handover. Hopefully therefore this situation will be satisfactorily resolved.

It is agreed that the siting of the children’s play area over access to the utilities is not ideal and I very much doubt that this will be permitted as a solution again elsewhere. Nevertheless, these two uses of this part of the site are not fundamentally incompatible if the STP is properly managed and maintained.”



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QUESTION 15

From: Councillor Fall

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Could the Portfolio Holder advise me what progress has been made to review arrangements for residents parking in Stanmore?”

Reply

“A review of residents parking is included in the agreed 2011/12 Traffic Management Programme.

It is hoped to start the consultation in May by writing to households in Stanmore. Following this initial consultation detailed proposals will be drawn up for further discussion with residents. The extent of the proposals will depend upon residents’ views and wishes. Formal advertisement of any firm proposals will then be undertaken.”



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QUESTION 16

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Winchester and Surrounds

“Could the Portfolio Holder explain what powers the Local Authority has to force residential property owners to ensure that their buildings are not left empty and could the Portfolio Holder detail any recent occasions when the Council has exercised these powers?”

Reply

“In total we estimate that there are fewer than 80 long term empty residential properties in the Winchester district i.e. empty for more than 3 years. Generally, the Strategic Housing and Council Tax teams cooperate in identifying long term empty properties with a view to bringing them back into occupation, where appropriate. There are legitimate reasons why a residential property may be empty for lengthy periods.

A Local Housing Authority has power under the Housing Act 2004 to make an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) to ensure that a residential property becomes and remains occupied. EDMOs can be made regardless of the condition of the property and can either be made with the consent of the owner or, where the owner does not consent, or cannot be traced, must be authorised by a residential property tribunal.

Before authorising an Order, the Tribunal must be satisfied, inter alia, that the property has been empty for at least six months and that there is no reasonable prospect of it being occupied. The effect of an EDMO is to require the authority to take appropriate steps to ensure that the property is occupied and properly managed. No EDMOs have been made in Winchester and unless a property were causing problems (as opposed to being merely empty), it is unlikely that an Order would be made.

Alternatively, as a last resort, a local authority can make a Compulsory Purchase Order to acquire empty properties, for either housing or planning purposes. This can be a lengthy and expensive process.

There are powers available to deal with problem properties (whether empty or not). These include those under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Building Act 1984. These powers are available where a property is giving cause for concern either because it is unsafe, or its condition is detrimental to the amenity of the neighbourhood or for other reasons.

Where problems arising from the condition of a property cannot be resolved by negotiation with the owner, the authority can serve a formal Notice and ultimately prosecute an owner who fails to comply with the requirements of a Notice.”



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QUESTION 17

From: Councillor Prowse

To: The Leader

“Could the Leader please give an update on the progress being made with the Voluntary Organisations relocating into the City Offices?”

Reply

“Officers are talking to the following organisations in respect of re-location to City Offices: Winchester Area Community Action; Age Concern (Winchester); Prospect; and Mencap.

Relate, who were in discussion with us, have now found other premises which more closely meet their needs.

The current situation is as follows:-

- An area of City Offices has been identified as suitable for use by voluntary sector partners. This area can be adapted to be self-contained.
- WCC Teams in this area are in the process of vacating to other suitable office space as part of a wider series of office moves.
- A full survey will be undertaken of the space showing the refurbishment work required, and cost for consideration and approval.
- Legal and financial documents are being drawn up.
- It is anticipated that the voluntary organisations will begin moving into the space by 31 May 2011.”



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QUESTION 18

From: Councillor Sanders

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Following the Members Seminar to review the consultation responses to the Winchester Town Access Plan, attendees were asked to submit their top five priority projects. Four Portfolio Holders attended the Seminar. What projects did each of them submit as their priorities?”

Reply

“From responses received to date the most commonly highlighted schemes/priorities are:

20mph zones/limits;

Shared space schemes;

National cycle route network 23 through Winchester;

Winnall traffic issues.

Officers are currently assessing these comments along with general responses to the consultation on the Winchester Town Access Plan and will be reporting back to Cabinet with suggested amendments to the plan in the summer.”



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QUESTION 19

From: Councillor Higgins

To: The Portfolio Holder for High Quality Environment

“Can you tell me the result of the consultation on reordering The Square in Winchester?”

Reply

“The results of the consultation are currently being assessed and will be reported to Portfolio Holders hopefully next week.”



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QUESTION 20

From: Councillor Achwal

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

“Could the Portfolio Holder give an update on the current position of the new Knowle Community building which is largely funded by Winchester City Council?”

Reply

“Work started in April 2010 and progressed well, with the building completed in March 2011. It will be on budget and thanks are due to Berkeley Homes for their contribution to the cost and to the well managed construction process.

Winchester City Council commissioned the new building to provide more usable community space, when the old chapel proved not to be suitable for the range and volume of community activity required by a community the size of Knowle. It incorporates a large hall, meeting room, office and changing room/shower facilities as well as kitchen and toilets. It has been well received by users and local residents and will form the hub of village activities.

The new community building is now owned by Wickham Parish Council, but managed on a day-to-day basis by local residents who comprise the Knowle Community Buildings Association. It was officially opened by the Chair of Wickham Parish Council on 22 March and is already home to a number of local groups and organisations.”



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QUESTION 21

From: Councillor Jackson

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

"What is the current situation with regard to the roll out of the contract for PV panels on Council owned properties?"

Reply

"Detailed discussions are ongoing with a number of potential suppliers. These discussions, along with reviews of trial schemes already underway elsewhere in the country have highlighted a number of both legal and technical issues that needed to be resolved before any formal agreements can be reached.

A further report on this issue is planned for Cabinet on 13 April with a final decision on appointing a partner organisation to be made by May. This will allow installations to commence in October or November. All potential providers have confirmed they can install up to 2000 panels within a four month period.

Current indications are that whilst over 2000 properties were initially considered to be suitable, the final figure is likely to be nearer 1500 due to technical limitations and the potential for some tenants to refuse access."



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QUESTION 22

From: Councillor Cooper

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

“Has 100% funding for the implementation of the Winchester ‘Street Pastors Scheme’ been secured by the Winchester District Community Safety Partnership (WDCSP)?

As a key stakeholder in the WDCSP is the City Council a contributor to the funding of this new venture? If so is this a Capital (one off) contribution or a Revenue cost that has been included in the 2011/12 Budget?”

Reply

“Funding has been secured for the implementation of the Street Pastor Scheme by the Winchester Churches Together and the scheme is due to be launched in June 2011. To date WDCSP has contributed £500 using Area Based Grant Funding which was used for the initial start up costs. To date there hasn’t been any other financial requests to the partnership nor have they made any commitments to the scheme in terms of monetary support. However, the partnership has offered to support the training/induction process by providing partnership expertise/contacts as and when required.”



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QUESTION 23

From: Councillor Pearson

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities

“After council house rents increases have been escalated to bring them in line with housing association rents, could the Portfolio Holder for Housing tell me what the differential between council and housing association rents is today? E.g. for two, three and four bedroom houses along with sheltered housing. What additional charges (over and above rents) are made that apply to our Council House tenants – including Sheltered Housing?”

Reply

“Council house rents are currently being increased on a phased basis with the aim of converging with existing rents for other social housing landlords. Most City Council properties will not reach their ‘target rent’ (based on the national restructured rent formula) until 2016. This is because the annual increase in rent is limited by a maximum cap of inflation + £2.17 per week.

It is not possible to say what the difference is between housing association properties and Council properties as each Council property will be at a different stage in the process. This is due to historic rents for Council properties varying significantly for a number of reasons.

Additional charges are added to certain properties in respect of service charges and for sheltered properties, both service and support charges.

Service charges reflect the cost of specific services received by certain tenants which are charged separate to rent, such as communal cleaning and lighting and grounds maintenance. Support charges relate to the cost of specific support provided to sheltered tenants (call alarm, visits from older persons support officers etc) as agreed as part of the Supporting People contracts with Hampshire County Council.

Again, charges from one property to another may differ to reflect specific services received by that resident. All residents receive statements providing a detailed breakdown of charges made.”



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QUESTION 24

From: Councillor Sanders

To: The Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Resources

"Could the Portfolio Holder provide the following information for each of the past ten years?

- a) The percentage of salary paid to the Hampshire Pension Fund for each year by WCC Employees and the Employer?
- b) The total amount of payment in cash terms for each year paid by the Council Tax payers?
- c) Are there any plans to increase the employees contribution to the fund in the future?
- d) What plans do the Trustees of the Hampshire Pension Fund have to address the shortfall in the fund over the longer term? I understand the fund is solvent over the short and medium term."

Reply

(a)	Employees %	Employers %
2011/12	5.5-7.5 depending on salary	13.1 plus fixed contribution of £678,600 per annum
2010/11	5.5-7.5 depending on salary	19.1
2009/10	“ “	18.6
2008/09	“ “	18.1
2007/08	6	17.7
2006/07	6	16.5
2005/06	6	15.0
2004/05	6	13.5
2003/04	6	12.9
2002/03	6	12.3
2001/02	6	11.7

(b) WCC has contributed the following in employers pension contributions:

2010/11	£2,149,148.75
2009/10	£2,141,094.89
2008/09	£2,084,404.92
2007/08	£1,962,389.08
2006/07	£1,787,477.38
2005/06	£1,512,663.09
2004/05	£1,328,329.19
2003/04	£1,211,700.19
2002/03	£1,075,107.97
2001/02	£ 943,135.52

(c) At present that is a matter for the Fund's Trustees, operating within existing regulations which affect the LGPS.

(d) The Hampshire Pension Fund is 'cash rich' with income from contributors far outweighing payments to pensioners; fund income in 2009-10 exceeded expenditure by £124 million. The Hampshire fund is at present well placed to meet its longer term commitments of 100% solvency (source: 2010 Report to Pensioners & Contributors). The Fund's Trustees will however keep matters under review.

It is possible that the Government may announce changes to the Scheme that will affect employees', employers' contribution rates or other aspects of the operation of the Local Government Pension Scheme. Such changes are most likely to affect the contribution rates from April 2012.

Lord Hutton of Furness has published his final report on public service pension provision on 10 March in which he set out his recommendations to the Government on pension arrangements that are sustainable and affordable in the long term. At Budget 2011, the Government accepted Lord Hutton's recommendations as a basis for consultation with public sector workers, unions and others and recognised that the position of the uniformed services will require particularly careful consideration. The Government will set out proposals in the autumn."