



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 11 January 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Mitchell

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport

“What are the plans for road and pavement sweeping outside the centre of Winchester Town and who takes responsibility for determining where the sweeping work is carried out satisfactorily?”

Reply

“The street cleansing service covers roads, channels and pavement cleansing. The new contract let in conjunction with East Hampshire District Council uses a combination of output and input specifications to set the standard of cleansing expected.

For input specifications the resources to achieve the required standard are quantified whereas for output specifications the standard of cleansing is stated and the contractor is allowed flexibility as to how that is achieved.

As a general rule input specifications are used in high profile locations such as the City Centre and output specifications used for other areas.

The contractor uses detailed cleansing schedules based on these requirements to manage the work and these will be used by client monitoring staff to check overall performance. This is done through monitoring inspections and responding to any individual service complaints.”



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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Jackson

To: The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Estates

"What are the current arrangements for mortgage support to enable first time buyers on low/moderate income to gain a foothold on the housing ladder? What is the likelihood of the 'Lend a Hand' Local Authority Mortgage Scheme (LAMS) - successfully piloted in the past year in various Local Authorities such as Warrington - being considered for Winchester?"

Reply

"Various mortgage support schemes are provided by Lenders and House Builders (for new build properties). All major Lenders have schemes designed to assist 1st time buyers onto the housing ladder, the common theme being the higher the deposit a purchaser can provide the lower the interest rate on the residual loan amount. Some Lenders will now offer discounted mortgages based on the length of time an applicant has held a savings account with them, mirroring the original aims and objectives of Mutual Societies when they were first established.

Lend a Hand Local Authority Mortgage Scheme was a pilot launched by five LA's and Lloyds TSB in March 2011, the original LA's were Warrington, Northumberland, East Lothian, Blackpool and Newcastle under Lyme. The aim of the scheme was to enable 1st time buyers to access the housing market but also to stimulate movement in the local housing market in areas where demand for some types of housing is low.

The Lend a Hand scheme is a cash backed indemnity scheme where the LA provides 20% of the deposit required by a 1st time buyer (who provides the other 5%) in the form of a cash payment to Lloyds TSB. The LA then receives interest on the 20% deposit however the deposit is at risk if the mortgagee defaults.

The Council does not currently have a Lend a Hand scheme, an average 20% deposit for accommodation in Winchester would be in the region of £40,000 which the Council would have to deposit at risk with Lloyds TSB. Having regard to the limited funds available to the Council, consideration would need to be given as to how a Lend a Hand scheme was funded and whether the benefits to the Council and 1st time buyers outweighed the risk of default. The potential impact to the local housing market would also need consideration as demand for all types of property is greater than supply, any stimulus may act in an inflationary manner."



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Warwick

To: The Leader

“Is the Leader committed to the continued provision of swimming facilities at the River Park Leisure Centre?”

Reply

“Yes, I am committed to the continued provision of swimming facilities at River Park Leisure Centre.”



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Achwal

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport

“Could the Portfolio Holder please advise what communications have recently taken place between the City Council and Hampshire County Council to open the Yew Tree Drive bus link in Whiteley to all traffic?”

Reply

“There have been no recent communications between the City Council and the County Council on the issue of the bus link. The County Council’s position is that the issue must be resolved as part of the wider transport planning for the proposals for the north Whiteley MDA which is now being undertaken. It is too early to say what final options will be put forward.”



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Gottlieb

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport

“Will the Portfolio Holder confirm that the quality of service for the refuse and recycling services has returned to a satisfactory level following the problems experienced at the end of 2011?”

Reply

“I am delighted to report that following the initial teething problems with the refuse and recycling collection contract, the quality of the service has now returned to the previous level of service.

The number of daily reports of missed bin collections in the Winchester District has reduced significantly and any that do occur are being resolved promptly. There was slight increase in the number over the Christmas period which is to be expected due to the change in collections days although publicity delivered to every household by the crews was used to keep the disruption to a minimum.

Client staff will continue to monitor the service closely using daily reports of the number of service requests received as well as the number outstanding.”



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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Safety and Public Health

“Is there any reason why the City Council cannot provide financial support as a subsidy to restore the bus service to those areas recently deprived of a bus service, due to the budget cuts made by Hampshire County Council, as has been done by some other District Councils?”

Reply

“The City Council is not in a position financially to be able to support bus services. There are also the practical issues to consider in relation to deciding on the priorities for such support across the different parts of the District.

The City Council does however provide support for community transport and Dial-a-ride schemes and works with Winchester Area Community Action and Community transport groups to help support such schemes.

The County Council has produced a Community Tool Kit which can be used to assess needs in certain areas and to identify the best way of providing a specific area with the most appropriate type of transport to meet its needs. City Council officers would be happy to provide support and advice in relation to this.”



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport

“Could the Portfolio Holder advise me of the number of grit bins that have been supplied in the Winchester Town area over the last year by Hampshire County Council and Winchester City Council and approximately how many bins are there in total and also what arrangements have been put in place to deal with any inclement weather, should the District experience it?”

Reply

“A total of 70 new grit bins have been provided in the town centre area by Hampshire County Council in accordance with the criteria set. In addition, the City Council on behalf of the Town Forum, will be providing a further 5 grit bins which did not meet Hampshire County Councils criteria.

Hampshire County Council has put in new and improved arrangements this year for salting and gritting. This includes bringing into use an additional salt/grit storage area and purchasing additional equipment. Also, additional partnership arrangements such as working with local farmers and landowners and other partners have been put in place to enable faster response times and salting/gritting of more areas than has been possible in the past.

The City Council will offer support through its Streetcare teams if required.”



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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Thompson

To: The Leader

“Given that the Conservative Administration has pushed through their plan to build 2,000 homes in Winchester Town in addition to 2,000 at Barton Farm and that the Core Strategy says that these will be on sites ‘within and adjoining the defined built-up areas of Winchester’, does that mean that Pitt Manor will be built on in any case, regardless of the outcome of the recent public inquiry?”

Reply

“If the recent planning appeal is allowed this would grant outline planning permission for development of the site and the Council would not be able to resist development. Pitt Manor will remain subject to the statutory policies in the Local Plan Review (2006), including Policy H.2 (identifying it as a Local Reserve Site) until such time as this Plan is replaced by the new Local Plan Part 1 – Joint Core Strategy (programmed for December 2012).

The new Local Plan Part 1 does not allocate Pitt Manor for development and seeks to retain existing settlement boundaries (other than the strategic allocations) until local development needs and urban capacity are reassessed. If smaller housing allocations are then found to be needed they would be identified and allocated through the Local Plan Part 2 – Development Management and Allocations, or local neighbourhood plans.

Therefore, while the outcome of the recent appeal is outside the Administration’s control, it has been keen to get the new Local Plan Part 1 adopted as soon as possible to avoid Pitt Manor being developed as a matter of course, and to help protect other sites which would be subject to development pressure.”



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QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Scott

To: The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Landlord Services

“Could the Portfolio Holder clarify whether the Government’s Self Financing proposals for the Housing Revenue Account will allow this Council to start building new Council Houses, and if the answer is yes, then when does the Portfolio Holder hope to be able to start the build programme?”

Reply

“Yes, the new funding arrangements will provide the opportunity to commence building new Council homes, albeit only on a small scale in the early years.

Detailed plans have yet to be drawn up, although the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan that will be considered by the Cabinet (Housing) Committee in February will propose a target to develop a minimum of 30 new Council homes in the next five years.

The scope of any programme will be limited by both money and land being available, although at least 3 new Council homes will be built and let within the next 6 months and proposals for a more comprehensive building programme will be considered at the same time.”



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QUESTION 10

From: Councillor Learney

To: The Portfolio Holder for Administration, Innovation and Improvement

“What are the top three innovations the Portfolio Holder has introduced so far this municipal year?”

Reply

“Winchester has introduced a number of innovative new ways of working over recent years, led by the 2006-10 Conservative Administration and, I’m pleased to say, continued by Councillor Learney last year. I’d include in that list flexible working, our *1-team* initiative to encourage staff to be more flexible and the commissioning of services from external providers.

The current Conservative Administration has continued to encourage and promote new ideas, and to build on these earlier initiatives. This year we are, for example, exploring more cost-effective ways of providing administrative and business support services across the Council, we have introduced an apprenticeship scheme to both help youngsters in the community and develop staff for the future, and we achieved Corporate Accreditation for Customer Service Excellence – a process begun in 2008.”



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QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Gemmell

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport

“Is the Portfolio Holder able to report of the level of Car Parking Receipts?”

Reply

“Car parking income was slightly less than anticipated leading up to the Christmas period but during November and December it was significantly above target. The anticipated outturn for the year is now in line with the revised budget.

The level of usage of the car parks and particularly the Park and Ride service over the Christmas period was unprecedented with most car parks being at capacity and additional buses provided on Saturdays and during the week to cope with demand. The Winchester BID also paid for buses to run on Sundays from the East car parks.”



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QUESTION 12

From: Councillor Hiscock

To: The Leader

“Would the Leader report the results of the discussions he promised Council he would have with the leaders of other Hampshire Councils and Biffa about exploring the prospects of weekly food collections? He will recall this was in the light of the announcement from Eric Pickles that the Secretary of State was putting £250 million into innovative schemes that would allow weekly waste collections?”

Reply

“There is already a well established mechanism through Project Integra for discussions between the Hampshire local authorities on future waste management initiatives.

The partnership has just completed a major review, the final recommendations of which will be considered the Project Integra Strategic Board meeting tomorrow. The recommendations include setting future targets for waste reduction and linking financial aspects of the partnership to performance on reducing levels of contamination and increasing recycling rates.

Once these discussions and decisions are complete it will be possible to consider next steps for waste management projects each of which will have to meet strict business case criteria at a time when resources are limited. Whilst the Secretary of State has announced the creation of the fund, the details of how it will work in practice are still not available and it is likely it will only fund initial implementation with future running costs being borne by local authorities.

Finally, any proposal to change waste collections systems will need to be made in partnership with East Hampshire District Council as part of our shared environmental services contract. In the meantime arrangements are being made to hold a workshop later this month to discuss future aspirations for the refuse and recycling service.”



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QUESTION 13

From: Councillor Ruffell

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Enforcement

“Would the Portfolio Holder please tell me what changes have been made to the Planning Dept over the past year?”

Reply

“In 2010, and the first half 2011, there were problems with Planning Team’s performance in relation to the time taken to make decisions on planning applications. This was mainly because a large backlog of applications awaiting initial checks had been built up in the Planning Admin Team. This meant that by the time case officers received applications, and allowed the statutory publicity period to expire, it was not possible to determine cases within the target times set by Government.

As a result, the Head of Planning Management put in place an Improvement Plan in July 2011 which incorporated a range of measures including changing internal processes and procedures to increase efficiency across the Planning teams, restructuring Development Management to replace the 2 large East and West teams with 3 smaller area based teams, which has enabled better performance management, and changing committee cycles from 3 to 4 weeks which has reduced time pressures on planning officers dealing with committee items.

As a result, performance has improved substantially over the past two quarters and is returning to satisfactory levels close to, or in line with, performance targets. In December, the Team decided 85% of other applications within 8 weeks, against the national target of 80%, 70% of minor applications within 8 weeks, against the national target of 65%, and 55% of major applications within 13 weeks against the national target of 60%.

Over the next year we will continue to look for opportunities to improve our performance, including customer experience of the planning process, and to implement the remaining measures of the Performance Plan where they are still relevant.”



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QUESTION 14

From: Councillor Verney

To: The Leader

“What future changes will be made in the planning process and information made public and to the Planning Development Control Committee, if necessary on an exempt Pink Paper basis, as a result of the Information Commissioners’ decision in the Freeman’s Yard case given on 28 September last year in relation to overriding the local Plan in 2010?”

Reply

“The Information Commissioner considered a complaint from a member of the public that a financial viability report should have been made public. He found that certain parts of the report should be redacted and a copy of the redacted report should be sent to the complainant. This has now been done, and a report will be made to the Planning Development Control Committee on 9 February 2012, proposing changes to procedures for handling confidential documents in the future.

Financial viability reports and other documents are often submitted as part of a planning application, but on a confidential basis. Such documents are not placed on a public file, or the website, but the contents are taken into account by planning officers when preparing their report and recommendations. Documents submitted as part of a planning application (whether or not they are confidential in nature) are not appended to PDC reports, but are instead summarised in the report, where relevant, by the planning officer.

Such confidential documents are comparatively rare (in relation to the volume of documentary material submitted with applications), and the general rule will therefore continue to be that all information relating to a planning application (including the application itself and supporting documents, and representations made in respect of it) will be made public and placed on the Council’s website.

Where reports are received which are (in whole or in part) either confidential by their nature, or are accompanied by an express request that they be kept

confidential, the report to the Planning Development Control Committee will propose that a note of the nature and other details of the document be placed on the website (so that the public are aware of its existence) but the document itself will not be placed on the website (unless it has been formatted in such a way that part can be made public, with the remainder being treated as confidential). Any member of the public who considers that a confidential report should be made public could then use the Environmental Information Regulations to seek to obtain a copy of the report, when the statutory tests can be applied before a decision is taken on whether or not the report can be released.

Members will usually have a right to see such reports, given the legislation on access to information, if they so request. In accordance with the practice of summarising applications in reports (rather than appending application documents to the reports), it is proposed that the documents will not be appended to committee reports, although the committee report will summarise the relevant material considerations which they give rise to. If necessary, detailed advice can be given to Members in Exempt Session (with the public not being present) in accordance with the provisions in the Local Government Act 1972.

In October 2010, the Ombudsman considered the Council's handling of the application, in respect of whether maladministration had occurred, and concluded that the Planning Development Control Committee had properly taken into account the relevant material considerations."



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QUESTION 15

From: Councillor Mather

To: The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Sport

“How is the City Council preparing to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee?”

Reply

“2012 is an exciting year, with many opportunities for community celebrations of local and national importance. Prime among these are the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympic and Paralympic Games. Officers have been working with partners for over a year now to ensure that there is appropriate support and encouragement in place for residents across the District who are keen to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee. Plans were outlined at a Member briefing last Autumn and have continued to develop apace, so this question is timely.

The Lord Lieutenant, Dame Mary Fagan is co-ordinating a County-wide working group which has led on the organisation of a County Jubilee Service at the Cathedral on 27 May, and which is encouraging community beacon-lighting events. Hampshire residents are also being urged to join the [Big Lunch](#) which this year takes place on Sunday 3 June, and to nominate a [Diamond Volunteer](#) who has given their time for more than 60 years – to be recognised at the service on 27 May.

The City Council’s tourism and events team, meanwhile, is bringing together a ‘Best of British Festival’ between May 25 and July 26. This is designed to showcase the strengths of the Winchester District as a centre for great British culture, retailing and hospitality, and as a home for the Armed Forces. Local businesses are being encouraged to play their part, with hotels and restaurants offering special menus and visitor attractions organising events which reflect Winchester’s finest traditions as a British heritage destination. These initiatives will be brought together under an artistic programme of ticketed events ranging from appearances by famous authors to debates and performances from some of the UK’s finest talent.

Officers are also supporting groups keen to organise their own local celebrations for either the Jubilee or the Olympics, such as street parties and fêtes. Free professional advice is available to all such groups from an external advisor, who is providing training for volunteers, event toolkits, basic promotion and one-to-one guidance where it is needed. The Council's Access and Infrastructure Team also has a good track record of supporting street parties with road closures, and signposting additional help where it is needed. Parishes have been asked to notify the tourist information centre of planned celebrations so that officers can track potential resourcing pressures, and also provide promotional support where it is requested.

The second half of the year will focus on the Olympics, when Winchester will turn outwards to 'welcome the world' as the country hosts the biggest sporting event on the planet. Details of local events and activities in support of the 2012 Games can be found on www.winchester2012.co.uk"



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QUESTION 16

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport

“Could the Portfolio Holder outline the extent of the work undertaken by the Hampshire County Council in the Winchester Town area through Operation Resilience and what further work is planned over the coming year?”

Reply

“During 2011/12 a total of 9 roads were resurfaced in the Town area. City Council staff have worked with the County Council to make the necessary road closures and diversions.

The programme for 2012/13 is being formulated and should be available shortly.”



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QUESTION 17

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Leader

“Could the Portfolio Holder advise me of the consequences of the Ombudsman’s ruling in the Freeman’s Yard case and what effect this will have on ensuring elected members have access to all the relevant confidential information regarding planning applications?”

Reply

“The Ombudsman considered a complaint that the Council should have made the financial viability report (submitted in support of the application) available to the public. The Ombudsman took the view that there was an alternative remedy available (namely a complaint to the Information Commissioner) and there was no evidence of maladministration in respect of those matters falling within her remit. She therefore concluded that the investigation would not be taken further.

The Ombudsman considered that officers and Members on the Planning Development Control Committee had had regard to material planning considerations when determining the application. The economic viability was a relevant material consideration and there was no evidence of inappropriate influence as to consideration of the profit to the developer which would result from the scheme.

The Ombudsman did not comment on the Council’s treatment of the report as exempt information, as this fell outside her remit and within the role of the Information Commissioner. A reply to a separate Council question from Councillor Verney sets out the issues arising from the Information Commissioner’s decision and the steps which Planning Development Control Committee will be asked to approve (at its meeting on 9 February 2012) to deal with information which is submitted, on a confidential basis, in support of planning applications.

In general, Members will be entitled to see reports of this nature, and any Member who feels they should have access to a particular report should contact the Head of Planning Management to arrange this. If they are shown the report, they should ensure that the contents are not passed to the public.”