



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Hutchison

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport

“How much of the Winchester Town Access Plan does the Portfolio Holder expect to see implemented in the current financial year?”

Reply

“Some good progress has been made on actions set out in the Access Plan over the past two years. This includes completion of the refurbishment in The Square and a review and changes to traffic management arrangements, completion of improvements to Black Path in Winnall, a review of the residents parking scheme and subsequent changes to it, implementation of the first 20mph area speed limit, new cycle facilities at Winchester Railway station, a review and changes to the Park and Ride service and launching of a new Bikeabout scheme including new bikes and a short term hire facility.

Over the next 12 months it is planned to complete the National Cycle Network Route 23 through Winchester including the refurbishment of the Hockley Viaduct, complete the street lighting PFI replacement programme and associated lighting improvement schemes e.g. the footpath between Airlie Road and St James Lane, progress further 20mph zones, install a second new pedestrian crossing in Stoney Lane Weeke, addition of a pedestrian crossing phase at the Junction of Stanmore Lane and St Cross Road, and further implementation of schemes following the successful Local Sustainable Transport Fund Bid including a station access plan and associated improvements.

It is also hoped that the County Council will finalise the traffic management study and agree what actions will be undertaken.”



COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 2

From: Councillor J Berry

To: The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Administration

“Does Winchester City Council intend to sign up as a living wage employer?”

Reply

“A Living Wage Employer ensures that all employees are paid at least the Living Wage. This is an hourly rate set independently and updated annually. The Living Wage is calculated according to the basic cost of living in the UK. The National Living Wage for outside of London is currently £7.20 per hour.

Employers choose to pay the Living Wage on a voluntary basis. Accredited employers are entitled to a licence to use the Living Wage employer mark. The accreditation process is open to employers already paying the Living Wage, or those committed to an agreed timetable of implementation. A review of Council hourly pay rates currently being paid shows that there are less than 10 employees whose hourly rate is below the Living Wage level. They are employed in roles in areas which need to reflect competitive market rates for commercial purposes or in areas which are currently subject to review.

In relation to services provided to the Council by contractors, it was not previously lawful to take into account the terms of employment of contractors' staff, as this was deemed to be a 'non-commercial' consideration (Section 17 Local Government Act 1988). Although this restriction was removed in 2001 (to the extent that such terms are relevant to achieving best value and take account of any Government Guidance), adopting a blanket policy to require tenderers to pay a living wage is likely to be unlawful and challengeable. Contractors will still be bound to comply with Equalities and minimum wage legislation.

For the reasons set out above, Winchester City Council is not in a position to comply with the Living Wage at present. However, this is something that will be kept under review. As far as contractors are concerned, it is suggested that they should be encouraged, but not required, to consider adopting a Living Wage policy.”



COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Byrnes

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture and Sport

"Can the Portfolio Holder provide an assessment of how successfully the Diamond Jubilee celebrations were conducted across the District?"

Reply

"The Council's approach to the Diamond Jubilee was to help residents and businesses to make the most of the celebrations, in a way which best suited them.

For residents, we commissioned the services of a Parish Celebrations Advisor who supported 30 parish councils and groups across the District working on events ranging from a duck race and parade in Easton to a barn dance in Droxford. We also encouraged applications to the Council's Small Grants programme, and provided sums of between £250 and £500 for twelve Jubilee initiatives, ranging from exhibitions and fun days to a commissioned picnic bench on a local green space in locations from Sutton Scotney to Boarhunt and Whiteley. Guildhall Winchester also devised and organised a two-day 'Jubilate' event on The Broadway which attracted over 10,000 people. The Access and Infrastructure team organised 54 road closures for street parties during the extended Jubilee weekend, and following Council encouragement three beacons were lit at Fort Nelson, Kings Worthy and Hursley. All in all, we supported tens of thousands of local people by enabling them to enjoy the Jubilee with friends and family, and in their own neighbourhoods.

Winchester City Council also co-ordinated a Best of British Festival between May and July, designed to celebrate the District for its quintessentially British qualities, ranging from independent shopping and excellent customer service to a fine cultural offer. As part of this, the Council staged seven high profile events at the Guildhall and Theatre Royal. These were attended by 1,408 people. The value of the national press coverage achieved by these events as at June was £138,000 (in equivalent advertising value). The Festival was backed by tourism destination marketing and BID advertising, and provided hotels, attractions, retailers and eateries with the perfect platform on which to promote their own themed offers and products. A review of the impact of the Festival will be carried out with participating partners next month.

To round off this exciting year of activities, we are now working with Winchester Business Improvement District to commission one of our talented local artists or makers to produce a unique piece of work to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee. Once installed, this will further enhance the network of pieces of public art around the City and District. The commission will be advertised in the early autumn."



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City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Nelmes

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment

“Are the Road Sweepers keeping to their schedule of sweeping on non-major roads? Granted we have had very unusual heavy rainfall but many gutters and drains are full of mud and causing flooding. Can we be sure that we, the City Council, are doing all that we can to keep the gutters clear?”

Reply

“The street sweeping schedules are based on two programmes of work; input based frequencies where cleansing intervals are clearly defined and output based frequencies which require roads to be maintained to a specified standard. Contract monitoring officers carry out checks to make sure programmes are being met and will investigate specific cases brought to their attention, particularly where these relate to the outcome based areas.

The cleaning schedules are designed for typical weather conditions and the recent severe rainfall is likely to have aggravated the situation. However, there is no evidence that the current schedules are inadequate for their purpose. However, contract monitoring staff will continue to check the contractor’s performance and, if required, used default and rectification powers to resolve any issues.”



COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Green

To: The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture and Sport

“Would the Portfolio Holder agree that staff of the Sports and Physical Activity team are to be commended for being the driving force behind the huge organisational and logistical task which resulted in a highly successful Olympic Torch Relay event in Winchester?”

Reply

“The Torch Relay brought around 30,000 to Winchester and another 7,000 to Kings Worthy, many of whom spent money in local shops and eateries which must have provided a welcome boost in this – so far – dreary summer.

The Sports and Physical Activity Team led on the planning for the event, which is one of four large scale events they are organising this year in celebration of the London Olympic and Paralympic Games. Members might like to be aware that there are only 2.5 full time equivalent posts working on these projects.

However, the Team recruited two internal secondees through the Council’s One Team programme, which has provided some excellent personal development opportunities for fellow officers. They also drew in the support and expertise of a wide range of colleagues and partners, including Hampshire County Council, Winchester Cathedral, WACA and the Winchester Business Improvement District. And on the day of the Relay, we saw officers from across the Council taking time to help with stewarding and organisation.

I would like to commend Kings Worthy Parish Council on the work they did to ensure a very special day for local people, too, which left our officers free to manage the larger scale activities in Winchester Town.

Together, our extended Team ensured that the event was well managed, professionally presented and hugely enjoyable for the crowds who gathered in the City Centre. I am sure you will wish to congratulate them with me.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 6

From: Councillor McLean

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment

“Does the Portfolio Holder agree that the current grass cutting contract is at the moment not fit for purpose, as evidenced by the number of phone calls from the residents of Claylands Road, Bishops Waltham and others?”

Reply

“I would not agree that the contract is not fit for purpose but there have been problems across the District with grass cutting this year caused partly by the extreme weather conditions experienced and in some cases inadequate performance by the contractor. As a result the grass cutting programme is behind schedule which is a problem also being experienced nationally by many local authorities.

Additional resources are being drafted in to deal with the backlog and where problems of contractor performance are identified then these are addressed using the mechanisms within the contract including the use of payment deductions and other penalties until defects are rectified.

If Members have specific problems with grass cutting within their wards then they should bring these to the attention of the Assistant Director (High Quality Environment) who will ensure they are properly investigated.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Tod

To: The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning and Economic Development

“What is the process for informing Hampshire County Council education department of new developments to ensure both accurate forecasting of school places and sufficient developer funding for them, which developments are referred, and how does this compare to other authorities in Hampshire?”

Reply

“Hampshire County Council is a statutory consultee on local plan matters and has been involved throughout the process of preparing Local Plan Part 1, as it was on all previous development plans. It is also a consultee on individual planning applications for large scale housing development. The County Council is therefore fully aware of the number of new dwellings proposed for settlements in the District over a particular period and of the location of both allocated sites and windfall applications. The consequential effect of development proposals on the need for school places is then reflected as the County Council sees fit in its School Places plan.

The County Council has a policy for the collection of contributions for children’s services which the City Council implements where there are specific proposals for school improvements and these are required in mitigation of the impact of the development in question. For example, the extension to St Bede primary school has been part funded using developers contributions negotiated from the Francis Gardens development.

I am not aware of the specific policies adopted by other districts but I believe they will follow similar principles.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Southgate

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport

"Is the refurbishment of the Hockley Viaduct for use as a cycleway progressing to schedule in the current inclement weather, will the opening date be affected?"

Reply

"The programme has not been affected by the weather to date as it has been largely brick removal, erection of scaffolding and work to remove the existing deck.

Brickwork repairs will hopefully start next week.

The opening date for the cycle route will depend upon completion of the viaduct repairs and construction of the new paths and ramps. At present the scheme programme is still on track."



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Hiscock

To: The Leader

“Hampshire County Council Decision Report Paper ref:3899 from the director of Children's Services states in para 9.2. that a piece of land in Abbots Barton currently in WCC ownership is being considered for as a possible site for a new Primary School.

As this matter is now in the public domain and subject to some local speculation, would the Portfolio Holder tell us which piece of land is being considered?”

Reply

“The area of land referred to is the large area of recreational land adjacent to Chaundler Road. The County Council report contains an accurate summary of the status of this land and the requirements the City Council would have as landowner if it were to be considered further, the key point being the reference to the outcome of local consultation.

The County Council Executive Member, Cllr Perry, has now made his decision on the preferred option for additional primary school provision in Winchester and the County Council is not pursuing any further interest in the Abbots Barton location.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 10

From: Councillor Gemmell

To: The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Administration

"What measures are the Council undertaking to combat the high incidence of Youth Unemployment?"

Reply

"Members will be aware that an Informal Scrutiny Group exploring Young People and Employment met last Autumn. One of its recommendations was to commission a mapping study quantifying the number and location of our unemployed young people, and identifying the services available to support them and the barriers facing them.

The study was shared with many organisations involved in this area of work at a conference on 20 June. The event was well supported and well received. The conference action planning session led to a wide range of ideas, currently being drawn up into a full action plan by a 'task and finish' group chaired by the Winchester Local Children's Partnership.

Meanwhile, two Council-led commissions are planned for this autumn. One will seek to increase the number of workplace opportunities for the unemployed, through work placements and through apprenticeships. The other will provide a new style of one-to-one mentoring for the unemployed, though a professionally co-ordinated network of volunteers.

The Council is also providing a positive role model for other employers. Following the success of a pilot apprenticeship in the Customer Service Centre last year, Personnel Committee has approved the appointment of more apprentices across the Council. There have been two appointments to the Council from the National Graduate Scheme on a two year programme starting in September, and the Council has made a commitment – following the ISG last year – to host at least 20 unpaid work placements per year and to report back to Personnel Committee on an annual basis on this target.

We are, Members will agree, taking this problem seriously and doing what we can to improve the life chances of young people across the District."



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Power

To: The Leader

“Given the recent decision to release £60,000 from reserves to fund cosmetic work to Great Minster Street, may rural members assume similar reserves will be released to fund work to rectify dangerous areas in the market towns?”

Reply

“Any dangerous areas of highway should be reported immediately to the County Council so problems can be addressed through maintenance programmes and repair work as required.

The works in Great Minister Street have been funded jointly between the County Council and the City Council to complete a ‘once in a generation’ improvement of an historic part of Winchester town centre. If the County Council can be persuaded to provide similar levels of funding in market towns for similar works then I would be very pleased to ask the Council to consider matched funding for those as well.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 12

From: Councillor Ruffell

To: The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Administration

“Would the Portfolio Holder advise me what progress is being made on developing the shared IT service with Test Valley Borough Council since it started in November 2010?”

Reply

“The joint arrangements with Test Valley Borough Council initially involved the two Councils sharing a joint Head of Service and a help desk. It was always the intention that more collaborative working should be undertaken to maximise efficiency and potential savings through a common approach where possible. However, regard would always be had to the individual business needs of the two Councils and, where appropriate, different solutions can still be implemented.

I am pleased to be able to inform Council that significant progress is being made on developing the shared arrangements. At its meeting on 13 June 2012 Cabinet approved the Council’s Information Management Strategy (CAB2345 refers). I have issued a draft Portfolio Holder decision notice on the related IT Technical Strategy (PHD420) and am carefully considering the representations received.

A major step forward in the practical arrangements are the proposals in CAB2319 for the sharing of IT infrastructure (both hardware and software) between the two Councils commencing with processing and storage solutions affecting the future operation of servers. At its meeting on 4 July 2012 Cabinet gave support in principle to the proposals and gave delegated authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with myself to approve the details following consideration of the report by The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 9 July. That Committee raised the issue of the need to protect against the position should either Council not wish to continue with the joint arrangements in the future. Both Cabinet and the officers recognise the potential difficulties and unquantifiable additional costs, should either Council ever need to remove itself from the joint working agreement.

However, these issues have been considered and weighed against the benefits of the greater efficiencies of shared services and facilities. CAB2319 provides a framework for both Councils meeting the relevant proportion of the costs involved and of sharing ownership of assets used by both partners as the service develops. The detailed arrangements are to be developed further in discussion between the two Councils, following the framework set out in the report. This will take account of the need for a potential exit strategy should the need ever arise. However, as savings are achieved and future capital requirements of joint working are likely to be lower than a stand alone arrangement, our aim is to continue to work with our partners.

I welcome this important milestone in developing the shared arrangements.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 13

From: Councillor Clear

To: The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning and Economic Development

“Although the Local Plan Part 1 is still up for inspection and so there is no decision as yet on the number of houses, can the Portfolio Holder confirm that it is not WCC's intention to have all village housing allocations built at once, but over 20 years?”

Reply

“Local Plan Part 1 has reached a critical stage in its progress with the Examination into its soundness to commence on 30 October 2012. Policies that refer to numbers of dwellings to be delivered in certain settlements are expressed to refer to a range of numbers to be delivered over the plan period which runs from 2011 to 2031.

Paragraph 3.78 of the Plan states ‘*Given this variety of circumstances the development requirements have been stated as a range, which it is considered can be delivered through a mixture of development and redevelopment opportunities in the short to medium term within the existing built-up area. Planned greenfield releases may be necessary in the longer term, particularly to meet specific local housing and employment needs and wider community aspirations, as identified through community plans. The need for any greenfield sites will be assessed, and allocations undertaken as necessary, through a future Development Plan Document or Neighbourhood Plan*’. This is then carried forward in policy MTRA2 (4th para).

What this means in practice is that a green field sites or sites will only be allocated if it appears that brownfield or other sites suitable for development within an existing settlement boundary will not provide sufficient capacity between them to meet the housing requirement over the plan period. The fact that a greenfield site could deliver more quickly is not in itself a factor; what matters is robust evidence of other sites being deliverable over the plan period.

Whether or not all the dwellings to meet the housing requirement for a settlement can be built on one site or at one time depends on the number required and the sites allocated. In larger settlements this is most unlikely but where a small settlement wishes to grow by a very small number of dwellings it is entirely possible.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 14

From: Councillor Wright

To: The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning and Economic Development

“Will the Portfolio Holder ensure the officers will research and make available to all members, the evidence which supported the planning inspectorates’ decision in support of the local planning authority of South Staffordshire Council Wind Farm refusal <http://www.barrystamp.co.uk/pdf/Decision.pdf> and the Scottish Ministers decision in refusal of the proposed Spittal, Caithness Wind Farm <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0039/00394949.pdf>

Will the Portfolio Holder also give an undertaking that this evidence will be available to the Planning Committee who may be considering possible Wind Farm applications later this year and that the current version of the Local Plan will be amended to allow the same protection for residents of Winchester when dealing with a similar application?”

Reply

“Members can undertake their own research into the decisions mentioned by Councillor Wright using exactly the same sources that officers have access to and it would be more appropriate that they do so rather than use scarce officer time.

The Planning Development Control Committee will receive all the information material to the consideration of any planning application before it. It is not possible to make assumptions in advance about what this will be because every application must be considered on its own merits.

The Local Plan Part 1 has now been submitted for examination into its soundness to the Planning Inspectorate. Only minor modifications which the Council agrees are necessary to ensure that the document is sound, can now be presented to the Inspector for consideration. More substantial changes requiring the submission of new evidence and additional consultation would require the Plan to be withdrawn, this will create a significant delay in the process and impact on the adoption of the plan. I do not intend to do this in response to Councillor Wright’s proposition.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 15

From: Councillor Evans

To: The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning and Economic Development

“At a recent meeting of the North Fareham SDA Standing Conference at Fareham BC the developers for the development north of Fareham showed an Option to build on the Winchester City Council area next to the proposed SDA. This land was defined in our Core Strategy (Local Plan Part 1) as open countryside without any development. Could the Leader and the Portfolio Holder both confirm to the Wickham ward members that they will continue to support this position in their PUSH and Planning meetings with Fareham BC and that they will strongly resist all development on the Knowle ‘Triangle’?”

Reply

“Yes.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 16

From: Councillor Learney

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport

“Would the Leader explain why Cabinet have not progressed the motion on cycling presented to Council on 18 April by Councillor Jackson?”

Reply

“Although a report on this specific issue has not been referred back to Cabinet much work on measures to assist the promotion and encouragement of cycling has been undertaken including the adoption of a District Cycling Strategy, the review and re-launch of an enhanced Bikeabout cycle hire scheme and good progress made on delivering the National Cycle Network Route 23 through Winchester.

The Winchester Cycling member champion post has been vacant for a number of months but has now been filled and therefore this issue can now be given further consideration, in relation, to what needs to be referred to Cabinet, in light of the good work being undertaken in this area, and when this should happen.”



COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 17

From: Councillor Nelmes

To: The Leader

“In the Hampshire Chronicle dated 12 July, comments were made about an empty council owned property, Avalon House. It was stated that the building had been empty for some 5 years. It was also stated that the Council has a duty to get a ‘reasonable value’ for the property. Surely after all these years an unsaleable/unlettable property will have decreased in value and will continue to do so over the coming years. How long will it be before we are forced to dispose of it for a minimal sum?”

Reply

“As Members will be aware Avalon House has been marketed continually since it was vacated by the Council in 2009. A number of potential lettings have been pursued only to fall at the last hurdle due to changes in the economic climate or changes of policy affecting the potential tenants business. The economic outlook for office based business is such that few companies are investing in new capacity and such business as there is, is largely based around relocations. Negotiations are underway with the NHS over the relocation of functions affected by the Silver Hill development proposals and if these negotiations are successful the Council will undertake a refurbishment of the building to suit the needs of the occupier.

Other options are being considered for the site, which may involve the demolition and redevelopment or extension of the building. With regard to questions of value the building is worth the market value at the time of valuation and this fluctuates up and down having regard to market conditions, the condition of the property and the quality of any occupier. If it is possible to secure a lease with the NHS this is likely to represent the best value for the Council. We will continue to have regard to the strategic importance of the site and a final decision on its future will need to have regard to the Council’s long term aim to achieve both the best result for its budget and the local community.”



COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 18

From: Councillor J Berry

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing

“Is the Portfolio Holder satisfied with the Council’s procedures and policies for involving and consulting residents in the process of developing its tenancy policy and tenancy strategy?”

Reply

“The Council has yet to determine proposals for consulting residents on its Tenancy Strategy, although I will be ensuring effective consultation takes place before it is approved.

The Localism Act 2011 requires all local authorities to publish a Tenancy Strategy by 15 January 2013 (within 12 months of when the specific provisions relating to the Tenancy Strategy came into force).

The Strategy must:

- Describe the high level objectives that all Registered Providers (including the Council as a landlord) should ‘have regard to’ in their tenancy policies
- Signpost people to where the Registered Provider tenancy policies can be found, or summarise these
- Have been developed with consideration to the local allocations policy and homelessness strategy and in consultation with all local Registered Providers

A draft Strategy will be considered by Cabinet (Housing) Committee in September and proposals for consulting all residents and registered providers, along with a timeline for final decisions and approvals will be set out in that report.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 19

From: Councillor McLean

To: The Leader

“Is the Leader planning on extending his visits to the Rural Districts after his most successful visit to Bishops Waltham?”

Reply

“The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Tourism, Strategic Planning and Estates and I attended the Bishops Waltham Parish Council on 10 July. The minutes of this meeting will shortly be available on the parish Council’s website at <http://www.bishopswalthamparishcouncil.co.uk/minutes.html>. The discussion centered around future development of the local economy and tourism in the market town.

The meeting was at the request of Bishops Waltham Parish Council, and linked well with the work of the Bishops Waltham Town Team which is bidding for Portas Pilot funding to support the local economy. I would happily consider attending other Parish Councils across the District to discuss matters of importance to them.

Council should also note that other Cabinet Members are regularly working to support our rural areas, especially in local economy matters through the work of Councillor Humby. This includes the LEADER rural funding scheme, rural planning seminars and rural tourism products such as the Bishops Waltham, Alresford and Wickham pocket guides and cricket and Jane Austen trails.

A useful link to the work of the tourism team is the Visit Winchester website <http://www.visitwinchester.co.uk/> and to the economy and arts team at <http://www.winchester.gov.uk/business/> and <http://www.winchester.gov.uk/community/arts/> “



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 July 2012

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 20

From: Councillor Gemmell

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment

"In the light of the inclement weather which is forecast indefinitely can the Portfolio Holder tell me what measures are in place for Flood Management?"

Reply

"An Operational Flood Plan is in place and sets out the role and responsibilities of the lead authorities including the Environment Agency and the County and City Councils. There are also emergency planning procedures in place which can be called upon if required.

The City Council has its own local procedures which are to support the lead authorities and to provide advice and support as resources allow.

The City Council's responsibilities as land owners i.e. open spaces and river banks are dealt with through the Streetcare team in terms of maintenance works and our inspection programmes."