



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Power

To: The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development

“Could the Portfolio Holder confirm the costs associated with use of the portable performance space, and how these costs will be funded?”

Reply

The idea of a portable event space was conceived following the rush of community events and gatherings inspired by the Olympics and the Golden Jubilee last year. There was a clear need identified for more flexible outdoor space for performances and exhibitions, particularly in the rural parishes around the District.

Members will recall that a detailed Cabinet report (CAB2431) was produced in January explaining the background to the project and details of the budget set aside for the commissioning process. The public consultation period inviting people to comment on the three leading design concepts has recently closed, and we will be in a position to select a winner before Christmas.

As we said back in January, the operating costs of the space will be determined by the design which is eventually chosen – and indeed they will be a factor in the final decision. Nothing has changed since we first said this.

As Portfolio Holder, I am committed to keeping the operational costs low – for the Council and for potential users. The January Cabinet report (Appendix 1) suggests that Members may wish to consider making a small charge to hirers in the future, but from the outset the goal will be to have the space used as widely and as much as possible.

I look forward to announcing the winning design after our final evaluation meeting on 4 December.



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Janet Berry

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing

“How much Discretionary Housing Payment funding has the Council awarded so far this year, and has any been awarded to people affected by the ‘bedroom tax’ or the overall benefit cap?”

Reply

Winchester City Council was allocated £105,155 in Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) funding for 2013/14.

It has awarded/committed £83,291.

It has £21,864 unallocated/unspent.

Of the £83,291 which has been awarded/committed:

- £54,714 has been to customers affected by the social sector size criteria
- £11,347 has been to customers affected by the overall benefit cap



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Byrnes

To: The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Environment

“In light of Eric Pickles’ recent announcement that Council’s must ‘do their duty’ and provide free parking for 30 minutes, can the Leader/Portfolio Holder confirm that there no discussions, either underway or planned, that propose discontinuing this important Conservative policy?”

Reply

“I can confirm that there are no plans to change the existing arrangements of 30 minutes free parking within the currently designated areas of the City Centre.

The issue of changing the policy was considered as part of the 2014/15 budget setting discussions but it was decided that the facility provided an important contribution to the economic vitality of the City so was therefore discarded.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Banister

To: The Portfolio Holder for Built Environment

“What percentage of the posts in the Planning department are currently being held vacant as part of the Administration’s saving strategy?”

Given that the performance failures of the department are the cause of numerous complaints and adversely affect the Council’s reputation, how can this be justified, especially when an important source of income may be compromised?”

Reply

Currently no posts are being held vacant in the Development Management Team in order to save money.

Given the pressures on our planning service we commissioned an independent review by the Planning Advisory Service in the summer to look at resources, workload and performance. This report acknowledges that there are a number of examples of good work and practice being undertaken by our Planning Team particularly in terms of the quality of decisions we make.

However it also highlights areas where we need to make changes and a number of recommendations are included which are designed to improve the service we offer. These relate to a variety of matters like identifying smarter ways to measure our performance rather than focusing solely on the old national performance indicators which look only at speed of decision making within 8 or 13 weeks. We will also be temporarily increasing staff resources, by bringing in two senior planners for a year, to provide an opportunity to make improvements to our processes and procedures to generate more capacity within the team in the longer term.

We have already started taking forward the report’s recommendations, and rolling out improvements, but it will take time for these measures to take effect.



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 5

From: Councillor McLean

To: The Leader

“Could the Portfolio Holder please inform us of any movement on the Building of Social housing in Bishops Waltham?”

Reply

The Leader recently announced the three new council housing priority schemes for the period 2013 – 2015, these three schemes will contribute 100 new homes for local families. I am conscious that these schemes are in Winchester town, however the initial three Council schemes that are currently on site and due for completion in 2014 are all in the rural areas of the District (Micheldever, Itchen Abbas and Otterbourne).

The New Homes Team are investigating a number of opportunities throughout the District for new council housing development including a site in Bishops Waltham. At the current time there will not be funding available to commence work on these sites until 2016, however, this is kept under continuous review and funding may become available before this date (through developer contributions for example) which may enable other schemes to be brought forward.



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Pines

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing

“Would the Portfolio Holder report on how many tenants of social landlords, including the City Council, are still being charged for so-called extra bedrooms in the District, and how many of them have been able to move to small properties, especially in view of the current high waiting list levels?”

Reply

As at 5th November 2013 there are 360 customers affected by the social sector size criteria. 240 of these are council tenants.

We are aware of 14 council tenants who have downsized via the ‘Wise Move’ incentive scheme who were previously affected by the social sector size criteria. A further 29 council tenants affected by the social sector size criteria are registered with us under Wise Move as wishing to downsize.



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Read

To: The Portfolio Holder for Built Environment

“Can the Portfolio Holder confirm that all new developments include a good mix of properties?”

Reply

Yes; new residential development should and does generally provide a range of house sizes. Policy CP2 of the Local Plan Part 1 requires the majority of homes to be in the form of 2 and 3 bed houses unless local circumstances indicate an alternative approach.

This was highlighted at the recent Member Policy Training on 16th October when Officers were seeking advice from Members as to whether there should be a policy in Local Plan Part to set out a guide of the expected size of two and three bedroom dwellings.



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Maynard

To: The Leader

“Following the upset caused by unilateral announcements over housing in Abbots Barton and the recent proposals for River Park Leisure Centre does The Leader now recognise that continued lack of consultation prior to taking decisions and making public announcements is detrimental to the activities of this council and not in the interests of our electorate?”

Reply

I think Councillor Maynard is confusing consultation and decision-making. Yes, the Administration has been looking at the potential for new homes in Abbots Barton, and yes we are considering the future of River Park Leisure Centre. But we have made no ‘unilateral announcements’ and taken no decisions. There have been public meetings and wide debate on both matters, and I recently announced a further consultation on RPLC later this month. It is unfortunate that some have chosen to present the consultation that has gone on in the wrong light and so mislead the public.”



COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Mather

To: The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Environment

“Does the Council have any intention to use its powers under S.9 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act and Regulation 22 of the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996 to impose a pavement parking ban in central Winchester streets?”

Reply

“The legislation quoted provides for the implementation of experimental Traffic Regulation Orders, which the City Council has used these powers previously to introduce TROs on a trial basis. However, they need to be reviewed before being introduced on a permanent basis.

It is not necessary to introduce any new TROs, experimental or permanent, to enforce parking on the footway as this is already covered within the existing TRO as the restrictions apply to the whole of the highway which includes pavements.

It is not possible to prevent vehicles stopping on the footway to load or unload as this is permitted within the TRO except for cases where loading restrictions are also in place.

However, the City Council does have powers to deal with pavement blocking by motorists and can issue a fixed penalty notice when there are restrictions such as yellow lines in place on the road as legally these extend back to any building line. In addition the Police can issue a fixed penalty notice for obstruction if a vehicle is blocking the footway regardless of any waiting restrictions being in place.”



COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 10A

From: Councillor Learney

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing

“What percentage of residential planning applications since March have provided the full amount of affordable housing required by our Local Plan on-site?”

What percentage of residential planning applications since March have paid a full financial contribution towards off site provision of affordable housing?

What is the shortfall since March between the affordable housing provision aimed at by our policies and what has actually been achieved?”

QUESTION 10B

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Housing

“Further to the question I asked at Full Council on the 17 July 2013 (Question 11) I was hoping that officers had now had an opportunity to assess the impact of our new planning policies as triggered by the adoption of the Winchester District Local Plan Part I and could now supply an answer to my questions?”

I am trying to establish if it is likely in the foreseeable future that we will see the delivery on any on-site affordable housing on sites of between five and fourteen dwellings other than on schemes where all the housing is classed as “affordable”.

If the information is now available it would be very helpful to be able to compare what the Council has agreed for off-site affordable housing contributions against the starting point as derived from our Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (with amendment November 2012).”

Reply

Officers have been working towards compiling a full list of contributions and on-site provision of affordable housing to be delivered through consented schemes granted since the adoption of the Local Plan Part 1 in March 2013.

The information needs to be drawn from several sources, and this work is being undertaken to ensure that we can provide accurate data regarding affordable housing provision. But this is not yet available. It is anticipated that we will be able to provide this information before the end of December.

However experience generally has been that for sites up to 15 units provision has to date been generally by way of an off-site financial contribution.



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Lipscomb

To: The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Environment

“Will the Portfolio Holder kindly clarify, preferably by listing the roads affected or to be omitted, the intended coverage of the proposed 20mph speed limit for Winchester?”

Will she further say what advice she has received regarding the possible adverse impact on air quality of the lower speed limit?

Finally, will she confirm that all the proposals have the backing of the Police, including their willingness to enforce them where necessary?”

Reply

The proposed scheme for Winchester City Centre, which is currently being consulted upon, is essentially an area around the one-way system and part of Hyde. A map is included as part of the exhibition, see link below to the City Council web site showing the exhibition display boards including a map of the area currently under consideration.

<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/roads-highways/city-centre-20mph/>

In relation to impact on air quality, in a situation where all vehicles are currently travelling unimpeded at 30mph and where this is changed to 20mph, then there may be a slight adverse effect on air quality, However, this is not the case within the proposed 20 mph area, where there are interruptions to flow such as traffic signals and vehicles emerging from junctions and where any changes in vehicle speeds are likely to be fairly small particularly in peak periods. Also a more steady flow of vehicles at lower speeds may in fact have a positive effect on air quality. There is therefore limited agreement over the effects of 20mph schemes on vehicle emissions and in the case of this scheme and the particular circumstances, there is likely to be no effect on air quality. There will be positive impacts in terms of quality of life for residents and people who walk and cycle along these roads.

Hampshire Police has been consulted and have been involved in discussions on the extent and design of the scheme, and its likely impacts. They have no objections to the scheme but cannot commit to enforcing it apart from during routine patrols. This stance is usual in the case of 20mph schemes due to the limited resources available to Hampshire Police. It is anticipated that the scheme will be self enforcing to a certain extent as some drivers will obey the new restrictions which will encourage other to do so. Existing speeds throughout the area are already fairly low and within the Department for Transport's range of speeds which will be positively influenced by 20mph limits. The benefits achieved through the implementation of 20mph speed identified through studies of other schemes, including the area-wide scheme implemented in Portsmouth, have shown that 20 mph speed limit schemes can be associated with reductions in road casualty numbers, reduced average speeds and have been well-supported generally by residents.

The scheme for Winchester City Centre is at an informal consultation stage and its progression will be dependent upon views received.



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 12

From: Councillor Cutler

To: The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Organisational Development

“Does the Portfolio Holder consider that the shared IT service contract is delivering high quality IT services to the Council, particularly in view of the continuing problems which many Councillors are experiencing with the time consuming and thoroughly unreliable remote access to the portal, which severely compromises their ability to communicate promptly?”

Reply

“I do consider that the IT service contract is delivering high quality IT services to the Council. In recent months the IT Service Desk has not received many calls from Members concerning remote access issues (less than three a month from both WCC and TVBC Members). However, IMT are aware of two WCC Members in particular who have had recurring issues that have been identified to local limitations (Broadband provision\supply) or personal equipment (non Council managed devices). IMT will deal with all calls made to the IT Service Desk and I would request that Members report all issues through the IT Service Desk.

The Citrix remote access service meets the ever challenging security standards being imposed by Central Government in order to retain our connection to the PSN (Public Services Network) whereas the former VPN (Virtual Private Network) solution does not. IMT are currently looking at the use of two factor tokens (Cryptocards™) and how the use can be made easier providing a better experience for the user.

The last 18 months has seen a huge amount of transformational change and reconfigurations of the network to achieve a better performing shared Infrastructure. This has resulted in the remote access system being taking offline over some weekends to accommodate the changes.

Since the conception of the shared IT the WCC IMT revenue budget has reduced by c. £347K per year (2010/11- 2013/14) equating to an estimated cumulative saving of £1.7M over a rolling five years. In addition to these revenue savings the Council has also managed to avoid an estimated £172K in Capital pressures.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 13

From: Councillor Gemmell

To: The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development

“Can the Portfolio Holder give us an update on the progress of the Grants for smaller organisations?”

Reply

As an Administration we are extremely proud of the work we have done to support the voluntary and community sector. This year we have made around £735,000 available through the Council’s grants programmes,

All voluntary organisations – regardless of size - are eligible to apply for a wide range of funding, from core grants to project grants, and from 2012 sports legacy grants to small grants. Organisations cover a broad spectrum, from those that provide vital social care for people or help to reduce their carbon footprint, to others such as sports, arts and heritage clubs that brighten our lives and keep us healthy.

We have implemented some planned reductions in core funding to our larger, more resilient organisations over recent years, in order to increase the overall reach of our grants programmes. This year saw our project grants allocation increased by 20% and we created a brand new 2012 Legacy fund of £15,000 specifically for sports and physical activities.

All in all, this means that many smaller organisations have benefited. So far in this financial year, we have allocated 75 grants worth £50,000 in total to 72 small organizations. They have, for example, been able to buy one-off pieces of equipment; to run special activities for local people; to provide vital training for volunteers, or to improve the safety or efficiency of the buildings they use.

But we do not simply help the sector with grants. Over and above the cash which we have provided, we have also:

- held a packed open event about different sources of grant funding;
- recruited a number of local organizations to pilot a new approach to digital fundraising through LocalGiving, and
- conducted an intensive consultation programme to determine the support needs of the sector as we look ahead – focusing mainly on the smaller organizations in our District.

We are backing the voluntary sector, reaching the parts of our community that other agencies cannot reach.



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 14

From: Councillor Hutchison

To: The Leader

“Given the expertise and the possible additional resources to be found in the District's sports clubs, the Hampshire County Council and the University of Winchester, would it not be wise for the City Council to set up a Partnership Working Group involving these organisations alongside elected members to take forward the options appraisal for a replacement for RPLC and to test out whether a partnership approach would best serve the public interest?”

Reply

“It is disappointing that some seem to think the Administration are not already talking about options for the replacement or refurbishment of RPLC with a number of organisations. For example, I recently met with the Leader of the County Council, and earlier this week the Deputy Leader and I met with the Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University, the latest in a number of meetings on just this topic. We have also met with Fit for the Future, who I believe speak on behalf of a number of sports clubs.

All organisations are anxious to work in partnership with the City, and I welcome that. I will want to make full use of their expertise and support. But sadly, although perhaps understandably, none are able to contribute significant resources to the project.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 15

From: Councillor Scott

To: The Leader

“The revised Community Strategy now places greater emphasis on what the Council can deliver across the District, given the demise of the Winchester District Strategic Partnership, although it acknowledges many projects will be delivered through established partnerships.

The previous version of the Community Strategy relied on statistical data taken from the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2007) which recognised that both Stanmore North and Winnall West fell within the most overall deprived areas in Hampshire, where the partners of the WDSP would concentrate their efforts during 2010-2014.

Does this mean that Stanmore and Winnall (Highcliffe) are now abandoned from the Community Strategy and if so why?”

Reply

“The revised Community Strategy takes a more holistic approach through the identification of broader priorities that can be applied across the whole District, given that this document will inform how the Council sets its budget and where to focus its diminishing resources. Notwithstanding this, where there is evidence to suggest the need for specific projects and programmes to be identified and delivered, then these will continue and may well be within Stanmore and Winnall, or indeed in other deprived areas of the District. There is no intention to abandon either Stanmore or Winnall given progress with the many projects already underway.

The previous version of the Strategy relied on partner involvement for the delivery of projects and therefore provided a strategy for partners to follow in identifying their own programmes, by giving specific direction to areas of the District on which to focus. It is now felt that specific reference to parts of Winchester is no longer necessary, as this is a district wide strategy that gives the Council the flexibility to identify projects based on evidence.”



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 16

From: Councillor Eileen Berry

To: The Portfolio Holder for Built Environment

“Could this Council thank Chris Webb and Officers for at last putting a plaque on the Black Swan building in Southgate Street. The Black Swan has been sitting on its perch for a very long time and tourist and visitors alike have asked what it’s there for, and now the plaque explains this. We ought to say thank you for all the work that has gone in to restoring the black swan itself.”

Reply

I thank Cllr Berry for her kind words.

Winchester’s streets are characterised by fine buildings and interesting features from across the centuries. We know that the network of historic plaques which can be found across the City are much valued by visitors and residents alike, as a really accessible way to learn the story of our City and its landmark buildings.

We would like to work towards a policy of standardisations for the format of historic information plaques, making it easier for visitors to recognise and enjoy our more historic buildings.

The refurbishment of the Black Swan represents a happy collaboration between the Council and the owners of the building. We are committed to improving the appearance of other unloved buildings in the central shopping area over time in the same way.

I would particularly like to thank Cllrs Berry and Tait for their active involvement, which has secured a happy ending for the tale of the Black Swan.



COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 17

From: Councillor Janet Berry

To: The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Organisational Development

“How much money would the Council save if gas and electricity prices were frozen now?”

Reply

A report produced by the Department of Energy and Climate Change in March 2013 estimated that electricity costs would increase by 20% and gas by 6% from 2013 as a result of climate change policies and wholesale prices.

It is, therefore, likely that these increases would impact Winchester City Council because of how frequently the Council's energy providers review their charges.

All corporate property, public conveniences, sewage treatment works, car parks, museums, sports facilities and communal housing areas are under two contracts: One for electricity and one for gas. Electricity and gas prices are reviewed by the energy providers every six months.

There are properties that are not under the above contracts. These include empty council houses and shops.

For the financial year 2012/13 the annual spend on electricity was £493,093 The spend on gas was £128,878. If the Department of Energy and Climate Change predictions on the possible increases are correct, costs would rise to: Electricity £591,711 and gas £136,610.

Therefore, if energy prices and the Council's energy consumption remained static, the saving would be: Electric £98,618 and gas £7,732.

However, energy prices are based on the cost of generation or the market price of the commodity and it may be unrealistic to expect that costs to the consumer could be fixed for any period of time.



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 18

From: Councillor Lipscomb

To: The Portfolio Holder for Built Environment

“Southampton Airport have recently announced the cost savings they have made with their new LED lighting. Is Winchester City Council planning to use LED lighting in any of our premises, notably in our multi storey car parks?”

Reply

“The City Council is reviewing a lighting replacement project this year within Chesil Multi Story Car Park as part of its’ energy and carbon reduction programme. The scheme under consideration will cost £48,000 and is predicted to reduce carbon emissions by 44.84 t or 104,483 kW’s per annum and savings of £14,000 per annum. The work will be carried out next year following the completion of painting works to the ceilings in the car park which will further improve lighting levels.

Work is continuing to look at further options for other car parks including Tower Street.

In addition to replacement lighting the programme also includes work to reduce lighting levels overnight when car parks are not in use including the South Park & Ride facility. Levels here have been reduced by 50% after 2130hrs with resultant energy savings whilst still allowing sufficient light for CCTV monitoring purposes.”



COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 19

From: Councillor Pines

To: The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development

“Following the City’s successful policy of supporting the apprenticeship model for young people in Winchester, could the Portfolio Holder report on what success he has had in promoting this policy in the commercial and business sectors of Winchester, especially among the City Council’s own contractors?”

Reply

At a time when youth unemployment continues to be a national concern, this Council has sought to lead by example in providing a wide range of workplace opportunities for apprentices, graduate trainees, work placements and interns. Our 28 apprentices have brought new skills, new perceptions and new approaches to our work.

We have encouraged others to follow our lead, too. For example

- Our Employer Engagement Service, commissioned earlier this year, has seen over 100 businesses across the District contacted for discussions about the opportunities they might provide. Alongside a dozen new apprenticeships, they have brought forward ten new permanent vacancies and around 60 work placement opportunities.
- We have offered grants to local young people who have been offered apprenticeships, with around 15 approved so far. These grants have bought basic work clothes, specialist tools, travel and IT equipment to ensure that they can make the best possible start in their new roles.
- Through our core grants process, we have included requirements in service level agreements for our larger voluntary organisations to provide a range of workplace opportunities for local people, alongside the excellent work they already do to help those with personal challenges to become more ‘work ready’.

- Our Estates and Planning Management Teams have already done much to encourage contractors and developers to include workplace opportunities for local people. However, last month officers met with the National Construction Skills Academy Group to begin the process of signing up to a scheme which would set standard benchmarks for apprenticeships and training in any future major developments. We would hope to see these standards applied in the North of Whiteley development as a next step.

This is not a 'quick fix' situation, but the response of our local businesses thus far has been extremely heartening.

As we look ahead to next year, we will be doing more to help young people make the most of this growing list of opportunities, with the commissioning of a one-to-one mentoring scheme and the establishment of a local skills and employment partnership for the District.

All in all I believe that this Council is genuinely helping to provide a path to future employment for local jobseekers, young and old.



Winchester
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 20

From: Councillor Lipscomb

To: The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Environment

“Has the Portfolio Holder noticed the unfortunate severe deterioration in the state of the high quality seating that was erected in the High street at the time of the re-paving?”

On the assumption that she has, will she say what action is in hand to return these seats to a condition appropriate to their location and where people will feel comfortable using them without risking damage to clothing?”

Reply

“The City Council is aware of the need for maintenance of the benches in the High Street and is in discussion with Hampshire County Council officers and also the original installation company regarding the appropriate treatment. The specialist style and construction of the benches were specified as part of the High Street refurbishment works and as they are bespoke items care has to be taken in the treatment carried and time of the year in order to avoid damage to the material.

It is planned to carry out works once the wooden surface has dried out sufficiently which is likely to be Spring next year although it may be earlier if possible.”



COUNCIL MEETING – 6 November 2013

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 21

From: Councillor Janet Berry

To: The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development

“Given that this week is Living Wage Week, how much progress has the Council made, after committing itself to adopting the Living Wage, in encouraging other employers in the district to do likewise?”

Reply

The Council believes in leading by example in areas relating to employment and staff health and wellbeing. The Living Wage is no exception, and we implemented this for our own staff from 1 April this year.

For many businesses, these are challenging times, and making the commitment to increasing wages for any staff can be seen as a potential risk. We have done much to engage with employers over employment issues this year – as you will hear in the response to Cllr Pines’s question on apprenticeships – and have been encouraged by their positive attitude towards providing opportunities for those who are suffering most in the current economic climate.

In central Winchester, the Business Improvement District reports that most commercial businesses already pay at least the living wage because they are unable to recruit to their lowest-paid roles if they do not.

This may not be the same across the District, and officers continue to raise the subject at appropriate times. Only this week, for example, the Board of the Theatre Royal formally considered and adopted the Living Wage. We can do more with other Partner Organisations through the service level agreements that will be attached to their core grants for 2014/15.

We will also continue to encourage businesses through network meetings, e-newsletters and other regular communications throughout the months ahead.

We are also committed to reflecting our commitment to the Living Wage in our procurement policy during 2014.

This is very much a live issue for the Council, as we strive to ensure that everyone is able to have a decent quality of life in the Winchester District.