



## COUNCIL MEETING – 23 September 2020

### Questions by the Public under Council Procedure Rule 15(1)

- Each questioner will have 2 minutes in which to ask their question. The order of the questions to be asked is as set out below and an officer will pass a microphone to the questioner when their name is called by the Mayor.
- Please note that following the response given by the Councillor, the questioner may also ask a supplementary question which must arise directly out of the original question or the reply.
- The total time allocated for questions will *normally* be limited to 20 minutes. For any question which cannot be dealt with at the meeting, a written answer will be provided, normally within one working week.

	From:
1	Martin Wilson
2	Rebecca Butler
3	Patrick Davies





**Winchester**  
City Council

**COUNCIL MEETING – 23 September 2020**

**Questions by the Public**  
**under Council Procedure Rule 15(1)**

**QUESTION 1**

From: Martin Wilson

To: The Leader (Cllr Thompson)

“Does the Leader agree that when members of the public are given the opportunity to ask questions at Council meetings, and they take the trouble to do so and to appear at those meetings, it is unacceptable when the questions (and supplementary questions) are not answered or are deflected to another meeting where the questions are not even acknowledged? If she agrees, please could full answers be provided to the questions posed at the meeting of Full Council on 8th July (as below)?”

8 July 2020

From: Martin Wilson

To: The Cabinet Member for Housing and Asset Management (Cllr Learney)

“Can the Leader please confirm that when indoor sports facilities are allowed to reopen after the Coronavirus crisis, the Council is not due to pay compensation or to make any payments to the operators of the River Park Leisure Centre (RPLC), whether they relate to before, during or after the period of lockdown? Can the Leader also please confirm that, before the indoor sports facilities at RPLC re-open to the public, a full and documented inspection will be carried out by the Council's "Authorised Officer" and dilapidations and rectification notices issued in accordance with the Contract to ensure the facility is safe and fit for purpose?”

My previous questions asking about 1) costs to the Council of £13,000,000 expended by previous Administrations, and 2) as to why the condition of RPLC was allowed to become so poor, have still not been satisfactorily answered, so I would ask the Leader to ensure that

there is complete transparency about all dealings with the operators from now on.”

### Reply

“The Council is awaiting Government Guidance on when Leisure Centres can reopen and under what conditions.

Full inspections of both leisure centres are carried out on a monthly basis and this has continued during lockdown.

Costs are still incurred even whilst Leisure Centres remain closed in order to enable the subsequent reopening and to maintain security.

All of these matters will be carefully considered by Cabinet on 22<sup>nd</sup> July. The public are welcome to speak at all Cabinet meetings and the live stream is available to listen to.”

### Supplementary Question

The sum of £13 million, spent by the Council up to 2014, as confirmed by the Council’s own Finance Director, is greater than the entire deficit in the Council’s budget caused by the Pandemic.

Before another penny is spent on this failing facility, can the Leader please commission an independent enquiry into the Council’s failure to monitor and enforce the contract, and properly account for all expenditure linked to RPLC over the 29-year period of the contract?

### Reply

“Many thanks for your question. The administration answers all questions as fully as we can at the time of asking, and we remain committed to open and transparent decision making. We introduced for the first time the opportunity for the general public to put questions in this way to council in 2019 when we took office.

The subject of your question was the leisure centres which, at the time of asking, was a fast moving situation and was answered as best we could then. We were grappling with the best way to re-open our leisure centres to the community in a safe way following their closure as a result of government instruction related to Covid-19.

As the cabinet member stated in her original reply all relevant matters were indeed considered at the cabinet meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> July. Council members and members of the public were able to speak at that meeting. A recording and minutes of that meeting are available on the council website to accompany the cabinet report.

The cabinet report contains information that answers the question about payments to Places for People, and I refer you to that comprehensive paper. The council will ensure that Places for People undertake maintenance and repairs that are their responsibility.

To clarify, historic payments to the Council's leisure operator totalled £1.6m over the period 1997 – 2014. A further £225k has been paid to the operator since 2014 up to 31 March 2020. The £13 million figure is entirely incorrect and I am satisfied that no further investigation of these issues is required.

The RPLC building has reached the end of its useful life and has, in recent years, continued to be maintained on an essential repairs only basis to reflect the fact that it was due to close on opening of the Bar End site. Statutory obligations have been maintained and reactive maintenance has been undertaken to ensure that the centre functions and operates safely with planned maintenance and any capital costs were limited by agreement between the council and Places.

I am very pleased to note that the council's new leisure operator, Everyone Active, has successfully worked with the council to re-open the leisure centres as planned on 1<sup>st</sup> Sept 2020 and that this has been widely welcomed by our community.”



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**QUESTION 2**

From: Rebecca Butler

To: The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency (Cllr Murphy)

“How does the Liberal Democrat Council propose to fund its 2024 Carbon Neutral Policy?”

**Reply**

“The Council’s Carbon Neutrality Action Plan sets out its ambitions to become a carbon neutral council by 2024 and district by 2030. To help achieve this, an allocation of £500,000 has been made available from general fund reserves to deliver a programme of action over a two year period to 2022.

A further £10m investment has been identified in the Housing Revenue Account business plan to improve energy efficiency of the Council’s housing stock.

Finally, we seek every opportunity to bring in additional funds through applications to sources such as government programmes, the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) and European funding to increase our capacity. For example we secured £5.6m to increase provision for the park and ride service at the Vaultex site and we currently have close to £500,000 of funding bids awaiting a decision, all of which would further enhance our carbon reduction programme.”



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**QUESTION 3**

From: Patrick Davies

To: The Cabinet Member for Built Environment and Wellbeing (Cllr Porter)

“How precisely will the City Council challenge the Government’s “algorithm” in its latest planning consultations which require a centrally imposed, massive increase in new house building in Winchester?”

**Reply**

“The Council is carefully considering a response to both Government consultations, including the proposed change to the current planning system relating to the methodology for generating a housing number for the district which will produce a significantly higher number of homes that would need to be planned for.

A report detailing our intended response regarding the way the Government proposes to calculate the quantum of new housing required for the district, and other changes to the system, will be considered at a special Cabinet meeting on 29th September 2020 the papers for which have now been published. As you can see from this report we intend to raise a number of serious concerns about the methodology for producing a new housing figure which we think is flawed and will not on its own achieve the benefits Government is aiming for in terms of making homes more affordable.”