



COUNCIL MEETING – 15 January 2025

Questions by Councillors under Council Procedure Rule 19.1

- Each questioner will have 2 minutes in which to ask their question.
- If a questioner who has submitted a question is unable to be present, the Mayor may ask the question on their behalf, or invite another Councillor to do so, or indicate that a written reply will be given and published on the website following the meeting. or decide, in the absence of the questioner, that the question will not be dealt with.
- Please note that following the response given by the Leader, a Cabinet Member or Committee Chair, the questioner may also ask a supplementary question which must arise directly out of the original reply.
- The **total** time allocated for Councillor questions will normally be limited to 40 minutes.
- Written answers will be published to questions submitted (but not supplementary questions) following the meeting.

	From Cllr:
1	Lee
2	Batho
3	Brook
4	Wallace
5	Godfrey
6	Bolton
7	Horrill
8	Miller
9	Warwick
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QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Lee

To: The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency (Cllr Kelsie Learney)

Reduction of Harm from Plastics in Winchester

Plastic pollution is a global crisis, with production surging from 2 million metric tons in the 1950s to over 400 million metric tons annually today. The environmental, health, and economic impacts are profound, with microplastics contaminating water, soil, air, and even the human body. Plastics also exacerbate climate change, contributing 850 million tonnes of CO₂e annually through production and incineration—a figure projected to rise dramatically. Without more action the cleanup costs increase, worsens health risks, and accelerates biodiversity loss for our local environment, residents and communities.

While Winchester City Council has made progress through initiatives like improved waste management, new street market contracts and procurement reforms, plastic pollution persists.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation is a distraction, but there is still time to do more to ensure a cleaner, safer world for future generations. By building on our existing efforts, we can create/influence a stronger foundation and legacy for the organisations that will succeed us.

Should the Council expand its leadership and actions to reduce the harm from plastics by adopting additional plastic reduction measures? What additional steps can ensure Winchester leads by example to tackle this urgent crisis and the associated challenges?

Reply

Plastics perform a key role in modern society, moldable into any shape, long lasting, non-corrosive, non-conducting and lightweight they are the basis for our consumer and business electronics, an intrinsic part of our vehicles and help reduce food waste.

We do however have to recognise the harms the production and incorrect disposal of oil-based plastics have on our environment and the potential damage to human health.

Many plastic products can be replaced by alternatives and over recent years we have seen a reduction in some uses as a result of national regulation – the plastic carrier bag levy and the ban on single use plastics in catering are good examples. We anticipate that the introduction of the Extended Producer Responsibility and Deposit Return schemes will encourage reduced levels of packaging and increased recycling.

As a district Council we do not have many levers at our disposal to change the amount of plastic in our environment. Our new 'Market contract' discourages the use and sales of disposable plastic goods and our licensing policy demands the use of non-plastic alternatives to unbreakable 'glasses' and containers.

Through our grants programs we have supported repair cafes and the sale of loose fruit and vegetables and welcome approaches from community organisations with plastic and waste reduction projects.

We have provided tetrapak recycling bins and pressed for improved recycling infrastructure which would allow a greater range of food packaging to be recycled from the doorstep. We have opposed the closure of local household waste recycling centres.

Increased recycling will not however get to the core of the problem - the need to reduce plastic use and production. We do need to look at promoting behaviour change – encouraging residents to keep products for longer and repairing rather than replacing where possible, at the end of product life using correct disposal routes such as our doorstep small electrical collection and household waste recycling centres and think about purchasing products made of alternative materials and with less or no packaging.

The introduction of food waste collection will create an opportunity to promote increased recycling and reduced levels of contamination, and we will also look at available resources for public campaigning on waste reduction in this year.



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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Batho

To: The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency (Cllr Kelsie Learney)

Dealing with the household waste generated by residents of our District is a joint responsibility between Winchester City Council who collect and Hampshire County Council who manage disposal.

As part of the drive to be Greener Faster the District would like to widen the range of waste that can be recycled, however this is dependent on facilities provided by the County Council. A major impact on this is the lack of a decision on the building of a new Material Recycling Facility (MRF), which has now been outstanding for years.

Can the Cabinet Member for the Climate Emergency please explain what the impact of this dither and delay by the Conservative administration at Hampshire has had on the recycling aspirations of the district?

Reply

It is an unfortunate fact that Hampshire and the Project integra partnership have gone from a national leader in recycling to below average.

The Alton MRF, the newer of two serving Hampshire was opened two decades ago in 2005 at a time when a far narrower range of materials could be recycled.

Although Hampshire County Council bought land at Eastleigh in 2018 for a new materials recycling facility and received planning permission in 2022, we still await the formal decision to move to construction.

The impact of the delay is that this Council will not meet the Environment Act 2021 requirements to collect recyclable plastics such as pots, tubs and trays from the doorstep for recycling by April 2026. This is something which we could start doing tomorrow if the appropriate infrastructure was in place.

This reduces our recycling rate, it increases the contamination of the recycling we collect because residents believe they can recycle these products, and it increases the amount of waste going for incineration. In addition, there is a potential financial penalty in a reduction in the income we will receive from Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding.



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Brook

To: Councillor Tod (Leader and Cabinet Member for Asset Management)

In advance of the follow up scrutiny assets meeting; how many Council assets are directly effected by the central Winchester regeneration and what is the value of those?

Reply

In March 2024, the City Council assets within the Central Winchester Regeneration area were valued on the council's General Fund balance sheet at £6.3m (in draft accounts subject to audit). These are existing use values and do not necessarily reflect the market value of all these assets for regeneration purposes.

Asset	Value @ 31/03/2024 £000
Coitbury House	801
Bus Station	1,604
Friarsgate Park	45
Kings Walk and Middle Brook Street (Antiques Market, Kings Walk and former Post Office, Poundland, Iceland)	2,523
Friarsgate Car Park	1,254
TOTAL	6,227



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Wallace

To: Councillor Tod (Leader and Cabinet Member for Asset Management)

Devolution and local government reorganisation will be very complicated and has massive implications across all level of local government, including local parish and town councils. To help with the transition process, please can you confirm that relevant Ward Councillors will be included in all communications (including meetings) with Town & Parish Councils where devolution and local government reorganisation matters are involved?

Reply

It's a top priority to ensure both City Councillors and Parish Councils are fully informed throughout the Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation process. To that end, we held a briefing for members on January 6th and included some initial information for Parish Councillors in a Parish Liaison Meeting on January 9th.

Our intention is that the next round of briefings will follow shortly after we receive the Government's formal invitation to participate in Local Government Reorganisation at the end of this month – and is currently scheduled for February 3rd for City Councillors and February 5th for Parish Councils. As part of the City Councillor briefing, we will also share and discuss the content of the briefing for Parish Councillors two days later.

Because the contents of the briefing will have been shared in advance, we don't currently plan to invite the 34 City Councillors who have parishes in their wards to join the 48 parishes invited to the meeting. I don't think that would be productive. Although, of course, I will be happy to feed back to members on any input received.

In the event that the Leader, Deputy Leader or other Cabinet Members are asked to attend individual parishes directly to discuss Local Government Reorganisation, we will ensure that district members are also invited to attend.

And we will, of course, continue to ensure that ward members are copied into the Parish Connect email briefings that we send to Parish Councils.



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Godfrey

To: Councillor Tod (Leader and Cabinet Member for Asset Management)

It is now another 6 months through the 5-year period agreed for the University of Southampton to develop and share their proposals for the River Park Leisure Centre site. It is also another 6 months since I last asked the Leader about the absence of any public indication of these proposals. When does the Portfolio Holder expect a clear milestone plan to be published leading to the submission of a planning application?

Reply

Six months ago, I promised that I would be meeting the university in September to discuss their future plans. That meeting took place slightly later than planned on October 10th.

Based on that meeting, we had hoped to be making some announcements about the university's investment plans and the plans for River Park fairly shortly. We continue to work with the University for the earliest possible clarification of the way forward.



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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Bolton

To: The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency (Cllr Kelsie Learney)

In 2019 the administration declared a climate emergency and your stated aim was to commit to making the activities of Winchester City Council carbon neutral by 2024. At what point since then did the administration decide that of those activities now designated as scope 1, 2 and 3 only scope 1 and 2 would be included as WCC activities?

Reply

For clarity, scope 1 emissions are direct emissions from sources an organisation owns or controls, scope 2 is indirect emissions from the generation of purchased energy. Scopes 1 and 2 are under the Councils control while scope 3 emissions are all other indirect emissions that occur as part of council activities for example staff travel to work and our contractor's emissions.

While many councils only look at their directly controlled emissions, we have always reported on the 3 scopes in full in excess of HM Government Environmental Reporting Guidelines and we will continue to do so. We have expanded what is included in scope 3 so recent figures are not directly comparable with those in 2019. Unlike many councils our figures are externally validated.

I have been delighted to celebrate the success of the Council in cutting those emissions we do directly control by an estimated 96%. We have also worked with our contractors to reduce their emissions with solar panels on their buildings, the use of green electricity and moving to low carbon HVO fuel for our waste trucks and buses.

Quoting directly from the Climate emergency declaration cabinet paper in 2019 "What is clear is that achieving "carbon neutral" targets by 2024 and 2030 will be reliant on external factors outside the direct control of the Council,".

We have had years of Conservative Government with a lot of noise about carbon reduction but failure to take the action needed to get us there. The opposition to land-based wind farms, the decimation of the home renewable energy industry and the transfer of funding from sustainable transport to roads are just a few examples of where government has actively damaged the ability for all of us to reduce carbon.

I am proud of the carbon reduction this Council has achieved in a difficult environment. Our intention to achieve full carbon neutrality has not changed and will continue alongside our work to decarbonise the district.



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Horrill

To: Councillor Tod (Leader and Cabinet Member for Asset Management)

Would the Leader confirm if he is prepared to establish a regular cross-party committee to discuss the devolution and local government reorganization proposed for our area and the agreed WCC responses?

Reply

Currently, the plan is that these discussions are held with all councillors – and any major decision, such as potential partners for merger, will be considered at Full Council.

Interests on these issues are not just party based, but also need to reflect the different geographical interests of councillors in different parts of the district.

We also don't currently know whether Hampshire will be accepted onto the Devolution Priority Programme or what process the government expects us to follow for Local Government Reorganisation. When we know this, I will come back to members with a revised way forward, if needed.



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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Miller

To: Councillor Tod (Leader and Cabinet Member for Asset Management)

What reassurances can be given to the residents of the Winchester District that neither Devolution or LGR will not delay the major projects such as Central Winchester and Station Approach.

Reply

I can't promise that Devolution and LGR will have no impact on our major projects, but I can promise that we will do our utmost to ensure that it does not delay them for as long as the City Council is responsible for their implementation.

As an example, we expect to agree the Central Winchester Regeneration Development Delivery Plan on March 13th – well ahead of both the implementation of both the combined authority and submission of any reorganisation proposals.

It's important to note that devolution may also bring opportunities. As and when we have a Mayoral Combined Authority, there will be devolution of wider grant funding to support regeneration and housing delivery: potentially helpful to all our projects. Mayors will also have an option for greater direct control over railway stations – which could unlock very significant opportunities for Station Approach.

Local Government Reorganisation could also allow for more tightly integrated decision-making on transport and development issues – again, important for both Station Approach and Central Winchester Regeneration – as development and transport would sit within one organisation.

That said, we are not alone in seeing potential risks to our major projects as well – particularly if any unitary authority for our area inherits Hampshire's financial challenges.

The other issue of particular concern is that at a certain point in previous reorganisations, controls have been put on local authorities which require new spending to be approved by the Secretary of State. This could be a significant issue if it happens at the wrong time in any regeneration programme – although we will continue to try and mitigate this as effectively as possible in our risk management ahead of any implementation.



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QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Warwick

To: Councillor Thompson (Cabinet Member for Business and Culture)

Are there any plans to enhance the signage for and protect the remaining small piece of Roman wall just below the Bishop on the Bridge in Winchester?

Reply

Thank you for your question.

It is a high priority for this council to ensure that our ancient heritage gets the attention and care that it deserves. Its one of the many reasons that people visit our city and one of the things that helps our area thrive.

As you know, it's not always straightforward. Many of the works require the approval of Historic England – and this can take a lot of time.

However, we do have a programme to clean and repair our monuments as well as improving the information displayed about them. The first priority is the Buttercross which will have scaffolding erected later this year to enable it to be expertly cleaned and the stonework repaired. Our focus will then be on improvements to Hyde Abbey Gateway. And of course, we recently improved the signage at the Nunnaminster in Abbey Passage.

The piece of Roman wall you have identified is a National Scheduled Monument which means that any work carried out on it, including new signage, will need the approval of Historic England. We will need to review where we stand with our other monuments, but once the Buttercross and Hyde Abbey works are complete, I would like it to be one of the next pieces of work to be looked at.

In the meantime, I did have a look at the site and I agree it could do with some TLC. So I have asked officers whether we could remove the leaves and debris that has built up in the chamber and I would be happy to keep you informed of the outcome of that request.



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QUESTION 10

From: Councillor Lee

To: Councillor Tod (Leader and Cabinet Member for Asset Management)

Devolution and the Local Government Review (LGR) – Lessons Learnt, Best Practices and avoiding wasting public funds.

LGR aims to streamline services and reduce financial pressures, yet external audits of eight unitary councils created since 2019 show limited financial success and adoption of best practices from previous authorities. This is particularly evident with the transfer of environmental and climate policies into new the new combined authorities.

Can Council members be assured that our existing best practices and achievements will be identified early and carried forward into the new unitaries and Mayor led Strategic Combined Authority? Specifically, how will we address concerns about Hampshire County Council's lack of clear progress data and comprehensive plans for achieving net zero, ensuring we avoid replicating the lowest benchmarks into these new organizations with a need for repeated work and wasted public resources?

Reply

I absolutely share your concerns about the weakness of Hampshire's approach to achieving net zero, but the policies and procedures of any new unitary authority will ultimately be a matter for those authorities and the councillors elected to them – not for current City, Borough, District and County Councillors.

However there are changes we can make that will carry over to any new authority.

As an example, our Local Plan, if agreed, will remain the planning policy for the Winchester district area until any new authority has gone through the process of creating a new one. Ensuring, as we have, that we set very high standards in that plan will make it harder for any successor authority to weaken those policies later on.

Other similar policies, such as our air quality management strategy, will also remain in place until replaced by any new authority.

Similarly, our ambitious approach to recycling is also likely to carry over – due to the costs of moving to a weaker system once our new system is in place.

Ultimately though, despite the enthusiasm some parties have for cancelling or delaying elections, we live in a democracy, and it will be for those of us who want a more ambitious approach in any new authority that is created to ensure that we – or others of like mind – are in a position to set the policies that our residents, our area and our planet so desperately need.



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QUESTION 11

From: Councillor Godfrey

To: Councillor Cutler (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance)

The main purpose of sharing IT Services with Test Valley Council is to ensure resilient services for our Council at an affordable cost. This should have meant that the recent flood in the Council Offices would have triggered an automated failover to prevent any significant loss of service. Why did this not happen and is there now any benefit in sharing IT Services with Test Valley?

Reply

The Shared IT service has been in operation for over 14 years and continues to provide resilience, economies of scale and expertise benefits to WCC.

The water leak that led to the loss of electricity supply to the West Wing clearly demonstrated the value of the partnership to enable swift recovery from a significant hardware problem.

Some systems were not affected at all, including the website, the Your Winchester App and My Council services, and all staff are enabled and equipped for remote working and could continue to use all our cloud applications including email and Teams. All core services were restored within 12 hours, with no data loss from major business systems.

Within 24hrs the disaster recovery site at Hyde Lodge was fully operational via connections to Test Valley BC servers, and our telephone system was back in operation, initially using TVBC lines.

Remaining internet-based services (e.g. planning portal and mod.gov) and network reliant systems took a little longer to restore to return to full functionality due to reliance on third party suppliers.

The shared service enabled restoration of services far more quickly than would have been possible without it, due to the ability to link into the TVBC system and having a larger pool of highly skilled technical staff than we could justify alone.

An independent assessment by external cyber security consultants cited the shared service as a major contributor to our resilience.

Clearly, as with any incident of this nature, there are lessons to be learned. The installation of an extra line direct to the city offices has now provided extra back up that would enable the wireless network and telephony to be restored more quickly, and consideration is being given to a better location for the servers to enable use of a generator in the event of a long power outage.



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QUESTION 12

From: Councillor Wallace

To: Councillor Tod (Leader and Cabinet Member for Asset Management)

As part of combining local authorities together, there is a risk that the new 'standards' are set at the lowest level for any authority. For example, the new Winchester air quality strategy is aiming to improve air quality across our district to above Government minimum standards. How can Councillors help to ensure that these higher requirements are retained in any future combined authority, rather than reverting to absolute minimum levels?

Reply

I think I've answered this earlier, but I would just stress that we need to crack on and ensure our current policies are signed off and implemented.

And to reinforce that this new system won't mean that elections are coming to an end – although I, like you, regret that we won't have elections this year – and that we will continue to have the opportunity to make our case at the ballot box and seek to ensure that the ambitious approach taken by this authority is carried over to any new authority.