



COUNCIL MEETING – 27 February 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	Bolton
2	Tippett-Cooper
3	Horrill
4	Lee
5	Brook
6	Godfrey
7	Langford-Smith
8	Warwick



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QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Bolton

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

Given the latest concerning economic outlook for businesses in Winchester. What is the administration specifically doing to counter the headwinds in order to stimulate growth?

Reply

Thank you for your question.

I agree, it is a very challenging time for businesses across our district. The combination of the previous government's disastrous economic policies – alongside the horrendous war in Ukraine and soaring inflation – saw our trade and economy crash. All of this, coupled with the Labour Government's National Insurance hike, means that businesses (and indeed councils) have been hit particularly hard.

But not every area is a disaster – and the choices made by this administration mean that our district continues to outperform many other areas. As an example, on Monday, the Guardian reported a CBI report highlighting that the net zero economy is growing at triple the rate of the UK economy overall – providing high wage jobs and increasing energy security. And that is what lies at the heart of our Economic Development Strategy; Our Green Economic Development Strategy.

While we're not in a position to deal with the full costs of the National Insurance change, the war in Ukraine or Brexit, we have successfully been working to help businesses reduce their costs and carbon footprint – and, where appropriate, succeed in this high growth sector. Our website signposts businesses to where they can find help and advice on green business grants as well as offering businesses help and advice on how to reduce energy bills and a lot more.

The GEDS action plan has meant that we have prioritised access to training courses for businesses across our district. One example is the very popular workshops we have provided on Artificial Intelligence. These have enabled

businesses to take advantage of the opportunities that this new technology brings.

Projects supporting green growth also proved very popular when distributing our shared prosperity funding. Our supportive approach to the green economy has also played a role in bringing in new investment. The instavolt EV charging station, as well as new battery storage and the anaerobic digester being built just off the A34 is a good example. Another is the recently installed training bays at Sparsholt College upskilling the workforce on fitting solar panels and EV chargers.

As a district council, our tools to tackle the national headwinds are limited. But by supporting high growth investment while continuing to work alongside local businesses across the district, we believe we can help our businesses stay better positioned to thrive, despite the national challenges so many face.



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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Tippet-Cooper

To: Councillor Becker (Cabinet Member for Community and Engagement)

The new River Park Pavilion announced recently by Winchester City Council will see a brilliant new sports and community facility in River Park, how are things progressing with this new project?

Reply

I'm very happy to report that this project is now continuing to proceed at pace. The tender process closed on February 21st with a total of nine tenders received - including from several local and regional firms. We are analysing and evaluating the tenders and expect we will be able to appoint a contractor within the coming weeks.

Part of the evaluation process will include considering the potential contractor's expected lead in time and construction duration, but we anticipate that the build will start in May 2025 with completion in early 2026.



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Horrill

To: Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan)

Can the portfolio holder please confirm that Winchester City Council is still committed to defending the draft local plan (2040) that has been submitted to the Inspector for approval this spring, when we are being swamped by developers who believe that they should have their site included?

Reply

This Council remains absolutely committed to defending our 2040 Local Plan. It is a vital tool to ensure that any new development is properly considered and has the infrastructure it needs.

As you will know, we now have the dates set for the Inspector to hold the Examination in public: matters to be debated have been published. The start date is 22nd April.

You know too that having worked on this plan for a number of years, Winchester City Council and I will be robustly defending the policies and proposals in the draft plan. The Inspector will determine whether the plan is sound and able to deliver homes and employment.

It's important to note also that the inspection process has changed vs previous plans and the Inspector will not be making any decisions on whether to include any specific sites that are not already listed in the plan. The choice they are making is simple – is the plan sound or not. We continue to believe that it is sound and will be putting forward the strongest possible case on that basis.



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Lee

To: Councillor Learney (Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency)

Increase in risks to Climate and Nature

Rising temperatures and biodiversity loss threaten community well-being and sustainable economic growth. We must continue to try and overcome bureaucracy, resource constraints, and weak government direction for **Climate and Nature Actions**, especially as Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation risk stalling/stopping vital initiatives. The absence of a National Climate and Nature Bill further delays coordinated action.

Key urgent actions:

- Urge Government to strengthen climate and nature mandates in the Devolution White Paper. Otherwise, Strategic Combined Authorities (SCA) will lack the mandate, resources, and accountability necessary to drive climate & nature actions effectively¹.
- Provide suggested guidance for members and the public to enhance responses to the Hampshire/Solent devolution consultation.
- Consider improvements for cross-portfolio coordination within WCC to enhance actions on these interlinked crises as part of the new Council Plan.
- Establish an early interim Climate and Nature strategy and action plan with new Unitary partners, when known, to minimise delays of inaction during the reorganising transition. These plans can then be reverse engineered, where possible, into the emerging SCA framework Strategies.

Will the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency consider these proposals?

¹ www.seclimatealliance.uk/making-devolution-work/



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Reply

I agree that while the strategic combined authorities have climate and nature responsibilities this should come with a duty to take action and meet statutory targets which isn't currently the case. In my personal response to the devolution consultation I have already said this. There will be a Council response to the consultation which will be published for residents to refer to if they wish. However, I don't feel it would be right for us to tell our residents what to say on this, I would encourage them to read the consultation documents and give their own response.

Cabinet already work very closely as a team, meeting weekly as a group to discuss significant issues and working in twos and threes as appropriate on all cross cutting issues. For example the leader works with me on the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan and I work with Councillor Westwood on the Retrofit program.

Ideally we would want to be setting direction on climate and nature to carry forward into the new unitary authorities but even if neighbours also wish to do this, it will not be down to existing authorities. Not only will the geography not necessarily follow existing boundaries but there will be new councillors elected to the shadow unitary authorities who will make their own decisions about policy and priorities. We will look at what work it is sensible to do, for example it makes sense to complete our local area energy plan which can feed easily into the Strategic Combined authority LAEP plan for Hampshire. It must be recognised that local government reorganisation will put considerable strains on the resources available for policy work within this and our neighbouring authorities and as we are all aware, Hampshire County Council is cutting non-statutory work to the bone. We cannot afford to put resource into complex plans which could just sit on a shelf.



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Brook

To: Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan)

Within the new enforcement plan, currently out for consultation, the communication section clearly states it could be weeks or months between key stages and therefore updates.

The enforcement team have a reputation for leaving cases long enough that they become not expedient to pursue and criticised for their inaction. Communication of the actions behind the scenes is critical for complainants and ensuring they are aware the case has not just been dropped or ignored.

How does this plan intend to change perception and make enforcement more effective?

Reply

I strongly refute the statement you have made: it is not true that the team leaves cases to become immune. Immunity rules are complex and often a breach has already accrued immunity by the time it has been reported. It is important to note that the Enforcement team resolves a high proportion of current cases within twelve weeks.

I know that you know from your own experience as the responsible cabinet member the challenges of handling enforcement cases. The previous administration handed over a significant backlog in enforcement cases - and it's important not to characterise the enforcement team by the failures of the past.

Currently the Enforcement team resolves a high proportion of current cases within twelve weeks. But we know we can do better - and we want to clear the backlog - and that is why, earlier in this meeting, we put £200,000 into the budget for the Enforcement team specifically to help tackle that backlog.



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It's also why we developed a new enforcement plan with the help of experienced Parish Councillors who took the time to give their views. This is explicitly designed to make the process clearer and improve communication. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them for their valuable and considered input.

And while I can't speak for you in your own period as portfolio holder, I can assure you that currently the team also does not leave cases to become immune. That doesn't mean that cases don't sometimes become immune. Immunity rules are complex and often a breach has already accrued immunity by the time it has been reported.



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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Godfrey

To: Councillor Learney (Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency)

Can the Portfolio Holder tell me how much Council money will be spent this financial year to help improve the energy efficiency of the homes of residents of property owned by the Council, by Housing Associations and privately?

Reply

The council's own retrofit program is a continuous improvement program and in year spend varies according to contractor progression but the climate change budget for next year is £5,936,000. Registered social landlords have their own programmes of improvement to meet national energy efficiency requirements which they finance themselves or through government grants.

A number of our staff are working to promote and help residents in private housing access government and other energy efficiency programmes – for example as part of the Warmer Homes partnership the council has helped low-income Winchester residents access £490,185.70 in HUG2 funding since its launch in July 23 to date. We have signed a letter of intent to join the successor “Warm Homes: Local Grant” scheme which will operate in the coming year and we hope that will be equally successful. The City Council website offers advice and links to schemes such as the boiler upgrade scheme which offers grants of £7,500 to residents installing air or ground source heat pumps

The work programmes for next year are being finalised but we will continue to put resources in to promote schemes as they become available. Last year this included not only HUG2 but promoting the Hampshire Solar together scheme which saw 786 expressions of interest from Winchester residents. We will be continuing to work with partners to offer both individual energy advice and community events promoting energy efficiency to residents.



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Langford-Smith

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

Can the Administration give their views on the position of large Parish Councils on the reform within the Local Government Reorganisation?

Reply

Parish and Town Councils are a vital part of how our district works and how local people's voices can be heard – and I know that the National Association of Local Councils is really frustrated that the government did not include parish and town councils in the guidance to local authorities about engagement and consultation on reorganisation.

I share that frustration – and I would like to reassure you that I will personally ensure that we continue to consult with – and engage with – Parish and Town Councils – as I did on my briefing on February 5th – when Winchester District's Parish and Town Councils were amongst the first in the country to be briefed on the Government's Local Government Reorganisation request to districts.

As I highlighted in that presentation, some parishes are interested in consolidating with neighbours to create scale in the context of new very large unitaries – and I remain interested in knowing whether parish and town councils are interested in pursuing this issue.

We are also interested in knowing – particularly from larger parishes – whether there are district functions or assets they would like to take on or protect.

And, as you know, within discussions of Local Government Reorganisation, there are discussions about potential boundaries changes – and particularly for those parishes neighbouring other areas – I am interested in understanding whether alignment with a neighbouring area might be more relevant to them.



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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Warwick

To: Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan)

I understand that plans to develop a 6000-home new town at Micheldever have been submitted to government this week. Will this proposal also be considered by the City Council within our next local plan process?

Reply

Winchester City Council has always rejected the principle of 6000 homes at Micheldever.

It is not where homes are needed in our district, as it sits in countryside and is not linked to any of our rural market towns or city of Winchester, nor does it support the housing needs of Portsmouth or Southampton. For those reasons, we did not include it in our Local plan to 2040.

In our plan, we must reflect the shortage of homes in sustainable locations around the city, the market towns and within short distances of Portsmouth and Southampton. In this plan, we have 'Duty to co-operate agreements' with Havant and Portsmouth who are already seeking homes for their needs in our district.

The Local Development Scheme that lays out the process to develop the next Local Plan which starts this Autumn. The Government has received 100 bids for new towns. The New Towns Working Party will announce the selected sites in the summer. Micheldever has been put forward to that list.

Officers have been advised that the allocation of homes in these new towns will not be considered as part of the allocation of homes in any future Local Plan.

