

Wiltshire Council

Council

17 October 2017

From Councillor Jon Hubbard, Melksham South Division

To Councillor Baroness Scott of Bybrook OBE, Leader of the Council

Question (17-53)

Does the Leader agree with Vince Cable that it is absurd that Wiltshire Council is able to undertake borrowing for speculative investment in commercial property but is currently barred from undertaking similar borrowing to invest in building new homes for Wiltshire residents?

Will the Leader undertake work with myself and my colleagues to support the campaign being spearheaded by the Liberal Democrats to change the rules imposed by the Conservative Government in Westminster?

Response

Firstly, to clarify Councillor Hubbard's inaccuracy, the caps on borrowing were imposed by the Coalition Government on each of 169 councils, including Wiltshire, that had housing stock in April 2012. In fact, the reduction of the debt was a key target proposed by David Laws MP, a Liberal Democrat.

The cap was based on calculations under the old Housing Revenue Account (HRA) subsidy system and included the other debt councils had at that point. That meant that councils such as Wiltshire that had invested in New Homes Standards found that they had no headroom to borrow more. Whilst there was some raising of the cap under LEP growth bids it was too small and it came with a host of strings attached with the coalition government creating a complex competition before authorities hoped to see the benefits, as such this has not proved an effective measure.

The caps were put in place because all council borrowing affects government debt, but this cap means that few if any councils can borrow as much as they could afford to do sustainably within the prudential rules.

Wiltshire supports removing the cap and has written to the Secretary of State in the past to raise concerns regarding this, but we believe that the principles of prudence must always be retained. That is the same whether it is for commercial, housing or any other investment. For housing, that means that borrowing for new stock must be based on a solid business case that still enables investment in current stock, can ensure cash flow whilst new properties are built and the Council has more certainty over rents than it currently has. As such the way to change the debt needs to be balanced but we believe there are various options to achieve this, and these must be pushed for rather than a simple lifting of the cap.

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Councillor Ian Thorn, Calne Central Division

**To Councillor Toby Sturgis, Cabinet Member for Spatial Planning,
Development Management and Property**

Question (17-54)

What measures will the Cabinet member take to ensure that parish and town councils are treated fairly during the negotiations concerning the transfer of assets and services from Wiltshire Council. In particular how will he ensure that there is a fair balance of positive as well as negative assets in any agreements that are reached?

Response

The original premise for packages of services and assets to be transferred to Town and Parish councils was set out in the paper presented to cabinet in July 2015, a clear principle being the negotiation of a package that suited both parties.

This policy is currently being reviewed in light of the lessons learnt following the completion of a package transfer of services and assets to Salisbury City Council. We anticipate that the revised policy will be put to the November cabinet meeting for consideration. It is envisaged that this policy will provide some guiding principles as well as detailing the process and parameters by which future packaged transfers will be managed.

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17 October 2017

Councillor Nicholas Fogg MBE, Marlborough West Division

To Councillor Bridget Wayman, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Waste

Question (17-57)

On a recent visit to Venice, I was heartened to find that the inhabitants enjoy a daily rubbish collection on a premise to premise basis. I enquired about the local taxes and found they were not excessively high.

Could the Wiltshire Cabinet member with this brief enquire into how such facilities are available in many places in continental Europe, but not in Wiltshire?

Is there any truth in the rumour that Wiltshire is considering the curtailment of such collections to three-weekly periods?

Response

I am delighted Cllr Fogg found time on his recent visit to Venice to tear himself away from the cultural delights of the City and enquire about the rubbish collection. From my quick search on the internet, I see that the Single Municipal Tax is, in fact, made up of 3 separate taxes, including a Garbage Tax. I went on to read of complaints about it being rather high.

However, back in rural Wiltshire, it is my opinion that a daily collection service would be prohibitively expensive and I am not prepared to suggest that my officers waste their time investigating European tax regimes and how they deal with waste collection and disposal.

I am aware that the legislation on waste collection services and the means of payment for these services are the subject of national legislation and sub-national policy and implementation. In the UK the duty to collect and dispose of waste falls to local government and delivery of these services is funded by residents' payment of council tax.

The frequency of collection of non-recycled household waste in Wiltshire was changed to fortnightly to reduce costs in order to offset some of the cost of collecting recyclable materials, and this also led to a demonstrable increase in our recycling rates. If residents are making full use of the recycling services the council delivers they should be able to manage with fortnightly collections of non-recycled waste. The cost of collecting non-recycled waste on a more frequent basis would be prohibitively expensive both in additional collection costs but also in higher waste disposal costs as our rates of recycling would be expected to decrease.

The council will be collecting additional recyclable materials from the kerbside from 30 July 2018 so residents should have more capacity in their grey lidded bin from that date. This may mean they could cope with a less frequent collection, possibly every three weeks, or a smaller bin for their non-recycled waste. The current consultation, responses to which will inform the development of a new waste management strategy, includes questions to gauge residents' views on these proposals.

For information, over three quarters of waste collection authorities have implemented fortnightly collections of non-recycled waste. Wigan Council and some of the Greater Manchester waste collection authorities have introduced three weekly collections of non-recycled waste. East Devon District Council now collects non-recycled waste every three weeks and North Devon District Council is carrying out three weekly collections of non-recycled waste on a trial basis. The council will monitor the impact of these service changes and ensure that this is reported to members when considering any future changes to the waste and recycling collection service for Wiltshire residents.

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17 October 2017

Councillor Alan Hill, Calne South and Cherhill Division

**To Councillor Philip Whitehead, Cabinet Member for Finance, Procurement,
ICT and Operational Assets**

Question (17-59)

Please would the Cabinet Member for Finance, Procurement, ICT and Operational Assets update me on the current Wiltshire Council position with regard to the roll-out of Universal Credit in Wiltshire?

Response

In accordance with the constitution a verbal response will be provided at the meeting.

Wiltshire Council

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17 October 2017

Councillor Ian Thorn, Calne Central Division

**To Councillor Toby Sturgis, Cabinet Member for Spatial Planning,
Development Management and Property**

Question (17-55)

What measures will the Cabinet member take to ensure that any proposals that come forward from the community for use of the former Grove Youth Club in Calne are given every opportunity to be selected by Cabinet as their option for the future use of the site?

Response

The Council's appointed agent is advertising the centre as a community facility to determine the level of community interest. This approach will continue for a period of 6 months and any viable community interest (demonstrated by a robust costed business plan) will be given consideration prior to any marketing for alternate uses.

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17 October 2017

Councillor Jon Hubbard, Melksham South Division

To Councillor Bridget Wayman, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Waste

Question (17-58)

I refer Cllr Wayman to the letter sent to her on 14 July 2017 by the four reuse charities in Wiltshire, a letter sent as a follow up to the one sent to Cllr Sturgis on 21 March 2017.

May I ask:

- 1) Why, as at the time of writing this question, has no substantive reply been received by the authors of this letter;
- 2) Does the cabinet member recognise the considerable challenges and threat to the service provided by these charities as a result of the council's introduction of punitive charges for these charities carrying out their business;
- 3) Does the cabinet member recognise the considerable savings gained by Wiltshire Council as a direct result of the provision of the services by these charities and does she agree with me that exposing the council to potentially having to meet these additional costs is both inappropriate and unwise?

Response

In accordance with the constitution a verbal response will be provided at the meeting.

Wiltshire Council

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17 October 2017

Councillor Ian Thorn, Calne Central Division

**To Councillor Toby Sturgis, Cabinet Member for Spatial Planning,
Development Management and Property**

Question (17-56)

What impact does Core Policy 49 have on the sale of Wiltshire Council's former community facilities?

Response

Core Policy 49 is a policy of the development plan that enables the level of community interest to be determined, prior to any alternate uses being considered. It therefore provides all community and other third party groups with the opportunity to make representations and submit proposals for ongoing community use of such assets.

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17 October 2017

From Councillor Jon Hubbard, Melksham South Division

To Councillor Bridget Wayman, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Waste

Question (17-60)

I refer the cabinet member to the email sent to her by myself on 18th July, to which I have received no reply, and the subsequent email sent on 30th July where I received a response promising a full reply which I have never received.

For the cabinet members' convenience I repeat the messages below:

Email sent 18th July 2017

Hi Bridget

I'm writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the Melksham Area Board asking if you could use your influence to try and move us on from an impasse that we seem to have with regard to the siting of the CCTV camera and associated equipment in the Market Place.

I have been contacted by xxxxxxxx who leads our Community Safety Partnership team in the town, and who volunteers countless hours of his own time to run the CCTV scheme in the town.

It seems that there has been a communication breakdown between his group and xxxxxxxx regarding the siting of the camera and the associated equipment. I am not going to pretend to understand the detail of the problem and have come into the situation quite late on so cannot comment on who is responsible for the issue, although I do have to say that having read them I do not consider xxxxxxx's emails to xxxxxxxxxxxxxx to have been overly helpful or mindful of the fact that xxxxxxxxxxxxxx is a volunteer who is spending his own money and time on supporting this project.

I had asked xxxxxxxxxxxxxx, to arrange a meeting with both xxxxxxxx and xxxxxxxx present so that we could find a solution to the problem that everyone was happy with and understood, and had said that if the solution was that I needed to go cap-in-hand to the Town Council to ask them to support the cost of additional equipment then I would do so.

However, today xxxxxxxx has contacted me to say that xxxxxxxx has refused to attend the requested meeting.

Frankly I find it astonishing that a Wiltshire Council officer is refusing to attend a meeting with the Chair of an Area Board where they are trying to find a settlement to an issue in the community.

I would appreciate your urgent attention to this matter and I look forward to hearing from you.

Email sent 30th July 2017

Hi Bridget

I haven't seen a response to this email yet - could I please check that it did arrive with you?

Many thanks

Email received 31st July 2017

Dear Jon,

I did receive it and requested some information to try to resolve the issue – I will follow it up this morning.

Bridget.

Could the Cabinet Member please reply to the original email sent to her and provide some form of reply to the issued raised within it. Particularly:

- Why have no replies been given to the emails sent?
- How is it acceptable for a Wiltshire Council officer to refuse to meet with a local member to discuss an issue?
- What efforts have been made to resolve this issue, and if any efforts have been made, why has the member who raised it not been informed?

Response

In accordance with the constitution a response will be provided at the meeting.