

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

13 October 2020

**Statement from Colin Gale on behalf of Pewsey Community Area Partnership
(PCAP)**

Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation and Questions from Councillors

**To Cllr Philip Whitehead – Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for
Economic Development, MCI and Communications**

Statement:

Background

The Questions put to Cabinet by PCAP on 14th July 2020 fell under the general heading “Wiltshire Council Finance and Finance Scrutiny” and were divided into two sections, as follows:

Case 1 - which was concerned with the costing of the new **SEND school on the Rowdeford site** following the announcement by the Council in July 2020 that a contract for £33.0m for the building thereof had been placed with Wilmott Dixon, and

Case 2 – which was concerned with a spreadsheet which was presented to a Full Council Meeting on 16th June 2020 as **Appendix B, - Provisional Earmarked Reserves Table** as at 31st March 2020 under Agenda Item 9 , Covid -19 Update and Financial Position.

Concerns were expressed in both cases, and Questions raised. It is not the intention to repeat these here, but to request Cabinet to note that the responses were not received until September 2020, some two months after they had been raised. Cabinet are also requested to note that due to the fact that the Questions had been submitted later than intended, it was agreed between PCAP and the Democratic Services Officer that there was insufficient time to include them in the Public Reports Pack for the 14th July Cabinet Meeting. However, the Democratic Services Officer, during the course of the relevant email exchange with the undersigned, on the

evening of 13th July, undertook to notify the Chair of the situation, to which reference was made during the course of the Meeting (although not minuted) and undertook to add the Questions and Responses to the 14th July Minutes as an Appendix. On 14th September, the Democratic Services Offer emailed the undersigned stating “Please find attached the responses to your questions to Cabinet in July 2020. I will attach these to the minutes for the meeting”.

However, this has not occurred. Instead, the Questions and Responses have been added to pages 35 - 41 of Supplement No 1 for the Public Reports Pack, as the last item, and not as an Appendix to the Minutes. PCAP considers this situation as unfortunate, as the passage of time since the Questions were asked originally, together with the current location of the relevant documentation (with no indication as to the fact that it is available) means that those Councillors and members of the public who might have taken an interest in PCAP’s view of these two matters have effectively been deprived of doing so. PCAP is, however, content to let the matter rest, on the basis that those who wish pursue these Cases further are now in a position to do so as a result of this Statement.

Otherwise with regard to:

Case 1. (Rowdeford and the SEND school) An extensive analysis has been made of the Responses to the Questions. PCAP does not believe that the Responses can be considered satisfactory in any way, and that they raise serious concerns about the way in which the Council costs major capital projects, in particular with regard to feasibility study, project financial control and scrutiny. PCAP’s concerns are such that they have decided it is appropriate in these particular circumstances, to send a copy of the analysis to Councillor Philip Whitehead, as Leader of the Council, which will be achieved shortly, and thus does not wish to make any further comment at this time, pending his response.

Case 2. (Appendix B – Provisional Earmarked Reserves Table)

PCAP thank the Council for their Responses, which have been helpful, but would like to point out that where spreadsheets form part of the financial data that form part of a Public Reports Pack, which is available to Councillors and the public, many of whom will not be trained in accountancy, but who nevertheless take an interest in the Council’s finances, it would be helpful if there was greater clarity as to how some aspects should be interpreted. It is noted that the Council seeks to make its financial documentation more understandable and this is very welcome.