

Council

13 July 2010

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLOR ERNIE CLARK
HILPERTON DIVISION

TO COUNCILLOR JANE SCOTT
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Question 1

I understand that the Council has a group providing services for ethnic minorities. Bearing in mind that Wiltshire has a tiny ethnic minority population, can you tell me how big this group is, what they cost and what they actually do.

Response

All areas within the Council are committed to, and are providing services for all our communities, including Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) communities.

In reference to 'groups' in the Council providing services for ethnic minorities, within Department of Children and Education (DCE), the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) deliver educational support to all teaching/school staff and pupils. EMAS support schools to provide equal access to life opportunities for pupils vulnerable to lower attainment levels, and works to deliver national language and literacy strategies to improve access to language learning and attainment of pupils from all ethnic minority groups, including for example Polish migrant workers. EMAS also provides a very successful mentoring service for children and young people who are under achieving and are from lower socio-economic and BME backgrounds. The mentors are drawn from Wiltshire Council employees and this programme supports attainment and achievement, and also contributes significantly to the linking of Wiltshire Council with its schools and communities.

EMAS have a staff team of 6.5 FTE advisory teachers including the head of service; 1 consultant for equality and diversity; 1 mentoring coordinator; 1 bilingual support teacher (largely funded by Honda); 10 bilingual assistants. The overall budget for EMAS (2010/11) is £613k, made up of £133k from Standards Fund; £437k from Direct Schools Grant; £31k from donations; £12k from other income such as from running courses, undertaking specific pieces of work that the service is commissioned to do by external parties. The service provides support to 4761 pupils and their families.

Also within DCE, the Traveller Education Service (TES) responds to the educational needs of Gypsy & Traveller children by supporting their inclusion in mainstream schooling, including outreach to families in order for pre-school children to access foundation stage curriculum. This service ensures that the outcomes of 'Every Child Matters' is the focus of its support, through implementing the government strategies on the Gypsy & Traveller educational achievements, (for example, the service provides training to teachers and governors so they are able to support Gypsy & Traveller children in education). The service also prepares young people 11yrs – 19yrs for working life, and to take up opportunities for further lifelong learning.

TES have a staff team of 2.4 FTE Teachers; 0.5 FTE Education Welfare Officer; and 2 teaching assistants covering the whole county, with an overall budget of £287k which is predominately derived from the Direct Schools Grant.

The TES service works with 326 pupils (to date), which includes pupils in early years and schools, pupils who received home education support, those who are out of school / disengaged, pupils from fairground and circuses who require on site teaching, and children who use the mobile library provisions for education.

Finally, at a corporate level, the Council has an equality and diversity team to support elected members/chief officers, and departments to work effectively so that we are able to meet our obligations under equality legislation, and promote all aspects of inclusion. The team works with partners to promote good community relations and participation in local democracy.

The team currently has 4 staff (2 x FTE and 2 x 0.75 FTE) and an overall budget of £177k (including staffing costs) within the Department of Community Services.

Question 2

At the last full council meeting, questions were asked about the non-pensionable honoraria paid by Kennet District Council. In answer to my supplementary question you stated that WC was hoping to recover approx. £10k from two people. What progress has been made on these recoveries?

Response

The Solicitor to the Council has written to the individuals concerned and is awaiting their response and proposals for repayment. Follow-up action will be taken as appropriate.

TO COUNCILLOR FLEUR DE RHE PHILIPPE
CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK

Question 1

The KPMG audit report last year (for the old county council) had 10 recommendations (6 red) – what is the average number of total recommendations and red recommendations for councils similar in size to Wiltshire Council?

Response

It is not possible to compare other Council recommendations in that detail. Even if it were collated, the information may not be meaningful as the Audit Commission use a range of companies to carry out audit work as well as undertaking some itself. Therefore there may be presentational differences.

KPMG however have confirmed that it is not unusual for Councils to have audit report recommendations including red ones. At the Audit Committee on 30 June KPMG reported that all actions had been progressed satisfactorily.

Question 2

The KPMG report states that bank reconciliations were not performed for part of the year and not signed off. How could the Chief Financial Officer be sure that the revenue budget monitoring that was being reported to Cabinet (for the months the reconciliations were not performed) was accurate? Equally how could he be sure that reports sent to external bodies, such as VAT return, did not contain significant errors?

Response

Difficulties were encountered during the early days in respect of bank reconciliations. Resolution of these was treated as high priority, and the bank reconciliation is now fully operational.

During the early months when it was not working properly, compensatory adjustments were made to ensure the accuracy and reliability of budget monitoring reports and external reports such as VAT. The Chief Finance Officer was satisfied that the compensatory adjustments were robust. This robustness is confirmed in terms of the Council's outturn for 2009-10 and level of General Fund balance which has been maintained in line with the budget strategy.

QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HELEN OSBORN
TROWBRIDGE LAMBROK DIVISION

TO COUNCILLOR LIONEL GRUNDY CABINET MEMBER FOR
CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Question

What is the rationale for continuing with the Special Educational Needs Review in light of the considerable cuts in this year's educational budget plus the certainty of future cuts and the consequences of a significant number of Wiltshire schools opting out of the Local Educational Authority to acquire the status of Academies and Free Schools?

Response

The Local Authority has not yet received any direct communication from the DfE on the future of SEN provision and two Education Bills are awaited; one on Academies and the other on Accountabilities.

However, the DfE website on Academies has an extensive list of Frequently Asked Questions. It explains that when a school becomes an Academy the existing educational provision transfers with it. The Local Authority has to be part of the conversion process where a school has a Specialist Learning Centre or Resource Base. Academies can be named as schools of choice where a child has a statement for SEN. Schools which convert to Academies retain the admissions criteria they currently use for pupils.

Therefore, most of the issues consulted on during the SEN consultation are not affected by the move of schools to academies. The only area directly affected could be the size of the SEN inclusion service being retained. All other recommendations from the consultation are part of a normal review of SEN provision which is the statutory responsibility of the Local Authority.

QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR PETER COLMER
CRICKLADE AND LATTON DIVISION

TO COUNCILLOR SCOTT
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Question

What are the quantifiable benefits of the Wiltshire Assembly to the ratepayers of Wiltshire and what are the associated costs in administering the process?

Response

Leading the Wiltshire family of partnerships (the local strategic partnership (LSP)) for the county are the three lead partnerships:

- Wiltshire Assembly conference –a very wide membership that brings together Wiltshire areas and the voluntary, public and business sectors. The Assembly looks at issues across Wiltshire and sets challenges, outlined in the Wiltshire Community Plan (SCS).
- I as Leader of the Council, chair the Wiltshire Public Service Board (PSB). It brings together chairmen or equivalent of the main public sector organisations to put in place arrangements to deliver shared priorities.
- Wiltshire Coordinating Group (WCG), which is chaired by Andrew Kerr and brings together representatives of Thematic Delivery Partnerships (TDPs), WFCAP (community area partnerships) and the voluntary sector to coordinate strategy and bring together information for the Assembly.

'One Wiltshire' is the principle aspiration for Wiltshire Council's in participating in partnership working. This means looking beyond the council's own responsibilities and making productive links with the work of other public agencies, the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and private businesses. Margaret West, Chief Officer, Voluntary Action Kennet, said 'The VCS welcome being involved in the Wiltshire Assembly as it is a gateway to enable the sector to join in at every partnership level and bring knowledge and experience of practically working with communities and making a difference locally. My view is that the VCS has been growing its voice and influence across Wiltshire partnerships, meaning the sector is making a real contribution to partnership working and is acknowledged as a true partner. From this position, the sector then can work with partners to address the challenges ahead'.

Benefits of the Wiltshire family of partnerships

- **Working to a shared agenda.** The Wiltshire vision is cascading through the partnerships and organisations, ensuring our aspirations apply to service delivery in every organisation with less risk of duplication and conflicting interests, and more value for money.

Without strong partnership arrangements, this would not be as effective.

- **Supporting local projects and initiatives.** The PSB coordinated the performance reward grant scheme for area boards which has so far allocated £376,604 to local initiatives. PRG of £1m was also allocated to Action for Wiltshire for initiatives to support Wiltshire people and businesses in the recession.
- **New relationships that the public want to see.** The partnerships are excellent networking and learning opportunities and open doors to new organisational links that have already started to make a difference to projects.
- **Making a difference.** Action for Wiltshire has been the most active Wiltshire Assembly project to date. Included in the project outcomes have been temporary job placements and work mentoring for young people, allocation of £288,000 to the Citizens' Advice Bureau to support them to handle extra calls, and a business support service.
- **Commitment and support.** The Assembly conference events are very popular with all member organisations – evident from evaluation feedback. These days provide a unique opportunity for specialists to stand back and take a broader view of Wiltshire, and what needs to happen to secure a successful future for the county.
- **Good governance.** Bringing all of the above together and reaping all the benefits requires good management and strong leadership. Wiltshire Council, as lead organisation and accountable body, provides this.

Partnership costs

Annual administrative costs to the council for each of the three lead partnerships with estimated staff time, based on average salaries provided by HR, are:

Wiltshire Assembly - £17,500. This is an average costs based on the four meetings to date. There has been a reduction in the cost of the meetings since 2008 as a result of negotiation with venues and speakers. In line with this pattern, it is anticipated that costs for 2010/11 can be lower still. To date, all conferences have been funded from regional grants; therefore cost to the Wiltshire council tax payer has been minimal.

Wiltshire Coordinating Group - £4,437. This is based on nine meetings. The majority of this cost is staff time for arranging the meetings (£3987 and meeting venue costs are minimal. These costs do not include any time spent by officers preparing presentations or reports for the meetings.

Wiltshire Public Service Board - £1,957. This includes staff time (£1,673) to prepare for and support the PSB and additional venue costs (£958). Much of the ongoing costs have been funded by grant and therefore are at no additional cost to the Wiltshire council tax payer. These costs do not include any time spent by officers preparing presentations or reports for the meetings.

Total annual administrative costs	£23,894
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Further information

More detailed information about the work of the partnerships is available in the Wiltshire Assembly annual report 2009. This is available on the website at <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/wiltshire-assembly-annual-report.pdf>.

QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JEFF OSBORN
TROWBRIDGE GROVE DIVISION

TO COUNCILLOR FLEUR DE RHE PHILIPPE
CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK

Question

Could members please be informed as to the extra audit fee that KPMG will be charging this Council to complete their external audit for 2009/10 as a result of deficiencies in the Council data originally provided?"

Response

There have not been deficiencies in the Council data originally provided.

At the Audit Committee, KPMG explained that in the first year of SAP teething problems were encountered in the early stages. This is common with the implementation of all new financial systems. As a consequence, KPMG will need to do more substantive detailed transactional testing than would be normal with an established finance system. The additional checking will be low level. KPMG will utilise Council Finance staff wherever possible to collate the information. Therefore the additional costs will be relatively low. As reported to the Audit Committee KPMG are not yet in a position to quantify these costs.

QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JON HUBBARD
MELKSHAM SOUTH DIVISION

TO COUNCILLOR JOHN NOEKEN
CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

Question

In the light of the yet unconfirmed changes to local government that the new government has hinted at with the proposed Localism Bill would it not be prudent to put the Workplace Transformation Project on hold until we know for certain what the role of local authorities such as Wiltshire Council will be?

Is there not a risk that we could waste millions of pounds of taxpayers money refurbishing and building new offices that will not be fit for purpose in just a few years time?

In this time of having to find savings and look at how we can best protect the taxpayers money, would we not be better off investing this money in protecting front-line services?

If you do insist on proceeding with the programme can you confirm what will be the total cost of moving County Hall staff to the George Ward school site in Melksham, including any loss of revenue caused by the delay in developing the site for residential use?

Response

Thank you for the question, which I welcome as it gives me the opportunity to restate what I said when originally taking the proposals to Cabinet - this programme is a true invest to save programme that generates savings which offer the opportunity to protect frontline savings. In fact, for the five year period 11/12 - 15/16 the Programme will deliver gross revenue savings of £24.99m, which after full capital repayment and interest charges equates to net revenue savings of £8.9 million. If the programme was paused, these savings which are already factored into the council's forward financial plan would need to be found from other sources, potentially including front line service reductions - the programme is in fact an excellent example of investing in frontline services and very much in line with the announcements made by government.

Councillors will all be aware that one of the areas highlighted within the Coalition Government's Emergency Budget that should be targeted in order to protect frontline services is property rationalisation and disposal - we are fortunate to be ahead of the curve in so far as we already have the WTP to deliver this

In addition to flexible better located buildings, the WTP delivers work anywhere telephony and ICT - tools that go to the heart of ensuring localisation of service delivery and ensuring that we have the flexibility to

respond to evolving models of public service delivery. A major aim of the refurbishment programme is to ensure that the accommodation provided is highly flexible and as far as possible is future proofed, where as it can be guaranteed that our current estate is not. The Coalition Government is clear that this is a time for Local Government to be bold, to do the right things in order to deliver long term value for money to local residents and take the hard decisions that this involves - standing still is simply not an option. I and my cabinet colleagues are committed to continue to do all we can to reduce costs - and this programme is an excellent example of this. Far from saving money, if the programme was paused now there would be significant additional revenue demands placed on the council's budgets - something that would be irresponsible at any time, but especially now when we are being asked to deliver increased savings.

All Councillors will understand the difference between capital and revenue budgets - the vast majority of the Workplace Transformation Programme is capital spend, money that cannot be transferred to front line service delivery which, in the main, is revenue funded. However, this capital investment in the programme will ensure that savings are generated that will help us protect and develop frontline service delivery over the coming years rather than continue to meet the high annual running costs of our estate (from revenue). There has been a review with Finance of the Workplace programme, endorsed by the recent Programme Board meeting; ensuring that these benefits are still deliverable. We will continue to reassess, based on any subsequent announcements by central government and any necessary change within this council.

The temporary use of George Ward does not represent a loss of revenue to the council, as the asset will remain in council ownership (and will remain part of our capital funding) and will be sold as originally planned at the end of the decant period - the sale will be delayed for up to two years, but as we currently have no prospective purchaser its temporary use by the council removes the need for vacant site security to be undertaken and as myself and Toby Sturgis have indicated previously to cabinet, this delay will hopefully allow for some recovery in demand for residential development land as the Coalition's economic policies begin to have an impact. We do not have a purchaser for the site at present. The total cost of decant across the programme will be in the order of £2.4 million, again, much of this sum which will be capitalised expenditure and of course is already fully funded for within the net savings I identified earlier.

TO COUNCILLOR JANE SCOTT
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Question

I refer you to the answer you gave to Cllr Trevor Carbin in February this year regarding the "Your Wiltshire Magazine".

Could you please confirm if the sales of advertising to date are meeting the targets you previously stated?

Can you clarify if the advertising you seek is publicly funded or from the private sector?

In the previous question you were asked in February you were asked to give the projected cost of the production of the magazine. I cannot see this figure in your answer although you have indicated that your target advertising income would be £150,000. You also stated that the cost of the magazine will be offset against this advertising so I assume that the total cost for the year will be £150,000.

If this is the case can you confirm that future editions will cost only £15,000 each? If this is the case then why did the pilot editions cost over double this amount? Can you confirm that this cost includes distribution.

Response

The net cost per magazine, per household is 11 pence including publication and distribution.

Research from market research company Ipsos Mori clearly evidences that good communication and raising awareness of what councils deliver results in higher levels of public satisfaction and confidence in their local council and what it delivers.

Local intelligence evidences that people like to be made aware through direct marketing or mail to their household. Good communication is about targeting messages and information to different audiences and using the most appropriate and effective channel to do this.

One channel that the council uses is its residents' magazine that is delivered via Royal Mail door to door to over 200,000 households. Currently this channel is the only method to reach all households. The implementation of broadband and digital inclusion across the county in the future will see the channels evolve using multi-media and as a result a reduction in published materials.

The first two magazines generated £1,950 in advertising income from the private sector.

We are currently investigating alternative ways to generate advertising income that will not be in competition with the local papers. Production and design of the magazine will be delivered in-house. Printing and distribution will be delivered by external companies.

In light of the economic climate we have reduced the number of magazines from ten to five per year and revised the advertising income to £5,000 per edition. The magazine has also been extended to promote public services and to streamline and target communications from Fire, Police, NHS, Probation, and Criminal Justice Board to local people.

The most recent edition of the magazine includes five pages of information from our partners generating an income of over £6,000.

Producing a magazine eliminates the need to publish separate service leaflets, booklets, flyers and other forms of communication. This is projected to save approx. £6,000 per edition.

Distribution cost of the magazine is around £18,500 an edition. The cost for printing is currently subject to a tender process. Previous editions print costs were approx. £20,000 per edition - total estimated gross cost - £37,000 per edition.

The combined income from partners, plus advertising, plus the saving from consolidating other communication materials into the magazine will reduce the cost to around £20,000 per edition. The net cost per household is likely to be around 11 pence per edition.

FROM COUNCILLOR STEVE OLDRIEVE
TROWBRIDGE PAXCROFT DIVISION

TO COUNCILLOR JOHN NOEKEN
CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

Question

Council at its meeting on 1 December 2009 adopted a notice of motion I had put forward on Fair Trade.

Can the Cabinet member please update me on how the actions agreed as part of the adopted motion have since been implemented.

In particular, I would like an update on the following points:

- How the requirements of the motion have been reflected in the Council's procurement and commissioning policies including the Council's contract regulations, procurement guidance and the manager procurement toolkit and
- How the Council is promoting the concept and practice of fair trade across Wiltshire.

Response

With the Council's increasing financial pressures the Procurement and Commissioning functions have focussed much of its efforts towards the planning and delivery of £9m savings year on year over the next 3 year period. Despite these financial pressures the concept of sustainable procurement, including the use of fairly traded products remains an important part of the Council's procurement strategy. With limited resources available key actions have been achieved since the Council meeting on 1 December 2009. These include:-

- Adoption in March 2010 of a new Corporate Procurement Strategy. Setting out our aspirations and communicating these to staff, partners and service providers.
- Detailed specific guidance regarding the purchase and use of Fairly Traded products for staff involved in tendering is being drafted and will be published on the procurement portal. This will support staff making procurement decisions.
- Talking to local suppliers via Meet the Buyer events as sustainable procurement should also include our local SME businesses in Fair Trading opportunities.

- Hosting Fair Trade event at County Hall.
- Engagement with local and regional groups regarding sustainable procurement.
- Developing the Council's targets on Climate Change.
- Attending South West Fair Trade events (next one is in October 2010).
- Encouraging suppliers, where appropriate to source Fairly Traded products as part of their service delivery (Councillors using the Byways restaurant will now see Sodexo provide a range of products for customers to choose).

So, despite the pressures on our procurement teams to achieve demanding cost savings, good progress is being made towards implementing the actions agreed by Council in December 2009.

**QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR TREVOR CARBIN
HOLT AND STAVERTON DIVISION**

**TO COUNCILLOR TOBY STURGIS
CABINET MEMBER FOR WASTE, PROPERTY AND ENVIRONMENT**

Question

Wiltshire Council's so-called 'consultation' on the future of waste collection is based on a fortnightly residual waste collection.

However Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, has stated that: "Fortnightly collections are unpopular and unhygienic. It's the traditional weekly bin round that people want. The new Government will work with councils to freeze council tax and help them improve the frequency of rubbish and recycling collections. Let's use incentives and rewards to increase recycling, rather than cuts, fines and taxes. Families now pay a fortune in council tax - it's time they got a better deal."

How will WC respond to the Secretary of State's advice, and will it be taken into account during the current 'consultation'?

Response

Why is the Council consulting on only one service option ?

The Council has considered the views of Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the results of earlier surveys before looking at a number of options for waste and recycling collections before making this proposal.

The Council came to a view that the proposal is the only option that could achieve all our aims, as follows:-

- provides the same service everywhere
- provides service improvements and better recycling opportunities to all
- meet targets set out in our Waste Strategy at an affordable cost.
- Avoid potentially huge EU fines

For these reasons the Council believes that many residents will support the proposal.

If the "No" vote is large, the Council can carry out further research using the "peoples voice" focus group of local residents to find out which aspect of the proposal is not supported.

The New Government has said that it is in favour of Weekly waste collections. Why is the Council not proposing to carry these out?

The council has timed its consultation on the proposal so that emerging government policy on waste can be assessed.

Any government announcements will be taken into account by the council when it decides on the proposal during the Autumn, following this consultation.

Recently, statements expressing a preference for weekly collections have been made by The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, without any guidance how to increase recycling, whilst maintaining weekly collection of residual waste.

For example, Mr Pickles' recent letter to the Audit Commission expressed anxiety that Councils might be given "perverse incentives" to cut the frequency of rubbish collections.

However, Mr Pickles also stated in the same letter that it was ultimately up to councils when they collected rubbish and recycling. This reflects his views about the importance of "localism". In a speech about this, Mr Pickles also encouraged local councils to be innovative, taking opportunities to improve services and reflecting the views of residents.

Mr Pickles also praised a recycling trial scheme in Windsor and Maidenhead, where residents are rewarded for recycling. Wiltshire Council's view of this is that the most effective and helpful way to encourage recycling is by offering more of the kerbside collection services that residents have asked for. Also, unlike any incentive scheme, the proposal does not involve weighing anybody's wheely bin or recycling box and keeping information about residents.

Caroline Spelman MP is Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, or DEFRA. Her responsibilities include waste management. In a recent speech, Mrs Spelman covered many subjects, including a commitment to "help councils deliver the quality and frequency of services their customers want whilst delivering our commitment to waste reduction."

The Council's view is that the proposal reflects these priorities, provided that it is supported by residents. If that support is forthcoming, a local solution has been found which delivers our aims at an affordable cost reducing landfill tax paid and the risk of EU fines which could be £150 per ton.

The Council is in discussion with a number of organizations to investigate the possibility of providing food waste treatment within the County.

QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLOR CHRIS CASWILL
CHIPPENHAM MONKTON DIVISION

TO COUNCILLOR JANE SCOTT
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Question 1

1) Did she raise any objections to the Grant Guidance recently issued to Area Boards? 2) Is she aware that it provides for Boards to "use a proportion of their funding for projects which fall outside the criteria of the Community Grant Scheme"?

3) Why did she intervene at the Chippenham Area Board to try and prevent the Board from exercising this choice?

Response

I did not raise any objections to the Grant Guidance as it is up to individual Area Boards to decide how to manage their grants.

I intervened at the recent meeting of the Chippenham Area Board, because, as a member of that Board, I voiced my objection to a percentage of the grant being placed at the disposal of members to facilitate their particular priorities. The Chairman asked for a show of hands in support, or otherwise, of my views and there was a large majority in support.

It was also felt that, as this item was not on the agenda and there was no supporting information for the meeting to consider, it was sensible to defer a decision until the next meeting.

Question 2

Is she satisfied that all appropriate and necessary actions have been taken in respect of the payments made by Kennet District Council to staff of that Council in the transition to this unitary authority?

Response

Yes I am satisfied. There is ongoing action in relation to the recovery of two payments, totaling approximately £20,000.

TO COUNCILLOR DICK TONGE
CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT

Question

At the current rate of expenditure, how long would it have taken the Council to repair the potholes and larger scale road surface damage still visible all over the county?

Response

I would like to thank Mr Caswill for his question as it allows me to tell members of the tremendous work that has been carried out by Highways since the severe winter weather.

The winter had a seriously negative effect on the condition of the road network, but an enormous amount of repair work has already been completed and will continue for the rest of the year.

It is estimated that over 7,000 potholes have been filled so far this year, including those repaired by the Parish Stewards who have been patrolling the network to fix the worst potholes quickly. Over 500,000 square metres of carriageway have been resurfaced, with a further 35,000 square metres currently underway.

Because of the extensive damage a programme of smaller localised repairs is underway with over 5,000 square metres of repairs completed, 17,000 square metres in hand, and further sites being identified in the south and east of the county.

The Velocity Repairers are working on repairing minor roads and have already treated over 15,000 square metres of road surface.

Mr Caswill will know that there is no answer to his question. A road network the size of Wiltshire's needs constant attention. Expenditure is broadly linear but slows as winter approaches as attention is turned to gritting and keeping the roads safe. I would like to point out that the road surface damage and the appearance of a road surface is not the main criteria when choosing the schedule of works. The most important factors are skid resistance and where there are underlying structural issues.

The Council is making significant investment in bringing the road network up to standard, and we are seeing improvements across the county, but this is an on going process which will last all year.

TO COUNCILLOR JOHN NOEKEN
CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

Question

- 1) Does the Council still have standards for the time taken to respond to requests from (a) members of the public and (b) Wiltshire Councillors and what are they in each case?
- 2) What procedures are in place to ensure those standards are met?

Response

Members of the public

The standards for responding to members of the public are:

Telephone calls – Answered within 20 seconds.

Email & Letter – Full response within 10 working days. (Emails to be acknowledged within 24 hours)

The flow of calls made to Customer Services is monitored and resources are adjusted as and when there is a spike in activity. Monthly reports are produced, which amongst other things, provides details of average response times. Individual members of customer services staff review their performance statistics in monthly one to one sessions with their line manager.

For emails direct to the customer services email box, there is an automatic acknowledgement which confirms the standard for response time. A number of these emails are forwarded to other service areas for action and response and when this happens, a reminder is given of the response standards with a request that they copy customer services in on the reply. This allows customer services to monitor any emails that may have gone over the 10 days.

You will appreciate that not everything goes through customer services and that most of the email and correspondence traffic goes direct to the individual service areas. Each Service Manager is responsible for ensuring the response standards are met. I hope this answers your question on responding to members of the public, but if you have a particular concern in mind, please do take this up with me after the meeting.

Councillors

As far as responding to requests from Wiltshire Councillors is concerned, I would draw your attention to Appendix 2 of the Councillor/Officer Relations Protocol approved by Council and as contained in the Constitution.

This states that response to Councillor enquiries including emails and telephone calls *'will be acknowledged within two working days of receipt, giving details of an alternative contact if the officer concerned is absent from*

the office' and that 'a substantive response will be provided within seven days of receipt. If that is not possible an explanation will be given as to the reason for the delay, what action is being taken, and when a response will be sent'.

I appreciate that there are more and more pressures being placed on officers, but I would hope that these standards are being met. Councillors themselves will be the best judge of that and if you or any other Councillors have any concerns that this is not the case, please discuss this either with myself or John Quinton, Head of Democratic Services after the meeting and we will look into it.