

COUNCIL
22 February 2011

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

**QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLOR ERNIE CLARK
HILPERTON DIVISION**

TO COUNCILLOR JANE SCOTT OBE, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Question 1

Wiltshire Council is due to relocate to the old George Ward school site soon. However, during November 2010, I noticed a number of Haven Fire vans outside the old school site including evenings and weekends.

The school had pupils in it until July and presumably had a fire alarm system that safeguarded the pupils and staff. Why, four months later, did it seem that the whole of the premises needed a new system? What work was required, why the apparent urgency and what was the cost?

Response

The school's occupation was under a fire risk assessment and management protocol in line with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, which would have acknowledged the presence of a functional fire alarm system. This system was not a full fire detection system, and relied on manual call points. This system, coupled with a robust fire risk assessment, based on the school's hours of use, evacuation procedures and the like, provided adequate protection for the pupils and staff at the school up to July, and was the responsibility of the school to manage.

The nature of the works carried out at the school to change its use from a school to an office, albeit for temporary use, required a full Building Regulations application to be made. This brings with it a requirement to comply with the current building regulations. The building regulations are not required to have been retrospectively applied to existing occupied school buildings. The former school is to be used on a temporary basis and so only absolutely necessary works have been specified. In order to ascertain what the legal minimum installation would be, a Pre-occupation Fire Risk Assessment (in accordance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005) was undertaken early on and a fire strategy developed in support of the Building Regulation application.

The system installed provides for smoke detection to corridors and escape routes only, with heat detection to tea-points, communications rooms, boiler room and the canteen/kitchen. We have not installed a full detection system to all areas. The developed fire strategy makes allowance for the fact that the

occupied areas of the building are on the ground floor and escape doors are numerous. In conjunction with active management by the Council over the next two years, this has avoided the need to install a full detection system. In addition, some works have been necessary to improve the sound level of the existing fire alarm sounders to meet current building regulations requirements for office buildings.

The cost of works to the fire alarm system is in the order of £48,000.

In summary, the works to the fire alarm system at the former George Ward School have been specified to match the requirements of the Building Regulations, and to fit with a robust fire risk assessment in line with fire safety regulations. These works have been wholly necessary in order for the use of the buildings to be changed from a school to an office.

Question 2

What progress is being made to recover the 'non-pensionable honoraria' awarded either for doing additional work or 'acting up' at Kennet District Council? Has any money actually been recovered yet?

Response

The Council is pursuing two claims amounting to a total sum of approximately £ 20,000. Both cases are being contested and one of the individuals has instructed a solicitor. The Council is considering its position in the light of the points raised in defence.

TO COUNCILLOR JOHN BRADY, CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING AND HOUSING

Question 3

What is the likely cost to Wiltshire Council for a) the tenure reforms required by the government and b) the cost to close the housing waiting list to accept only people that WC define to be in housing need?

Response

The costs associated with the tenure reform and the potential changes to the housing waiting list are not yet known because Wiltshire has not yet decided how it would like to take advantage of these new flexibilities. Our current position is that any cost associated with this reform will be absorbed within existing budgets as we have no provision within existing budgets to incur extra expenditure for this work.