

**Wiltshire Council**

**Council**

**10 July 2012**

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**Questions From Councillors**

**From Cllr Jon Hubbard, Melksham South Division**

**To**

**Cllr John Brady, Cabinet Member For Finance, Performance And Risk**

**Question 1**

What is the current size of any backlog for Housing Benefit Claims and how does the size of that backlog compare with the last eight quarters?

**Response**

The council's revenue and benefits service undertook one of the largest migrations of data ever undertaken by a local authority completing the merger of data in December 2011. The merger did have an impact upon the performance of the service, whilst at the same time demand, in terms of benefit claims reached an all time high.

The figures below confirm the position in terms of the main types of work carried out. The spreadsheet attached indicates the rise in demand brought about by firstly the change in the system and secondly, in April, 2012, a further increase and subsequent slowing of performance as a result of year end billing and the annual up-ratings of all claims. It is encouraging to report that performance has improved in May 2012 and will do again in June, however the figures are not available yet.

The position, at the beginning of this week, , with work outstanding was :-

Claims currently being worked on = 26/6/2012 Total 636

Change of Address currently being worked on = 25/06/2012 Total 96

Change of circumstances currently being worked on 27/06/2012 Total = 208

Should you have any further query regarding this matter please do not hesitate to contact Ian P Brown for an explanation.

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**Questions From Councillors**

**From Cllr Jon Hubbard, Melksham South Division**

**To**

**Cllr John Thomson, Deputy Leader And Cabinet Member For Adult Care,  
Communities And Housing**

**Question 2**

I note that Enara are asking some residents to sign an agreement that the resident will not receive a daily visit.

Could the cabinet member please:

- i) Assure me that no resident is being encouraged to sign an agreement without having a full understanding of the implications of such as change;
- ii) Inform me of how any cost savings from reducing the level of care is being passed back to this council.

**Response**

Enara, and the other 3 Help to Live at Home providers, are currently meeting every tenant in sheltered housing to talk to them about their future requirements for support. Some tenants do not wish to receive regular visits from housing support officers whilst others have indicated that they would like to receive more support.

Those tenants who do not want this service at this time can review this decision and choose to receive the service once more at anytime.

Once this work is completed and meetings held with every tenant in the county, the Council will have a complete picture of the services that sheltered housing tenants require and the funding required to deliver that service and will work with partners to deliver this.

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**Questions From Councillors**

**From Cllr Jon Hubbard, Melksham South Division**

**To**

**Cllr John Thomson, Deputy Leader And Cabinet Member For Adult Care,  
Communities And Housing**

**Question 3**

The introduction of benefit changes by the Government is going to lead to a number of challenges for landlords. In particular are the changes which will stop Housing Benefit being paid directly to Landlords and instead directly to tenants.

This could lead to an increase in rental arrears and, as a consequence, an increase in tenants being evicted.

Could the cabinet member please:

- i) Inform me of what steps the council is taking to support their own tenants manage these changes when they are implemented;
- ii) Give me some understanding of the planning that is taking place to mitigate the impact of the changes on Wiltshire residents who find themselves in financial difficulty and how the potentially significant increase in families/people presenting themselves as homeless will be managed.

**Response i)**

Because some customers will be experiencing a number of changes to their benefits the council are preparing as a whole a communications campaign, extending into 2013, which aims to provide accessible information and deliver it in a number of ways. This includes the council's website, mail shots and interacting with the local radio and media to inform and share information. This work is being carried out in conjunction with the voluntary sector and specifically the CAB and also with the housing providers so that best practice / knowledge is shared.

For our own tenants we will also be providing information to them through our tenant magazine and\_ are currently recruiting a dedicated financial inclusion officer. We already provide significant funding to the CAB, who also support our tenants. Training on the impact of welfare reform has begun for all our front line staff and we be able to target our resources to contact each individual tenant who will be impacted by these changes

We will also make best use of our ability to transfer applicants who would be in financial hardship to move into smaller accommodation that better suits their needs, which in turn will free up larger accommodation for other households.

**Response ii)**

The impact of these changes are varied and that is why a cross-departmental group has been put together working with other partners as above on a county wide action plan and communication strategy. Wiltshire Assembly members who also looked at this issue in detail at the June meeting and in addition we have done and will continue to provide presentations and briefings for members.

For people who may be in still then be in danger of homelessness we will continue to focus on prevention measures and have extra funding from government for rough sleepers and single homeless; extra funding to assist households at risk of losing their home; A mortgage rescue scheme and ongoing housing advice and support.

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**Questions From Councillors**

**From Cllr Brian Dalton, Salisbury Harnham Division**

**To**

**Cllr Dick Tonge, Cabinet Member For Highways And Transport**

**Question 1**

The massive roads maintenance backlog of £43.5 million, as reported in the Gazette & Herald, is rife across Wiltshire.

There seems to be a lack of maintenance on south Wiltshire's roads and many are in a dire need of repair. Here are just some of the roads in south Wiltshire that require immediate attention; but there are many more:

- A30 London Rd
- A338 London Rd to the Winterbournes and beyond

In the City:

- Catherine St
- Silver St
- Minster St
- Castle St
- Blue Boar Row
- Winchester St
- Endless St
- Brown St
- St Ann St

In my own ward:

- Harnham Gyrotory
- Folkestone Rd
- Essex Square
- Norfolk Rd
- Harnham Rd

I am aware that the gyrotory will be resurfaced in September and about time too; but not after filling potholes in two places, probably more than a dozen or so times each recently!

The roads through the City are a total disgrace and probably match that of third world countries.

Just when will south Wiltshire's Roads get attention? It's no good just adding them to an endless list, that is £43.5 million long and growing each year. A failing 'target' that the council needs to get a grip of.

**Response**

A verbal response will be given at the meeting.

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**Questions From Councillors**

**From Cllr Jon Hubbard, Melksham South Division**

**To**

**Cllr Lionel Grundy, Cabinet Member For Children's Services**

**Question 1**

Department of Education figures show that in 2011 Wiltshire had the highest proportion of 16-18 year olds not in employment education and training amongst the counties of the South West. Wiltshire also has the highest percentage of young people between the ages of 16 and 18 for whom no activity is known (17% overall and 36% in the case of 18 year olds). Given that the Council retains a statutory duty "to enable, encourage and assist young people's participation in education and training", what steps are this administration taking:

- a. To help improve the situation in Wiltshire for school leavers?
- b. To help compensate for the loss of the Educational Maintenance Allowance and the disbanding of the Connexions advice service?
- c. To ensure better collection of NEET data under the new devolved arrangements?

**Response**

**NEET Performance:**

Wiltshire's annual NEET figure for 2011 was 6.3%.

The monthly NEET figure for Wiltshire in May 2012 was 5.4%. This is a reduction on the same period last year when the figure was 5.9%. In May 2012 there were 751 young people NEET.

It is important to note that 2011 data cannot be compared with that published in previous years because significant changes have been made to the information collected in preparation for the Government's commitment to raise the participation age. 2011 figures:

- i) Relate to young people resident in the local area. Data for previous years was related to the area in which the young person was attending school or college.
- ii) Relate to the young person's academic age; i.e. their age on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2011. Data for previous years was based on calendar age. This is in line with other statistical collections and has the effect of increasing the number and percentage of NEET.

A report on Youth Unemployment, NEET & Support for Young People to move into Employment and Training was presented to the Public Services Board on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2012. The report provides detail on the cross cutting and extensive work that is underway across the Council and its partners to support young people to move into employment and training.

### **Not Known Performance:**

The not known figure refers to 16-18 year olds whose activity is not known. For example, whether they are on a full-time college course, in a job etc.

In 2011 Wiltshire's not known figure was 16.5%.

**In May 2012 the not known figure was 10.8%** Tracking involves internal and external partners including Integrated Youth, Jobcentre Plus, schools and post-16 learning providers.

A number of steps have been taken to support improvements to tracking and reducing our not known figure;

- A former member of Connexions staff has been seconded into a Tracking Coordinator role.
- A Tracking Coordination Plan has been developed and is being implemented.
- Information Sharing arrangements have been reviewed and strengthened with relevant internal and external partners.

a) **What steps are the administration taking to help improve the situation in Wiltshire for school leavers?**

Targeted Personal Advisors within the Integrated Youth Service are continuing to provide information, advice and guidance to school leavers. This will continue until September 2012 when the delivery of careers guidance to all pupils will become the responsibility of schools (for which schools have been funded by central Government).

The Local Authority continues to fulfil its duty to encourage, enable or assist young people's participation in education or training through work with partners, including:



- The Integrated Youth Service assisting the most vulnerable young people and those at risk of disengaging with education or work. This includes carrying out Learning Difficulty Assessments for young people with a learning difficulty and/or disability.
- Ensuring that eligible 16 and 17 year olds have received an offer of a suitable place in post-16 education or training, and that they are assisted to take up a place. This is called the September Guarantee which is coordinated by the Integrated Youth Service.
- The new Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) is providing strategic leadership for the Employment & Skills agenda in the local area. One of its key priorities includes delivering Apprenticeship growth and maximising take-up.
- As part of the Wiltshire Strategic Economic Partnership (now Enterprise Wiltshire) the Employment & Skills Board (ESB) is the delivery arm for the employment & skills agenda in Wiltshire. Delivery of work for the ESB is undertaken by two sub groups, Wiltshire Works and the Apprenticeship sub group. The former involves a number of partners working together to address worklessness, whilst the latter is focused on driving up Apprenticeship growth in the county. Wiltshire Works is currently supporting the development of an employability and informal skills development programme for young people. This is being supported with funding from the Council. A Work and Skills Plan is also in place with a focus on reducing worklessness and promoting economic inclusion. It places an emphasis on support for key groups including young people who are NEET and Looked After Children.
- An Apprenticeship Action Plan is being implemented which has a key objective of increasing the proportion of 16-18 year olds participating in Apprenticeships.
- The Employment and Skills Board has supported the following initiatives for young people:

*Delivered for Young People:*

- 5,150 'Have a Go' workplace skills activities undertaken by young people during Apprenticeship Week (Feb 2012)
- 495 jobs created for out of work young people
- 300 Work Experience opportunities created for unemployed young people
- 169 people (aged 16+) across Wiltshire and Swindon supported with travel to work/training
- 136 EET outcomes for 13-17 year olds at risk of offending or NEET
- 100 new Apprenticeship enrolments including the creation of 52 new jobs through Wiltshire's first Apprenticeship Campaign
- In-Council Apprenticeship Programme launched
- Wiltshire Council awarded the 2010 JCP (South West) award for a major employer's contribution to supporting youth employment

### *Current Initiatives to Support Young People:*

- 1000 Apprenticeships to be created through Wiltshire's second Apprenticeship Campaign
- 350 Work Experience opportunities to be created specifically for unemployed young people
- 150 further Work Experience opportunities and 30 new jobs to be created for JSA/ESA customers aged 18 years + who are not currently supported by other initiatives. Individuals will also receive support with overcoming personal and employment barriers and personal development mentoring and job coaching to support progression into employment
- 100+ unemployed young people supported into work through Sector Based Work Academies
- 62 further EET outcomes for 13-17 year olds at risk of offending or NEET
- Self-employment advice and support to start a new business through the Wiltshire Business Support Service linking in with relevant Government 'Get Britain Working' initiatives such as the Enterprise Allowance and Enterprise Clubs and the recently announced Enterprise Loans under the Youth Investment Fund
- Development of volunteering opportunities for young people to assist with the development of transferable skills, experience and increase employability
- Encouraging the establishment of more community led Work Clubs

### *Planned Initiatives to Support Young People:*

- 350 disadvantaged 14 and 15 year olds across Wiltshire and Swindon supported to participate and succeed in education or training in order to achieve better future employment outcomes subject to a successful bid to the DWP Innovation Fund
  - 275 individuals (aged 16+) benefitting from in-work/self employed support services for a period of between 9 and 18 months for employees who have recently gained employment/entered self-employment following a period of unemployment to help them sustain that employment/achieve career advancement subject to a successful bid to Channel Programme (INTERREG)
  - 30 Work Placements created abroad subject to a successful bid to Leonardo Mobility 2012 for young unemployed people to gain vital experience of the work environment and enable them to broaden their life experience and confidence
  - Further development of the In-Council Apprenticeship Programme to provide opportunities for Looked After Children/NEET
- The 11-19 Commissioning Strategy and Implementation Plan includes a priority related to supporting young people to move into employment and training. A number of high level actions have recently been

identified in collaboration with partners to support delivery of the commissioning priority mentioned above.

- A Partnership NEET Reduction Action Plan has been developed and is being implemented.
- A Raising Participation Age Strategy and Plan has been developed which sets out the actions which are required in order to secure full participation for 17 year olds by 2013 and 18 year olds by 2015. As part of the plan a Risk of NEET Indicator Tool has been developed to help identify young people in schools who are at risk of NEET so that they can be supported much earlier.
- The Integrated Youth Service has recently funded a number of specific local based projects within community areas to support young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming so.

**b) What steps are the local authority taking to help compensate for the loss of the Educational Maintenance Allowance and the disbanding of the Connexions advice service?**

The Connexions Service has not been disbanded in Wiltshire. Instead the Service has been realigned in the light of changes to the delivery of careers advice in September 2012.

Remaining staff from the former Connexions Service continue to work with and support young people who are NEET and/or are at risk of becoming so. This involves supporting vulnerable school leavers to make a successful transition from pre to post-16 learning. Many of the initiatives mentioned earlier will help to compensate for the removal of the EMA. However in addition to these:

- A government Bursary Fund is available to support young people who are vulnerable in post-16 learning and colleges have use of a discretionary fund to support the most in need post-16 learners.
- The provision of careers guidance from schools and the National Careers Service will encourage young people to continue to participate in learning.
- The Raising of the Participation Age to 17 in 2013 and 18 by 2015 will mean that young people continue in learning for longer and this should help to increase participation rates and reduce NEET.
- Further development of the In-Council Apprenticeship Programme is being considered to provide opportunities for Looked After Children/NEET.
- The Integrated Youth Service is funding a range of small scale projects across Wiltshire focussed on targeting those young people who are NEET/at risk of NEET and supporting them into education, employment or training.

**c) What steps are the local authority taking to ensure better collection of NEET data under the new devolved arrangements?**

- The Council has set up new information sharing protocols with the following:
  - Schools, including academies
  - Post-16 learning providers, including colleges
  - Education Funding Agency
  - Jobcentre Plus
  - The Data Service (Apprenticeship data)
- Appointment of a tracking co-ordinator to oversee the collection and recording of the activity/destinations of young people aged 16-19.
- Working with relevant staff within the Integrated Youth Service so that they fully understand their responsibilities in relation to tracking work. Requirements in relation to tracking are being clarified through the development and implementation of a specification for the Integrated Youth Service.
- Exploring the option of taking on a young apprentice to work alongside the tracking coordinator to develop innovative approaches for tracking, including use of social networking and applications.
- Will have introduced by September 2012 a new electronic single case management system across the whole of the Integrated Youth Service

Mal Munday

Head of Service

Integrated Youth

James Fortune

Lead Commissioner 11-19

Commissioning Team

5<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

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**Questions From Councillors**

**From Cllr Chris Caswill, Chippenham Monkton Division**

**To**

**Cllr Toby Sturgis, Cabinet Member For Waste, Property, Environment  
And Development Control Services**

**Question 1**

Are you yet in a position to give a definitive answer to my question at the May meeting about the Council's agreement with ING for the redevelopment of the Bath Road site in Chippenham? Are ING being asked to provide alternative facilities for the services currently housed in the Bridge Centre (such as the youth cafe) or is the Council adopting the more sensible course of asking for cash payments in lieu?

Why has it taken so long to come to this decision?

**Response**

The Council has requested a cash payment for replacing YPSS, the skate barn and youth storage facility. The amount of such payment is currently the subject of discussions with ING.

The Council is keeping its options open in relation to the replacement youth cafe. Both parties would prefer the Council to take responsibility for securing the facility and in this respect the Youth Service are preparing a specification. This will mean that a cost estimate can then be prepared to enable either party to acquire such premises should a suitable opportunity present itself. Naturally, ING will only release such funds to the Council once the contract has gone unconditional (grant of planning consent, minimum number of pre-lets secured etc). Therefore Member approval would be needed for an acquisition in advance of receiving payment from ING.

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**Questions From Councillors**

**From Cllr Chris Caswill, Chippenham Monkton Division**

**To**

**Cllr Toby Sturgis, Cabinet Member For Waste, Property, Environment  
And Development Control Services**

**Question 1**

- (a) Has the Council now paid the £600,000 fine which it incurred last year for carbon emissions?
- (b) How much do you expect the Council to be charged for this year's performance?

**Response**

- (a) The Council has not paid a fine of £600,000, as the reporting deadline is not until 31 July 2012. The changes in the Carbon Reduction Commitment Energy Efficiency Scheme have been reported to The Environment Select Committee. This is not a fine but a mandatory payment for all organisations, both public sector and private companies, that consumed over £500k worth of electricity in 2008.
- (b) For the year 2011-12 the projected energy consumption figures and the current unit price of £12 per tonne announced by the Government in March equates to a payment of £524k. (this includes the schools estate). Schools will be taking on individual financial liability for their allowances from 2012-13.

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**Questions From Councillors**

**From Cllr Chris Caswill, Chippenham Monktondivision**

**To**

**Cllr Fleur De Rhé-Phillipe, Cabinet Member For Economic Development  
And Strategic Planning**

**Question 1**

Given the legal challenges to the Core Strategy being threatened by at least one developer, is it the administration's intention that the Council retain external legal representation for the Inspector's Hearing?

**Response**

It is government policy to discourage legal representation at public examination of the core strategy. Because of the importance of the core strategy, each step will be monitored by the Legal Unit to ensure appropriate legal representation is present. If formal Court proceedings were to be instigated, the Head of Legal Services would ensure there were appropriate resources to enable the Council to protect the Council's interests.

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**Questions From Councillors**

**From Cllr Chris Caswill, Chippenham Monkton Division**

**To**

**Cllr John Thomson, Deputy Leader And Cabinet Member For Adult Care,  
Communities And Housing**

**Question 1**

Given the distressing news that the Care Quality Commission's latest national review of learning disability services has found that more than half of those reviewed did not meet Government standards, what assurances can be given about the provision of learning disability support in Wiltshire?

What actions will this Council be taking in response to the CQC Report?

**Response**

This report focused on residential provision for people with learning disabilities, most of that provision is commissioned by the health services across the country. However as a council we do commission places within Wiltshire with 55 providers who are all compliant with CQC regulations.

The key messages highlighted in the report apply to a 'whole system approach' and within Wiltshire we already have joint commissioning and provision and will be reviewing the report's findings with the Learning Disability Partnership Board and the Health and wellbeing Board.



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**From Cllr Chris Caswill, Chippenham Monkton Division**

**To**

**Cllr John Thomson, Deputy Leader And Cabinet Member For Adult Care,  
Communities And Housing**

The Council will no doubt welcome the web based publication of the Care Quality Commission reviews of Care and Nursing Homes in Wiltshire and elsewhere.

**Question 10**

(a) What steps will the Council be taking to publicise this resource?

**Response**

a) The Council in partnership with Care Choices has recently published a directory of services that details all care homes and domiciliary care agencies operating in Wiltshire. There are references throughout the directory to the CQC website and the information contained therein. Any family or individual that contacts the Council for advice or information about care homes is forwarded a copy of this directory which is also available on line via the Council's website. Staff, when discussing care home options with members of the public, advise people to review the information about that care home on the CQC website.

**Question**

(b) What use will the Council itself be making of this information, particularly of the several care homes in Wiltshire where improvement is being required or in some cases enforced?

**Response**

b) We work closely with CQC not just by reviewing information on their website but through bi monthly meetings to review registered services in Wiltshire. In this way we can share informally information about

services of concern. This information then directs the work of the Quality Assurance officer whose role is to work with those providers to develop and implement an action plan to improve those services. Our aim is to work with providers to help them improve however, in some circumstances it is necessary to stop new placements or care packages with those organisations until improvements have been delivered. This has a financial impact on the provider. Whilst an action plan is being developed and improvements being implemented we monitor this closely with providers through regular meetings and progress reports.

Our priority is to ensure the safety of those receiving care and every effort is made to improve the service rather than moving residents. However, where a provider fails to comply and does not deliver the required improvements steps would be taken to move residents. However our primary aim is to work with providers to deliver improvements that will enable residents to remain in their home.