

**Wiltshire Council**

**Council**

**26 February 2013**

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**Item 14 (1) - Questions from Councillors**

**From Councillor Nicholas Fogg, Marlborough West Division**

**To**

**Councillor Keith Humphries, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Protection Services**

**Question 1**

How many visits/tests on food have been carried out in the past year by Council officials and with what results?

What cuts, if any, have been made to the funding of the Trading Standards department? Has the number of staff employed been reduced together with the number of tests made on food?

Has the Food Standards Agency asked Wiltshire to carry out any tests on the current food scare (some 24 authorities round the country asked to do so)?

**Response**

Due to the speed at which this matter is progressing and the likelihood of further updates from the FSA before Council, a verbal response shall be provided at the meeting.

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**Item 14 (2) - Questions from Councillors**

**From Councillor Bill Douglas, Chippenham Hardens and England Division**

**To**

**Councillor John Thomson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Communities and Housing**

**Question 2**

In April the new so called 'Bedroom Tax' will be introduced. This will impact families across Wiltshire of working age, meaning from about 38 years, with potential additional bills which could be as high as £80 per month. Those without the means to pay will be forced to seek alternative and smaller accommodation. I believe that there are roughly 18,000 people on Wiltshire's housing waiting list currently. Can the Cabinet Member explain to us how he intends to resolve this housing situation?

**Response**

The new Housing Benefit rules will help free up larger social housing stock and reflect the existing arrangements in the private sector. Although we support the aims of these changes, we appreciate that the transition into these new rules may cause difficulties for both tenants and housing providers. We can provide reassurance that we are working very hard with our partners to support housing tenants and our housing providers through this transition.

In August 2012 extensive analysis of households across Wiltshire who will be affected by the 'bedroom tax' was undertaken, which enabled us to work effectively with our partners to ensure targeted communication could take place in October 2012. Below is a breakdown of the total households affected by this change and how it impacts them financially. This data can be broken down to address level which has significantly helped with targeting our resources and that of our housing providers to ensure that every households affected has been well informed.

Reductions to HB per week	Of which...		Total
	Under-occupying by 1 bedroom	Under-occupying by 2+ bedrooms	
£30+	1	16	17

<b>£25-£30</b>	1	236	<b>237</b>
<b>£20-£25</b>	6	170	<b>176</b>
<b>£15-£20</b>	441	6	<b>447</b>
<b>£10-£15</b>	1978	9	<b>1987</b>
<b>£5-£10</b>	28	0	<b>28</b>
<b>&lt;£5</b>	1	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2456</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>2893</b>

Money management, debt advice and housing advice are crucial to households seeking to manage their increased liabilities for rent. The letters that had been sent out signposted households to seek this advice from our website and trained housing staff, Wiltshire's Citizens Advice, Shelter and the government's Directgov website.

A training programme has been developed and training sessions have taken place with operational staff both at Wiltshire Council and across many of our partners on the changes contained within the Welfare Reform Act to ensure they are best placed to provide robust and beneficial advice to these households.

As with all the housing providers across Wiltshire, the housing management team for the council's housing stock wrote to all their tenants affected by the bedroom tax offering them a visit to discuss their options and they are now in the process of attempting to contact those that have yet to respond. The results of these visits were as follows:-

9% of tenants have said that they are considering moving.  
37% of tenants have decided to pay the difference  
16% of tenants are not affected (pensionable age, back in work and off benefits, babies born etc)  
1% tenants are thinking about taking in a lodger  
37% tenants still to see.

The other housing providers across Wiltshire who have also conducted home visits are getting a very similar feedback, in that the majority of households are deciding to pay the difference rather than considering a move.

To help facilitate moves more easily for those households who may need to consider down sizing into smaller more suitable accommodation, we conducted a full 3 month consultation exercise to allow us to amend our current allocation policy to give the highest priority we were able to under the new allocation guidance for households who would be in financial hardship and under occupying by 2 or more bedrooms.

Based on the information we have we have identified 447 who would meet this criteria, with 297 households who are not currently registered on the housing register and 144 households who are on the housing register and who we are currently writing to offer advice and carry out financial assessments.

As well as using the choice based lettings system to bid for a transfer we have advertised and have noticed a significant increase in tenants who are doing a mutual exchange. Mutual exchanges are home swaps between social sector tenants and have provided many households affected by the new rules with the opportunity to move to smaller properties without having to bid through choice based lettings.

Ensuring sufficient affordable homes for those in need will aid those affected by the new rules in the longer term. One of our key priorities as a council is to ensure that there is an appropriate supply of good quality housing of all types and of all tenures, delivered to address the needs of people in Wiltshire. Our target is to deliver 600 new affordable homes a year. As well as working with our housing providers and private developers to increase the levels of affordable homes in Wiltshire, the Council has also built and let new council homes in the area, and is delivering the only affordable housing PFI scheme in the South West. This project will provide over 242 new affordable homes to rent.

### **Question 3**

With no homes available people seeking to downsize but who cannot afford to pay will be trapped and forced to pay the tax, or become homeless if they collapse into debt. Can the Cabinet Member tell us what steps Wiltshire Council has taken for when the assistance money allocated by the Government runs out? What provisions are in place to assist genuinely poor elderly people, and families, already struggling to pay bills and rent while feeding themselves and their children?

### **Response**

The new rules relating to housing benefit 'bedroom tax' will only affect those of working age who have a spare room and are claiming benefit. Anyone over the qualifying age for state pension credit will not be affected by these changes.

The Government has allocated us discretionary housing funds amounting to £474,000 for 2013/14. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) provide customers with further financial assistance when a local authority considers that help with housing costs is needed. DHP is only determined a year at a time and could be subject to major change next year with the arrival of universal credit which will incorporate housing costs. We are not able to assess at this stage what the impact on Wiltshire will be due to the limited information provided to date. The roll out is not scheduled to begin in Wiltshire until March 2014 and it maybe that some households are better off. DHP awards can either be a short term award to give a customer time to sort out their financial circumstances or they can be awarded until the customer's circumstances change.

A report is due to go to cabinet to seek approval in terms of prioritising the spend of this grant to ensure the most vulnerable are able to keep their homes and not fall into debt, especially if the properties have been significantly adapted to allow a member of the household to live independently.

In addition to what is described above, there is an identified need to increase 'financial capability' across the county to enable individuals to manage their finances independently and responsibly. In particular the introduction of Universal Credit could present a challenge to people who are not used to managing their benefits. Universal Credit will help claimants and their families to become more independent and will simplify the benefits system by bringing together a range of working-age benefits into a single streamlined payment. The new Universal Credit system aims to:

- improve work incentives
- smooth the transitions into and out of work, supporting a dynamic labour market
- simplify the system, making it easier for people to understand, and easier and cheaper for staff to administer
- reduce in-work poverty
- cut back on fraud and error.

It will be launched in 2013 and will replace:

- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credits
- Working Tax Credits
- Housing Benefit.

Universal Credit is known as the new single payment for people who are looking for work or on a low income. The council and other partners are working together through the financial inclusion partnership for the county, Wiltshire Money, to address this need.

For example, Wiltshire Money is working with front line staff in children's centres to raise awareness of financial exclusion issues and ensure that staff understand where to refer families which are struggling. Another key area of work for Wiltshire Money is the promotion of services which support good money-management and provide alternatives to unaffordable credit. This includes working with the credit unions through Wiltshire Community Bank and England's Illegal Money Lending Team.

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**Item 14 (3) - Questions from Councillors**

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

**To**

**Councillor Dick Tonge, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

**Question 4**

Can I ask how much of the £18.7m for “maintaining and improving roads” was spent in the Salisbury area in this financial year? It seems that only the Harnham gyratory was resurfaced within the Salisbury area in September as planned, and nothing else.

**Response**

The budget figure of £18.7m includes expenditure on Integrated Transport Schemes, Bridges and drainage works. The capital budget for road maintenance in 2012/13 was £14.1m. The expenditure on major maintenance in the Salisbury area was approximately £500,000 this year. As well as the resurfacing of Harnham Gyratory, there were carriageway repairs at Crane Street, safety fence work at Churchill Way South, footway works at Manor Road, and other bridge and sign maintenance work across the area. This total excludes the day to day carriageway defect repair work carried out, including repairing potholes, and the repairs to the drainage systems.

The investment in improving the condition of the road network is spread across the whole county, and is based on need. The structural condition of the roads and their skid resistance are important. The severe winter weather and flooding has badly affected parts of the network, and this year this was particularly noticeable on some of the minor rural roads where the construction is not as substantial as on many of the purpose built urban roads.

**Question 5**

I note that the council plans to spend an additional £3m in the next financial year. Are there any road works planned for the Salisbury area this time around? Roads in South Wiltshire are in a dire state. The list of roads below are from my question to council last year. None of these have received any attention and are in a state of disrepair. There are numerous other roads that could be added to this list that councillors will be aware of:

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

### **Response**

The priorities for road resurfacing next financial year are currently being reviewed and finalised. Road safety is the priority, and technical surveys regarding road condition and skid resistance are used to inform the site selection. The high speed roads with poor accident records are of particular concern. It is too early to know which roads it will be possible to treat next year.

It would be unrealistic to expect a long list of roads to be resurfaced in a single area. There is an extensive 2700 mile road network in Wiltshire which has suffered from under investment in the past, and from severe winters in recent years and flood damage this year. The maintenance backlog is being reduced through the ongoing investment, but the priority has to be to keep the highway network in a safe condition, and this requires work to be prioritised according to need. The use of technical surveys of road condition and skid resistance is important to inform this process.

Whilst it is unlikely that it will be possible to resurface a long list of roads in Salisbury next year, it is intended to carry out a series of repairs across the network based on those sites most in need of attention, which could include those listed. This carriageway repair programme has proved successful in addressing problem sites in recent years and will be developed further with the increased budget for 2013/14 and the new Highways and Streetscene contract starting in June.

### **Question 6**

How much has the council paid out in compensation claims since the 2009 financial year in Wiltshire Council as a whole and separately, South Wiltshire for:

- a) Vehicle damage claims and
- b) Personal injury claims.

Are there any cases ongoing for the above?

**Response**

The Public Liability claims received which have been caused by defects on the Highway or Car Parks and include payments for compensation and associated costs from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 to 18<sup>th</sup> February 2013 are:

- a) Wiltshire Council total paid £112,434.73 for vehicle damage claims. Of this £53,159.40 is from the Southern Highway Area. Breaking this down by year;

	Annual figures	Southern Area
09/10	£55,320.70	£26,928.51
10/11	£41,534.05	£20,227.55
11/12	£6,481.80	£1,802.42
12/13	£9,098.18	£4,200.92

- b) Wiltshire Council total paid £275,526.35 for personal injury claims. Of this £102,135.30 is from Southern Highway Area.

	Annual figures	Southern Area
09/10	£55,320.70	£26,928.51
10/11	£147,301.23	£70,050.00
11/12	£12,010.00	£11,350.00
12/13	£44.98	£44.98

There are cases ongoing. However, the cost of claims is not high taking into account the extensive highway network, and they represent a very small proportion of the Council's expenditure on highways.



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**Item 14 (4) - Questions from Councillors**

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

**To**

**Councillor John Thomson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult  
Care, Communities and Housing**

**Question 7**

At the recent cabinet meeting held in Salisbury the Cabinet Member gave me an assurance that he would be asking officers to revisit the decision not to issue emergency cash loans as part of the council's new crisis support scheme.

I was disappointed to note that no mention of this was to be found in the draft minutes of the meeting.

Is the cabinet member able to assure me that this was an error of omission and that this work is indeed being undertaken and could he outline for me when we can expect to see the revised plan?

**Response**

A written or verbal response will be presented at the meeting.

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**Item 14 (5) - Questions from Councillors**

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

**To**

**Councillor Dick Tonge, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

**Question 8**

What provision, if any, has been made for additional grit bins in the proposed 2013/2014 council budget?

**Response**

There is no provision for new bins but consideration is given to cases where relocating existing bins might be more advantageous to the community. The council has approximately 1600 salt bins which it fills and maintains on the road network throughout the county. Each location is recorded and identified on town and parish maps. The resource to fill these bins particularly during extreme weather when they become emptied in a short time is great. The council operates a 1 tonne salt bag scheme. In this scheme Wiltshire Council delivers the salt to the town/parish councils. This enables them to treat areas of their community which they consider to be important through the winter. It has proved very successful. Since we trialled the scheme two years ago 46 councils have joined the scheme. Chippenham Town Council already participates.

In some cases own and parish councils have provided new bins themselves and undertaken to fill them from the 1 tonne bags of salt provided to them at the start of the winter season. I will ensure an officer of the winter team contacts Chippenham Town Council to further develop their weather response plan in preparation for the next winter season.

All requests for existing salt bins to be repaired or refilled can be reported to Wiltshire Council through CLARENCE 0800 232323. Requests are then noted, prioritised and every attempt to refill them will be made as soon as possible.

The salt must only be used on the highway and not on private driveways or property.

## **Question 9**

If there are to be any additional grit bins, what can residents do to make the case for their streets or areas?

## **Response**

Any request for an *existing bin* to be relocated must be supported by the town or parish council. These requests together with any *new bins* provided by the town or parish councils will then be reviewed by the Area Highway Engineer who will consider the following:

- A request will not be accepted unless the new location to site the bin has been agreed between the local and adjacent residents.
- Bins will not be placed on main roads that are routinely salted on Primary or Secondary routes. These routes are published on the council's web site:  
[www.wiltshire.gov.uk/parkingtransportandstreets/roadshighwayspavements/gritting.htm](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/parkingtransportandstreets/roadshighwayspavements/gritting.htm)
- Bins will only be considered in areas that are populated and have either a steep incline or a known seepage from spring water.
- The location is not within 200 metres of another salt bin location.
- Bins will only be placed where there is a sufficiently wide verge or footpath to allow safe passage of pedestrians and allow safe access for salt replenishment.
- Bins will not be placed on roads that are not adopted.
- Bins shall not obstruct sight lines.
- Bins will only be provided if there is sufficient traffic and/or pedestrian use to justify provision.
- If salt bins are misused for the treatment of private driveways, or regularly vandalised, Wiltshire Council reserve the right to remove them.
- Area Highway Engineers will notify the Weather & Drainage Team of any moves so updated maps can be issued for town and parish councils and weather plans amended.
- Once a suitable site has been agreed, the Area Highway Engineer will arrange the works through the Community Steward.

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**Item 14 (6) - Questions from Councillors**

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

**To**

**Councillor Dick Tonge, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

**Question 10**

When do you expect the string of large potholes in Cocklebury Road, near the Chippenham train station, to be filled in?

**Response**

The majority of potholes on site were filled earlier this week. There are a few more by the site entrance to the new station car park; we have raised a new works instruction for these to be filled in during the next week.

**Question 11**

Given the tendency for potholes to open up the time on this busy stretch of road, what plans are therefore it to be resurfaced?

**Response**

The priorities for road resurfacing next financial year are currently being reviewed and finalised. Road safety is the priority, and technical surveys regarding road condition and skid resistance are used to inform the site selection. The high speed roads with poor accident records are of particular concern. It is too early to know which roads it will be possible to treat next year.

There is an extensive 2700 mile road network in Wiltshire which has suffered from under investment in the past, and from severe winters in recent years and flood damage this year. The maintenance backlog is being reduced through the ongoing investment, but the priority has to be to keep the highway network in a safe condition, and this requires work to be prioritised according to need. The use of technical surveys of road condition and skid resistance is important to inform this process.

This carriageway repair programme has proved successful in addressing problem sites in recent years and will be developed further with the increased budget for 2013/14 and the new Highways and Streetscene contract starting

in June. Cocklebury Road will be considered for treatment next year to ensure it remains in safe condition.

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**Item 14 (7) - Questions from Councillors**

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

**To**

**Councillor John Thomson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult  
Care, Communities and Housing**

**Question 12**

In the light of growing national concern about the combined effects of benefit changes on the poorest section of our society, do you now regret passing up the opportunity to protect residents in Council Tax Bands A and B from the removal of their Council Tax relief?

Do you see an opportunity to review this decision, and if so when?

**Response**

A written or verbal response will be presented at the meeting.

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**Item 14 (8) - Questions from Councillors**

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

**To**

**Councillor John Thomson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Communities and Housing**

**Question 13**

Which stakeholders did the Council consult on its way to abandoning all emergency cash awards in its Local Welfare Provision replacement of the previous Social Fund Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants?

Given that there were over 2000 Crisis Loan awards of an average of £51 and 580 Community Care Grants averaging just under £600 made in just six months in 2011, and that the DWP award rates for these two schemes were 84% and 76% respectively does he accept that the Social Fund met a genuine need for the people of Wiltshire?

And if so, what is his response to those people who will genuinely need small cash advances in the future? Are they simply to be referred to pay day loan providers, charging extortionate rates of interest, and guaranteeing continuation of the poverty cycle?

**Response**

A written or verbal response will be presented at the meeting.

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**Item 14 (9)- Questions from Councillors**

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

**To**

**Councillor John Thomson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Communities and Housing**

**Question 14**

What opportunities to report poor care or abuse are open to Wiltshire residents whose relatives have been privately financed in care homes in the in the County, without the involvement of the NHS or this Authority?

**Response**

The Council has a responsibility to ensure the quality of all services including those provided to individuals funding their own care. To this end all care homes are reviewed and visited by commissioning staff and all homes are subject to inspection by the Care Quality Commission. CQC's telephone number is 01225 712553.

There are a number of opportunities that include:

Report to Care Quality Commission details of which have to be displayed in public areas of the care home;

Report to the Council's care quality helpline – the number is 01225 712553

Contacting Age UK or South West Advocacy Network to support an individual in raising a complaint or concern;

Report to the Council's safeguarding team where poor care or potential abuse of residents are a concern. The role of the safeguarding team is widely publicised.

The Local Adults Safeguarding Board have an overall responsibility to assure that all residents of Wiltshire safeguarded. To this end it produces information which is available in written form and on the [Council website](#) .

The Quality Assurance Sub Group of the Safeguarding Adults Board monitors all safeguarding alerts, their source and the response. This information is presented to the Safeguarding Adults Board on a quarterly basis. They have



recently undertaken an audit of homes and identified where no alerts have been made. Information on safeguarding is being sent to all those homes identified.

The Council have a specialist Safeguarding Adults Team who provide a service to the whole of Wiltshire. All alerts from whatever source go this team. They perform a triage function, using a multi-agency threshold guidance. This ensure there is consistency of approach throughout the county and they are able to identify patterns of abuse at an early stage. The telephone number for the Safeguarding team is 0300 456 0111

Report to the police on 01380 734212 where abuse or poor care is suspected

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**Item 14 (10)- Questions from Councillors**

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

**To**

**Councillor John Thomson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Communities and Housing**

**Question 15**

Specifically how, and how often, does this Authority monitor the quality of nursing care delivered in care homes which the Council uses for placements, and which offer nursing services?

**Response**

The Council has block and framework agreements with nursing home providers and have a number of means by which we monitor quality. These include:

**Regular feedback and liaison with the Care Quality Commission** to exchange information informally and formally about care homes. Representatives from CQC undertake a formal inspection process of providers measuring their performance against defined legislative standards expressed in legislation. CQC inspectors visit care homes on an announced and unannounced basis and this information is shared with the Council's commissioning team

**Individual reviews of people placed in care homes** and funded by the Council. These reviews are undertaken by the Council's operational staff and take place in care homes. Whilst completing reviews staff are expected to take into account the service that is provided on a more general basis. This information is reported to commissioning staff.

**Formal contract reviews:** These take place annually as a minimum at which providers are expected to report back on a number of quality issues.

**Regular information and liaison with the Council's safeguarding team** to ensure commissioners are aware of safeguarding alerts and actions arising as a result of any safeguarding alerts. Where a number of concerns are raised, investigated and found to be proven, the Council can take a number of actions including implement a decision to make no further placements, to restrict the number of new placements or to provide additional assistance to the provider

to enable them to improve services. Our principle aim is to ensure customers are safe and every effort is made to ensure existing residents do not have to re-locate.

**Unannounced and announced visits to care homes by commissioning staff:** Every care home is visited annually as a minimum in addition to formal contract management meetings. Homes will be visited more frequently where there are concerns or where a potential risk is identified such as those where the existing manager has left and no replacement appointed; those where CQC have identified some compliance actions are required; those homes where the number of residents who have fallen or those homes where members of the public or the Council's staff have raised concerns. The emphasis of these visits is on the performance of the whole home rather than services delivered to individuals so whether residents are self funders or supported by the Council is not taken into account.

**South West Audit Partnership:** A recent audit of two large nursing home providers in Wiltshire was very complimentary about the quality of service being provided. .

Where concerns about quality are founded, the Council and Wiltshire CCG will work with the provider to develop an improvement action plan which will be monitored closely to ensure improvements are made.

In terms of the Council's role in proactively promoting quality in nursing homes the Council funds "My Home Life" which is a national programme supported by Age UK which provides training and support to care home managers. To date 45 care home managers have completed or are currently undergoing the My Home Life programme.

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**Item 14 (11) - Questions from Councillors**

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

**To**

**Councillor Keith Humphries, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Protection Services**

**Question 16**

With reference to the recent Briefing Note on the ongoing horsemeat scandal, why has this Authority chosen to use a public analyst which is not capable of carrying out DNA analysis? Was that decision informed by a need to reduce costs?

How many Public Protection Service officers qualified to carry out food safety checks does the Council currently employ? And what were the equivalent numbers for 2010 and 2011?

Why is the Council "liaising with any food manufacturers operating in Wiltshire who process comminuted beef products" rather than seeking clear assurances or carrying out checks?

For how many meat processing businesses in the County does this Council have enforcement responsibility?

What checks are being carried out on the beef being served in Wiltshire schools, both within the Academy system and in those schools for which the Council still has direct responsibility?

**Response**

Due to the speed at which this matter is progressing and the likelihood of further updates from the FSA before Council, a verbal response shall be provided at the meeting.