

Wiltshire Council

Council

25 February 2014

Item 10 - Questions from Councillors

From Councillor Chris Caswill, Chippenham Monkton Division

To Councillor Jane Scott OBE, Leader of the Council

Question 15

Councillors' Questions provides an important and indeed unique opportunity for non-Executive Councillors to question individual Cabinet members in public about their areas of responsibility and decisions they have taken. As such it is one of very few channels for democratic accountability of a powerful executive with significant levels of delegated powers.

1. Do you accept this analysis, and would you agree that is therefore a matter of public concern that Councillors' Questions has first been moved to the end of Council agendas, and now further eroded by the growing practice of Cabinet members not providing written responses, except to say for the public record that "A verbal response will be given at the meeting"?
2. Whilst this latter practice is formally sanctioned by the Council Constitution, do you agree that it does not appear to be in the spirit of transparency and accountability to which you have often committed yourself and your Administration in public meetings?
3. I understand you are now planning to meet with Group Leaders to discuss Councillors' Questions, which is a welcome next step. Will you give an undertaking to report the outcomes of that discussion to the next Council meeting, and to allow for debate there on this issue?

Response

Councillors Questions was discussed at the Group Leaders meeting on 19 February and it is proposed that the subject is referred to the constitutional working group to consider and clarify.

In the interim, Group Leaders concluded that Council Questions should remain at the end of proper business and that members would strive to provide a written response, however, verbal responses would be given where relevant.

Group Leaders also felt that councillors should be encouraged to submit their questions, where relevant, to other formal council meetings such as Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny and Community Area Boards and not leave them for Full

Council. There is also of course the normal Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holder route for Councillors to raise questions at any time.