

From Councillor Clark

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

**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.

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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.

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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.