

From Councillor Hubbard

**WILTSHIRE COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL  
13 JULY 2010**

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**COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS**

**QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JON HUBBARD**  
**MELKSHAM SOUTH DIVISION**

**TO COUNCILLOR JOHN NOEKEN**  
**CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES**

**Question**

In the light of the yet unconfirmed changes to local government that the new government has hinted at with the proposed Localism Bill would it not be prudent to put the Workplace Transformation Project on hold until we know for certain what the role of local authorities such as Wiltshire Council will be?

Is there not a risk that we could waste millions of pounds of taxpayers money refurbishing and building new offices that will not be fit for purpose in just a few years time?

In this time of having to find savings and look at how we can best protect the taxpayers money, would we not be better off investing this money in protecting front-line services?

If you do insist on proceeding with the programme can you confirm what will be the total cost of moving County Hall staff to the George Ward school site in Melksham, including any loss of revenue caused by the delay in developing the site for residential use?

**Response**

Thank you for the question, which I welcome as it gives me the opportunity to restate what I said when originally taking the proposals to Cabinet - this programme is a true invest to save programme that generates savings which offer the opportunity to protect frontline savings. In fact, for the five year period 11/12 - 15/16 the Programme will deliver gross revenue savings of £24.99m, which after full capital repayment and interest charges equates to net revenue savings of £8.9 million. If the programme was paused, these savings which are already factored into the council's forward financial plan would need to be found from other sources, potentially including front line service reductions - the programme is in fact an excellent example of investing in frontline services and very much in line with the announcements made by government.

Councillors will all be aware that one of the areas highlighted within the Coalition Government's Emergency Budget that should be targeted in order to protect

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frontline services is property rationalisation and disposal - we are fortunate to be ahead of the curve in so far as we already have the WTP to deliver this

In addition to flexible better located buildings, the WTP delivers work anywhere telephony and ICT - tools that go to the heart of ensuring localisation of service delivery and ensuring that we have the flexibility to respond to evolving models of public service delivery. A major aim of the refurbishment programme is to ensure that the accommodation provided is highly flexible and as far as possible is future proofed, where as it can be guaranteed that our current estate is not. The Coalition Government is clear that this is a time for Local Government to be bold, to do the right things in order to deliver long term value for money to local residents and take the hard decisions that this involves - standing still is simply not an option. I and my cabinet colleagues are committed to continue to do all we can to reduce costs - and this programme is an excellent example of this. Far from saving money, if the programme was paused now there would be significant additional revenue demands placed on the council's budgets - something that would be irresponsible at any time, but especially now when we are being asked to deliver increased savings.

All Councillors will understand the difference between capital and revenue budgets - the vast majority of the Workplace Transformation Programme is capital spend, money that cannot be transferred to front line service delivery which, in the main, is revenue funded. However, this capital investment in the programme will ensure that savings are generated that will help us protect and develop frontline service delivery over the coming years rather than continue to meet the high annual running costs of our estate (from revenue). There has been a review with Finance of the Workplace programme, endorsed by the recent Programme Board meeting; ensuring that these benefits are still deliverable. We will continue to reassess, based on any subsequent announcements by central government and any necessary change within this council.

The temporary use of George Ward does not represent a loss of revenue to the council, as the asset will remain in council ownership (and will remain part of our capital funding) and will be sold as originally planned at the end of the decant period - the sale will be delayed for up to two years, but as we currently have no prospective purchaser its temporary use by the council removes the need for vacant site security to be undertaken and as myself and Toby Sturgis have indicated previously to cabinet, this delay will hopefully allow for some recovery in demand for residential development land as the Coalition's economic policies begin to have an impact. We do not have a purchaser for the site at present. The total cost of decant across the programme will be in the order of £2.4 million, again, much of this sum which will be capitalised expenditure and of course is already fully funded for within the net savings I identified earlier.

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**TO COUNCILLOR JANE SCOTT**  
**LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

**Question**

I refer you to the answer you gave to Cllr Trevor Carbin in February this year regarding the "Your Wiltshire Magazine".

Could you please confirm if the sales of advertising to date are meeting the targets you previously stated?

Can you clarify if the advertising you seek is publicly funded or from the private sector?

In the previous question you were asked in February you were asked to give the projected cost of the production of the magazine. I cannot see this figure in your answer although you have indicated that your target advertising income would be £150,000. You also stated that the cost of the magazine will be offset against this advertising so I assume that the total cost for the year will be £150,000.

If this is the case can you confirm that future editions will cost only £15,000 each? If this is the case then why did the pilot editions cost over double this amount? Can you confirm that this cost includes distribution.

**Response**

**The net cost per magazine, per household is 11 pence including publication and distribution.**

Research from market research company Ipsos Mori clearly evidences that good communication and raising awareness of what councils deliver results in higher levels of public satisfaction and confidence in their local council and what it delivers.

Local intelligence evidences that people like to be made aware through direct marketing or mail to their household. Good communication is about targeting messages and information to different audiences and using the most appropriate and effective channel to do this.

One channel that the council uses is its residents' magazine that is delivered via Royal Mail door to door to over 200,000 households. Currently this channel is the only method to reach all households. The implementation of broadband and digital inclusion across the county in the future will see the channels evolve using multi-media and as a result a reduction in published materials.

The first two magazines generated £1,950 in advertising income from the private sector.

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We are currently investigating alternative ways to generate advertising income that will not be in competition with the local papers. Production and design of the magazine will be delivered in-house. Printing and distribution will be delivered by external companies.

In light of the economic climate we have reduced the number of magazines from ten to five per year and revised the advertising income to £5,000 per edition. The magazine has also been extended to promote public services and to streamline and target communications from Fire, Police, NHS, Probation, and Criminal Justice Board to local people.

The most recent edition of the magazine includes five pages of information from our partners generating an income of over £6,000.

Producing a magazine eliminates the need to publish separate service leaflets, booklets, flyers and other forms of communication. This is projected to save approx. £6,000 per edition.

Distribution cost of the magazine is around £18,500 an edition. The cost for printing is currently subject to a tender process. Previous editions print costs were approx. £20,000 per edition - total estimated gross cost - £37,000 per edition.

The combined income from partners, plus advertising, plus the saving from consolidating other communication materials into the magazine will reduce the cost to around £20,000 per edition. The net cost per household is likely to be around 11 pence per edition.