

**Wiltshire Council**

**Council**

**25 February 2014**

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**Item 10 - Questions from Councillors**

**From Councillor Helen Osborn, Trowbridge Lambrook Division**

**To Councillor Laura Mayes, Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

**Question 1**

Can I please be informed whether Wiltshire Council lobbied central government and Wiltshire MPs regarding the reinstatement of the Aiming High funding?

The loss of this funding will seriously affect the long term future of such highly valued, volunteer centres for children with learning difficulties and disabilities, as Stepping Stones in Trowbridge, and others across the county.

If we did lobby, what was the response?

Given that the amount involved is relatively paltry, why did the Council make the cut rather than finding the money from elsewhere?

Both the coalition government and this Council has failed these children.

**Response**

Under the **Aiming High for Disabled Children** programme, **£280m was allocated to Local Authorities in England between 2008-11** to significantly increase the range and number of short breaks they provide to disabled children and their families.

In Wiltshire, a dual approach was taken in distributing this funding. Parents and children were/are given a payment to access their own short breaks, whilst a number of schemes, including the opportunity centres, were funded an additional amount to enhance their provision for disabled children. In the case of the opportunity centres this was over and above their core funding from Wiltshire Council. These local and specific Aiming High grants were always intended to be short term, encouraging local schemes to become self sustaining. This short-term additional money was specifically identified within the service level agreements with each opportunity centre as coming from this grant and the organisations all understood that this additional money was time limited. Wiltshire Council staff have been working closely with these charitable organisations to support them in becoming sustainable.

Since 2011, Local Authorities have not received Aiming High Funding, yet Wiltshire has continued to fund short breaks for disabled children to the tune of £1 million a

year, with over a thousand disabled children benefiting each year. Far from failing children this Council has maintained a significant level of investment.

Since 2011 money has been available to local authorities through the **Early Intervention Grant (EIG)**. The EIG covers a wide range of early intervention services for children and young people, including those with disabilities. The EIG is **non-ring-fenced** and has now been absorbed in to the overall revenue grant received by the Council. This grant is reducing year on year.

The funding to opportunity centres has had to be reduced, as planned, to reflect the reduction in Central Government funding. The opportunity centres are still in receipt of core funding from Wiltshire Council, however, the £10,000 that was allocated from the Aiming High grant is no longer available.

Over the last three years the opportunity centres have received £889,320 from Wiltshire Council as core funding and this core funding is continuing.

Wiltshire Council recognises the excellent work carried out by these charities in providing a service to Wiltshire disabled children and this is reflected in the core funding noted above.

To help these charities remain sustainable Wiltshire Council has assisted them in accessing the Free Entitlement funding for 3 and 4 year olds and more recently helping them to ensure they meet the criteria to be able to access childcare funding for disadvantaged two year olds. The funding allocated to the opportunity centres for those children taking up the free entitlement to childcare is set at a higher rate than for other providers to recognise the additional needs of these children. The Council has good relationships with the centres and will continue to work with them. Each centre will receive core funding of £74,100 this year as agreed through the service level agreement.

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**Item 10 - Questions from Councillors**

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

**To Councillor Toby Sturgis, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning,  
Development Management, Strategic Housing, Property, Waste**

**Question 2**

It was recently reported in the London Evening Standard that Southwark Council has banned new betting shops, payday loans firms and pawnbrokers from opening in its borough. Businesses in Southwark will not be allowed to change the type of business operating on a site without a fresh application to the council. Southwark is believed to be the first local authority to tighten planning rules in this way. Councillors are said to be "concerned with the proliferation" of such businesses. The council hopes to create more "mixed" high streets to help people avoid "debt traps".

Could the cabinet member please inform me if they believe such a policy could, and should, be enforced in Wiltshire and if so what steps they will take to bring this about?

**Response**

A verbal response will be provided at the meeting.



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**Item 10 - Questions from Councillors**

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

**To Councillor Fleur de Rhé-Philippe, Cabinet Member for Economy, Skills and Transport**

**Question 3**

Numerous councils across the county, including Durham, Nottingham and Swansea, have blocked access to PayDay loan companies from council computers.

Could the cabinet member tell me if they intend to implement such a restriction on computers belonging to Wiltshire Council and if not, why?

**Response**

A verbal response will be provided at the meeting.



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**Item 10 - Questions from Councillors**

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

**To Councillor Jonathon Seed, Cabinet Member for Communities, Campuses,  
Area Boards, Leisure, Libraries and Flooding**

**Question 4**

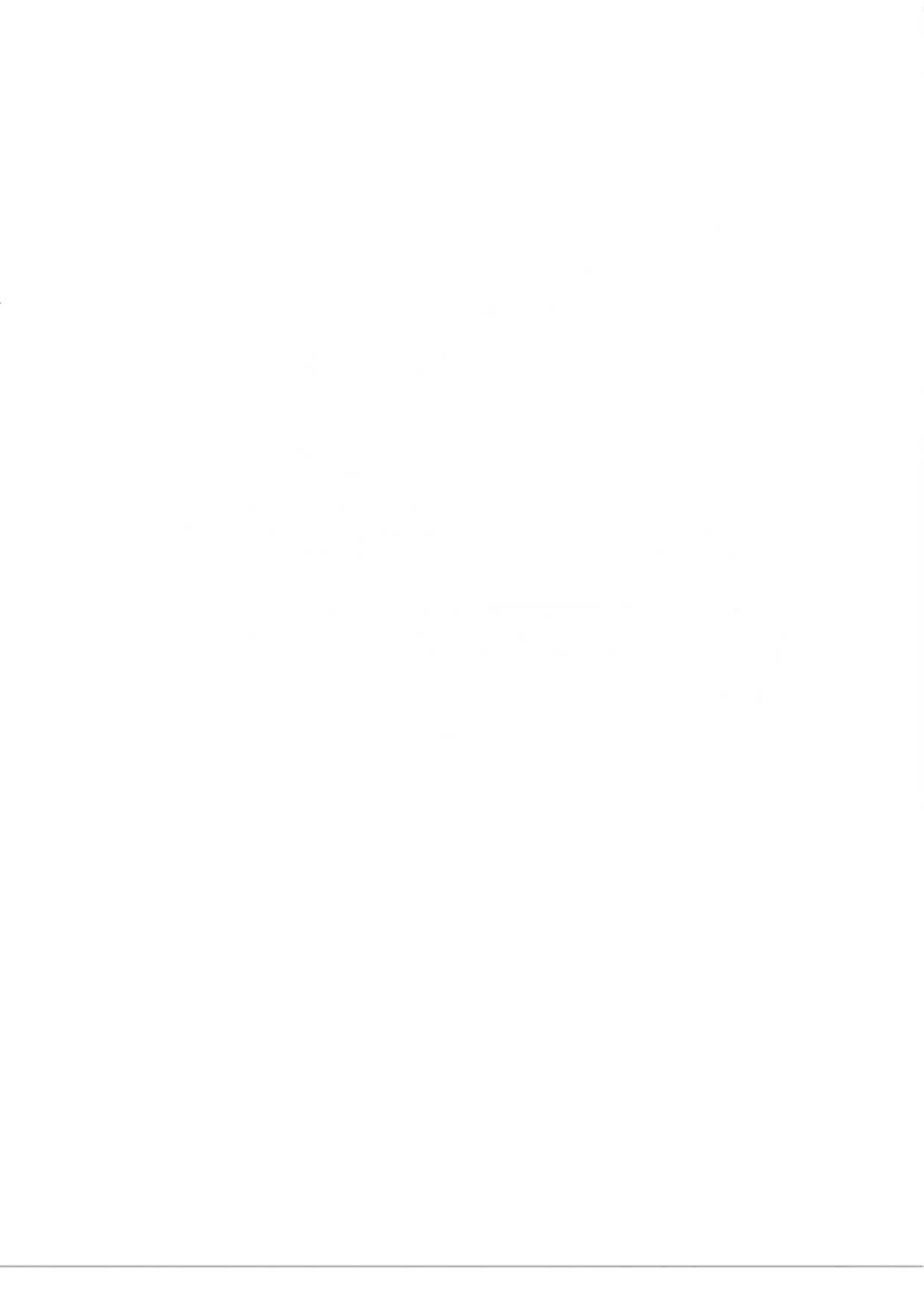
Here in Melksham we are getting very excited about the new Community Campus which we should see starting to be developed in the coming months.

Residents in other communities are also excited to hear when they will also see similar developments taking place, especially in the light of an increased number of proposals from the council which will see services delivered through the Campus model.

Could the cabinet member provide a timetable for the remaining campus development programme across the county, and give details of how each of the remaining campus developments will be funded?

**Response**

A verbal response will be given at the meeting.





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**Item 10 - Questions from Councillors**

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

**To Councillor Jane Scott OBE, Leader of the Council**

**Question 5**

The majority of the contact telephone numbers for Wiltshire Council are now based on either local geographic numbers or 0300 numbers. This is good and I applaud that the majority of contact points for Wiltshire residents can be made a minimal or no cost.

However there are a few services still relying on expensive 0845 numbers. I was particularly concerned that the out-of-hours number for vulnerable adults is still an 0845 number.

Could the cabinet member tell me how many chargeable 08xx numbers the council still maintains, what services they are for and if there are plans to replace them with local or 0300 numbers?

**Response**

I have recently asked officers to review our out of ours telephony and as part of this, to ensure we replace as many of the few remaining 0845 numbers with 0300 numbers as possible.

I confirm that, as you mentioned, the only number regularly used at this time is the Emergency Duty Service which is an 0845 number for use out of normal working hours. This number has been in place for several years and is used for out of hours contact.

When Customers call our main number out of hours they may be diverted to 0845 numbers, however as their call is the diverted call, they will only be charged at the local call rate. .

At this moment in time there are no plans to allocate 0300 numbers to any further services however this will be reviewed in the future. Requests for these changes generally come from the specific service areas, often following a systems thinking review.

I have attached a breakdown of the 0845 & 0870 numbers used for customer enquiries for your information.

Number	Deliver to	Alternative delivery number	Service Provider	Contact	Comments
0845 275 0123	01306 747 767	BT	Parking Payments Line		Ported from Freedom Sep 2010. Should probably be delivered to <somewhere else> - SPM. Talk to Karen Perrett
0845 601 0487	01249 706 265	BT	NWDC Concessionary Travel		Not much used - legacy number. Still on Kingston Langley village website. Kill off?
0845 602 4149	01225 718 772	BT	Property Services		Making changes re OOH/Keyline summer 2013
0845 607 0888	01249 454 630	BT	Emergency Duty Service		Moved to Fox Talbot House Chippenham Aug 2011 from Hopton Devizes 732 338
08456 52 52 55		Switchcall	Connect2Wiltshire	Dave Gillett	Costing c. £200/month. Press 1 for this etc. See <a href="http://www.bookaride.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&amp;view=article&amp;id=119&amp;Itemid=54">http://www.bookaride.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&amp;view=article&amp;id=119&amp;Itemid=54</a>

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**Item 10 - Questions from Councillors**

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

**To Councillor Keith Humphries, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Protection Services, Adult Care and Housing (excluding Strategic Housing)**

**Question 6**

Recently the West Yorkshire public analyst reported that almost 40% of 900 food samples they tested were not what they were advertised, or were mislabeled in some way. He is quoted as saying:

“We are routinely finding problems with more than a third of samples, which is disturbing at a time when the budget for food standards inspection and analysis is being cut.”

He is also quoted as suggesting that budget cuts increase the risk that mislabeled or fake food will be left unidentified by council-run labs.

- a. What was this Council's budget for food testing and analysis in each of the last two years and what will it be for 2014-15 if the budget proposed today is approved?
- b. What are the Wiltshire percentages equivalent to those reported in West Yorkshire?

**Response**

- a. The budget for food standards testing and analysis in 2012- 2013 and 2013 – 2014 was approximately £30,000 and £26,000 respectively.

In the financial year 2014 – 2015 the budget will remain unchanged at £26,000. The team are also currently bidding for funding from the Food Standards Agency in conjunction with the South West Trading Standards Partnership to carry out additional food sampling.

- b. The West Yorkshire public analyst was reporting on 900 food samples taken across a number of local authorities. The number of food samples in Wiltshire

will therefore be lower. In 2012/13, 225 food samples were taken by officers in the Public Protection Service, of which 34% were reported as unsatisfactory.

The Food and Safety Team have taken 93 food samples at present in this financial year and have received 29 unsatisfactory results; however they are still awaiting reports on over half of the samples submitted.

### **Question 7**

How many trading standards and / or environmental health staff and /or public protection officers with qualifications in food standards and inspection have left the Council's employment in this Financial Year and in each of Financial Years 2012-13 and 2011-12?

### **Response**

There are currently 8 Trading Standards Officers and Public Protection Officers within the Public Protection Service who are qualified to carry out food standards sampling and inspections.

In addition, there are a further 10 Environmental Health Officers and Public Protection Officers who hold the appropriate qualifications as required under the Food Law Code of Practice. They require a period of structured practical update training before undertaking food standards inspections and this is programmed to take place in the next few months.

In 2012- 2013 there were 12 Trading Standards Officers/Public Protection Officers qualified to carry out food standards inspections and in 2011 – 12 there were a total of 14 officers qualified to undertake the role.

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**Item 10 - Questions from Councillors**

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

**To Councillor Jane Scott OBE, Leader of the Council**

**Question 8**

Where in the Cabinet does responsibility lie for the shortcomings of the Council's draft Core Strategy, and particularly for the disastrous failure to achieve any planning guidance for housing allocations for the Chippenham area?

**Response**

The Wiltshire Core Strategy Pre- Submission Document was approved by Council on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2012 and the Spatial Strategy for Chippenham Community Area CP10 is just one of the sixty nine core policies. The delegation for consequential actions are set out in the third part of the minute.

The question pre-empts the outcome of the Examination process which we are still within. The Inspector is yet to publish his findings on the plan. The Inspector has requested that the council reconsider the Chippenham options through a discreet policy document. This is an acceptable part of the public enquiry process. Should the Inspector wish to apply that modification, then the Core Strategy itself will need to be amended to reflect this. The National Planning Policy Framework provides the guidance for policy development.

**Question 9**

Why was there so little Cabinet member, Corporate director, or Service director participation in the hearing of evidence about Chippenham housing allocations at the Core Strategy Enquiry in Public?

**Response**

An Examination in public is a very technical and complex procedure and we have highly experienced officers to undertake presenting the evidence on behalf of the Council. There was support both from the Service Director and legal advisors throughout the sessions, and the Cabinet member and Corporate Director were kept fully informed. At the pre-hearing meeting, the Inspector requested that member involvement was directed through the Officer team.

### Question 10

When I asked a question at Council about your Administration's preparations for the enquiry into the draft Core Strategy, I was assured that the Council had taken advice about its draft plan and was assured that it was robust. Who provided that advice and why was it so inaccurate?

### Response

The draft core strategy was sent to Leading Counsel (a QC) to check for soundness before going to Council and the advice received was that it was considered sound. The QC had been advising the Council throughout. As with any hearing the Inspector has to come to his own application of the facts. In this case the Inspector has placed different weight on some of the evidence presented and put weight on the new National Policy framework and is indicating that he is considering a different conclusion to the Council. That does not mean that the original advice or the Council's original position was wrong.

It is of note that the Inspector has not determined that the underlying Core strategy is unsound but has merely asked for Council's comments in respect of proposed modifications to ensure soundness. In fact the Inspector said in his 10<sup>th</sup> procedural letter: -

"... the matters summarised below are those upon which I am most interested to hear how the Council may wish to proceed. Such matters are not exhaustive of those that will be addressed in my final report albeit many aspects of the plan appear **justified, positively prepared, consistent with national policy and likely to be effective in their implementation.**"

### Question 11

Who is overseeing the preparation of the Council's responses to the Inspector's requirements for changes to the draft Core Strategy?

### Response

The Core Strategy is still within the Examination period, and is currently the Inspector's process during his consideration of evidence. The Associate Director of Economic Development and Planning is overseeing liaising with the Inspector in conjunction with the Cabinet Member and other professional officers. Cabinet approved the approach being taken on the 21<sup>st</sup> January.

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**Item 10 - Questions from Councillors**

**From Councillor Simon Killane, Malmesbury Division**

**To Councillor Jane Scott OBE, Leader of the Council**

**Question 12**

Let's now use the electronic voting system to give the people of Wiltshire direct access to the full voting profile of each Councillor and save time on traditional recorded voting!

I would like to ask Cllr Jane Scott's opinion on my suggestion that the new electronic voting system is used for all voting requirements from now on, including this budget meeting, and that the old system of hands in the air or the "Ayes/Nays" method of voting is consigned to the history books. I would also like to know when the people of Wiltshire to be able to access the complete electronic voting history for each Wiltshire Councillor just as can be done for MP's in Parliament.

**Question 13**

Let's now use the new electronic video recording system give the people of Wiltshire direct sound and visual access to all our Full Council meetings!

I would like to ask Cllr Jane Scott to update me on the progress of the implementation of the video recording and streaming technology. The people of Wiltshire must now have the opportunity to listen to and see the debates first hand and to make up their own minds about the proposals, amendments, decisions and debates that are a regular part of these meetings.

**Response to Questions 12 and 13**

Following discussions at the Group Leaders meeting on 19 February it is proposed that a cross party working group (to include group leaders) is set up to consider the introduction of video recording, streaming technology and the use of the electronic voting system for Full Council meetings. This would include ensuring that relevant safeguards are in place to protect the interests of the council

It is suggested that the working group will consult cabinet and any changes proposed to the constitution would be reported to Full council through the Standards Committee.

#### **Question 14**

Let's resolve to address the issues that deter the people of Wiltshire from participating in Wiltshire Council as elected representatives!

I would like to ask Cllr Jane Scott, Leader of Wiltshire Council, to express a view on the following:

That Scrutiny Management must be actioned with setting up a Task Group to quantify the diversity of age, gender, race and ethnicity of the elected membership of the council, that the outcomes from this study are used to determine the root causes responsible of any diversity imbalance and that proposals are made for consideration by full council to address any imbalance.

#### **Response**

It is not for me, as leader, to determine the issues that Overview and Scrutiny should consider. However I recognise that this is clearly an important issue but one that requires addressing at a national level and would suggest that councillors who are concerned about this should take it up through the appropriate channels.



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**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 it 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.