

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday 22 December 2016

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Executive Meeting

22 December 2016

Questions and Answers



Public Questions as specified in the Council's Procedure Rules of the Constitution

There were no questions submitted by members of the public.

Members' Questions as specified in the Council's Procedure Rules of the Constitution

- (a) **Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and External Affairs by Councillor Lee Dillon, asked on his behalf by Councillor Alan Macro:**

"What are the Council's policies to protect whistle blowers?"

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and External Affairs answered:

The whistle blowing policy is currently located on the Council's intranet page and is owned by HR and our Head of HR, Rob O'Reilly. It is based on best practice but the Public Concern public body and was updated in 2013. It was recently published in an article on the intranet reminding staff of the policy and the afforded protection to whistle blowers.

The Chairman asked: *"Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?"*

Councillor Macro asked the following supplementary question:

"It is interesting to hear that you have recently drawn employees' attention to it because, as you know, there was an email flying around recently from a former employee making allegations which one would have thought could have been brought up under a whistle blowing policy and apparently hadn't been. That was the reason for asking the question to make sure employees were aware".

The Portfolio Holder for * answered:

On that particular issue, to be clear, there was an allegation which on further investigation was not... The policy has been used on a number of occasions and the anonymity is crucial. It has often been used successfully. It's something that we pride ourselves on and I know a number of other Local Authorities endeavour to emulate the policy that we have.

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- (b) **Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People by Councillor Lee Dillon; asked on his behalf by Councillor Alan Macro:**

"How many school standard and effectiveness visits have there been this academic year?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People answered:

Taking it from this academic year, so from September 2016, there have been no visits • No visits have taken place in Autumn 2016 as there has been a move to change the format of the panel. In fact I have met with the current chair of the panel as well as the Head of Service and the Joint Principal Advisers for School Improvement to start discussion around what that might look like for liaison between council members and schools going forward. There is a meeting booked for January with Heads to discuss how to have an effective school standard and effectiveness mechanism going forward. In the interim I, myself, have actually visited four

schools to conduct a similar type approach and to discuss with them how that should look going forward. It is our intention to change the format.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Councillor Macro asked the following supplementary question:

“I think it’s disappointing that we have gone several months without any visit at all. When I was Shadow Portfolio Holder and also the local member I found those visits very useful because they were a two-way process. First of all, you would get some understanding of how the school was doing but also often the issues that the school was complaining regarding Council services and responsiveness. OK so you have had visits but I think a panel is far more effective than just one person so I hope you do get some system going again involving more than one person and hopefully one or two members of the Opposition aswell.”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People answered:

You may have felt that a panel was more effective but the schools’ feedback to use certainly wasn’t that a panel was more effective so we are working in consultation with Heads to look at what will work for them and I believe we need to look at how Members interact with schools in their Wards and form part of that process going forward. We absolutely believe that there is a role for Ward Members with the schools within their locality and that is what we are currently consulting on looking at the mechanism for. As I said before, I have done five visits and those schools have had the same opportunity to discuss issues that a panel would have given them.

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport by Councillor Alan Macro:

“What is the Portfolio Holder doing to resolve the traffic problem in Newbury?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

In the context of the vagueness of your question, let me reply with an equally vague answer: quite a lot is going on. Could we have questions and supplementaries that are a little more focussed please Councillor Macro.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Councillor Macro asked the following supplementary question:

“In the situation we have seen ourselves in, there have been many traffic problems over the past few months. Could we have something more specific in terms of what the Council is planning to do to resolve the problems out there?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

I'm going to repeat, it's too vague a question. We've got to get a bit more specific on questioning. There is a lot going on, I will gladly get the Portfolio Holder who has sadly had to go away for personal reasons to send you a note.

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