



PLEASE FIND ATTACHED: For your information.
Reports of the activities of Wiltshire Council
June 2009 to March 2010

From:

Jane Scott OBE: Leader of the Council

John Thomson: Cabinet Member for Community Services

John Brady: Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Housing

Lionel Grundy: Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Keith Humphries: Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

John Noeken: Cabinet Member for Resources

Toby Sturgis: Cabinet Member for Waste, Property and Environment

Dick Tonge: Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

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ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

JANE SCOTT OBE, LEADER OF WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

It has been a good first year for Wiltshire Council. The transition went through more smoothly than I expected, largely due to the most excellent team of officers a local authority could wish to have.

The transformation is proceeding satisfactorily and I expect the financial savings over the next few years to be greater than predicted.

The approaching general election has already had an effect on two of our proposals for the future. We have still to determine a common waste collection procedure across the county. We were about to consult on a wide basis with residents when it became apparent that, post election, we could be required to follow a Whitehall policy. It was, therefore, a waste of public money to consult before such a policy, if any, became known. If, as has been suggested, a conservative government will wish to see weekly collections of household waste, I hope we will be financially helped to maintain it.

The second policy matter we are trying to keep on hold until after the election is the requirement within the Regional Spatial Strategy to build a government directed number of houses in Wiltshire in areas not always acceptable to local communities. We understand that a conservative government will abolish the RSS and allow local government to have more control over the number of houses to be built and their location. This was confirmed by Bob Neill, the relevant shadow minister on his recent visit to county hall where he saw, at first hand, some of the advantages of unitary status.

As always, it was a difficult budget to determine and I would have liked to have seen council tax frozen at this year's level. However to have done so would have meant cuts in some of our services and it became clear from a wide consultation with partners and residents that this was not what was wanted even if it meant some increase in local taxation. In the event, the average increase across the county was well below inflation at 2.3%.

As well as at least maintaining services at not less than current levels, the budget will allow us to deal with the damage to our highways caused by the exceptional winter weather and an additional £1.7m has been allocated for that. It will also allow us to spend more on youth services in the county which was a priority within the consultation.

Area Boards have been very well received and attended and have already brought greater democracy to local communities. We have allocated £100,000 to the Boards for them to help young people access the services available to them, £250,000 for local highways expenditure and £100,000 to be spent on arrangements to reduce expenditure on local street lighting. As greater experience is gained, I am sure more services will be delivered locally rather than from County Hall.

Attached are more detailed reports from my cabinet members about our work over the year, all of whom will be happy to answer any questions.

Jane Scott OBE
Leader, Wiltshire Council
March 2010

ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

JOHN BRADY, CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING AND HOUSING

Economy & Enterprise

1. Action for Wiltshire – This programme was established to provide help to both the Community and Local Businesses during the recession. A business support helpline was set up and £288,000 was allocated to Wiltshire CABs to help them meet increased demand. We subsequently were successful in bidding for the ‘future jobs fund’ that has brought £4,000,000 of funding in to Wiltshire to help young long term unemployed into meaningful employment. This has been highly successful and we now have 125 young people in jobs that provide community benefit that would otherwise be unemployed. With the co-operation of the CABs, we have helped prevent very many evictions and repossessions and enabled people to stay in their own homes.
2. The South Wiltshire Core Strategy has gone through both Cabinet and Full Council and is now being examined in public by the government appointed inspector and we hope it will be adopted in the near future providing a framework for the future development of South Wiltshire through to 2026. We are presently progressing the Core Strategy for the rest of Wiltshire and currently we are at the early consultation stage. The Council also successfully adopted the Minerals and Waste Core Strategies in this year, the first council in the region to do so. The documents set out the strategic planning policy approach to delivering new minerals and waste developments over the plan period (2006-2026).
3. Vision Boards have been set up and active for Salisbury, Chippenham and Trowbridge and good progress is being made. Salisbury in particular now has a detailed plan and timescale for implementation.

Planning

1. The previous 4 District Councils all used separate systems for delivery of their service including 4 differing IT systems. The main objective since becoming one Council is to bring about a consistent approach to planning delivery across the County. The Development Service has now made a successful transition from five services into one involving the harmonisation of documentation and working practices, including committee frequency and numbers. On line access to information on planning applications is now possible from all hubs (previously there was no access in the western part of the county) and web content is constantly improving. We now have an approved budget to bring in one common IT system that will be delivered and installed by early/mid 2011.
2. Planning is kept constantly under review and we have responded to Councillor suggestions and are continually making improvements, such as the ability now to call in Listed Building applications which were previously exempt.

Housing & Homelessness

1. I am pleased to say that through a PFI project we are close to delivering 350 new affordable homes with final sign off due May 2010. This will be delivered in 2 phases and will provide a much needed boost to affordable homes in Wiltshire as the number being delivered through the private sector via S106 agreements has greatly reduced due to current economic circumstances. However overall we have exceeded our target for new affordable homes.
2. We were successful in bidding for grant funds to build new Council Houses –the first to be built in Wiltshire for many years. We will be building a total of 65 new houses and hope to have the first available for occupation by early 2011.
3. We have eliminated the use of Bed and Breakfast for homelessness in Wiltshire and we carried out a survey in December of the number of 'rough sleepers' throughout the County. I am pleased to report only one was found in the whole County. This shows the efforts of our partners in providing temporary shelter to these vulnerable members of society is having a significant effect in helping many to avoid the recent harsh winter conditions.

Overview

This is an outline of the key activities that have taken place, but in addition, we have organised Housing Seminars for Councillors both in the north and the south of the County. We have held 3 planning enforcement seminars for Councillors and Town and Parish Councillors and we will be holding a fourth by popular demand.

John Brady
Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Housing
March 2010

ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

LIONEL GRUNDY, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Children's Services have had a positive year reflected by an Ofsted rating in December 2009 of "Performs Well".

There are now 30 Children's Centres in place across Wiltshire. This was achieved ahead of time and provides additional support for young children and their families. Schools premises continue to be improved, recent works have included: the replacement of 7 temporary classrooms at Calne Fynamore Primary with permanent build; the re-building of Shrewton Primary School; the completion of a major extension at Monkton Park Primary, Chippenham; a new hall at Shaw Primary and a larger hall at Ogbourne St George; support for St Laurence Bradford on Avon to develop a new Learning Resources/Study Centre and South Wilts Grammar School for Girls to develop a new Sixth Form Library. The rebuild of George Ward Secondary School in Melksham is going well and in addition we have delivered a £2.5m major maintenance programme (replacement roofs, rewiring) in schools. The new Wellington Academy has been established in Tidworth and plans are well underway for the new Academy in Salisbury.

In addition to the existing free early years provision for 3 and 4 year olds, extra free flexible nursery education has been made available to 25% of the most disadvantaged 3 and 4 year olds (2,500 children) and free nursery education provided to 120 of the most disadvantaged 2 year olds. Early years assessments show that children are progressing well. One to one tuition is being given to specific pupils in schools needing additional support to help them achieve. GCSE results have been the best ever with 55.4% of young people getting at least 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and maths, well above the national figure of 49.7%. A-Level results have been strong too.

Extended schools services are in place in nearly all of our schools providing a range of services outside of school hours for primary and secondary school age children, their families and the local community. These include access to childcare, activities and support for learning. Most schools (85%) also have achieved the Healthy Schools Award which links good health, behaviour and achievement through a whole school approach.

Youth work has been progressing well with a variety of initiatives, for instance 35 young people were recruited as volunteers through the Government funded V Talent year programme and over 32,000 votes were cast in Wiltshire for the United Kingdom Youth Parliament and Wiltshire Assembly of Youth elections - the highest vote rate in the South West. Sparksite, Wiltshire's website and webcast radio station for young people goes from strength to strength letting people know what's going on. Community Area Young People's Issues Groups are operating in all community areas and are contributing to the Area Boards. Additional funding has been identified for potential youth activities via area boards. The Youth Offending Service has been working with young people and has reduced frequency and seriousness of offending in Wiltshire.

A new recruitment campaign has been successful to attract an extra 15 social workers to help keep children and young people safe. We ensure that all children and young people with a child protection plan or in Council care have an allocated social worker. We have

also been recruiting new foster carers to look after children in care and have had a net increase of 18 carers in 2009 and are still looking for more.

Additional short break provision for children with disabilities and their families has been put in place - parents have been crucial in this and have led the process of deciding what was needed and who would provide it.

Lionel Grundy
Cabinet Member for Children's Services
March 2010

ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

KEITH HUMPHRIES, CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Following the successful transition from five councils into one, Public Protection Services have been involved in a number of high profile events. Wiltshire trading standards officers joined up with the police to take part in "Rogue Trader Day". Officers from trading standards accompanied the police on road blocks and surveillance around the county in order to combat rogue trading practices and hosted successful business seminars for both businesses and other enforcement agencies to raise awareness of doorstep crime. Officers have also worked with community safety staff and the police to train Wiltshire Council employees who come into regular contact with the elderly or vulnerable members of the community.

The service has harmonised a number of areas in this first year including alcohol and entertainment licensing following a public consultation process. The Pest Control Service has also been reviewed and the service in the former Salisbury District Council area will be brought back in house once the existing contract expires at the end of March, and a harmonised service and fees introduced across the Council area. In addition a new Environmental Health out of hours service was introduced at the beginning of February. It divides the county into two areas (north/west and south/east) and extends the previous level of service to the south area, harmonising the service provided to the public for emergency environmental health issues.

During 2009 the Emergency Planning Team was busy with the response to the Swine Influenza outbreak and more recently with the disruption caused by heavy snowfalls.

Members of the Anti-Social Behaviour Team have been consulting with communities across Wiltshire on the draft anti-social behaviour strategy and will be taking all the responses, comments and suggestions into consideration to ensure that the final plan will help us to work with our partner agencies to deliver an effective response to anti-social behaviour. The draft strategy and questionnaire will be available on the Council's website until 18 March.

Keith Humphries
Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing
March 2010

ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

JOHN NOEKEN, CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

Workplace Transformation Project

The Unitary council is undertaking a radical programme of reorganising its real estate over the next few years to respond to customer needs and offer better value for money in the use of our buildings. Every service is reviewing and restructuring how it works, with the first phase focusing on Bourne Hill and the Salisbury area which is scheduled to be complete by October 2010.

Other hub offices to be refurbished include starting work at Monkton Park at Chippenham in November 2010 as well as Browfort in Devizes. Both of these are expected to be completed by November 2011. Further work will take place at County hall, with completion by December 2012. In addition to the refurbishment of Bourne Hill, Workplace Transformation will require a net budget of £22.9m. Over the next 25 years, the programme will save £85m and will remove a maintenance backlog for the existing office estate of £22m.

Funding for the refurbishment of the 4 main hubs and the new ICT programme which underpins it will be repaid by a mixture of the disposal of buildings made surplus by the programme and from other savings. Overall, the programme will be more than self-financing. Altogether we presently have around 95 office buildings around the county and the plan is to reduce these to 4 main hubs as well as office provision and “touch down” facilities in places like libraries and leisure centres. After the programme has fully met all of its own costs, additional revenue savings will be in the region of £3.5m per annum.

To make sure the programme is a success we will be radically changing the ICT solutions we offer to our staff which will require redesigning our ICT infrastructure and telephony systems to support flexible working. We will also review and change our back office applications, as we have too many different systems in place doing the same jobs. We will also need to become more slick around information management, both electronic and paper, and review our document scanning and file retention policies to ensure they are fit for purpose. All in all, many more staff will be able to work flexibly providing a better customer access strategy throughout the county and not just at the main hubs.

John Noeken
Cabinet Member for Resources
March 2010

ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

TOBY STURGIS, CABINET MEMBER FOR WASTE, PROPERTY AND ENVIRONMENT

Waste

Diversion of 50,000 tonnes per annum of household waste from landfill to a waste to energy plant is now underway reducing the amount of landfill tax paid and protecting the council from the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme fines payable if the council exceeds its allocation of biodegradable waste going to landfill. Hills Waste Solutions have been granted planning permission on a site at Westbury for a Mechanical and Biological Treatment Plant and Cabinet will be considering this contract on 23 March, this is the second phase in our Waste Strategy to reduce landfill.

The consultation on the improvement to the household waste collection service was put on hold until after the election as differing policies were being put forward by the 3 main parties. This will avoid the risk of this work being of no use once the government announce their policy after the general election.

Environment

The Council has to meet obligations in response to a number of drivers at European, national and local level, which will have quantified financial and environmental benefits. Reduction in energy usage in the Council's buildings and services and the obligation to reduce the carbon footprint across the whole of the county align with many of our policies and strategies. The Council is identifying a stream of energy efficiency projects to deliver the savings required under the different legislations.

Property

The Council inherited a vast range of properties from the five councils. A programme to rationalise their use to meet our customers' needs while offering better value for money is underway. (Further information under Workplace Transformation).

Toby Sturgis
Cabinet Member for Waste, Property and Environment
March 2010

ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

JOHN THOMSON, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

Good news about adult social care in Wiltshire

We are one of the top five of the fastest improving adult social care departments in the country.

Numbers of people helped

So far this year we have helped 9000 people. By end of the year we expect to have helped 1000 more people than last year.

Helping people to stay at home

We helped 6,500 people to stay at home. We also provide grant support to well over 100 voluntary organisations. A survey in a week in November 2009 showed that we were helping a further 3,000 live at home through that grant funding. In a national survey last year 94% of people expressed satisfaction with the help they received.

Help for carers

So far this year we have helped more than 2,000 carers either with information and advice or a break from their caring role. This is about 20% more than last year. In the national carers survey 85 % of carers in Wiltshire thought the service we provided to people they cared for made things a lot easier for the carer. Of those who have had a rest/respite 89% expressed satisfaction with the service.

Treating people fairly and with respect

In a January 2009 survey 92% of people said that they felt that they had been treated with respect and 88% said they had been fairly treated. Adult social care is changing to focus on people living their lives in the way they want, with as much independence, choice and control as possible and in the council we have transformed our services by changing the way we work. We are working closer with the PCT to make sure we have a more joined up service in the future.

Area Boards – the story so far

As interest and trust in national politics has declined, Wiltshire Council has sought to plug local people back into power by involving them in decisions that most directly affect them where they live. Wiltshire is working to strengthen grass-roots democracy through its new community area boards with devolved powers and delegated funding of over £4.5m over the next 2 years. The boards have become a powerful catalyst for partnership working and collaboration by bringing together council officers, public agencies and local people to solve local problems together. 10,000 local people have signed up to be part of this new approach and 5,547 local people have so far participated at the meetings. Already, the boards have committed £549,000 to support 253 local community projects. This funding has generated an additional £3.1m of external funding delivering a total community benefit to Wiltshire of £3.6m in the year so far with every £1 spent by the Area Boards helping to lever £5.60 of extra investment.

Area boards are also working hard to sort out local problems and issues. By bringing together council services, partners, local councillors, parish and town councils and the public, more than half of the 715 sticky issues referred to the Boards have been resolved. One of the real success stories so far has been the launch of the Community Speedwatch scheme with volunteers from 46 villages now assisting the police and highways staff to tackle speeding problems right across Wiltshire. The value of this work is beyond doubt, but it is nonetheless encouraging and reassuring that Wiltshire has been recognised at national and regional level for its work in this area and through the award of the Audit Commission's prestigious Green Flag CAA accreditation

Library Service Highlights

During another busy year the library service has increased community-run reading groups to almost 100, extended its book and story clubs to include adults with learning disabilities and enabled yet more adults who are less confident in their reading to achieve success through the 6-Book Challenge. 12 libraries now offer the "Health Matters" service providing regular on site advice sessions from health practitioners; more children than ever participated in our Summer Reading Challenge and we introduced a brand new mobile library into service at Warminster. Young people and older people have worked together in an intergenerational computer club and children who are looked after by the Council have formed an inspirational book club. Customer satisfaction with the service has remained high, with 98% of library customers rating our staff helpfulness and customer service as good or very good. We have new library projects in hand at Pewsey and Trowbridge, funds have been earmarked for a new library at Ludgershall, and all Wiltshire libraries have remained open during the recession period.

John Thomson
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community Services
March 2010

ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

DICK TONGE, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT

Public Transport

The Public Transport team put enormous effort into making arrangements for the transport of pupils joining new schools last year. The concessionary fare arrangements were changed to give wheelchair users in the former Salisbury and Kennett areas taxi vouchers that they did not have before. Significant savings were made in transport costs by renegotiating contracts with taxi and other operators.

Rail

Land adjacent to Melksham station was purchased to ensure that when the frequency of trains increases in the future access improvements can be made.

Network Rail's draft Route Utilisation Strategy together with the recent announcement concerning electrification of the main line from Paddington to Bristol are welcomed. The report supports the case for a number of improvements including the provision of an hourly train service between Westbury and Chippenham or Swindon. Other recommendations are for an additional platform at Westbury and a modest increase in capacity on the route between Wales and the south coast, particularly between Bristol and Westbury.

Much has to be done on these and other rail projects but this report is very welcome.

Winter and the Highways

The winter of 2010 was one of the coldest and most persistent for many years and made huge demands on Council staff.

Our first priority was the support of elderly and vulnerable people using 4 x 4 vehicles. This enabled carers to reach them where road conditions were too difficult for two wheel drive vehicles. This included patients who needed insulin, or other medicines, and those who were suffering from cancer who would otherwise be trapped.

Many pupils had examinations during the cold weather so we made special efforts to clear snow and ice from the schools where exams were taking place.

All hands were deployed to snow clearance and tackling ice on pavements. To complement Highways staff local farmers were equipped with snow clearing equipment and due to the suspension of waste collections staff were diverted to help with weather related work.

Winter – the after effects

The freezing weather has played havoc with the roads. The damage takes a month to happen but it takes far longer to fix it, the legacy of this winter will be with us well into the summer. Teams are now working on repairs with the Parish Stewards engaged in filling the most dangerous potholes and the Highways teams resurfacing stretches that have underlying problems. We have had tremendous help from Towns and Parish Councils and individuals who have reported problems using the Clarence help line on 0800 232323.

Major Projects

There was huge disappointment that the government inspector turned down the application for the Westbury by-pass. Consultation is almost complete at the Petersfinger Park and Ride scheme in Salisbury. The objective is to encourage cars not to use the city centre making it more attractive for residents, shoppers and tourists. We want Salisbury to be a city for people, not cars. Another £16m was spent on structural maintenance of roads, bridge strengthening and replacement and on schemes designed to improve road safety.

Road Safety

This is always uppermost in our minds when considering new schemes. These are prioritised on the basis of risk reduction before any design work is carried out. The Council and the Police have developed Community Speedwatch to address speeding concerns and we continue to provide training to children at schools. We are spending time with students at colleges to stress the need for careful and considerate driving to this statistically very vulnerable group.

Looking forward

The biggest project ahead of us in 2010, apart from overcoming the depredations of winter, is to integrate the street cleansing, grass cutting and amenities group from the former Districts with the Highways Maintenance teams from the former County. This has the prospect of significant savings that can be reinvested into the service to make it more efficient and responsive.

Dick Tonge
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
March 2010

ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

STUART WHEELER, CABINET MEMBER FOR LEISURE, SPORT AND CULTURE

The new Wiltshire Council inherited 23 leisure centres across the county when it came into being. We have started a review of all these facilities with the intention of producing a detailed report by early summer which will contain a set of suggested options to meet the demand for leisure over the next 10/15 years. These options will then be the subject of a detailed consultation with all stakeholders. In November 2009 a progress report was presented to Cabinet who supported the intent of the leisure strategy that Wiltshire becomes the healthiest county by 2014.

During the year over 3.2 million visits were made to our facilities. The government's Free Swim initiative led to us welcoming more than 225,000 16 and under, and more than 80,000 over 60, swimmers to our pools.

The Council's sport development team was active in encouraging wider participation in all types of sport across Wiltshire. More than 1,800 young people took part in sports unlimited projects, and over 350 adults joined "return to sport" initiatives. The team were successful in obtaining over £200,000 of external grant funding for various projects.

The Culture team were very pleased at the continued success of the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre. We attracted over 1,000 visitors for our Tudor themed open day, and the Centre has now welcomed more than 50,000 users since opening in October 2007.

We have continued to give wide support to the vibrant arts sector across the whole county. In particular we are very pleased to note the achievement of the Salisbury International Arts Festival in winning the South West Tourism Event of the year award for 2009/10.

Stuart Wheeler
Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture
March 2010