

## Wiltshire Council

### Points for discussion with Parish Councils in January

#### 1. The Cabinet meeting on December 12<sup>th</sup> dealt with the following agenda items:

- **Fleet Strategy 2023 – 30.** In essence this is a long-term plan to convert the Council's vehicle fleet to use renewable energy over the next 7 years. While the option to switch to battery powered EVs for lighter vehicles is pretty straightforward, the best options for renewable fuels for heavier vehicles are still unclear, and were reserved for later in the period.
- **Home Upgrade Grant Scheme 2 (HUG2).** Wiltshire Council secured £3.6million to improve the energy efficiency of 175 homes by installing measures including loft and wall insulation, air source heat pumps and ventilation systems. There is also limited funding available for other measures, such as solar PV, double glazing, underfloor insulation and electric heating. Further funding may be available for the retrofit of additional homes, up to the value of £7.2m. The programme will run until March 2025.

The biggest issue facing the officers in putting this scheme into effect is finding eligible houses & home owners. Detailed criteria have yet to be published, but Parish Councillors may be able to assist in identifying potential beneficiaries.

- **Setting of the Council Tax Base for 2024/25.** This was an enabling paper, paving the way for decisions regarding the level of Council Tax to be charged this year. The actual decisions regarding the level were not covered - these will be taken during January and should become clear next month.
- **Provision of Education Learner with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs.** Across Wiltshire there is significant need for Primary Day Special Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) provision for children with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs), but Wiltshire has no maintained special school provision for primary-aged learners. And there are increasing numbers of secondary age pupils struggling to access mainstream education due to high levels of anxiety, leading to Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), with a lack of in county provision to support learners in reintegration into school settings.

As a consequence, Wiltshire is placing high numbers of children in independent special schools that are expensive and often result in children traveling long distances and being further removed from their local communities.

This paper requested approval for a 5 year contract to commission an external provider to deliver education provision for 45 primary age learners with SEMH, and 15-25 secondary age children with high levels of anxiety, from September 2024 so as to meet the current levels of demand and reduce expenditure on expensive independent special school placements.

I had put a question accusing the Council of greenwash in making claims that its waste programme will be carbon neutral by 2030 while continuing to incinerate 40% of it (costing 60% of the £30 million budget). And followed it up with a further question to ask why Wiltshire doesn't follow Swindon, Bath, Somerset, Dorset, Devon and others in using anaerobic digestion of food waste that would save £2.5 to £3.0 million on my reckoning. The Cabinet jeered at the notion of following any lead from elsewhere and response I got a long lecture on how the calculation of greenhouse gas emissions work. **I plan to continue my campaign against the environmentally damaging practice of incineration, arguing that we need to start separating out food waste.**

2. **Following on from the November meeting of the South West Area Board meeting I emailed Dave Thomas,** Head of Highways Asset Management & Commissioning with a paper detailing the appalling state of roads in and through the Donheads (attached).

I have proposed an amendment to the minutes of the Area Board meeting to ensure the issue is properly recorded, and await a response to the questions raised.

3. **River Nadder, water quality etc. There is a meeting planned for the evening of 23<sup>rd</sup> January between the Tisbury Parish Council and Wessex Water, in the Victoria Hall, Tisbury, to which members of other local Parish Councils will be welcome.**

The issues of particular concern to Tisbury Parish Councillors are

- Phosphate levels in the Nadder, and the performance in this regard of the Tisbury sewage treatment works
- The storm overflows into the Nadder associated with the Tisbury sewage treatment works and how to better monitor them

But I anticipate this will lead on to a wider discussion of matters related to water quality upstream of Tisbury and I hope to prompt statements from Wessex Rivers Trust on

- their plans for a Wiltshire Council funded scheme for upgrades to septic tanks and for
- progress on working with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust on a sub-catchment scale programme for the upper Nadder to deliver benefits for water quality, water quantity (incl. flooding and low flows), and biodiversity.

And from the local Nadder farmers group on their plans to initiate monitoring of discharges into the river from adjacent farmland