



Oversight and Governance

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MEMBERS' WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Friday 25 April 2025

Members' Written Questions

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MEMBER'S WRITTEN QUESTION



Member submitting the question: Cllr Chris Wood

Date received: 4/9/2025 7:58:38 PM

To the Cabinet Member for: mark.lowry@plymouth.gov.uk

Question: 'What is the impact of current financial events on the pension fund balance sheet and council's investments tied to the stock market.'

Answer:

Global Impact

President Trump's policy shift towards worldwide tariffs has caused significant volatility across markets with sharp movements in bond yields as well as turbulence in equity markets. The uncertainty around tariffs, reciprocal tariffs and the resulting inflation have led to concerns around slowing growth or potential global recession.

Council - Impact on Investments

The Council has limited direct exposure to the impact of US instigated financial events. This has been achieved by prioritising its investments by security ahead of liquidity and yield. It therefore does not have direct investment to the stock market.

Exposure to risk with the stock market is limited through holding long-term investments directed into pooled funds such as the Church of England, Charities and Local Authorities (CCLA) Investment Fund. These funds aim to provide income as well as capital growth over the long term (defined as five years) and are diverse, actively managed portfolios.

Short-term investments are predominantly made through money market funds as they provide a stronger security and offer instant diversification among a range of securities.

Council - Impact on Pension Fund

The Council has received the following statement (on 11th April) from Devon County Council who manage the Devon Local Government Pension Scheme (Devon LGPS):

'I am unable to provide a response in relation to Plymouth specifically as its share in the fund but at fund level, as of this morning the fund remains fully funded despite the recent and ongoing volatility. Obviously, this position could change but the funds' investments are well diversified in order to spread and reduce risk.'

This is obviously good news going into the end of the financial year and approaching the next triennial valuation which is due in October/November.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'M. 10' followed by a long horizontal line.

Date: 15 April 2025

Written questions:

- will be replied to within 10 working days
- will be published on the last Friday of each month

MEMBER'S WRITTEN QUESTION



Member submitting the question: Lee Finn

Date received: 3/31/2025 4:02:55 PM

To the Cabinet Member for: mark.lowry@plymouth.gov.uk

Question: 1. Why has the Audit & Governance been guided to close down the discussions on the Miel transaction when the representations to Government have not been completed. 2. Why, when agreed by the A&G via the Vice Chair that members be furnished by officers with the letter minding to grant capitalisation as soon as it was known not actioned. 3. Why, has the A&G committee not been furnished with the full CIPRA Report regarding the MIEL investigation as soon as it was published, as agreed by the A&G committee. 4. Why has no one been held accountable for the MIEL fiasco. 5. How will Plymouth be affected by the SEND deficits when the statutory override ends in March 2026 when this debt must return to the council balance sheet.

Answer:

1. Why has the Audit & Governance been guided to close down the discussions on the Miel transaction when the representations to Government have not been completed.

I am not aware of the Audit & Governance Committee being guided to close down discussions on the Miel transaction. My understanding is that there was a request for you Councillor Finn to discontinue raising the matter at each Committee during the presentation of Grant Thornton's (GT) reports when unrelated matters were under discussion. I note that at its meeting of 11th March, the Audit & Governance Committee agreed to remove the standing agenda item on the Capitalisation Direction, as the matter had been substantively closed (see published minute 89 of the Committee, which refers to this). However, I anticipate that the Audit & Governance Committee will wish to review the CIPFA report findings and the Council's response at a future meeting and officers stand ready to discuss this with the chair ahead of the Committee's next meeting in July (noting that the composition of the Committee may change following the forthcoming Council AGM). If you are not satisfied with the response above, I would ask that you clarify what you mean by 'close down discussions' in relation to the Miel transaction.

2. Why, when agreed by the A&G via the Vice Chair that members be furnished by officers with the letter minding to grant capitalisation as soon as it was known not actioned.

I would ask that you clarify this point. Having reviewed recent minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee I cannot find a reference to any agreement with the Committee to share correspondence. There has been an ongoing, lengthy discussion with MHCLG on the capitalisation direction, and I am not clear which letter you refer to.

3. Why, has the A&G committee not been furnished with the full CIPRA Report regarding the MIEL investigation as soon as it was published, as agreed by the A&G committee. *The CIPFA external assurance review for Plymouth City Council was published on 20th March, and the report was shared with Committee members on 2nd April.*

4. Why has no one been held accountable for the MIEL fiasco.

There have been no findings of wrongdoing in relation to the Pension Transaction, but there were governance issues which have been addressed, as set out in the CIPFA report. As a result of the Pension Transaction, Grant Thornton undertook a governance review in 2021 which resulted in 11 recommendations for improvement in governance arrangements. This was presented to the Audit & Governance Committee in July 2021. Subsequently PCC provided its response to the GT recommendations to the Committee on 29 November 2021. These recommendations have all been implemented.

5. How will Plymouth be affected by the SEND deficits when the statutory override ends in March 2026 when this debt must return to the council balance sheet

The majority of councils with Education responsibilities have accumulated significant deficits relating to overspending on the High Needs block within the Dedicated Schools Grant budget; currently, these deficits are treated as 'off balance sheet' as result of a national statutory override put in place under the previous government. Plymouth City Council's deficit position is not as significant as many other councils, although it is growing and a deficit recovery plan has been put in place by Plymouth's Schools Forum. Whilst the current statutory override is due to end on March 31st 2026, the significance of this national issue and the number of Councils affected means that it is very likely that a solution will be developed at the national level. This being the case, we anticipate that Plymouth's deficit position will be mitigated before the statutory override ends – your statement that 'this debt must return to the council's balance sheet' is a little premature in light of the ongoing national debate. Nonetheless, the High Needs block deficit presents a significant financial risk to the Council. Officers are working to implement the SEND sufficiency plan to address increasing levels of demand for special school places and the position is being kept under close review through the Council's budget monitoring process.

Signed:



Date: 15 April 2025

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MEMBER'S WRITTEN QUESTION



Member submitting the question: Lee Finn

Date received: 3/31/2025 4:07:09 PM

To the Cabinet Member for: mark.coker@plymouth.gov.uk

Question: 1. What is the unit price of one camera- To include all associated cost in the Millbridge traffic scheme. 2. What is the total cost of all cameras in phase one of the Millbridge traffic scheme to include all associated costs?

Answer:

To provide the cost of 1 camera would be commercially sensitive and we don't have that information. They all cost different amounts in any case depending on where they are erected.

The total cost of the camera Scheme is approx. £123k and we are paying the Police to arrange for the installation.

Signed:

Date: 8 April 2025

Written questions:

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- will be published on the last Friday of each month

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MEMBER'S WRITTEN QUESTION



Member submitting the question: Cllr Chris Wood

Date received: 4/9/2025 7:59:36 PM

To the Cabinet Member for: mark.coker@plymouth.gov.uk

Question: To Mark Coker- Millbridge Traffic Scheme. 1. 'Why has the council not painted all the camera poles yellow inline with standardised methodology applied to other cameras in the city' 2. 'Why has the council chosen to locate, or hide, a camera directly behind the Railway Bridge in Stuart Road out of sight of travelling public?' 3. 'What is the total cost of individual cameras, including maintenance, signage and operational costs over a 12-month period?' 4. 'What is the expected revenue for the scheme over a 12- month period?'

Answer:

1. Cameras on individual columns are painted yellow. Where the camera is affixed to a Lamp Column, the Lamp Column may be painted yellow at its base but it is more usual to apply yellow banding to the columns. This has been the approach with the latest cameras installed in the Stoke area and was also the system used for the Old Laira Rd scheme installed in 2022.
2. The Camera in question is clearly visible on both approaches and it was observed on site, on 10/04/25, that even though the Camera is not yet in operation and the Speed Limit and Camera Warning Signing not yet in place, drivers were noticeably reducing their speed on approaching the Camera from both directions indicating that it is visible. Pictures Below illustrate.
3. The system was purchased from the Police at a cost of Approx. £123,000. Individual pricing of cameras is commercially sensitive and not available. The Estimated Costs of signing and Lining the Speed Limit are as follows.

Temporary Advanced Warning Signs	£ 835
20mph Road Signage	£ 6,038
20mph Road Markings	£ 17,646
Total	£ 24,519

There are no expected maintenance costs for the signing in the first year. Signing of this type usually lasts in the region of 20 years. Road markings are expensive to install for individual

schemes because of the costs of Traffic Control. The type of material to be used will last at least 5 years and will be replaced under routine maintenance as and when required.

Operational Costs and maintenance of the Cameras will be covered by Devon and Cornwall Police

4. No revenue from the Cameras will accrue to Plymouth City Council. Any Revenue will be allocated to the Police who will operate the system or to the Exchequer depending on the level of offence detected. There is no expected level of Revenue at this point but it is expected to be low as Average Speed Camera Systems are extremely successful in controlling speed and in reducing injury collisions.

Signed:



Date: 24 April 2025

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