

Innovative approach to PFI public meetings June 2011.

Rather than using a meeting hall, Isle of Wight Council has used Facebook to hold a live public meeting, giving residents the opportunity to ask questions on a major subject from the comfort of their own homes.

On Wednesday 15 June, the council held a two hour debate live on the popular social networking site to answer questions about its Highways Public Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme. The PFI is a 25 year multi-million pound project that aims to bring all Island roads up to national standards. The questions were answered by the PFI project director, the head of the department overseeing the scheme and the respective Cabinet councillor.

The event attracted a total of 121 comments from all the posters and the council responding to the questions.

David Pugh, IW Council Leader, feels the event was a success and is something unique. He said "We believe we are one of the first local authorities in the UK to host a public meeting, where you can ask questions to council officers and councillors, solely on Facebook. We effectively held the meeting in people's homes.

"While this won't be an end to traditional council meetings that the public can attend, it did prove popular and is something we'll certainly look at doing again on a variety of subjects."