

Questions:-

The Leader of the Council

Question running order:

1st: Conservative

2nd: Labour

3rd: Liberal Democrat

Question 1 – Councillor Caserta

Would the lead member for Children's Services join me in congratulating the coalition government for providing additional funds to enable us to bid for funding to provide new premises for Elton High School and Radcliffe Hall Primary?

A. Obviously, I am delighted that we have the opportunity to bid to replace our two schools in the very worst condition. I hope our bid is successful as we really deserve this opportunity. In terms of Councillor Caserta's congratulations, I am afraid that I cannot join in. Let me explain why. The last Government deserves our congratulations because they had a very proud record of investment in our schools. An investment which spans a decade. Many of our schools benefited from much needed improvement. What, however, was one of the first acts of this Coalition Government? Well I'll tell you. They cut funding for school capital development by three quarters, after pledging to invest in our schools and to invest in our pupils. Now when I go around and visit our schools, I can see this is a constant source of concern and worry and many of our schools simply do not know how they will cope.

Secondary schools which used to get an average annual capital budget of £130,000 now have to get by on £30,000.

Primary schools have suffered too with their average budgets being slashed from £30,000 to less than £10,000. So whilst I am more than happy to support this particular bid, and will work hard to help it succeed, it should not blind us to the overall position and the very serious damage being done to our schools by the scathing cuts of this Coalition Government to capital spending. In the past year alone these budgets in Bury have been cut from £19 million, which nationally is poor, to £5.8 million, a massive 60 percent. Cause for celebration? I think not.

I would ask Councillor Caserta, instead of celebrating, to do what we have all done on this side of the chamber and condemn these draconian cuts to our schools.

Question 2 - Councillor Rothwell

The Equalities Act 2010 has major implications for council's and public bodies. Can we be given an assurance that the equality implications and their potential impact will be taken into account when decisions are being taken about reviews of services and changes in policy?

A. I would like to thank Councillor Rothwell for his question and in particular for highlighting how vital it is to carry out equality impact assessments when making decisions about the future provision of council services.

Failure to carry out an Equality and Cohesion Impact Assessment; (ECIA) or even the failure to give proper consideration to equality issues when taking decisions will leave this council open to challenge.

Recently Birmingham City Council hit the headlines when users of advice centres took judicial review proceedings against the council over its decision to cut £1.4 million in funding from 13 voluntary organisations. Although the council argued that it had had to act quickly because of the urgent need to make budget cuts, the judge ruled that the council's equality impact assessment was inadequate and that to remedy this it must undertake further consultation and reconsider the matter. The judge went on to say *"that even in ... straitened times the need for clear, well-informed decision making when assessing the impacts on less advantaged members of society is as great, if not greater"* To assess the impact of proposed changes to policy, procedure or working practice it is important to have as much knowledge as possible about how it will affect people who use our services.

**As councillors we have a responsibility to ensure that an effective ECIA has been carried out:-
Firstly we must ensure that a proper assessment of how the proposals are likely to affect people from relevant groups has been carried out.**

Furthermore we must be satisfied that we have consulted with those people who are likely to be affected by the proposals and taken their views into account.

As part of the ECIA we need to determine whether the proposal will have a positive, negative or neutral impact on one or more equality groups, or will improve equality relationships between groups.

I am pleased to say that this labour administration is committed to open and transparent decision making. This administration reinstated the Executive and extended the right of members of the

public to ask questions; we did this because we are receptive to question and challenge.

We will continue to do everything possible to ensure that full account is taken of the views of our residents, employees and service users; this has been the hallmark of the Choices Consultation exercise. We will also ensure that full account is taken of the equality impact of our decisions.

Question 3 – Councillor Pickstone

The Government is providing £250 million to provide grants to Councils to develop innovative schemes to increase their recycling rates – something Bury needs to improve on. Could the Leader confirm that the Authority will be bidding to this fund when details become available?

A. The details of the £250 million fund was announced on the eve of the Conservative Party conference by Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, ostensibly as money to help councils reintroduce weekly residual waste collections. However, full details of the fund are yet to be formally revealed. Government has said that 'the whole idea is to develop a programme to devise ways where the pressure for waste collections does not conflict with high levels of recycling. It will be by a competitive grant and local authorities are not obliged to be involved. If local authorities are happy with where they are, they don't have to be involved.'

Until further details are forthcoming therefore, the Council cannot state one way or the other whether it will be bidding for this fund. The Council is confident that with the service changes introduced this month that its recycling rate will improve significantly, to somewhere in the region of 40%.

Question 4 - Councillor Harris

In the last municipal year, the Labour leader promised that each Labour member would donate the equivalent of three days worth of their allowances to charity, thereby showing solidarity with other staff members. Could the leader please inform this Council how much money was involved and to which charity it was donated?

A. This was intended to be a private matter between the Labour Group and its chosen charity but in the spirit of openness and transparency that was so missing in the last municipal year I am prepared to tell Cllr Harris that Labour members intend to keep their promise and during this year a total of £1,690 will be donated to charity. This is in addition to the 10% reduction in Special Responsibility Allowances that I asked the last meeting of Council to approve.

In the same spirit of openness will Councillor Harris please confirm the amount donated by members of her party, or do they not believe in showing solidarity to the staff for the effects of a policy that they introduced?

Question 5 – Councillor Boden

What is the anticipated income (or equivalent reduction in expenditure) which the Council expects to receive from the disposal of segregated recyclable material if the re-organised refuse collection system achieves its aims and objectives.

A. The new collection rounds introduced from October 2011 are expected to result in an increase of the recycling rate in Bury to 40%.

This means that residual (grey bin) waste will need to be reduced from 2010/11 levels by around 5,100 tonnes in 2011/12 (10,700 tonnes in a full year), with the waste diverted to the paper (green), comingled (blue) and garden/food (brown) waste bins. The savings on disposal and landfill costs, based on the latest price information from GMWDA, will be £785,000 in 2011/12 plus a further £1.2m in 2012/13.

This includes the extra income of £25/tonne which we receive for paper (green) and comingled (blue) waste through the new contract.

These savings have been included in budget forecasts for these years as part of the approved savings and levy amounts.

Further savings could be achieved if recycling levels exceed the 40% level.

Question 6 - Councillor Vic D'Albert

Could the Leader confirm what plans are in place for winter pressures this year? In particular given the fortnightly/four weekly nature of waste collections what extra measures are being put in place to ensure that bin collections are not missed. How many extra grit bins will be provided?

A. All the necessary plans are in place for winter pressures this year.

The service will commence with a stock of 2500 tonnes of 'Safecote' salt operating out of dry storage facilities at Bolton. This provides a 25% increase in the opening stock from the winter before last. Last winter a total of 1800 tonnes of salt was spread onto the road network.

There is an additional 1000 tonnes at Bradley Fold. This is used to provide the salt for the grit bins within the borough, hand gritting in town centres and car parks and for pre gritting waste collection

routes in extreme conditions. Last winter 875 tonnes of the Bradley Fold supply of salt was used. Operational staff from highways, street cleaning and grounds maintenance were quickly deployed to hand grit pedestrian areas and assist in keeping Bury's household waste collections running.

The Council is part of the automatic stock replenishment scheme with Salt Union, which means that as salt stocks are depleted they are automatically replenished.

Approximately 300 salt bins are provided across the borough at known trouble spots such as sharp bends or steep inclines and where historically snow and ice have caused serious problems. Following a review of locations, the number of bins was increased by 25 last year and is now at the maximum. No more bins are available for distribution and the service does not have the capacity to fill any more than those currently provided or to provide salt piles at other locations.

Question 7 – Councillor Hankey

I refer to a previous written reply concerning the proposed future consultation on the future of the Borough's Civic Halls and note that this is to be carried out by PWC consultants. How does the leader reconcile the continued use of external consultants with his avowed "no outsourcing" policy and what other projects, current or planned, will involve such external assistance?

A. PWC undertook a specialised piece of work in March 2009 to optimise the Council's VAT position.

This resulted in a significant VAT refund for the Council.

Part of the contractual position around this work was that a certain amount would be reinvested with PWC to carry out further reviews.

The review of Civic Halls has been identified as a suitable piece of work to be funded from these "credits";

- PWC have access to business experts in the entertainment / hospitality sector**
- They also have a well developed Business Turnaround practice**

We are therefore confident that they are the right people to do this work, and more importantly, there will be no additional cash cost to the Council.

This is not outsourcing - rather we are utilising credits that were created by an arrangement set up prior to this administration.

The alternative is that we surrender the credits and let them go to waste - I don't think so...

Question 8 - Councillor Boden

How many jobs are expected to be generated in the borough as a consequence of segregation of an increased amount of recyclable material compared with that same material being co mingled and disposed of to landfill.

A. The GMWDA 25 year PFI contract secured 620 jobs within the existing workforce (in what was Greater Manchester Waste Limited) and the creation of 100 new workforce jobs.

The Contract, plus its associated works, expected to provide 5,000 jobs during the early years of the construction programme across the GM sub-region.

Question 9 – Councillor O’Hanlon

Can the Leader confirm how long the backlog in tree surgery work is within the Borough?
How much has been spent on tree surgery in each of the last 3 years?

A. We are currently experiencing a 3/4 month backlog on trees predominantly in Housing and Highways but the tree team can respond to a tree emergency within 1 hour anywhere within the borough, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

2008/2009 expenditure - £240,211.2

2009/2010 expenditure - £227,556.86

2010/2011 expenditure - £ 249,148.01

Question 10 - Councillor Walker

While very much welcoming the Government's 2013 introduction of health and Well Being Boards which restore some of the local authority's responsibility for the partnership in the provision of public health and social care for local people, can the Leader say how he will ensure that elected councilors (who represent the public) will be able to enjoy democratic participation in the new Bury Health and Well Being Board?

A. The Health and Well Being Boards are to be established as local authority committees and as such the Council will take the lead on improving the strategic coordination of commissioning across the NHS, social care and related children’s and public health services. As such, agendas and minutes will be available to elected members and the public through the Council’s existing channels, and the meetings will take place in an open and democratic way. The Health and Well-Being Board is in shadow format. The Council was successful in achieving a leadership bid to shape and design the Board’s value base and action plan. The core membership is established, which includes the Executive Member for Health, Housing and Adult Social Care. The wider membership is being considered through the shadow period, which is currently at a development phase, to ensure a holistic representation on the board.

Question 11 – Councillor Mary D’Albert

Could the Leader outline what plans are being considered to reduce the amount of flower beds in the Authorities parks and gardens? What use of volunteers is being made to keep this reduction to a minimum

A. As with other Council Services, the bedding and grounds maintenance budget has been reduced. This includes reducing the number of hanging baskets and floral beds across the authority together with increasing sponsorship and sustainable planting where possible to keep reductions to a minimum.

Gardening clubs are already active in various parks and gardens with volunteers helping to sustain planted areas. For example the park rangers are currently promoting a gardening club for St Marys Park in Prestwich, to help maintain the 21 beds that are located in the Flower Park. The Council would warmly welcome involvement from interested residents or local community groups.

Question 12 – Councillor Vic D’Albert

Could the Leader outline how the £200,000 earmarked in the 2011-12 budget (by the Liberal Democrat Group amendment to the budget) to provide for a more flexible approach to refuse collection, including areas of compact housing and meeting the needs of the borough’s different religious communities has been spent?

A. My recollection of the amendment is the amount of £100k.

The Council recognises that a one size fits all approach to the new refuse and recycling collection service is not appropriate and it has therefore made a number of provisions for bespoke solutions.

Examples include the following:

- 1. large families of 6 or more being able to apply for additional grey bin capacity, if they can demonstrate that they are maximising recycling.**
- 2. residents being able to choose which size bin i.e. 140 or 240 litres they prefer across the four colours to best meet their requirements.**
- 3. allowing residents to share bins.**
- 4. providing larger communal recycling bins where appropriate**
- 5. providing a one off sack refuse collection to the Orthodox Jewish community on Monday 17 October in recognition of back to back festivals which generated an excess of waste.**
- 6. providing comprehensive recycling collections to all residents who live in flats and apartments.**

- 7. during the first cycle of fortnightly refuse collections an effective amnesty in respect of excess waste left next to the grey bins was operated.**
- 8. in partnership with the GMWDA, Salford and Manchester City Councils a project to more effectively engage the Orthodox Jewish community in respect of recycling, utilising workshops and focus groups, will be delivered this financial year.**
- 9. In partnership with the WDA again a similar project will be delivered to the Asian community in Pimhole.**

Question 13 – Councillor Pickstone

Could the Leader outline what provision will be made by the Authority to help the community celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. How will the Council enable communities to organise street parties or similar events if they so wish?

A. The Council is working closely with the Greater Manchester Deputy Lord Lieutenant's office to help facilitate events and activities to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Members of the community are encouraged to organize street parties or other events and the Council will seek to facilitate these wherever possible. Community groups or residents organizations considering such events are asked to make contact with the Council as soon as possible for support.

I can also inform you that the Bishop of Manchester and the Lord Lieutenant of Greater Manchester have agreed to hold a special church service in the Boroughs that form the Manchester Diocese. The service in Bury will be at the Parish Church on Sunday 13 May 2012.

Question 14 – Councillor O'Hanlon

Could the Leader outline how many pot holes have been filled using the additional Government money provided to repair potholes after last winter?

A. Works have been carried out to 68 streets using the additional Department for Transport's maintenance funds following the severe winter of 2010/11. Range of works include for resurfacing, traditional patching, joints repairs, velocity patching, preparation for micro asphalt and surface dressing.

A statement listing all the streets has been published on the Council's website as per the directions of securing the additional monies.

Question 15 - Councillor Mary D'Albert

Could the Leader outline, by both area of spend and by Township, how much Section 106 monies are available to the Authority? What plans are there to spend these monies?

A. As Councillor D'Albert is aware, this issue was reported in some depth at the Planning Committee meeting of 18 October 2011. The report is available to access through the Council's e-Meetings Manager System.

Not all section 106 agreements involve cash payments to the Council. They do however form part of the Planning system whereby the developer is legally contracted to meet an obligation without which the development proposed would be unacceptable. Planning regulations ensure that agreements must conform to strict controls and essentially they must relate to the actual development and be reasonable in relation to the nature and type of development.

In cases where monies are paid this must relate to the actual development and are usually paid after the development has commenced. Such funds are not "shared" across the townships but rather relate primarily to those areas where development has taken place.

There are a range of existing section 106 agreements in place, some of which may or may not materialise. The total sums included in these agreements amounts to £1,263,784, but such funds will only be paid if and when the development projects approved are implemented.

However for the period of the 1st October 2010 to the 30th September 2011, the Council received £574,075.

There is currently a further £383,766 which has fallen due for payment and is currently being pursued by officers. This is part of the Council's active monitoring system to secure compliance with the agreements which have been activated.

Whilst some contributions are very specific a large proportion of the contributions are for recreation purposes. This expenditure is firstly directed by the actual terms of the agreements but is further managed by officers in consultation with ward Members about the detail of the actual spend. Potential schemes are identified from a number of sources such as green space strategy, park plans, township forums and local demand. The protocol is to initially identify schemes within 1 mile of the development providing the Section 106 funding, however the distance can increase dependent on suitable schemes and local priorities. Included within the sums above is a significant element relating to compensatory payments associated with the loss of employment land. We have to date currently received £387,000, with 2 further payments due in the near future providing a total budget of £620,000. These monies are to be used as an Employment Land Development Fund and a programme is currently being drawn up to support a range of initiatives.

In addition to the sums referred to above we have, over the past 3 years, also secured payments amounting to £502,091 for affordable housing. This is as yet unspent but will be spent in accordance with the Council's Affordable Housing Strategy, including refurbishment of empty properties and the development of new affordable housing.

Whilst subject to legal limitations the contributions are capable of delivering positive results and the Council will continue to negotiate with developers to maximise the benefits of development for the citizens of Bury.