

**Questions:-**

**The Leader of the Council**

**Question running order:**

**1<sup>st</sup>: Labour**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Liberal-Dem**

**3<sup>rd</sup>: Conservative**

**4<sup>th</sup> : Independent**

**Question 1 – Councillor Tariq**

Can the Leader please update the Council on the proposed reform to the Council Tax Benefit System?

**A. As part of its localism agenda the Coalition Government is localising Council Tax benefit and asking Council's to design their own schemes. However, typically of the Government, this approach comes with a number of stings in the tail.**

**Firstly despite the fact that this is supposed to be localism several key features of the scheme will be dictated by the Government.**

**Secondly, and more worryingly, the Government is using localism as an excuse to cut 10% out of the benefit budget with the expectation that Council's will do their dirty work for them by either meeting the gap from further cuts in services or by passing the cut on to claimants. In Bury's case the cut will work out at around £1.5m a year starting from next April. Councils will also have to absorb the cost of increased claim numbers that will no doubt come as a result of the terrible state of the British economy.**

**Thirdly we are still waiting for legislation setting out the detail of the reforms, despite the fact that the Government are expecting us to introduce the new scheme by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 and to begin formal consultations over the summer.**

**Finally, and probably most worrying of all is the fact that the people that will be affected potentially by any cuts forced on us by the Government will be the same people who are already likely to be affected by other benefit cuts being made in the name of welfare reform.**

**As part of the Labour Group's commitment to involve local people in decisions that affect their lives we have already held a conference on welfare reform to which we invited a wide range of our partners and we are now looking at the key features of a local scheme and also ways in which we can deal with the £1.5m cut imposed on us by the Government.**

**Question 2 - Councillor Pickstone**

Could the Leader report to members on the roll out of garden and food waste collection to the remaining properties in the Borough in April/May? In particular how many requests have been received from properties with 'street caddies' for a larger brown bin, how many of these requests will be able to be met? What proportion of street caddies have been put out for collection in the collections to date?

**A. Around 25000 more householders have recently received brown bins. Of these, 5000 households with gardens were provided with the larger 140 litre or 240 litre brown bin. Approximately 20,000 households without a garden were provided with a sealable 23 litre brown bin for kerbside recycling of food waste only. All 25,000 properties received a small black kitchen caddy and free compostable liners to help make food waste recycling cleaner and easier. The Council has received a small number of requests (150 out of 20000 23 litre street caddies) for a change to a larger size bin. It has not been possible to change all of these due to operational collection points but we have managed to change 30. It is still early days with approximately 6000 small street caddies put out for collection. Promotion is ongoing to maximise participation.**

**Question 3 - Councillor Gartside**

Would the Leader of the Council join with me in recognising the hard work and outstanding achievements of our staff and in particular congratulate those who won Employee Achievement Awards recently?

**A. The Employee Achievement Awards enable the council to show its appreciation to individuals and groups of employees who have provided outstanding public services to residents, local businesses and visitors to Bury.**

**The awards are an integral part of this labour administration's commitment to the workforce and since they were first introduced by the then Leader of the Council, John Byrne in 2003, 30 individuals and 30 Teams from each of the Councils departments have been nominated by their colleagues, Council Members or service users for their outstanding achievements and contributions to service improvements.**

**Since the introduction of the Employee achievement awards in 2003, 10 outstanding employees have been selected for the David Burton Award. Awards have also been made in the following categories:**

- The Volunteer of the Year award;**
- The Learner of the Year award;**
- The Partnership award presented to a team who have worked exceptionally well with partners.**

**The Employee Achievement Awards demonstrates the importance this administration places on high standards and recognizes the value of employee development and self improvement within the organisation as part of our commitment to improving service.**

#### **Question 4 - Councillor Bevan**

The Council Leader will be aware of the lack of a credit union in the north of the Borough to assist residents to help themselves get out of debt and further poverty. Is the Council Leader able to facilitate a meeting to explore a joint venture with the Mid Rossendale Credit Union who are willing to extend their "common bond area" to include the areas covered by the Ramsbottom, Tottington and North Manor Township?

**A. The Council is well aware of the important role that can be played by credit unions in helping to alleviate poverty, especially in the current economic climate. We are already working with Six Town Housing to investigate the possibility of extending the work of a neighbouring credit union into Bury.**

#### **Question 5 – Councillor Matt Bailey**

Can the Leader advise what the Revenue Outturn is for 2011/12?

**A. The Executive will be receiving a full report on this matter at it's meeting on 11 July which will show that the Council under spent it's revenue budget for 2011/12 by £1,299,000**

**The majority of the under spending arose from lower than anticipated borrowing costs and from other under spendings which arose as a result of one-off savings from sound budget management.**

**However the bottom line hides some areas of concern. Children's Services ended the year with a very small overspending which masks the fact that there remained very considerable pressures on the demand-led social care agency budgets and Adult Care Services faced considerable demand levels relating to all client groups. This means we need to be extremely vigilant during the current year if we are to maintain our spending within budget.**

#### **Question 6 - Councillor O'Hanlon**

Bury MBC vehicles have recently been seen again clearing away fly-tipped waste at the site of the former Prestwich Tip. What has been the total cost incurred to date, including any costs re-charged to the Waste Disposal Authority?

**A. The Service provided by Bury Council is being completed on full cost recovery to Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority. So far we have recharged Viridor for 15 occasions at a total cost of £3,757.86. This arrangement will continue until GMWDA have erected a barrier.**

#### **Question 7 – Councillor Gunther**

Can the Leader/Cabinet member responsible for parking charges in the Borough please give a detailed list of where parking charges may be increased or introduced this year?

**A. There is certainly no intention to introduce parking charges to any more areas of the Borough.**

**In terms of parking fees, the annual review of fees and charges will take place later in this calendar year and due consideration of prices will be taken at that time.**

**It is the norm that any new price would be implemented as of the 1<sup>st</sup> of January.**

### **Question 8 - Councillor Quinn**

What can a new CCTV Control Centre at Bradley Fold bring to the people of Bury?

**A. Bury Council operates a 24/7 Emergency Control Room which supports Council service delivery. This facility acts as the main 'out of hours' contact point for residents and partners including the monitoring of public area CCTV.**

**This 'invest to save' project to modernise the control room will bring about ongoing Council efficiency savings as part of our Plan for Change Programme and develop a one Council approach to CCTV.**

**The investment will ensure service continuity of the CCTV service for the people of Bury together providing modern reliable equipment and an improved working environment for our employees.**

### **Question 9 - Councillor Pickstone**

The 'Plan for Change' assumed extra income from charging for services of £521,000 in 2012-13. Could the Leader inform members if we are on target to reach this target? Could he provide members with a list of new or increased charges for the 2012-13 financial year?

**A. Following the approval of the budget and Plan for Change Directors and Cabinet Members have been giving considerable thought to ways in which they can earn the additional income required by the Plan. In fact the majority of the additional income will not come from increased charges, rather it is intended that it will be generated by new income streams which have been identified, for example:**

- **Increased number of fixed penalty notices served on utility companies**
- **New income from Traffic Orders**
- **New income generated through highways permits (GMRAPS) and coring**
- **New income from the loan of art exhibits**
- **New income from pre-application planning advice - large applications**

**These options are a good example of innovative thinking and I'm sure that Members will agree that it is better to raise income as opposed to cutting front line services. Whilst it is very early in the year, we currently expect that the new income streams will meet their targets.**

**However we had also assumed that additional income would be earned from proposed changes to legislation which would have allowed us to recover the full cost of planning applications. Unfortunately the Government has not yet been able to pass the necessary legislation and guidelines and so there will be a delay meeting the income target in this area. The shortfall will be met from identifying under spends elsewhere to ensure the overall target is met.**

**In respect of existing Fees & Charges, we have assumed a 2% increase - as agreed by the cross-party Medium Term Financial Strategy sub-group, and as approved by Council in February 2012. Services are free to meet this target by increasing income or by making efficiency savings in their budgets.**

**Question 10 - Councillor Hankey**

Can you Leader/Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism look urgently into the situation at Dow Lane Park where there has recently been noticeable influx of horse riders. The area is poorly marked there have been some incidents recently of horses galloping near the children's play areas. Is there anything the Council can do to improve safety here?

**A. Responsible horse riders are welcome at Dow Lane. Signs will be placed at the entrances and near the play area reminding horse riders of their responsibilities to other park users.**

**Question 11 – Councillor Donal O’Hanlon**

What has been the cost to Bury MBC, and how much officer time has been spent around the staging of the Stone Roses concerts in Heaton Park this summer?

**A. A Service Level Agreement was agreed with Manchester City Council to recover the cost of services provided by Bury Council in connection with the Stone Roses concert. This includes Trading Standards, Street Cleansing and Community Safety. Any other time spent by officers has been kept to a minimum as Manchester is endeavouring to run events in Heaton Park as far as possible within their own resources.**

**Question 12 - Councillor Wiseman**

Can the Leader of the Council/Cabinet Member responsible for Regeneration please give an update as to which initiatives have commenced in Radcliffe and Prestwich since the start of the municipal year?

**A. The Council recognises the importance of seeking to promote the regeneration of all our townships, particularly in the current difficult economic climate, and in relation to Radcliffe and Prestwich is active in a number of areas.**

**For example:**

- **Portas Pilot Bids** - We have been working with the local business groups in both Radcliffe and Prestwich to improve the previous bids and these have been submitted (submitted on Saturday 30th June) as part of the 2nd round of bids.
- **Radcliffe Town Centre** - Currently working with Transport for Greater Manchester to finalise proposals that will contribute to the town centre regeneration scheme and will then be looking to seek a development partner.
- **Prestwich Town Centre** - Discussions are ongoing with HMG and Terrace Hill but as has been said before, we are committed to ensuring any scheme meets the Love Prestwich Village Strategy.
- **Community Dig (HLF - Heritage Lottery Fund)** - project now

underway with £350,000 HLF funding to carry out a community archaeological programme focussing on the historic core of Radcliffe including Radcliffe Tower, St Mary's Church and Bealey's Bleachworks.

- **Philips Park Bike Trail** - Work commenced in February 2012 on a mountain bike trail which is now nearing completion with an opening scheduled for this summer.
- **Farmers Markets** - Programme in place for both Prestwich and Radcliffe to support local businesses and increase footfall.
- **St Mary's Churchyard, Prestwich** - Approval received in June from HLF for a £36,000 grant towards a conservation and heritage project as part of the St Mary's Park Conservation Area Management Plan.
- Radcliffe Works is well established in the heart of the Town Centre. What has changed since the beginning of the municipal year is that the newly formed National Careers Service has selected Radcliffe works as a pathfinder location. We are also working hard to establish the 'Works' model in Prestwich.
- **The Backing Young Bury Campaign** is for all our unemployed young people across the borough. This is a partnership approach to create more accessible apprenticeships internally removing the barriers that stop some of our community applying. The campaign is also aimed at local businesses to encourage them to create more and a wider range of opportunities for our young people.
- **Radcliffe and Prestwich Township Plans** – Township Forums have brought partners together to agree local priorities for their respective Township Area Plans. The aim is to work together to achieve a number of key outcomes which help promote better social, health, economic and environmental wellbeing for each Township. For example, included in Radcliffe's township Plan is an action for Groundwork to organize 4 annual clean ups of the Radcliffe Area to enhance its appearance
- **Community Grants** – Funding re-affirmed for the 2012/13 year to support local community and voluntary groups in Radcliffe and Prestwich. For example, since April 2012, the Community Fund has supported 6 local projects/activities in Radcliffe and 8 local projects/activities in Prestwich. Examples of community projects we have supported include environmental improvements, local community events and sport/music activities.
- **Radcliffe Community First** – the Council has supported the Community First Panel in allocating the first round of funding for local community groups in Radcliffe West. Over £5,738 of funding has been approved at the first Panel meeting

**Question 13 – Councillor Walker**

How many homes in Bury which are operated as businesses, e.g children's homes in residential properties, are not currently paying council tax or business rates but are still receiving services ( i.e, education, social services, refuse collection, highways services and police) ?

**A. The Council is aware of 9 properties out of a total of 80,000 which are effectively used to house children who are being supported by childcare providers. As the sole or main occupiers of the properties are under the age of 18 then the Council has no choice under existing legislation but to award full exemption from Council Tax. The Council regularly inspects any such properties to ensure that exemptions are still relevant. Most properties should be liable for either council tax or business rates: eg a childminder would be operating from their property but would be liable for council tax rather than business rates. Some properties may be liable for both: eg a pub. However just because a property is liable for one or the other doesn't mean that they actually have to pay anything: eg due to receiving small business rate relief, discretionary relief or others and if the property was liable for council tax it could mean no payments due to an award of benefit or other council tax exemption (such as in the children's homes already referred to).**

**Question 14 - Councillor Gartside**

Can the Leader of the Council/Cabinet Member responsible planning in Bury consider looking into developing a "Wind Turbine" Policy for Bury?

**A. The Coalition Government have issued the National Planning Policy Framework which replaces the majority of existing Planning policy and advice. This document represents National policy and the basis for all planning decision making.**

**The policy context for considering wind turbines is included within this framework. Essentially this requires Local Authorities to support initiatives for renewable and low carbon energy development. It further stipulates that applications should be approved if the impacts are considered acceptable.**

**A local policy could not therefore depart from the above approach.**

**We have established a vigorous approach to ensuring that applicants provide all the necessary information to assess the impacts – noise, flicker, visual amenity and it is on this evidence base that decisions will need to be made.**

**As a Council we have been generally supportive of renewable energy initiatives and would want to continue this approach.**

**Therefore whilst the Council would be prepared to consider any suggested approaches from interested parties on what may for the basis of a local policy, the weight such a policy, in the light of national policy, must be questionable.**

**Question 15 - Councillor Wright**

Can the Leader of the Council/Cabinet Member responsible for the food and corporate entertainment budget please give a detailed breakdown of the amount spent in the financial year 2011/12 and how much is budgeted for in 12/13 ?

**A. Within the Civic Budget there is an amount of £25,000 included for meeting expenditure associated with the Mayoralty. This covers a whole range of items of which hospitality would be one. In 2011/12, total expenditure was £14,400 so a significant saving was achieved. Expenditure on meals within this budget would range from supply of teas and coffees to visitors to provision of food following Mayor Making.**

**Within the Members' Budget there is an amount of £18,900 set aside for "Committee Meals Contract."**

**There has been a determined effort by Members to reduce this and as a result actual expenditure in 2011/12 was £6,300, a significant saving. To support this trend, meals are provided in a limited number of circumstances which include:**

- **Planning Control Committee where a site visit takes place and Members could not be expected to make suitable provision.**
- **Youth Cabinet**
- **Corporate Parenting Panel when representatives of the Children in Care Council are also in attendance.**

**In conclusion I would point out that the budget is based upon historic spend levels; there has been no uplift for inflation for a number of years; and the under spending reflects the efforts of Members to lead by example and make efficiency savings in this area.**