

COUNCIL MEETING
12 DECEMBER 2012
LEADER'S STATEMENT

Madam Mayor, Fellow Councillors and members of the public, this is a very historic occasion for Bury, where for the first time the public can listen and watch proceedings from the comfort of their own homes, even dare I say it from around the world thanks to the wonders of technology and the World Wide Web. I can't promise this evening will match the excitement of the X Factor or be as intense as Eastenders but you never know!

It's also thanks to a new local Company called Digital Tree who are managing the live stream of the Council meeting. I hope all Members in the Chamber enjoy the experience.

Could I start tonight by welcoming our two new Councillors Susan Nutall and James Daly. Congratulations to you both on your recent election to the Council.

I also want to add my congratulations to Councillor Sharon Briggs our Mayor elect for 2013-14. I know Sharon is looking forward to her year as Mayor and I am sure we would all wish her success in this endeavour.

Before I report on the business of Cabinet, I would like to single out three outstanding events showcasing the very best of Bury.

As the saying goes 'Success breeds Success' and so it proved to be with our second year of the hugely successful Light Night. I would like to express my thanks to everyone connected with the event it was a great team effort.

The event itself attracted over 30,000 people and in many ways it has been said there were simply too many people to cope with, such is the popularity of this event.

We will, of course, look at all these issues including whether it should be held on a Friday or Saturday, but be assured it will be back next year.

Let me take Members back to 2004. An unremarkable year you may say, but for Bury it marked the start of a remarkable relationship with Britain in Bloom so much so that Bury have now won this competition for nine, yes nine consecutive years and this year included wider success in Radcliffe and a clutch of environmental awards. Again many thanks to our gardeners and managers for their fantastic efforts to keep our Borough looking at its best and developing innovative ways of presenting a feast of colourful flora and fauna for our residents and visitors which, I know, is very much appreciated.

The third event I want to showcase is an Art Exhibition, but it isn't located in Bury and it's not just any old Art Exhibition. The event is taking place over 5,000 miles away in Beijing China. So what is the connection with Bury?

Let me explain, the event is a collection of Masterpieces from across Greater Manchester Galleries loaned to the Chinese. So where does little old Bury fit in?

The idea for touring International Exhibitions started here in Bury; the programme is led and managed by Bury, In fact by our very own Tony Trehy our Principal Arts Officer no less. Oh, it gets better; Tony also came up with the idea to charge for these exhibitions, where previously they were free to countries like China. So Bury and other art galleries have developed new income stream and now Bury leads on this.

Madam Mayor back to the work of the Cabinet which is important and varied. I will now take this opportunity to report to Council on the work of the Cabinet since the last Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 17 October.

I was pleased to see a new 3 year procurement strategy adopted that will ensure the Council continues to secure value for money when purchasing goods and services. On the same agenda we discussed how we could join a bigger campaign against illegal money lending. A practice that callously singles out the vulnerable and the disadvantaged and blights people lives through fear and intimidation. I am proud to say that Bury stands up for the vulnerable and those who can be taken advantage of in their hour of need and Cabinet agreed to join the Birmingham campaign to go after and see off illegal money lending here in Bury.

Wherever we go today we are not far from the doom and gloom of the state of the economy and the constant bombardment from the ConDem Government rushing headlong to cut, slash and burn its way through local government. Bury I know hasn't necessarily been singled out but we know historically we don't fare well when it comes to securing government cash. And so as an Administration, quite properly we strive to live within our means and that process continues unabated.

And so it was pleasing to note from the Month 6 report that financially, Bury is in reasonable shape but as ever we are vigilant about the internal and external pressures which present us with a number ongoing challenges, notably in Looked After Children and Vulnerable Adults.

We heard yet again of the good and important efforts where Directors and staff are working tirelessly in successfully managing services with ever reducing resources on reducing budgets. Despite the growing pressures on Looked After Children and Vulnerable Adults the latest financial report saw the overspend reduce from £1.6m to £1.2m over a quarter and where further reductions are anticipated over the coming months.

The Cabinet were pleased to learn that Corporate Performance Plan progress report highlighted many notable successes and reported very few targets being missed.

The Cabinet also received two reports following important reviews on our Libraries and Civic Venues.

As far as our Libraries are concerned, it is clear from the nearly 4,000 responses to the consultation that users want something different, something that reflects the needs not only of a new generation but also to acknowledge and embrace the innovations of the digital age we live in.

The review has been split into two phases and where the 1st phase focuses on Bury Central Library and a second phase to be launched for consultation next March which will cover the rest of the Borough's Libraries. The wide and increasing access to digital technology is challenging the way we deliver Library services and this review is attempting to reposition libraries so they are not only relevant for 2012 and beyond but retain a high value with all our residents, young and old.

Cabinet also received a report on Civic venues from Price Waterhouse Coopers on the future of our 4 venues in Ramsbottom; Prestwich; Bury and Radcliffe. These venues we know are valued by our residents, but the reality is that they are massively underused and require ongoing significant financial support to keep them running.

The report identified a number of weaknesses and developed an action plan with some new ideas to address these weaknesses. I am hopeful that good progress will be made, particularly around the new management arrangements and where the Management Group is being led by the Director of the Met, which in itself has been very successful in developing new and innovative use of its own venue.

Members may recall that Cabinet previously considered what best to do with derelict Garage Sites which were causing untold problems for local communities. Cabinet agreed to a second phase which will see further sites cleared and developed and some of the sites developed into Allotments and Community Gardens.

A number of other reports covering the new Localism Act were agreed concerning the Right to Challenge which relates to a service provided by the Council from which local communities which may seek to take over and run. The second report concerned the Right to Bid which relates to land and buildings that are deemed fit for community use and where local communities can express an interest in taking these over.

The third and perhaps the most important report linked to Localism was the updating of the Council's Community Cohesion Strategy.

Bury has a rich diversity of communities and by and large Bury continues to be a place where people of all backgrounds can live together safely, happily and have that sense of belonging.

This is thanks in part to the successful development of multi-agency working and the strategy seeks to build on that good work to combat hate crimes, work through schools and provides ongoing support to local Councillors and voluntary group's which promotes better integration.

Madam Mayor, it's Christmas and what does that mean, yes all the usual festive activities, but it's also a time when there are lots of paper; packaging and Christmas trees not to mention empty bottles and cans to dispose of.

The message to all our residents is a simple one **'recycle it, don't bin it'**. We should all do what we can and avoid any of this material going into our Grey bins and on to landfill.

Finally, Madam Mayor, before I sign off, this is my last statement to Council for 2012 and I would like to wish all Members and Our hard working staff a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

End