

Council meeting – 3 April 2013

Questions:-

The Leader of the Council

Question running order:

1st: Conservative

2nd: Labour

3rd: Liberal Democrat

1. Councillor Gunther

The "Council Tax Demand Notice 2013/14" states an increase in Council Tax of 3.7%. However for some people in the Borough notably pensioners the increase is significantly higher (6.8% in some cases). Does the Leader/relevant Cabinet Member agree with me that this "Open and transparent Council" should have stipulated real increase on the demand notice for the people affected?

A. The information that can and should be shown on Council Tax bills is tightly controlled by Government regulations and these mean that we are only allowed to quote the percentage change in the Council Tax requirement, which is the level of the Council Tax before applying any local discounts. I am happy to confirm that Bury Council's bills comply fully with these regulations.

2. Councillor Black

Can the Cabinet Member for Health please provide an update on the current status of Greater Manchester's campaign for Plain Packaging for Cigarettes?

A. The North West had the best response to consultation on plain packaging. There was overwhelming support in the North West and we are now awaiting the Government's response. A full report is available on request from Dr Peter Elton, Director of Public Health - Bury, to Councillors, which gives a particular Bury perspective. A copy will be uploaded following this meeting.

3. Councillor Pickstone

Could the Leader update members on changes to youth unemployment in Bury in the last year? How does this compare with the Greater Manchester average, the North West average, and the UK average?

A. Youth unemployment in Bury as of January 2013 stands at 1,360 Job Seekers Allowance claimants (JSA 16 – 24 year olds). This is an 11.1% decrease from the January 2012 figures. However it is a 2.3% rise from December 2012.

The percentage of total JSA claimants in Bury of 16 – 24 year olds accounts for 28.2% of all JSA claimants.

Whilst compared to GM in number terms we have the lowest number, however the % of all claimants in this age group is one of the highest and has increased by 41.6% since the start of the recession. (fourth highest after Tameside, Wigan and Rochdale)

GM

Youth unemployment (JSA claimants aged 16–24) in GM increased on a monthly basis between December and January, rising by 800 (3.6%) to around 23,000.

The rise in total JSA claimants was anticipated as temporary employment opportunities came to an end, however the fact that JSA claimants aged 16-24 increased on a monthly basis highlights that youth unemployment remains a key issue to be addressed in GM.

On an annual basis, however, the number of youth JSA claimants is down by almost 4,000 across GM, nearly 15% lower than this time last year, in line with regional and national trends. As a percentage of total JSA claimants, Greater Manchester's youth unemployment sits between the regional (28.1%) and national (26.8%) levels at 27.1%. Bury higher as a % at 28.25)

Bury -	28.2
GM -	27.1
NW -	28.1
GB -	26.8

% of young people 16 – 24 as a total of all JSA claimants

What are we doing?

Continuing to work in partnership with other agencies including:

Work Programme Providers
GM Commitment to Youth Employment (CA initiative)
Jobcentre Plus
Connexions
O2

Recently, through our Backing Young Bury initiative, 9 young people completed 6 weeks work experience which has led to temporary employment.

Work is targeted at those furthest away from securing employment in line with the Troubled Families work.

Bury Council will continue to work with our GM partners to maximise out share of City Deal money and further work on Traineeships.

4. Councillor Hankey

Bury Council has continually boasted of it's policy of consultation with the public on all major decisions. In the light of this why was it considered unnecessary to consult the public on the recent large rise in Bury's Council Tax?

A. I am delighted that Councillor Hankey now recognises the importance of consultation because whilst he was a Cabinet Member, his party certainly didn't believe in it at all. His was the party that was so frightened of consultation that they scrapped the Budget Roadshows.

However the ruling Labour administration has continually and consistently demonstrated that it is committed to open and meaningful consultation. Since we took control the whole budget and Plan for Change process has been underpinned by the largest and most wide ranging consultation ever undertaken in the history of this Council.

When it became clear that coalition cuts meant that we were facing yet more major financial problems in 2013/14 we were once again determined to be open and transparent with the people of Bury about the choices we faced and about the options open to us.

The Plan for Change 2 document, and the consultation meetings that took place right across the borough, explained clearly the impact of the Government's cuts and why the actions of the Government were forcing us to find more cuts in our own budget. It set out what we'd done so far and how we were intending to bridge the gap between what we were expecting to have to spend and the reduced resources that the Government were providing.

We made it clear that this was true consultation and that no decisions would be made until we'd heard what people had to say and so it would have been completely wrong to have made any decisions about the level of the Council Tax rise until the end of the consultation process.

5. Councillor Southworth

Could the Cabinet Member for Children and Families please explain why £2 million has been kept back from the capital funding for schools when some of Bury's schools are so desperately in need of money for repairs and improvements?

A. Capital funding available to schools and the local authority has reduced by over 60% per annum since 2010.

Coupled with this is an expectation from Government that local authorities will increasingly take responsibility for the maintenance of school premises, something which would have previously fallen to schools.

This was a key recommendation of the James Review of capital investment in schools and, whilst the recommendations have not yet been formally adopted, in practice the way in which Government now allocates capital resources has resulted in local authorities taking on greater responsibility.

The Government did invite bids for capital funding to enable those schools in the worst condition to be rebuilt through the Priority School Building Programme. Bury was successful with its bid for The Elton High School. However, the school has been placed at the end of the five year programme and is not expected to be rebuilt until 2017. In the interim, the school will require significant investment in order to maintain it in a safe and secure condition. A bid for the rebuild of Radcliffe Hall Primary School was unsuccessful.

A programme of investment totalling £3m addressing condition needs in a number of schools will begin in the coming months. However, given the investment needs at The Elton High School and Radcliffe Hall it has been necessary to set aside a sum of £2m as a contingency to meet the needs at those two schools. The contingency is drawn from capital grant that would otherwise be available to meet condition needs in other schools.

The local authority has expressed concern to the Department for Education about the timing of The Elton's inclusion in the programme but has yet to receive a satisfactory response.

6. Councillor O'Hanlon

Could the Leader update members on planning targets? Specifically the number of planning approvals as a percentage of total approvals where we have achieved target of 25% Affordable Housing and the percentage of employment land planning approvals compared to domestic ones?

A. Every 6 months the Planning Department give the Planning Control Committee (of which he is a member) a full update on the performance of the department in terms of the processing of planning applications and S.106 negotiations and compliance, of which Affordable Housing is one of the categories specifically reported upon as is payments for the loss of employment land.

7. Councillor Bevan

As a result of recent streamlining of management, staffing, committees and decision-making structures and with on-going pressures on the revenue budget, does the Council Leader consider that it is appropriate to also review if there are too many councillors by asking the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to conduct an electoral review of the Borough of Bury?

A. I would like to thank Cllr Bevan for his question, although it's a question I am struggling to understand given its less than 10 years since the Local Government Commission last made recommendations for the current structure.

I suspect from the tone of Cllr Bevan's question, he sees a reduction in costs as his starting point, which I would respectfully suggest is the wrong place to start.

I refer Cllr Bevan to the outcome of the 2003 review and its objectives and I quote:

"The purpose of these proposals is to ensure that, in future, each borough councillor represents approximately the same number of electors, bearing in mind local circumstances".

"The Commission found that the existing arrangements provided unequal representation of electors in Bury:

- **in five of the 16 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10% from the average for the borough, and three wards vary by more than 20%;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to improve slightly, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in five wards and by more than 20% in one ward.**

In the light of these changes, recommended by the Commission, I can see no reason to request a further review at this time.

8. Councillor Noel Bayley

Please will the Leader confirm once and for all that the rise in the Council Tax approved by Council in February 2013 falls well within the limits set out in the Government's own rules under which a referendum would have to be called?

A. I am very happy to confirm once and for all, and I do mean once and for all, that the rise in the Council Tax for 2013/14 approved by this Council falls a long way below the limit set by the Government under which a referendum would be required.

The Government have said Councils must hold a referendum if they increase their Council Tax by more than 2%. However, under the Government's own rules, increases in levies for Waste Disposal and Transport must, and I stress must, be excluded from this calculation. Once the cost of these levies is stripped out of the calculation then the rise in the Bury element of the Council Tax is 0.16% which is clearly well below the 2% limit.

Another way of looking at this is to say that the Council could actually have increased the tax by 4.63% and still stayed below the limit at which a referendum would be required.

9. Councillor Pickstone

In the light of the introduction of new 20mph zones, could the Leader inform members if any attention will be given to older traffic calmed areas in the Borough, some of which are in a poor state of repair? How much money has been paid out by the Council as a result of claims made as a result of poorly maintained traffic calming measures?

A. There are a number of traffic-calmed areas within the Borough which are not currently within 20mph zones.

All of these areas are being reviewed as part of the StreetSafe initiative and can be expected to be included within new area-wide 20mph zones.

Maintenance is considered as part of ongoing repairs of the highway and prioritised accordingly. If the Cllr has any particular examples please let us know so they can be considered.

10. Councillor Daly

Is it the policy of this Council to allow development on potentially hazardous or contaminated land, as in the case of Gin Hall?

A. The Council's policy in relation to new development and potentially contaminated land is to seek to ensure that new development will not result in the contamination of land or land stability concerns and, where appropriate, will require a developer to take steps to remediate existing contaminated land and/or land stability issues.

For sites where land contamination is known or is likely to be present, the local planning authority will require a desk study assessment and site reconnaissance, and possibly site investigations, to be carried out prior to a planning application being determined.

Any unacceptable risks should be identified and proposals made to deal with them to an appropriate standard, taking into account the intended use, as part of the development process.

Developers of potentially contaminated sites will be required to arrange pre-application discussions with the local planning authority to identify the scope of any necessary investigations.

The responsibility lies with the developer to ensure that a development is safe and suitable for its intended use.

11. Councillor FitzGerald

Please can the Leader update the Council on progress with the national 2013/14 pay negotiations and explain whether an offer has been made by the Employers' Side and, if so, how the costs would be met by this Council?

A. At a meeting of the National Joint Council on 21 February 2013 the National Employers asked the Trade Union Side to consider two options with a view to securing an eventual pay agreement for 2013/14. The options were:

Option 1

- **1.0% on all pay points from 1 April 2013**
- **NJC car mileage rates to be replaced by HMRC Approved Mileage Rates**
- **An increase in the minimum paid annual leave entitlement from 21 days to 22 days, from a date to be agreed**
- **An increase in continuous service entitlement for the purposes of calculation of entitlements to annual leave, occupational maternity leave / pay and occupational sick pay**
- **A joint statement providing a list of the issues on which both Sides agree to commence immediate serious discussions.**

Option 2

- **1.0% on pay points 4 to 10 from 1 April 2013**
- **0.6% on pay points 11 and above from 1 April 2013**

UNISON's NJC Committee met on 27th February to consider the two options tabled by the National Employers. The Committee's unanimous decision was to reject both options and to seek to re-open negotiations. The Committee also agreed to carry out a ballot of members via branch consultation meetings. We do not at this stage have any indication of the likely timescale of this consultation.

The outcome of GMB's and Unite's NJC Committee meetings that were due to take place in early March has not yet been announced.

Members will see that the pay offer was not made until after Council set the budget. The budget for 2013/14 makes no allowance for the cost of any pay award although this was noted as a risk and provision was made within the minimum level of balances equivalent to an award of 1%.

However under the Golden Rules any draw on balances would have to be paid back and the on-going costs met from on-going savings in other areas of the budget. The risk arising from the possibility that a pay award would be made was one of the reasons why it was felt that it would be imprudent to accept the Government's Council Tax freeze grant, given the high degree of uncertainty over the nature of the grant.

12. Councillor O'Hanlon

Could the Leader update inform members of the capital expenditure, by Township, in each of the last three years?

A. Due to the extensive number of schemes within the Capital Programme it is not realistic to provide the analysis requested in the time available. However I would be very happy to provide the Councillor with a written answer setting out the information.

13. Councillor Gartside

Does the Leader or relevant Cabinet Member agree with the Secretary of State's recent announcement that parking enforcement officers should allow motorists at least 10 minutes leeway before giving them a ticket in pay and display council roads and car parks?

A. The Highway Code deems that 2 minutes should be allowed as this would cover legitimate reasons for boarding/alighting or dropping-off/picking-up.

This Council used this as a benchmark in previous Parking Enforcement contracts. However the policy in the current Parking Enforcement contract that began in March 2008 extended this to 5 minutes to mitigate various appeals based on loading/unloading; differing timing mechanisms etc.

If 10 minutes was to be allowed then the level of drivers parked in contravention would increase. There would also be the issue of Civil Enforcement Officers having to "wait around" before issuing Penalty Charge Notices which could lead to accusations of targeting by motorists.

Additionally, Councils are actively encouraged by DfT (Department for Transport) to prevent congestion on the major highways (traffic flow, manoeuvrability, pedestrian safety etc) by introduction of measures including Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO's). To not enforce the orders would then appear self-defeating.

Therefore this Council is satisfied with the current policy and level of enforcement.

14. Councillor Simpson

Could the Cabinet Member for Health outline what work is being carried out in Bury with regard to administering the HPV vaccine to young women to help prevent them suffering from cervical cancer later in life.

A. HPV is provided through a private contractor IntraHealth. There is a good response from almost all of the schools. For this year, for 12 to 13 year olds we have administered 2 out of the 3 doses with a 3rd dose coming up this term. A table of vaccine rates by school is available on request from Dr Peter Elton, Director of Public Health – Bury

15. Councillor Daly

Is it this Council's intention to reinstate funding to Bury Housing Concern, with immediate effect?

A. The funding provided to Bury Housing Concern was not a grant but in respect of a service commissioned several years ago to work with rough sleepers. The cost of this service was £75,000 per annum.

In the light of reducing budgets and national policy direction (as set out in the Coalition's No Second Night Out initiative), future funding has to be focused on actively breaking the cycle of rough sleeping and getting people off the streets rather than providing drop in facilities or maintaining contact with former rough sleepers.

We have been working with Bury Housing Concern for over a year to develop a specification to deliver the revised outcomes as they knew the existing contract would expire in March 2013. They were formally notified of this in October 2012.

Re-designing and re-aligning services is not easy but the Council is duty bound to get best value for money – whether services are provided by in-house staff or voluntary organisations. A new specification has been developed and this is out to tender. Bids for the new service will be welcomed from any voluntary organisation that has the right skills.

16. Councillor Quinn

The Low Carbon Hub has been established across AGMA. One of the priorities is to reduce energy used by buildings. Will the Leader ensure that Bury gets its fair share of funding to help home owners reduce their energy bills by eg better insulating their homes?

A. The main framework for assisting home owners to reduce their energy bills, for example, better insulation, now comes through the

recently launched Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation government initiative.

The Green Deal (GD) provides funding for energy efficiency measures at no upfront cost to customers. It is paid back through electricity bills, based on projected savings on energy bills as a result of the measures. The Energy Company Obligation (ECO), distributed through the energy companies and funded through a levy on all energy bills, is implemented alongside the Green Deal and provides (£1.3bn per annum) to support those in fuel poverty and in the poorest neighbourhoods and in the hardest to treat homes.

AGMA are taking a leadership role in the Green Deal in GM, kick-starting from April 2014, a 3 year GM focused approach which will improve energy efficiency of homes and also drive short and long term economic opportunities and benefits for local businesses and individuals.

Similarly, AGMA are taking a lead role in relation to ECO, with partners currently being procured to deliver and maximise ECO investment within GM from mid April 2013.

Bury are fully involved in this. Estimated benefits for Bury over the 3 years include at least 1052 properties being improved with £4.6m capital investment and at least 150 households being supported out of fuel poverty; in addition to 76 fte jobs being created within the wider supply chain and the creation of apprenticeship and training opportunities. Further, it is estimated that the ECO investment in Bury will be at least £1.2m.

Much of the delivery of this will be at AGMA level. However, there will be a local dimension to delivery, which facilitates the maximisation of benefits at the district level. This includes for example developing and providing property and household intelligence, marketing, engaging with the community, individuals and businesses and community leadership. There is currently a level of existing resource in place to manage this input.

Other opportunities and government initiatives such as the Renewable Heat Incentive will also be maximised at an AGMA and local level.

Another AGMA initiative, within which Bury is fully participating, is the GM Fair Energy Campaign. Although not a vehicle for improving energy efficiency of homes per se, the objective is to get a better energy deal and reduced energy costs for as many residents as possible.

More generally Bury will continue to develop/deliver and participate in schemes and initiatives to maximise outcomes for Bury residents.

The above is articulated in the HECA (Home Energy Conservation Act) Report for Bury, recently submitted to Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC).

17. Councillor Carter

Please will the Leader explain what effect the Coalition Government's recent Budget will have on local government.

A. Quite simply the Budget was a disaster for the country and for local government.

The Chancellor's own figures show that the country can look forward to lower growth, higher inflation and more unemployment, and despite all this the country's debt will continue to rise.

And just to show that "we're all in it together" millions of the poorest people in the country will see massive cuts to their benefits whilst 13,000 millionaires will be awarded with tax cuts.

As far as local government is concerned there will be yet more cuts as the Chancellor announced that funding for local services will be reduced by a further 1% in 2014/15, on top of the 2% cuts already announced. In Bury's case this could lead us to having to find another £0.5m of cuts on top of the £4.4m that was shown in the budget forecast submitted to Council in February.

18. Councillor Quinn

Next month the Prestwich Festival will commence starting with Clough Day and finishing with the Prestwich Carnival in June, in between various cultural events will take place in Prestwich. Will the Leader take up our invitation to come and enjoy as many events in Prestwich as he possibly can?