

Leader's Question Time – 3 February 2016
Questions/Responses

Q1. Could the Leader advise me of the estimated number of students who go into higher education each year from Bury?

A. In 2015 from a Year 14 leaver total cohort of 2241, 780 are recorded as entering higher education. This equates to 34.8%.

Q2. The Government claims that schools funding is being protected for the next financial year. Given what we know about the cost pressures facing schools, does this claim stack up?

A. I'm afraid that the Government's claim really doesn't stack up.

The Government is trying to say that by maintaining school funding at the same amount for each pupil in our schools and yet it is clear that they have failed to recognise the substantial unavoidable increases all schools will have to meet over the forthcoming months.

Last year the Chancellor triumphantly announced that the National Living Wage for the over-25's would increase well above inflation and would be £9 per hour by the time of the next General Election. We welcome the pay rise for the lowest paid members of society but would welcome even more the additional money for us and our schools to be able to pay people without having to make even more reductions.

In addition to this there is no provision made for the pay award for staff and for big increases in National Insurance which will drive up costs still further.

If people really want to know the reality of the Government's claim then they need only ask our

Secondary Headteachers who have made clear to us that they are facing a huge hole in their funding. In some cases this could lead to savings of over £1 million per school having to be made by the time of the next General Election to plug the gap.

Whilst we will work hard with all of our schools to ensure they have a viable budget for future years the Chancellor's claims do not reflect the reality for schools in Bury who are facing real terms cuts in their budgets.

Q3. Now that we have received the draft settlement figures, could the Leader outline the impact for Bury both in terms of 2016/17 and future years?

A. We received the draft settlement on 17th December 2015.

The figures highlight a cut of 10.75% in our "Settlement Funding Assessment" for 2016/17 on top of the huge cuts already made since 2010.

In addition to this, the settlement also outlines significant reductions to a number of specific grants e.g. Education Services Grant, and the Benefit Admin subsidy. Further reductions are expected in other areas including the Public health grant, however these have not yet been announced.

Is Bury now getting a "fair deal" ?

I'm afraid the answer is "no"; in 2016/17 - Bury residents will receive £294.45 per head in Government support, compared to a national average of £342.46.

If we were funded at this level we would have an extra £9 million.

The settlement sets out indicative figures for the next 4 years, which will see funding reduce in total by 32.22%, and ultimately disappear by 2020 – leaving the Council reliant solely on locally raised taxes – Council Tax and Business Rates.

Finally I would add that we still await the final settlement figures – which is totally unacceptable when we are only 3 weeks away from setting our budget

Q4. While noting that all our Labour Councillors now welcome giving the public a Referendum on continuing EU membership, could I ask the Leader how Bury Council is informing Bury residents that the Council, as their elected body, has voted to represent them as being in favour of staying in the EU - and what level of expenditure is being used to (a) organise Summit meetings with trade unions, business leaders and universities and (b) to publicise the Council's support for EU membership ? Can it be made clear in such literature that individual residents are not bound by their Council's decision but are free to vote to leave if they so wish ?

A. **Can I thank Cllr Walker for his question? It's particularly timely because after Mr Cameron's pathetic performance during this week's negotiations it seems ever more likely that a referendum is on it's way.**

However, as always, Councillor Walker totally misrepresents what the Council decided at its last meeting. We have no intention of representing the Bury people in this matter but what we do want to do is show civic leadership and help to ensure our residents and businesses have all the facts they need to come to a balanced and informed view on this vitally important matter.

In answer to his first question, we will be exploring a wide variety of options to minimize the costs of this exercise.

As far as his second question is concerned, I am sure that residents fully understand that on this matter or any other they are free to vote as they wish and I really think he needs to apologise to the people of Bury for insulting their intelligence in this way.

Q5. Can the Leader tell us the main themes of Bury's Locality Plan and how this will affect the people of Bury?

A. There are 5 key themes to the Bury Locality Plan, which closely link with the 3 main themes of the Greater Manchester Health & Social Care Devolution plans.

As a reminder, the 3 Greater Manchester themes are:

- 1. Commissioner Reform / Sharing Back Office**
- 2. Better Care**
- 3. Prevention**

Bury's 5 key themes are:

**Commissioner Alignment
Redesigning & improving Services
Moving Services Closer to the Community
Enabling People to Self-Care and
Investing in Early Intervention & Prevention**

We are still working through some of the detail around the implementation of the Locality Plan; however, our overriding aims are:

- For the people of Bury to be treated for the minimal amount of time in the most appropriate place**
- A reduction of inappropriate time spent in hospitals**
- For people to be supported to stay at home for as long as possible and for as long as is appropriate**
- For more of our services to be provided in the community (where feasible and financially viable)**
- For services to be built around people and the issues they face, rather than the symptoms of their illnesses**
- For advice, guidance and support to be provided as early as possible so that people can care for themselves**

- **For people to be active participants in their own health & wellbeing**

Q6. We understand that the Council was recently successful in a bid for funding to support victims of domestic violence and abuse? Please can the Leader outline the objectives of this project?

A. The Council has worked closely with partners to make a successful bid for £100k of national funding to transform accommodation based support for victims and families.

Through the SET Project (Support, Empower, Turnaround), we aim to reduce homelessness caused by domestic violence and abuse (DVA) by increasing and strengthening accommodation based support for female and male victims.

Specially adapted dispersed properties will provide everything a family needs who are fleeing DVA. Over £64K of the funding will be used to commission the voluntary sector to strengthen a range of support services for victims and families and help them move forward with their lives.

The project supports the objectives of Bury's recently launched, hard hitting Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy.

Q7. Can the Leader estimate the number of rented houses unfit for human habitation in the Borough and agree with me that the voting down of the measure to enforce human habitation rules recently in Parliament is a disgrace?

A. I am acutely aware that the private rented sector, which is home to some of our poorest and most vulnerable residents, has some of the worst housing standards.

Dominated by small scale landlords, including accidental landlords who may not fully understand their requirements, problems can be difficult to identify until tenants report problems. The most recent evidence of stock condition comes from a national survey in 2013

which indicated that 30% of the private rented sector stock could be non-decent.

I am aware of an amendment to the Housing and Planning Bill tabled by the opposition, to which you refer. This would have required residential rented accommodation to be fit for human habitation and I share your disappointment that this was voted down. However, this would require tenants, some of whom are among the poorest and most vulnerable, to take action whereas I believe it would have been much better if powers were given to local authorities.

Q8. Considering this Council has repeatedly said there is no increase in the amount of Fly Tipping since the introduction of the three weekly bin collection would the Leader be interested in commenting on some pictures of Fly Tipping in my possession and inform this Council what steps he intends to take to try to trace the offenders and will he repudiate any comments made by his fellow colleagues not to prosecute offenders when discovered.

A. The 3 weekly waste collection service was introduced in October 2014 and has saved the Council £860,000 in avoided waste disposal costs, through an increase in the recycling rate of about 10%.

It would have been helpful to see the photos because it is a fact that a lot of fly tipping is commercial or bulky waste such as furniture and not household bin waste.

The frequency of bin collections has no correlation with the number of incidences of fly tipping of commercial or bulky waste. When fly tipped household waste is found there is very often a high proportion of recyclables that should of course be placed in blue, green or brown bins and not the grey bins.

The Council will always investigate incidents of fly tipping and formal action will continue to be taken against any perpetrator where sufficient evidence is found to prosecute.

Q9. The two most recent 'snapshots' provided by NHS England (October and November 2015) show that Bury has a significantly higher number of days lost to 'delayed discharges' than our immediate comparable neighbours (Rochdale, Oldham, Bolton, Blackburn) - highest in October, second highest in November. Could the Leader please inform members what we are doing to address this?

A. The pressures mentioned by Cllr Pickstone are not just evident in Bury, they are replicated the length and breadth of the country and the main reason for these pressures are the huge cuts in funding made by this Government.

Thanks to the work of local authorities and CCGs the number of people being supported with complex needs at home has actually increased and whilst being a very welcome development this has undoubtedly put additional pressure on existing re-ablement and homecare services.

In Bury we have recently piloted a 'discharge to assess' model which has started to reduce delayed transfers of care, and we have sought additional capacity through funding from the CCG.

Some problems are also caused by delays in access to acute and NHS services, for which the CCG has a recovery plan, which is monitored through the urgent care group and the local Health Scrutiny Committee.

We are proud of the commitment our staff have shown over this winter period, not only to managing the demand, but ensuring good quality safe services are provided.

Q10. Could the Leader outline the impact of the 1% annual rent reductions proposed under the Welfare Reform and Work Bill.

A **This Council has always sought to deliver value for money to tenants in its Housing Stock and in the levels of rent charged.**

However the arbitrary imposition of a 1% pa reduction for the next 4 years totally undermines the principles of "Localism" and "Self Financing" which were introduced by the last Labour Government.

We need to be clear about the motives behind this move. On the face of it rent reductions are to be welcomed but by far the biggest winner from this will be the Chancellor of the Exchequer as it will lead to a huge cut in the level of housing benefit he has to pay out.

The losers will be our tenants because this move will lead to a cumulative cut of £3 million in the amount that will be available to manage and repair and invest in their properties.

Q11. Could the Leader provide a summary of the Council's input following the recent flood damage to business and domestic premises in the Borough?

A. The Boxing Day floods brought devastation to parts of the borough for residents and businesses.

I am extremely proud of employees of this Council who rallied to help affected businesses and residents and I'm equally as proud of the voluntary efforts of the borough's magnificent community.

Once the rescue phase was over our priority was to help with the clean up by providing skips, additional refuse collection rounds and free access to refuse disposal facilities. We also helped to restore power supplies, protected vulnerable residents, set in train urgent

repairs to highways, bridges and parks and then began to get financial aid to affected residents and businesses.

All affected properties are entitled to an immediate payment of £500 and we have done our best to get this into people's bank accounts as fast as possible.

We are also administering Council Tax and Business rate relief for people who have had to leave their properties.

Officers have been out in the community talking to affected people and we have also established a wider business support scheme which has been drawn up by our officers and by the Greater Manchester Business Growth Hub. This will make available additional grants to businesses enabling them to recover and trade successfully as quickly as possible.

We are also very keen to learn lessons and to put pressure on the Environment Agency to implement improved flood defences.

On 11 February the Council will be hosting a community drop in event where residents and businesses can access information from the Environment Agency and a range of Council services and external agencies. This will be followed by a public meeting.

There is much work to do but I can assure this council that supporting our business community is and will continue to be a priority.

Q12.Would the Leader join me in congratulating the Council in achieving 60th in the Stonewall Top 100 Employers 2016?

A. Absolutely!

I am delighted to confirm that the Council has again been recognised by Stonewall as a top employer for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans staff.

We are proud to have held a place in the 'Top 100' of Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index since 2009. This

year we improved our position slightly moving up from 62nd to 60th.

We are also the only Council in the North West to feature in the list, and 6th best local authority in the UK.

Furthermore, Stonewall have previously recognised the Council's LGBT Employee Group as a Star Performer Network Group. This acknowledges the role of individual employees who participate in the network group, often in their own time, to help make sure the Council is on the right track.

I'm proud of our employees, and think it is fantastic that we are being formally recognised as an inclusive employer. Our employees are our greatest asset, and it is vital that we continue to support them all, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Q13. The Labour Group is informing the residents of our borough that the Council is having to make cuts to services. Does the leader think it wise to spend money, albeit match funding, on refurbishing the members' room. Does he not think it sends out the wrong message to residents.

A. Thank you for your question Cllr Harris. I absolutely think that this is the perfect time to be drawing in funding from the trade unions to spend money on refurbishing the Members' Room, which was an under-utilised room and, quite frankly, a waste of space in a prime building.

The total cost of the fit out was £5,000, half of this being funded by the trade unions. I am more than comfortable with the contribution the Council has made to the refit on the basis that:

- It reinforces our strong commitment to officer and member level training

- It creates a venue for training - at a time when the number of meeting rooms has been reduced as part of our rationalisation of office accommodation
- It means we won't have to hire external venues for training. In fact we may even be able to generate some income if we make the facility available to others.

The message that I will be sending out to residents is that we care about our employees and want to upskill them to make sure that they can do the best job possible in these times of austerity. I will also be sending out a message that this room will, in fact, save us money on room hire from elsewhere and will potentially bring money in through hiring out the room.

Q14. What plans does this Council have in place to raise awareness of hate crime during national hate crime awareness week in February?

A. Bury is a place where I am very proud to live, work and enjoy my free time. Community Cohesion lies at the heart of what makes us a strong, vibrant and safe community and is central to all we do.

I am pleased to say that partners in our borough continue to work together to raise awareness of hate crime.

Tied in with Greater Manchester Hate Crime Awareness Week (08 to 14 February 2016):

- GMP will be disseminating media messages to the general public and via the press;
- the borough's Hate Crime Forum will be meeting to allow partners and third party hate crime reporting centres to discuss how they continue to meet the needs of their communities and the support they are able to provide to victims of hate crime;
- we will be delivering a Disability Awareness Day to Year 7 students at Tottington High School, where there is

specific emphasis on raising awareness of Hate Crime relating to disability and learning disability;

- **and there will be a Jewish Forum meeting where partners will be engaging with each of the local Jewish Synagogues and schools from Prestwich and Whitefield.**

As we have been raising awareness in high schools, with both staff and pupils, regarding hate crime for a significant time now, we will be launching Bury's Interschool Youth Hate Crime Forum in March 2016.

Students will be developing resources for their peers which will be used to add to the messages in school about bullying and hate crime incidents.

We continue to be committed to ensuring that the Council's contribution to this agenda through the Team Bury Cohesion Plan for 2013-2016 will build on the good work already undertaken in Bury and ensure the Council's valuable role in this vital area of work will continue.

- Q15 Can the Leader give us reassurance that Council will do everything possible to protect local pharmacies in Bury from closure following Government plans to cut pharmacy budget by £170 million. This will result in an overall reduction of around 15% in pharmacy provision. If someone has mobility difficulties it is critical that they have access to a local pharmacy.

The Council considers community pharmacies to be a key public health resource.

We recognise that in addition to the core services pharmacies offer there are opportunities to promote health and wellbeing, including healthy lifestyle advice, self care support, advice on medicines and long term conditions, screening, prevention, signposting and treatment of minor ailments. Pharmacies have the advantage of being easily accessible and open at convenient times.

NHS England (NHSE) commission pharmacy services and has responsibility for ensuring adequate provision of pharmaceutical services in local Health & Well-being Board areas.

For their part, Health and Wellbeing Boards have responsibility for assessing pharmaceutical needs in their locality, identifying any gaps and publishing their findings.

You will be aware that Bury Health & Wellbeing Board produced a Pharmacy Needs Assessment (PNA) in 2015 to look at pharmacy provision and whether it meets the needs of the population. In general it concluded that there was adequate pharmacy provision across Bury, with the exception of Besses. Since then NHSE has granted an application for a new pharmacy in Besses which is expected to commence services in the near future.

With regard to future cuts to budgets for pharmacy services, NHSE report that efficiencies can be made without compromising the quality of services or public access to them. The full details of how this will be achieved are not yet available, however you can be assured that the council will work closely with NHSE to understand how cuts to pharmacy contractual funding may impact on pharmacy provision in Bury and to minimise the impact on Bury residents.

Q16. Can the Leader give us details of why there is an increase in delays in discharges and what we are doing to improve this?

A. I have already provided details of the reasons behind the increase in delayed discharges in an earlier answer.

It should be noted that Bury is consistently performing well. The pressures which are felt in Bury are being felt across the country and we continue to identify ways in which people can be supported home safely. We are proud of the commitment our staff has shown over this

winter period, not only to managing the demand, but ensuring good quality safe services are provided.

Q17.What are Bury Council doing to address the problem of unlawful and inconsiderate parking together with related anti-social behaviour outside schools in the Borough at drop-off and pick-up times?

A. Parking Services is aware of the problem around parking at schools in the Borough. Schools are visited regularly on a rota system as there are not the resources to attend every school on a daily basis. Unfortunately whilst the parking situation may improve when the Civil Enforcement Officers are present the problem soon recurs .

There is an option to utilise the CCTV vehicle for school enforcement however this would not alleviate the problem as parents would revert to parking on the restrictions in the absence of the car and this would not be the best use of this resource.

Whilst we are doing all we can to assist with this problem the responsibility for the problem parking around schools ultimately lies with the parents themselves.

Q18.How many apprenticeships were taken up by Bury residents so far this year and in each of the last three years? How does this compare to neighbours in Greater Manchester?

A. Councillor D'Albert may remember that back in October 2015 Bury was included in the Apprenticeship Careers List as one of the top 50 apprenticeship employers in the country. We were listed as one of the top 10 employers within the 'Public Sector and Charity' category of the list and are very proud of our achievement.

We are the only Council within Greater Manchester and indeed within the North West that has been recognised

for its commitment to providing apprenticeship opportunities.

This year's figures have been published up to the end of October 2015 and show a total of 620 apprentices starting in Bury.

In 2014/15 the full year figure was 1,980

In 2013/14 there were 1,730

In 2012/13 we had 2,120

These figures compare extremely well with our neighbours given that we are the smallest borough within Greater Manchester.

Within our own Council, even with the austerity measures we face, we currently have 53 apprentices.

Q19. Would the Leader comment on the successful renewal of Bury Town Centre's Purple Flag status?

A. Certainly. For those that have yet to hear, Bury has been successful in securing renewal of our Purple Flag accreditation for a second year following a recent assessment.

The Purple Flag is the equivalent of the Green Flag for parks or Blue Flag for beaches and is only given to those towns and cities that have quality and vibrant town centres and that are able to demonstrate excellence in the way their evening economies are managed.

This is great news for Bury town centre and confirms that Bury continues to be 'on the up' with an ever expanding offer for both day and night time visitors.

Purple Flag towns and cities generally benefit from a higher quality environment, more visitors and lower crime and anti social behaviour.

Bury remains the only town centre across Greater Manchester to achieve this prestigious accreditation and we aim to continue working with our partners and town centre venues to maintain that status.

In particular, we will be working hard to build on our evening offer to provide what is already a safe and enjoyable night out.

I am therefore pleased to assure you that Purple Flags will continue to fly proudly in Bury!

Q20. What action has the Council taken to assist businesses affected by the recent floods?

A. I am happy to refer Councillor Fitzwalter to my earlier response given to Councillor Preston.

Q21. Can the Leader tell us how many empty houses and retail properties there are in Bury and what work is being done to bring these properties back into use?

A. Within the borough there are just under 3000 empty properties, of which approximately 1600 have been empty for 6 months or more and approximately 1000 have been empty for a year or more.

Tackling empty properties and in particular bringing them back into use can be a challenge. Successful action can be lengthy and complex and we only have so many resources to deal with the issue. However we are very much committed to tackling the problem, using a range of tools including advice and negotiation, access to external funding and various forms of enforcement action.

We concentrate our efforts on properties that have been empty for 6 months or month as they are less likely to become occupied as result as normal housing market activity and we take a targeted approach to particular properties and areas of the borough.

We have had some good success in our commitment to tackle the empty property problem over the last few years. For instance taking an area wide approach in Radcliffe, we brought over 60% of 185 targeted empty properties back into use.

We have also recently been successful in compulsory purchasing four properties and last week commenced demolition of two other properties. These six properties have been empty for many years, are in very poor condition and have created a severe negative impact on the surrounding area. These cases have been extremely complex to deal with but we have persevered with the multiple action to obtain a permanent solution, thus demonstrating that we will not shy away from tackling these types of cases.

A multi- disciplinary and partnership approach is taken to both targeting and finding solutions to empty properties. For instance targeting empty properties with large council tax arrears has outcomes around bringing properties back into use and also recovering revenue for the council.

Over the last few years we have also been successful in obtaining over £1m of funding from the Homes and Communities Agency and have allocated over £600k of commuted sums funding for empty properties. This has enabled us, together with Six Town Housing, to so far purchase, improve and bring back into use over 30 empty properties. We have a significant programme going forward through this funding. As these properties are being provided for affordable rent, this approach also helps us meet housing need.

Members can be assured that we are committed to targeting and taking action to deal with empty properties to tackle what we all agree is an issue which requires our continued attention.

Q22. Will the Leader of the Council join me in thanking those residents and Council Officers and Consultants involved in the planning process in relation to the Anaerobic Digestion Waste Plant at Fletcher Bank in Ramsbottom?

A. I have said in the past in relation to questions on this particular matter that it is important for all concerned to be guarded in making public statements.

Applicants and developers have the right to apply for planning permission and therefore, whilst appreciating and respecting the efforts of those involved in the planning process, we need to always be mindful of what could happen in the future.

I shall hope that this is a close to questions on this matter and that my cautious response is a reflection of consistency and pragmatism. The Council will always exercise caution and I once again find myself encouraging Members of all persuasions to do the same.

Q23. Can the Leader outline the current position with regard to fuel poverty in the Borough?

A. The Council is dedicated to tackling fuel poverty and helping our most vulnerable residents, especially through the winter months.

In Bury 8,047 households are said to be living in fuel poverty, approximately 10% of all homes, resulting in an estimated 100 extra deaths in winter each year in Bury. I find it incredible in a modern, civilised society that people are still dying of cold.

It is therefore no surprise that I am committed to helping bring these households out of fuel poverty by doing what we can to improve the quality of housing, cut the cost paid for fuel and increase people's income. For instance last year as well as giving advice and promoting a range of energy efficiency measures to thousands of households, we arranged for 216 improvements for vulnerable and low income households, bringing

investment of £280,000 into the Borough and saving those households £45,000 on annual energy bills.

Changes have also been made to council owned properties. The last five years have seen 6000 energy efficiency measures being implemented for the benefit of tenants – many of whom are on low incomes.

But I know there is still work to be done. Thousands of private properties remain in need of improvement and we can assume that energy costs will rise in the years to come.

That is why we are in the process of drafting a new Fuel Poverty Action Plan.

Discussions with stakeholders, such as the event held last week, show that there is a lot of support for reducing the impact of fuel poverty on health and I am convinced that this level of commitment, coupled with our strong partnership approach, will continue to make a difference in the years to come.

Q24. Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour always features as a priority for local people across the Borough. How are we working with partners to make the best use of our shared resources, particularly in a climate of public sector budget cuts?

A. Bury's Joint Engagement Team (JET) was formed in July 2014. It aims to provide a cohesive and joined up multi-agency response to anti-social behaviour. Through the JET, partners - including Greater Manchester Police, Six Town Housing and Bury Council - work together to make the best use of shared resources.

The JET work to an agreed set of operating principles including:

- Early and consistent identification of risk and social harm**
- Intelligence led, multi-agency responses, based on collaboration and co-operation and**

- **Real time information and intelligence sharing.**

The Community Safety Partnership has commissioned New Economy to undertake an evaluation of the JET, including cost benefit analysis (CBA). An interim report shared in December 2015 demonstrates overall positive results in relation to work on ASB - including cashable savings through this way of working.

Q25. Members of the Council heard last year about the work the local authority was undertaking to promote World Mental Health Day on 10 October – an international day to raise awareness of mental health. What is Bury Council doing to build on this, to further promote the good mental health and wellbeing?

A. In February, the council will be supporting Time to Talk Day. This is a national day of awareness raising, organised by Time to Change, encouraging everyone to talk about their mental health and share their experiences. The aim behind this national campaign is to help break the silence and end the stigma around mental health.

Mental health problems affect 1 in 4 people every year, yet too often people are afraid to talk about their experiences. By supporting Time to Talk Day, Bury Council can play a part in trying to break the silence that often surrounds mental health, and show that talking about it doesn't need to be difficult.

Members of staff will be encouraged to think about, and talk about, their mental health and emotional wellbeing at work.

We'll be promoting the same message to all Bury residents too, with tweets leading up to the day, and on the day itself. The Bury Directory feature a special banner message to raise awareness of the campaign amongst the wider public, to try and bring positive mental health messages into the mainstream.

However, this is a very challenging agenda and building awareness and understanding of mental health is an on-going task. The authority will continue to link into national campaigns to promote positive mental health and challenge stigma.

Q26. During the Boxing Day floods Ramsbottom Town Centre suffered flood waters from one of the 2 lodges at Carr Bank and Springwood Street. Water from the lodges would normally flow through the culvert but because the weir/spillway was blocked the water breached the banks and flooded down the roads. Can the leader advise who is responsible for ensuring the weir/spillway on both lodges are maintained and kept free of any blockages?

A. There are two lodges on Springwood Street. The upper one is the responsibility of the Council and the lower one is privately owned and maintained.

The culvert to the upper lodge is on a weekly inspection and clear throughout the year. In addition it has further periodic inspections by the Council, especially when heavy rain is forecast and in the Autumn when the leaves are falling.

Flooding in the area was due to the sheer and unprecedented volume of rain and certainly not through lack of council maintenance.

Q27. Congratulations on once again being one of the small minority of Local Authorities to feature on Stonewall's top 100 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans friendly employers. What work is the council doing, or could we do more, to share this good practice with other employers in the Bury area, both public sector colleagues and larger private employers in the Borough.

A. Thank you very much for your congratulations. The Council did have a great result, yet again, in the

Stonewall Workplace Equality Index. In terms of sharing our good practice with other organisations, we do a number of things. For example:

Our LGBT Employee Group is open to employees of Six Town Housing and Persona

We regularly support officers and other network groups on an informal basis – for example in the last couple of months alone we have met with Bolton Council to support them with their LGBT work, and also worked with representatives from UNISON at Pennine Care to assist with setting up their own network groups

We always fly the rainbow flag for IDAHO day at various locations across the Borough to increase awareness and to show our determination for tackling homophobia, biphobia and transphobia

We regularly attend equality meetings with colleagues from across AGMA and share best practice

We support the Proud Of Gayness Youth Group (commonly known as POG) in organising the Rainbow Walk each year in Bury, and work to encourage other organisations to join in with the event. A variety of organisations have already been involved, for example the police and The Samaritans.

We are proud to be recognised by Stonewall as one of Britain's best employers for our outstanding efforts to create an inclusive workplace for our LGBT employees, and support other organisations wherever possible.

Q28. Members will have heard about the work taking place at a Greater Manchester level, on the Transformation Fast Track, to bring people with learning disabilities, who are in health placements outside the Borough, back into the community. What is the Council doing locally to support people with learning disabilities in Bury?

- A. We are working closely with the CCG in planning for the nine people we currently have who live outside of the borough. Some people have expressed a desire a return to Bury, which we are supporting. Two people require a specialist placement which will be out of the borough. A further two people have stated they do not wish to move from their current care provision.**

Through the joint reviews with Health staff we are ensuring that individual needs can be met and that the services are of a good quality.

Q29. Can the Leader tell me how we are engaging with under-represented groups to get involved in exercise?

- A. The I Will If You Will (IWIYW) project commenced in Bury in 2013 to address the growing gap in respect of the number of women and girls that participate in physical activity and sport compared to men.**

As part of the IWIYW project, and via the Council's Sport and Physical Activity Service, a number of initiatives are in place to engage under-represented groups in Bury: -

- 1. Bury's Exercise and Therapy Scheme (BEATS) has been actively engaging with Midwives across Bury to establish a maternity pathway for mothers (including those identified troubled families). The up-skilling of Exercise Referral Officers, and having a dedicated female Referral Officer funded by IWIYW has ensured women who are contemplating exercise both ante-natal and post-natal have a dedicated gateway to access safe effective physical activity to support a healthy delivery.**
- 2. IWIYW have been working with Persona and their learning disabled and physically disabled customers to engage in Physical Activity. Following receipt of activity equipment from IWIYW, customers from across the Learning Disability Day Service have been supported to engage in a range of new activities to help stimulate and improve their physical and mental well-being. The**

IWIYW equipment given to Day Services has been utilised in 2 main ways: -

- a. Persona have been able to use some of the resources to run regular group sessions which customers take part in as part of their timetable**
 - b. Resources are also used on a one to one basis with customers as and when it is appropriate to them or when they choose to use them.**
- 3. IWIYW have commissioned various Mental Health pilots across the borough for varying levels of the condition, ranging from mild to severe through Services such as Healthy Minds, Wellbeing and Recovery, and both Secure Units at Prestwich Hospital and Fairfield General Hospital. Mindfulness sessions are currently running at Castle Leisure centre and participants are engaging in Yoga. Depression and anxiety levels are being measured to gauge the success of the scheme.**
 - 4. IWIYW has just received a proposal to work with a Somali women's group at Bury Employment Support and Training site (Welly Cafe). The women have expressed an interest in self defence classes and have been supported by staff at the site to create a robust proposal for IWIYW which we are confident will commence asap. Additionally the IWIYW project team has worked with Bury Asians Centre to increase opportunities for BME Communities.**
 - 5. The Active Travel Officer is currently working with Bury Blind Society to train walk leader volunteers thus ensuring a walking group for local residents to support Blind/partially sighted walkers. Macmillan also support an IWIYW walk offer for those living with and Beyond Cancer, this group established in the summer 2015 now has a regular 8-10 walkers and a volunteer walk leader.**
 - 6. One of the Locality Officers from IWIYW is actively involved with the BME community in Bury East. A number of initiatives have been trailed and implemented with this group. Sessions have included piloxing, Zumba, walking and Yoga. Key Asian leaders and Counsellors are signed up to these initiatives and actively promote and**

support the IWIYW programme. As a township, Bury East has the highest level of participation within the IWIYW programme in Bury. Hundreds of BME women and girls have participated in physical activity and sport via IWIYW since the project commenced, and continue to do so.

7. The IWIYW Project Team met recently with JCOM a not for profit Employment Agency and Careers Guidance based in Prestwich to ensure there is additional consultation to engage the orthodox Jewish community in Physical Activity and Sport.

8. Bury Sport & Physical Activity Service secured some external funding in late 2015 from Sport England to deliver a programme focussed around increasing opportunities for disabled people to participate in activities. Total project costs £243,727 to enhance local opportunities.

Q30. What does the Leader think about the current proposals by the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority to reduce the number of fire engines in use in the evening in Bury down to 1? Does he agree with their proposals to raise the Fire precept in 2016/17?

A. Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service are valued partners of the Council, and we think that it is appalling that the Government that Cllr Gartside supports should have slashed funding to the point that the service has had to impose these cuts.

We will continue to work closely with the service to ensure that their response to Government funding cuts is as safe and sustainable for Bury residents as possible.

In terms of the precept for 2016/17, that will be a democratic decision taken by the Fire and Rescue

Q31. Could we be given a brief update on Bury Council's "Twinning" relationship with Datong in China in the last three

years and how much expenditure has been incurred in that time ?

- A. When this administration came to power in 2011 it was made clear that there would be no further formal relationship with Datong.**

There has therefore been no expenditure incurred since then.

Q32. Would the Leader confirm that Bury Central Library could have been retained in its original form if it had benefited from the £102,500 spent so far by Bury Council installing the sculpture centre and subsidising exhibitions?

- A. I will assume that Cllr Daly is referring to figures provided in the January Scrutiny Committee report on the Sculpture Centre, which identified £110,000 capital spend on the Centre's fit-out plus an exhibition spend of £28,100 minus the income from exhibition grants of £26,400.**

Having subtracted the income from the expenditure, we have spent less than £2000 on 'subsidising' exhibitions. Neither the Council's capital spend nor the £26,000 capital grant from the Arts Council would be available in any form to 'benefit' Bury Library.

With the capital figure excluded as it must be in relation to Library spend, it is difficult to see how the net spend of £2000 on exhibitions could in any way have contributed any benefit to library services.

- Q.33** What is the average waiting time between a pothole being reported to it being repaired? How does this compare to the previous three years?

- A. Data on the average waiting time between a pothole being reported and being repaired is not readily available.**

The Council's Highway Inspection Team inspect the entire adopted highway network in accordance with the Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management, "Well Maintained Highways". Streets are inspected dependant on their hierarchy at varying frequencies and are inspected on either a monthly, quarterly, biannual or annual basis.

Response times for the treatment of highway defects are determined on a risk basis. The Council's current response time categories are 2hrs, 7 days, 28 days, 60 days and next available maintenance programme.

We are also investing in new machinery and more efficient ways of working as budgets have been cut.

- Q.34** Will the Leader confirm that Bury Council will accept the offer by the Conservative Government to raise the Council Tax by 2% to help pay for more adult social care?

A. Firstly I wish to clarify the wording of this question – this certainly isn't an "offer" by the Conservative Government.

They have recognised the significant pressures faced in Adult Social Care, but have actually "offered" nothing.

They have dodged the issue, and simply passed the liability on to local Council Tax payers.

A 2% precept would raise approximately £1.3m in Bury, but frankly that is a drop in the ocean compared to the overall pressures faced.

In terms of whether we introduce the precept, well Councillor Gartside should know by now that any decisions about the level of Council Tax are taken by Full Council at the budget setting meeting – 24th February.

Q35. The Council has come in for criticism from residents during the recent floods in Ramsbottom and other areas of the Borough due to the lack of gully cleaning to allow surface water run-off. As this Council has responsibility for highway drainage under the Highways Act 1980 and as a Lead Local Flood Authority under the Flood and Water Management Act (FaWMA) 2010, can the Leader confirm how often the Council clean the gullies to prevent blockages to the drainage system?

A. **The Council currently operates a cyclic gully cleansing regime where all gullies within the adopted highway network are checked annually. In addition to this we attended to gullies either reported, or identified through our routine highway inspections, as being blocked on an ad-hoc basis. Sometimes this work can be problematic due to the presence of parked vehicles.**

The recent unprecedented flooding events in the Borough were primarily due to the river and other natural water course flooding. Maintenance of the existing highway drainage network had no effect on this as the majority of this network discharges into those flooded rivers and water courses.

I have received many compliments from residents of the Borough for the work carried out by Council Officers during the recent floods.

Q36. Given that we have seen a net increase of 1,929 firms set up in Bury in 2015, most of which are located in some of the most deprived parts of the Borough, will the Leader acknowledge that this is another example of the successful Long-Term Economic Plan by the Government?

A. **It is indeed good news that Bury has seen an increase in new start ups across the Borough. The greatest increase was in Moorside, followed by Bury East. The success of the Town Centre has had a positive impact on the number of new business start ups in these wards.**

In 2015, I can confirm a total of 1,929 new businesses were registered in Bury. However unfortunately a total of 1,259 were dissolved giving a Bury a net increase of 670, and highlighting the continued fragile state of the economy.

The Council have consistently demonstrated our commitment and support to our business community. This year we funded a dedicated Business Growth Advisor who I know from feedback has been positively received.

I and the Chief Executive of Bury Council continue to visit businesses on a weekly basis. We are in awe of the struggles and achievements of business right across the borough.

The Council is once again supporting our own Made in Bury Business Fair on the 13th and 14th May. This two day event will bring together businesses large and small in the town centre with an expected footfall of over 2000 visitors.

In addition the Made in Bury Business Awards go from strength to strength.

As Leader of the Council I am delighted to attend the many network events throughout the year.

The Council facilitates Business Breakfast Events alongside our colleagues from the Greater Manchester Business Growth Hub.

Our Procurement Team have delivered Procurement Master Classes to 30 businesses with another session due this month as a result of demand and positive feedback.

In addition we have a dedicated Business Engagement Team who acts as first point of contact for businesses engaging with Council departments or seeking advice and guidance.

Supporting business start ups and business growth will continue to be a Council priority as we prove that "Bury Means Business"