

COUNCIL 6 APRIL 2016 – WORK OF THE CABINET
LEADER’S SPEECH

Thank you Madam Mayor, it gives me great pleasure to up-date Council on the work of the Cabinet since the last meeting of Council.

Madam Mayor before I start I hope you, and Council, will indulge me for just a couple of moments whilst I say a few words on matters not relating directly to Cabinet.

Firstly, as you rightly said, there are 4 members of Council who are stepping down and not standing in the forthcoming local election and I would like to endorse your kind comments.

Councillors Wiseman, Fitzwalter, Isherwood and Cassidy are all long standing and highly respected Members who have given to this Council, to their constituents and to the people of our Borough a level of service which has been nothing short of outstanding and I hope that all Members will join me in thanking them and wishing them well for long, healthy and happy “retirements”.

Michelle Wiseman has served not only as a Councillor but she was also a first class Mayor and Deputy and she has been a first class councillor whilst also holding down a really time consuming day job. I stand in awe of her time management skills! Thank you for your service Michelle.

Luise Fitzwalter is the epitome of a community campaigner and in her time on the Council she has worked tirelessly for the people of Ramsbottom.

Council has already heard about the very sad death of her husband Ray and during the time that he was ill, whilst she was at his side looking after him, Luise never once shirked from her duties to the people she represents. That Madam Mayor is the calibre of Luise Fitzwalter and the Council will be a poorer place without her just as the world will be a poorer place for Ray's passing.

Dot Cassidy is also another absolutely first class Councillor, totally dedicated to the residents of her ward and another tireless worker and campaigner.

Madam Mayor, in the times we live in, where the public seem to have grown weary of archetypal politicians, it's a crying shame that more people don't see the work that Councillors such as Dot put in, day in and day out. And why do they do it...because they care Madam Mayor, that's why, and no-one cares more than Dot.

Dot...or Granny Dot as she's better known amongst the Labour Group...thank you for everything you've done for this Council, for Moorside ward and for the Labour Group. We'll miss you but at least after your op we can now take you home and plug you in!

Last but not definitely not least is Tony Isherwood. Tony has served on Bury Council for many, many years and has held some of the most important, complex and challenging portfolios. Most recently he's been responsible for the Council's finances and for the environment brief.

Tony has an incredible mind...particularly when it comes to maths, as the Chief Executive found out to his cost while Tony was in charge of finance! He can be faced with incredibly complicated matters and take them right back to their core and most of all he can take the big decisions that matter.

Tony is also a man of great integrity who has never shirked an argument when faced with matters of principle and he's also a man of great courage, something he demonstrated in spades when we made changes to the refuse collection service.

In my view, political giants are few and far between and in Tony, Bury Council is losing a giant. Again, thank you Tony for everything you've done to make this borough a better place.

Turning to you Madam Mayor, tonight's meeting will be your last sat up there in the hot seat and I really wanted to place on record my personal thanks, and the thanks of the Labour Group, for the superb way that you have chaired Council meetings during your year of office.

You have been firm but fair, clear and considerate and you've done a great job keeping us moving and keeping us under control! Quite simply you've been a credit to the office of Mayor.

I know that there will be other opportunities to express our thanks but I'm sure that all Members will want to join me now in saying a huge thank you to you.

Moving on to the work of the Cabinet....

Madam Mayor, the last Cabinet meeting devoted itself to a subject that is incredibly dear to the heart of this Labour Group, that is our staff.

Our staff are this Council's most valuable asset and we take their welfare very seriously which is why I was delighted that Cabinet approved reports covering the new Workforce Wellbeing Strategy and the Equality Strategy.

The Equality Strategy 2016-2020 sets out the Council's equality vision, objectives, and policy along with a framework and decision making structure in relation to equality matters.

The Strategy's main objectives have been developed from the Council's corporate Vision, Priorities and Outcomes and from research and consultation and they mean that we will:

- take action to tackle and reduce unwanted behaviour in both our workplace and our schools;
- reduce the amount of unknown equality data we hold on our employees;
- work to digitally include more of our employees.

We also approved a new Wellbeing Strategy which sets out the framework for how we can help and support employees to develop better physical and emotional health.

In turn this will bring about substantial benefits for our employees, for the Council and for the Borough.

Of course Madam Mayor, there are already many positive initiatives and interventions already in place including:

- The Occupational Health service
- Our Work life balance toolkit
- Awareness raising days
- Initiatives such as Get the World Moving
- Employee health checks
- Staff surveys
- Policies and processes to tackle unwanted behaviour

The Workforce Wellbeing Strategy builds on this existing good practice and sets the foundations for a more effective way forward.

Madam Mayor, like most Members I read with some dismay, and not a little anger, the Bury Times headlines about the Wellbeing Strategy.

Whilst I can understand the focus on references to bullying that are mentioned in the report, and whilst I fully accept that this is a critically important issue that we intend to address quickly, it was very disappointing that there was no reference to the many positive responses that we received to our employee survey.

My colleague, Cllr Holt, was absolutely right when he wrote to the paper pointing out that the Council has committed employees and strong managers as demonstrated by the fact that, for example, around three quarters of those who responded to the survey said that their work gives them a feeling of personal accomplishment and that their manager recognises and acknowledges when they have done their job well.

Over 80% also say that there is good team co-operation, leading to a supportive work environment.

These are just a couple of examples of the many positive comments that we have heard from our people.

I know that there are questions on this matter later on our agenda which Cllr Holt is very happy to answer so I won't say any more on the subject other than to reassure staff that we will take their responses to our survey very seriously indeed.

Finally Madam Mayor the Cabinet approved the long awaited report on the A56 through Prestwich Village.

The proposals before Cabinet had been the subject of widespread public consultation and had been amended several times to reflect the comments that we had received.

Madam Mayor, regeneration of Prestwich is absolutely vital and is something that the other political parties on the Council put off and put off but not so this Labour Group.

Despite the coalition and Conservative Governments' crippling austerity agenda we have put together a £2m funding package to improve the A56 as a key element of our plans to revitalise Prestwich village, and now we intend to implement this vital scheme.

And vital it most certainly is.

You only have to look at other similar areas where high streets have been remodelled and improved and there is no doubt that the work has led to a revival in the fortunes of these centres and so in my view, and the view of the Labour Group, this scheme is a prerequisite if we are to secure the regeneration of Prestwich.

In fact so important is this to the revival of Prestwich that we believe that there is no choice but to go ahead. Lesser schemes have been tried in the past and they have not worked.

It is interesting that the other two main parties are now jumping on the populist bandwagon and are up in arms about the scheme.

Let me read you a small quote Madam Mayor...

"Our recommendation is that a single lane of traffic is created in each direction and to remove obstructions from this as far as possible so that it flows smoothly.

This allows the second lane to be reallocated to permanent parking bays, wider pavements and street trees."

You'd think I'd lifted this from the Cabinet report because this is exactly what the scheme will do.

But no...it's actually a quote from the Love Prestwich Strategy, a strategy that was approved by the parties opposite in 2009....and then immediately shelved because they didn't have the courage or the commitment to Prestwich to carry it out.

And yet now Madam Mayor, even before a shovel has hit the ground, we are seeing dividends from the scheme.

Just this week I have been delighted to hear that a nationally lauded company, Muse Developments, have signed an agreement with HMG, the owners of the Longfield Centre, to redevelop the centre.

This is another vital element of our plans and it was great to hear Muse say, and I quote, "The council's plans for the improvement of the A56 through the village fit in very well with our ambitions for the Longfield Shopping Centre and have given our plans a major boost".

Yes, we are aware that there are issues with cycling and we have committed to work with cyclists to see if we can make changes to the scheme down the line should additional funds become available.

I would like to place on record my thanks to the Prestwich Labour Councillors and to officers of the Council for the enormous effort they have put in to bring this scheme to life and to bring such a big name as Muse to the Prestwich table.

Madam Mayor as I think we probably all know this is the last Council meeting before the elections and so I would like to finish by passing on my best wishes to all candidates who are standing for office...clearly I'm sending better wishes for some

than others and even better wishes for the candidate for Bury
East!

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