

Council Meeting – 16 October 2013

Questions:-

The Leader of the Council

Question running order:

1st: Conservative

2nd: Labour

3rd: Liberal Democrat

1. Councillor Gunther

Can the Cabinet Member for the Environment give the full criteria to be used for issuing on the spot fines for incorrect use of waste bins?

A. The new Waste Management Regulatory and Enforcement Policy, as attached to the Cabinet Report, defines the approach that will be followed regarding incorrect use of waste bins, including providing extensive help and advice to householders, removing affected waste in the first instance, serving a written notice and as a last resort only for repeat and deliberate offending the issuing of a fixed penalty notice (FPN) of £60 payable within 14 days. The penalty is discounted to £40 if paid within 10 days.

Formal powers will be applied in an open and reasonable way and the general principles of enforcement, will always be applied, namely proportionality, consistency, transparency, effectiveness and accountability. Firm but fair regulation will be applied in all cases.

Penalty notices may be issued in respect of:

- **contamination of recycling bins,**
- **bins presented incorrectly either by the position of the container or time of presentation e.g. bins being left out permanently on the highway causing an obstruction,**
- **littering re: waste that should be contained within a wheeled bin.**

The Government is currently considering a draft Deregulation Bill that could amend Section 46 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. This may include requirements such as the issuing of notices of intention to issue a fixed penalty, identifying where a nuisance is caused and guidance on appeals. The Council's Waste Management Regulatory and Enforcement Policy may be amended from time to time to take account of such changes in legislation.

2. Councillor Southworth

Local businesses have suffered as a result of Government policies over the last few years and now Business Rates look likely to rise and huge energy rises are being nodded through unchallenged by the Tory-led Coalition.

What is the Council doing to help local businesses in these difficult times?

A. The Council fully understands how much local businesses have suffered at the hands of the current Government and we are committed to supporting them as much as possible.

There are many ways that we are doing this and these include:

- **In line with the Labour Group's amendment that was passed at the last Council we are lobbying the Government to extend the funding for increased small business rate relief beyond 2014;**
- **The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive have made a point of visiting as many local businesses as will let them through the door. These visits are then publicised on the Leaders' blog and are used to discover the best ways for the Council to help individual businesses;**
- **These visits are built on, and followed up by, a group of existing officers who have come together to form a Business Engagement team which means that local businesses will now have a named Council officer to contact, giving them a much more effective way of working with us. This will also allow the effective dissemination of business, employment and skills information to the business community;**
- **We have worked with the local Chamber of Commerce and completely reviewed our procurement procedures so that Council tenders are now far more accessible to local SMEs. Even the Government has recognised how effective our procedures now are by giving us the national award for 'Best Council to Do Business With'. This work will continue as we actively encourage an allegiance to the borough through the 'Made in Bury' campaign;**
- **We have established the Best of Bury awards which will showcase successful Bury businesses. The Award ceremony will take place on 22 November at the Longfield Centre.**
- **The Council's Business rates team have actively brokered discussions with the Government's Valuation Agency Office to help address rates appeals submitted by local businesses**

and on the Rock, for example, we have seen valuations reduce by up to 20% as a result;

- **We are developing and facilitating a Bury Business Economic Alliance Group to oversee the objectives of Team Bury's Economic Strategy. This group will also actively promote Business Start Up Support, the Greater Manchester Business Growth Hub and all other business support activity**
- **We have worked with businesses to promote the Backing Young Bury meaning that businesses can access apprentices and local young people can find a gateway into employment.**

Of course Madam Mayor we also recognise locally the high, and increasing, cost of energy and Members will know that the Council has signed up to the Green Deal and we have supported the GM Energy Switching Scheme, both of which will be a big help to both businesses and residents in these tough times.

3. Councillor Pickstone

Could the Leader please update members on the availability and take-up of apprenticeships in Bury, in current and recent years. How do these rates compare with the Greater Manchester, North West and UK averages?

A. I would like to thank Councillor Pickstone for his question.

At the end of last week there were 42 Apprenticeship vacancies available within the Borough on the National Apprenticeship Service Vacancy Matching Database. Across Greater Manchester there were 587 vacancies advertised on the National Apprenticeship Service database; many of these opportunities are within Bury's Travel to Work Area.

With regard to the availability of apprenticeships the available data highlights the number of apprenticeship starts over the last three academic years and is broken down into the 16 - 18 , 19 – 24 and 25+ age bands.

With regard to apprenticeship starts for 16 to 18 year olds the following trends have been identified:

- **Between 2010/11 and 2012/13 the number of available apprenticeships in Bury rose from 354 in 2010/11 to 382 in 2011/12 and then fell slightly to 347 in 2012/13.**

- However the number of available apprenticeships for 16 – 18 year olds in Bury reduced by 2.5% overall compared to a 23.9% reduction across the north west (where numbers dropped from 18,766 to 14,727) and an 11.6% reduction in England (where numbers dropped from 122,852 to 90,939).

With regard to apprenticeship starts for 19 to 24 year olds the following trends have been identified:

- Between 2010/11 and 2012/13 the number of available apprenticeships in Bury rose from 404 in 2010/11 to 456 in 2011/12 and then to 542 in 2012/13.
- The number of available apprenticeships for 19 – 24 year olds in Bury increased by 34.2% overall compared to a 7.9% increase across the north west (where numbers increased from 17,515 to 18,883) and a 19% increase in England (where numbers rose from 102,828 to 122,320).

The availability of apprenticeships for the over 25's rose by 10.6% in Bury compared with 16.6% in the northwest and 21.4% in England. What emerges from the data is that within Bury we have 'bucked the trends' by maintaining the availability of apprenticeship opportunities for 16 – 18 year olds; whereas overall numbers fell regionally and nationally. Bury also showed a significantly higher percentage increase in the availability of apprenticeships for 19 – 24 year olds.

Although there has been a slight reduction in 16 to 18 year olds starting Apprenticeships, the decline in Bury has been slower than elsewhere. The availability of apprenticeships for 19 -24's is continuing to grow, but starts aged 25 and over have peaked due to lower government funding for this age group.

With regard to apprenticeship take up through 'Raising the Participation Age', in April 2013 4.2% of 16 and 17 year olds in Bury were on apprenticeships, this compares to 4.8% in the north west and 3.6% in England.

I am also delighted to report that under this administration's leadership the availability of apprenticeship opportunities through Backing Young Bury has been equally impressive.

The total number of apprenticeship opportunities including conversions comes to 176 for the period 1 April 2010 to date.

Since the launch of the Backing Young Bury campaign in January 2011, 43 additional apprenticeships have been created and;

- 13 additional apprentices were recruited by the Council in 2011
- 30 additional apprentices were taken on in 2012
- 11 additional apprentices have been taken on in 2013 to date with an additional 8 planned for April 2014.

4. Councillor Daly

At the call-in scrutiny meeting on the 14th August concerning libraries, why didn't the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Tourism and Culture or the Leader of the Council mention the plan to install sculptures into Bury library?

A. Can I remind Cllr Daly that the basis for the call-in was two fold:

- i) that the results of the consultation exercise were ignored**
- ii) insufficient financial figures in respect of alternative proposals.**

However, at that time we were waiting for the outcome of the bid for monies to Arts Council England (ACE). The confirmation letter from the Arts Council was not received until the 28th August. We needed to discuss the plans with staff at Bury Library and Art Gallery which took place on the 3rd September after confirmation of the ACE funding bid being successful.

I would be interested to know Councillor Daly's view on whether he supports this new exciting development which further promotes the cultural offer and increased tourism.

5. Councillor Quinn

The latest Lib-Dem. Focus leaflet in Prestwich states that Bury Council has failed to collect £12 million in Council Tax in the last 3 years. Is this true?

A. No this is most certainly not true and it is very disappointing that such figures are being provided to the public.

So let me be clear. Information extracted from the Council's audited Accounts for 2012/13 shows that the total arrears for the past three completed financial years currently stand at £4.2m out of a tax charge of £226.4m.

Bury Council has an enviable record of collecting amounts due to it. Our in-year tax collection rate for 2012/13 was 97.3% which is the second best in Greater Manchester and it is some 2% higher than the average for Greater Manchester and 1% higher than the average for metropolitan Councils. Overall we collect more than 99% of the tax due to us and we do this whilst having extremely low collection costs.

This is something of which we should all be justifiably proud. Council Tax pays for a significant proportion of our services and the more we can collect then the more money we have to pay for essential front-line services.

I would have hoped that the Liberal Democrats would have been supporting us in this aim and yet instead they look once again to score cheap political points whilst supporting national policies, such as the shameful cut in Council Tax benefit, that not only make life harder for our most vulnerable residents but also make it more difficult to collect the Council Tax itself.

6. Councillor O'Hanlon

Could the Leader please inform members of the current waiting time or backlog of tree pruning in the authority? How many new trees have been felled and how many new trees planted in recent years?

A. (Part one only)

At the end of a busy growing season as well as past budget cuts it is inevitable that there will be a backlog of tree works to be carried out. There are approximately 800 tree jobs waiting for work to be carried out although many of these will be for low priority work, smaller jobs and second requests.

The waiting time is approximately 12 months, however all work is prioritised in accordance with the tree management policy so higher priority work such as highways trees or dangerous trees will be attended to much sooner. The winter period will also be used to catch up where possible.

7. Councillor Nuttall

How many planning applications have been refused within the last twelve months which, if granted, would have created new jobs in Bury?

A. During the last 12 months, October 1st to 31st September, 60 planning applications have been refused planning permission.

Of these applications 37 were for extension to homes, 30 were small scale applications ranging from proposals such as new shop fronts, and installations of atm's up to conversion of building for 5 apartments and 3 were 'large scale major applications' such as the proposed retail store on the former gas works site in Bury.

By their very nature, all applications potentially have job creation as a by product of granting consent, but the creation of jobs in itself, if not a reason for granting permission.

It should be remembered that when applications are refused, it is not done so lightly and they are only refused on the basis of careful consideration and non-compliance with the adopted Council or National planning policy.

However, it should also be noted that the refusal often results in a revised application that accords with Council and National Planning Policy and they are then approved.

During the same period, 781 applications of all types were approved, 24 were 'major applications' such as the 239 dwellings and 11 commercial/industrial units on land at Dumers Lane.

8. Councillor Parnell

Has the Council considered using the new technology available for repairing pot holes?

A. As resources for carrying out highway repairs gets tighter and tighter we are doing all that we can to ensure that funding is well spent and genuine efficiencies are achieved.

This is why we are piloting several new ways of repairing potholes with a greater shift towards planned and preventative repairs. This includes testing the use of versatile machinery and equipment that can be used for digging out repairs and surface preparation to ensure the repairs are more permanent. Another example is jet patching where temporary repairs are carried out to support in-house operations under controlled procedures that ensure longer lasting repairs. This, together with the development of area based working in Highways, will go a long way towards improving our highways in a cost effective way.

9. Councillor Pickstone

Could the Leader please inform members of the amounts raised in bus lane enforcement fines in the current and recent years?

**A. 2011/12 - £271,000
2012/13 - £201,719**

It is clear from this that we are seeing a greater level of compliance as time moves on and indeed the income projections took this into account.

10. Councillor Gartside

Will the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs please give details of all recent meetings with AGMA colleagues in relation to sharing services and how much taxpayers' money can be saved? Will he also give details of any such agreements with Team Bury?

A. Bury remains committed to exploring all avenues for achieving efficiency savings but there are currently no formal AGMA meetings taking place in respect of shared services. Efforts are now being focussed on the wider issue of public service reform and Bury is playing a full part in these discussions.

There are no formal shared service agreements with Team Bury partners although there are examples where partners are sharing accommodation and where the Council is providing services for partners, such as property management.

11. Councillor Jones

Can the Leader give an update on how many street safe schemes have been completed?

A. Seven of the 20mph speed limit schemes are substantially complete and associated Traffic Regulation Orders for these will become operative from tomorrow (Thursday 17 October). The locations of these seven schemes are as follows:

**Holcombe Lee/Carrwood Hey Area (RTNM)
Rudgwick Drive Area (Bury West)
Redvales Road Area (Bury East)
Egerton Road Area (Whitefield & Unsworth)
Fir Street estate (RTNM)
Woodley Avenue Area (Radcliffe)
Hamilton Road Area (Whitefield & Unsworth)**

Works on site have already commenced on a further four schemes and these will become operative within the next few weeks. The locations of these four schemes are as follow:

**Bolton Road/Turks Road estates (Radcliffe)
Prestwich Central Area (Phase 1) – Bent Lane & Ostrich Lane (Prestwich)
Elton Area (Bury West)
Chesham Road Area (Bury East)**

12. Councillor O'Hanlon

Could the Leader please inform members of the numbers empty homes in the Authority. If possible could this include detail by township and trends in recent years?

A. Out of a total stock number of around 82,000 properties, the total number of vacant properties (across all tenures) tends to be around 3,200 at any one time. This includes properties awaiting sale, letting, refurbishment or demolition as well as those experiencing long term non-occupation.

An 'empty property' is usually taken to mean one which has been empty for 6 months or more and it is at these properties where most of the Council's efforts are directed. Comparison between 2012 and 2013 on these properties is as follows:

In September 2012:

Total empties over 6 months = 1926

In September 2013:

Total empties over 6 months = 1728

This is a reduction of 198 empty properties over the last 12 months.

Information by area is as follows:

	2012	2013
Bury	698	637
Ramsbottom	148	142
Prestwich	369	332
Radcliffe	385	323
Tottington	139	121
Whitefield	187	173
TOTAL	1926	1728

The Urban Renewal team within Adult Care Services, in consultation with Council Tax, continues to track the number and distribution of empty residential properties. Urban Renewal has also developed several projects and programmes to tackle this issue and target resources in areas that will bring about the greatest impact.

13. Councillor Rothwell

Could the Leader update us on proposals for a new community fund to support community safety initiatives across the Borough?

- We work closely with the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to help ensure Bury continues to be one of the safest places to live in Greater Manchester.**
- As part of this work, we are pleased to announce proposals for the 'Commissioner's Community Fund' in Bury, using money from the Police Property Act Fund.**
- This equates to an annual allocation of £10k per year for Bury, starting from this year. The maximum grant allocation for each group will be £500.**
- Although this sounds a relatively small amount, experience from our existing community fund is that it is often small pots of community funding for local groups that make the biggest difference to communities.**
- We are working with the Commissioner's Office to agree the detailed criteria for the fund which will be available to voluntary and community groups across the borough, who will be able to submit their proposals/bids.**
- Key criteria will involve groups showing how their proposals support the Police and Crime Commissioner's community safety priorities and also township plan priorities for their area.**

- **The aim is to develop and launch the scheme before the end of October 2013.**
- **The scheme will be administered using existing staff resources (the Programme Manager responsible for the Council's other grant funding programmes to the voluntary and community sector).**