

Council Meeting – 11 December 2013

Questions:-

The Leader of the Council

Question running order:

1st: Labour

2nd: Liberal Democrat

3rd: Conservative

1. Councillor Jones

With so many libraries closing around the country, disproportionately so in the North, can the Leader provide a comparison of the situation in Bury with the other AGMA Authorities?

A. Thank you Councillor Jones. I'm sure you are aware that despite the huge cuts in funding that the library service has had and continues to manage, we are proud to confirm that all 17 of Bury's libraries will remain open for business and with their opening hours intact. We have contacted local authorities across the region and can confirm that:

- **Tameside: closed 5 libraries in October 2012.**
- **Bolton: Closed 5 libraries between January to April 2012.**
- **Liverpool: Closed 3 libraries from April 1st 2012.**
- **Cheshire West and Chester: One library closed last year.**
- **Warrington: Mobile library service closed**

2. Councillor Pickstone

The Leader will no doubt be aware of the proposals for a Greater Manchester Smart Motorway which will affect the M62 and M60 as it passes through our Borough. Will he join with me in asking the Highways Agency to consider environmental measures which will reduce the impact of additional traffic on immediately neighbouring communities, particularly in Simister, Whitefield and Prestwich?

A. As part of a consultation on Phase 1 of the Manchester Smart Motorways Scheme, the Highways Agency consultants have submitted an Environmental Assessment to the council for consideration. This extensive document looks in detail at the likely impacts of the scheme on the local environment. Our officers will assess this document and make any necessary comments to the Highways Agency before the deadline of 20th December 2013.

The details of Phase 2 of this scheme are still to be confirmed and it is likely that this phase will be considered a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and would require an application to the planning inspectorate for a Development Consent Order. Consultation with statutory environmental bodies, local authorities and the public is a major component of the process for obtaining a Development Consent Order.

3. Councillor Bevan

Can the Leader of the Council confirm what actions the Council took to support the small businesses in the Borough on Small Business Saturday on 7 December 2013?

A. Town Centres Business Support supported Small Business Saturday through distribution of information via social media streams and direct emails and meetings with local business groups throughout the borough. We also encouraged local businesses to take part, register and put on special in-store activities/offers.

Since its conception, the @TownCentresTeam twitter handle has promoted and supported small businesses with information on how they can help themselves with promotion, funding, finances, government legislation etc., on a continued effort throughout the year. This is mirrored with other social media channels and retweeted through the various streams monitored/updated by Business Support.

This is in addition to global emails to over 8,000+ Bury Council employees and working with the local press/media to enhance exposure.

The Council also continues to support the borough's businesses in many other ways such as through the new virtual Business Engagement Team, through our sponsorship of the Best of Bury business awards and by opening up our procurement procedures to make it easier for Bury businesses win contracts with the Council.

We must be doing something right because the Government has recently given Bury Council a national award for being the Best Council to Do Business With.

4. Councillor Cummings

Could the Leader tell us how much money has been invested in Radcliffe lately?

A. Bury Council is committed to investing in all parts of the borough and I am proud that Radcliffe is no exception.

Whilst the party opposite promised much and delivered little in Radcliffe, I am delighted that this Labour administration has put its money where its mouth is.

We have just embarked on an exciting multi-million pound regeneration project in Radcliffe Town Centre, which will deliver a refurbished Market Hall, new public toilets, a revamped bus terminus and a new retail scheme. A planning application for the Market Hall is to be submitted next week and it is anticipated that the works will start as early as next March.

I'm also pleased to say that myself and the MP for Bury South, Ivan Lewis, will soon be meeting with Sir Michael Heller chairman of London and Associated Properties about investment opportunities in Radcliffe.

Although Radcliffe's excellent bid for Portas Programme monies was ultimately unsuccessful, the Council has nonetheless pledged £10,000 of its own money to the Radcliffe Town Team.

The Team is currently reviewing its options for investment, although I understand that there is a preference for works which will compliment the refurbishment of the Market Hall, to maximise the impact of the expenditure.

Radcliffe has a heritage to be proud of and the Council has worked hard to secure an investment of £250,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to investigate and celebrate the surviving medieval core of the town, which is centred on Radcliffe Tower, St Mary's church and the Tithebarn. The contribution of volunteers has been immense and I am thrilled that the project has engendered such local interest and pride.

In the field of education, the Council has recently spent £635,000 refurbishing and repairing four primary schools in Radcliffe. This is in addition to the £12m spent on building the new Millwood Special School which opened its doors last year and has proven to be an enormous success, with a recent OFSTED inspection judging all areas of the school to be outstanding.

Members will recall that the Council has also approved £617,000 to part fund the Radcliffe empty property pilot. In partnership with Six Town Housing the strategy will involve a total investment of £3m in order to bring around 30 private sector properties back into use and available for affordable rent over the next two years. The project will target properties that have been empty for at least six months and are causing the greatest negative impact.

The Council has also secured £950,000 to create a pioneering scheme which will improve the quality of life for people with dementia. The work will be carried out at Rose Court, bringing yet more much needed employment into the town.

We should also not forget that last year saw the completion of the £6m Red Bank extra care facility in Radcliffe. This award winning scheme has been designed to provide much needed affordable housing into the town by providing 40 independent apartments for older people requiring support.

Finally, sport and leisure within Radcliffe is also benefitting from the Council's spending priorities:

- There has been a £13,000 enhancement to Close Park outdoor gym and to the Bolton Road Park outdoor table tennis facility**
- £85,000 has been spent on play area improvements at Coronation Park, Bright Street, Snape Street, Bolton Road Park and Close Park**
- Tennis courts have been refurbished at Close Park and Bolton Road Park at a cost of £10,000**
- £13,000 will shortly be spent on the refurbishment of the Bolton Road ball zone.**

At a time when the Council is rising to the challenge of the most severe Government spending cuts in living memory, the examples that I have just given add up to a total investment of over £25m which must surely make it absolutely clear to everyone that this Labour administration sees Radcliffe as being a worthwhile priority for investment.

5. Councillor O'Hanlon

Would the Leader join with me in welcoming the announcement by the Coalition Government of a 50% discount in Business Rates to encourage businesses to occupy vacant town centre shops? What steps will the Authority take to maximise the benefit of this initiative for our town centres?

A. Town centres have been decimated by the recession created by this Government's woeful economic policies and so, yes, I do welcome the very belated support that was announced in the Autumn Statement. I also welcome the announcement that at long last the Government are going to take action on the shambolic appeals system that they have presided over and which has caused untold suffering and unnecessary expense for businesses up and down the country.

I am also delighted that the resolution passed by this Council in September 2013 calling on the Government to extend small business rate relief has been heard in Whitehall and that the Chancellor has done exactly what the Council asked him to do.

Of course, I will be even happier when I see evidence that these measures have been fully funded by the Government in a way that means that Bury's businesses and taxpayers will not be unfairly disadvantaged in the way that we normally are from the distribution of Government funding.

Bury Council is committed to helping businesses in any way that we can, as evidenced by our recent national award as one of the best Councils to do business with, and so we will be very happy to promote the new relief through our contacts with the managers of the Rock, Millgate and Longfield centres, through the local Chamber of Commerce, the Business Growth Hub, local estate agents, Township Forums, local traders' groups, the Council's own Business Engagement Group and New Economy to name but a few.

6. Councillor Walker

Can the Leader advise us how much income has been generated by introducing Sunday car parking charges in Bury Town Centre and how many fines have been levied on those who have not paid and displayed ? What have been the staffing costs of supervising Sunday parking?

A. £25,500 income has been generated from Sunday charging. Sunday parking is still being monitored by the existing Sunday enforcement resources who report that there is major compliance for Sunday parking. Therefore no penalty charge notices have been issued to date and there have been no additional staffing costs.

7. Councillor Black

What has the response been to council's campaign to encourage residents to downsize their grey bins from 240 litre to the smaller 140 litre?

A. From January 140 litre grey bins have been offered FOC to residents as an alternative to paying £25 for a new or replacement 240 litre bin.

Between January 01 and December 06 x3272 140 litre grey bins and x446 240 litre grey bins have been issued to residents in the form of new or replacement bins.

8. Councillor Pickstone

Could the Leader please inform members how many hours of adult home care was provided in the last two years and estimated for the current year? Could the figures be separated for home care paid for by the authority and that paid for by the recipient?

A. This response covers all adults 18+, not just older people 65+.

The in-house home care service was transformed to become a specialist Reablement Service during 2010/11. As a consequence, the vast majority of home care is now commissioned by the Council and provided by external providers.

The total hours of domiciliary care delivered during the past 2 years were:

2011/12 – 192,700 hours

2012/13 – 253,900 hours

This is a 32% increase between the two years.

The estimate of the number of hours for the full year 2013/14 is 304,000 hours, an increase of approx 20% over 2012/13.

The Council commissions home care for customers with an assessed need under Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) eligibility, and pays for this under its statutory duty of care.

The Council does not currently keep records in respect of self funders who would approach providers directly and pay themselves for the care they receive. However, customers do contribute towards the cost of their care package – in respect of home care this stood at approximately 38% customer contribution during 2012/13.

9. Councillor Vincent

This Council has received £400,000 by way of an extra dividend from Manchester Airport. This money was an unexpected windfall. Can the Leader of the Council confirm what it has been spent on, or what the Council propose to invest the money in?

A. The additional dividend was earned as a result of the innovative work done by the Labour led Association of Greater Manchester Authorities to bring about a deal to acquire Stansted Airport. This deal was aimed at increasing the profitability of Manchester Airport Group (MAG) and which in turn was aimed at increasing the value of our taxpayers' investment in MAG whilst also increasing the return that we earn from that investment.

Bury Council has taken a very prudent approach to the use of the additional income and we have decided to bring it into our revenue budget and use it to help offset the demand pressures that our services face and to go some small way towards offsetting the £38m that we have had to cut from our budget thanks to the actions of the coalition Government.

Of course this contrasts with the reckless suggestion from the party opposite that we should spend the money on vote-winning schemes without troubling ourselves to think of the future.

10. Councillor Southworth

Last year a large sum of money was given to fund a recruiting programme for new Foster Carers in order to limit the need to use Independent Fostering Agencies and Out of Borough placements. Can you please update me on how effective this has been, how many extra Foster Carers have been recruited and how, as a result, the use of more expensive placements has been reduced?

A. Thank you for your question Councillor Southworth.

The Invest to Save has had a very positive impact on the fostering service. We have used the financial investment and new staff team to really push forward the need for Bury Children to be placed with Bury Foster Carers. Since April 2013 we have increased our general foster carer households by 16 and currently have 10 households in assessment.

We are booking up for February's 2014 training and have three households already booked on. We have run training every two months since the initial investment in September 2012 with the first applicants being approved in April 2013. These training groups are always full. Our initial inquiries have soared and we are hitting our target of 21 initial enquiries each month, averaging 21.5 each month.

Our initial target was to increase our baseline of foster carers by 10 households by 31st March 2014. We are well on track to exceed this target. We continue to market our service within Bury. We have monthly ads in local papers, we have held a number of community events across the borough, going out and engaging with the public and talking about the fostering task.

I am also pleased to confirm that all parties on the Council have agreed to include fostering advertising on campaign material and newsletters. We are eagerly awaiting our new joint fostering and adoption website which will offer an efficient and informative service to existing foster carers and to people interested in fostering.

In budget terms we are making positive progress. Although our budget is still overspending our agency placement spending has reduced £800k compared with last year, reflecting the improvement in our fostering capacity and a range of other initiatives. We are working on a further invest to save which will look at how we attract foster carers for older children and those with

additional needs, who we currently need to place in Independent Placements or residential provision.

In conclusion we are delighted with how the initiative is going and the success it is having. I would like to thank the opposition parties for their support. Getting Bury carers for Bury children not only saves money but greatly improves their life chances.

11. Councillor O'Hanlon

Could the Leader please inform members of the level of preparation of the Authority for winter weather? Has the Council been able to provide additional grit bins for areas that need them?

A. Preparations have been made ready for the winter maintenance service that commences in early November. Salt levels for road gritting have been restocked. The 5 gritting vehicles are in place at Bolton from where we work in partnership with Bolton Council. In advance of any wintry weather salt bins will be restocked. So far this winter the gritters have been out on 6 occasions.

The salt bin locations for this winter season have been decided. We do not have the resources to provide salt bins in every road or street that isn't on a gritting route. We have to limit the number of bins we provide so that critically we are able to maintain them at times of most need. As a result we are unable to provide any more salt bins.

12. Councillor Daly

What is the Council doing to address the problem of unlawful, obstructive and sometimes dangerous parking outside schools in the Borough when children are being picked up at the end of the school day?

A. A number of primary schools have now signed up to the "Safer Parking Charter" which involves banners being displayed outside schools to highlight the issue to parents.

Furthermore Parking Services regularly request additional enforcement by NSL outside schools at both ends of the day.

A large amount of schools are now on the additional enforcement list which is causing resource problems in attending all the schools on a regular basis.

However enforcement is difficult as many of the restrictions near schools require an observation period before a penalty charge notice can be issued.

13. Councillor Simpson

I understand that the Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety has worked with the Police and Crime Commissioner to establish a small fund for voluntary and community groups across the borough – please can you provide further details on this?

A. Bury has been allocated £10,000 from the Police Property Act Fund, and voluntary groups can bid for some of this money to help them in their work. Organisations must demonstrate how the project to be funded meets the priorities in the Police Crime Plan for Greater Manchester and the Local Township Plans in Bury focusing on one or more of the following themes:

- **Driving Down Crime**
- **Building and Strengthening Partnership work**
- **Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour**
- **Protecting Vulnerable People**
- **Putting Victims at the Centre**
- **Maintaining Public Safety**
- **Supporting Individuals Vulnerable to Violent Extremism and Serious Crime**

Individual grants of up to £500 are available and funding decisions will be made by a panel which will include the Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety, Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety, Chief Officer of Bury Third Sector Development Agency, Member of Greater Manchester Police and a Member Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service.

Application forms can be requested from Liz Saunders in the Communities team.

14. Councillor Bevan

Can the Leader of the Council update Ramsbottom Members regarding the Council's consultations with the owners of the former Mondi Paper Mill site on Bridge Street, Ramsbottom in terms of the potential future development of the land?

A. There has been no formal approach to the Council in relation to the redevelopment of this site since April 2013, where the land owner sought views on the redevelopment of the site for a mixed use scheme. Pre-application proposals are confidential and therefore the details of the proposals are commercially sensitive and cannot be released. However, it is understood that the site is once more on the market.

15. Councillor Carter

Can the Leader please give an update on how many 20 mph zones have been completed?

A. A total of eleven 20mph speed limit schemes are substantially complete and the associated Traffic Regulation Orders for these are all operative. Works on site have already commenced on a further four schemes and Traffic Regulation Orders for these will become operative at the earliest opportunity.

16. Councillor Daly

In Bury we have at least 8 breweries, more per head than London. What can the Council do to support this thriving local industry and to make Bury the real ale capital of Britain?

A. It is good news to learn of a growing SME sector in our Borough. Bury Council had worked hard to build relationships with our local business community. We will continue to build those relationships by offering a first point of contact for business leaders through our Business Engagement Team. This team has been pulled together from areas of the Council that have contact with our local business community. This piece of work has been developed on the back of our visits to businesses over the last 2 years. A key part of this work is to develop a streamlined facility to get key business related messages out to our small, medium and large businesses and indeed to those residents who are on the verge of their Business Start Up journey. At a national and regional level there is a myriad of support for business to start up, to grow, to invest and to access support. We will be promoting the Business Growth Hub, Access to Finance, New Enterprise Allowance, Start Up Support, Digital Support , support in employing young people and any other information advice and guidance that is out there. One of our officers has recently visited a small independent brewery to share information about the financial incentives offered for those small businesses that want to employ a young person.

17. Councillor Stella Smith

Could the Leader tell us how many food banks are now operating in Bury?

A. In a modern society it is shameful that the poorest and most vulnerable members of society have been treated so badly by the coalition Government that reliance on food banks has tripled over the last year alone. The Trussell Trust, which runs 400 food banks across the UK, has handed out supplies to more than 350,000 people between April and September this year. Even more scandalous is the fact that a third of those being helped were children, and a third needed food following a delay in the payment of benefits. Bury's Poverty Strategy (2013-2016) sets out our approach to tackling pockets of poverty that exist within the borough, including food poverty. This is within the context of a challenging economic climate and welfare reform. The Poverty Strategy is discussed and reported to Bury's Welfare Reform Board which is the over-arching body tasked with developing Bury's approach to tackling the implications of the Government's Welfare reform agenda.

The Welfare Reform Board has received progress updates regarding the valuable work of the Community Food Action Group which has been meeting in Bury since March 2013 with the following aims;

"To work in partnership to alleviate food poverty in our Borough"

Members of this group include Bury Council representatives, Porch Boxes, Mosses Centre, Churches Together, Christians Against Poverty, Calico (Bury Rough Sleepers project), Rotary, Incredible Edible, Caritas and others. The Group has established a network in order to explore and map out long-term needs, gather information about what is on offer, and publicise this appropriately.

Although the Porch Box scheme is the one widely recognised and valued “food parcel” provider in Bury, the group have also identified a number of other organisations that regularly give food parcels, and others that provide free or heavily subsidised hot meals on a regular basis.

A Food Mapping exercise has been carried out and a full list of providers is now available to agencies to point people in the right direction. The list is still work in progress as the group are constantly finding new groups or organisations offering help to people in Bury. Members can access a copy of this list by contacting Cindy Lowthian, Communities Manager.

We are currently working with our partners on the Welfare Reform Board to explore opportunities to fund a temporary role to further help co-ordinate work on food poverty in the Borough. The aim would be for this role to work within the Bury Support Fund Team.

18. Councillor Parnell

Would the Leader like to comment on the recent award to Bury Hospice as Community Impact Best in Class at the inaugural Made In Bury Business Awards 2013, and to congratulate all the community finalists for the tremendous contribution our community groups make to the lives of the borough’s residents.

A. The inaugural Made In Bury Business Awards held on Friday 22 November was a fantastic success. The room was buzzing with excitement and it was quite breathtaking to witness the drive and commitment that our business community have for their individual businesses and for our town and its people. The award to Bury Hospice was well deserved and they in turn thanked the community of Bury for supporting them and their important work. Indeed we should thank all our community groups for their role in developing and maintaining strong and safe communities. The Made in Bury branding was adopted from the work done to engage communities to feel proud and connected to our townships. We thought that it was crucial to take that branding and embrace it with our business communities as well.

19. Councillor Fitzwalter

Could the Leader of the Council please provide an update on the progress made by the Digital Inclusion Steering Group, which is a joint council trade union initiative, committed “to support all people in Bury in their efforts to access and use the internet?”

A. The Council recognises that people’s expectations about how they access our services is changing and we also know that one way of tackling the crippling effect of the coalition Government’s cuts is to move towards ‘digital by default’ for the provision of relevant services.

However it is essential that we take steps to ensure that this doesn’t mean that people are excluded from accessing services this way. For that reason, working in partnership with Unison, the Council has established a Digital Inclusion Steering Group which I am very proud to Chair.

The Group originally consisted of representatives from all front-facing Council services, Unison and our Organisational Development team but we have now extended the Group's membership and invited Six Town Housing, Job Centre Plus and the Citizen's Advice Bureau to join us.

We have recently appointed a graduate on a fixed-term contract to manage and implement the project and his first task has been to carry out a survey to determine levels of inclusion among Bury Council staff. The results of the survey will allow us to take targeted action to address any internal exclusion issues and, as the borough's largest employer, this in turn should begin to address wider exclusion issues.

We are also undertaking a borough-wide mapping exercise to identify all internet access points in Bury, including those provided by the Council, the 3rd sector, DWP and other public and private sector partners. Out of this we will be able to highlight areas and groups of residents who may be digitally excluded again allowing us to take targeted action to close any gaps

The project will be launched formally in January with a partner conference that will aim to attract delegates from all parts of the borough and from as many agencies as possible.

I am particularly pleased that this work is being carried out in partnership with Unison who have sourced some funding to assist the project. In addition Unison Learning Reps will be available to help strengthen digital inclusion amongst Bury Council staff.