

COUNCIL MEETING

29 January 2014

LEADER'S STATEMENT

Madam Mayor, Members and Officers of the Council, there has been only one meeting of the Cabinet since the last meeting of the Council.

Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Cabinet received the Medium Term Financial Strategy, covering the period 2015-2017. A period which many agree will be the most challenging in the recent past and possibly within the life of this Borough.

It makes for grim reading but never the less it's important, as a responsible Administration that we have a strategy as finance is central to all activities of the Council; virtually everything the Council does has a financial implication; whether it involves incurring costs, or generating income.

What will be the Post 2015 Challenge

I have already told Members that 2015 will be our toughest year so far given the huge cuts by Government to our revenue budgets. The strategy also speculates, quite strongly that a similar cut is likely for 2016-17. The view was re-enforced recently by the Chancellor who indicated further cuts of £25 billion are still needed. If we thought a cut of £54m was eye watering, think about a figure of £70m by 2017 which is off the scale and simply overwhelming to think we can meet all of the needs of our residents given these levels of cuts.

I have been accused in some quarters of scare mongering and being fast and loose with announcements of doom and gloom. I hope those watching and listening to announcements from Government will finally appreciate and accept the scale of the revenue reductions we are facing and scale of the cuts we need to manage.

Accepting what we have to do to deliver £10m of cuts in 2014-15, the urgent priority now is to develop proposals that will see reductions identified as part of a medium term financial plan that places these detailed budget options within a two-three year timeframe.

Post 2015 Challenges

Things will change, that's a fact. I have previously spelled out some of the changes.

Changing the expectations about what the Council can deliver – In the future, the Council will not be able to meet all the public's needs/expectations or be able to deliver services at the quantity/quality/standard that we currently provide. The Council will need to be up-front about the need to cut services, spell out why levels of service are reducing, develop more targeting or in some circumstances stop delivering services altogether.

Working more closely with individuals and communities to deliver services – The Council will not be organisationally or financially able to meet all service needs in the future and therefore will need to work with individuals and communities to encourage them where possible to undertake more for themselves. This is an approach that we will need to consider across all the Council's services where we do not have an individual statutory requirement. For example, the Council may provide facilities or equipment but community/voluntary groups/individuals may have to organise events, maintenance, support etc. themselves.

This approach builds on the very long standing and successful 'self management' partnerships operating for bowling greens, football pitches and play areas and, more recently, with the Park Rangers' service. More of this approach is needed and involves engaging and encouraging a greater partnership between the Council and voluntary community groups in providing services in their area. Over the coming period we will be working with 3rd Sector partners to develop a new and comprehensive Volunteer Strategy that will support a transformation of this important area.

Stronger focus on demand reduction - Part of the principles behind Public Service Reform is to manage the demand for services, reduce this demand where possible and to identify more cost effective ways of meeting the demands that remain. It is important that we adopt the same approach to the delivery of the Council's mainstream services. We have had some success for example through the changes we made in the refuse collection arrangements which has changed people's attitude towards recycling and helped the Council reduce the expensive costs of tipping rubbish into landfill.

Can we do more for less? – Bury Council, its Members and employees have and continue to work miracles in delivering services with less resources and less costs. Yes, employees have been subject to changes to their terms and conditions with the latest change which focused on reducing cost of car allowances and car parking permits. This has, quite rightly, also involved Members who now, for example, have to pay if they want to park at the Town Hall during the day.

However, I question whether that is enough giving we are seeing no reductions in demand for services?

Over the coming period we must redouble our efforts to ensure the services we directly provide are securing value for money and are delivered in the most effective way as I know our residents would expect this. This may well mean doing things differently to the way we have always delivered services; **No change** is not an option for us!

Changing the way Residents access services

Bury Council has been trying to widen access options in addition to providing very traditional ways residents and service users access services and secure information about services. Whilst there have been developments with the Council's web site to move to become a 24/7 Council

access is still primarily through face to face contact and telephone.

The challenge for us is that we need to offer a wider range of 'self service' remote options similar to the high street experience so familiar to many of our residents, such as booking holidays, on-line shopping, and banking. In a post 2015 environment the Council will have to look to becoming a 'virtual' council where the 'high street' experience of 'self service' using smart technology becomes mainstream, whilst still offering the traditional options, but these, because of affordability, will have to steadily reduce over time.

Corporate Debt Policy

The cabinet agreed to a new Corporate Debt Policy and I was personally pleased to see some of the positive changes which includes encouraging customers owing the Council and Six Town Housing to make contact as soon as they get into difficulty.

To support this approach advice and information will be provided at the first point of contact in relation to all council debts which includes a risk assessment

Customers will be advised about free independent money advice services provided locally and given information about free on line help available.

We are also working in partnership with Step Change (formally CCCS) who is the UK's leading debt charity. We are utilising this valuable, free independent service and have hot keys in place within the Council and Six Town Housing.

Flood Management Strategy

This is a very topical subject right now.

Cabinet Members approved the final Strategy and Sustainability Appraisal for a further six week period of consultation in order to establish final stakeholder views on the revised Strategy and any comments on the Sustainability Appraisal. Following on from this consultation any necessary revisions will be incorporated in to the documents prior to issuing a final 'adopted' version of the Strategy.

Surplus Land Disposal Strategy

This strategy:

- Encourages services to look critically at their use of property and, where possible, to release such assets for disposal.
- Where properties have been declared surplus, their interim management will be undertaken by the Estates team and the ongoing running costs associated with such properties transferred accordingly.

STONEWALL

I was delighted to see again the Council has been recognised as a high scorer in the annual Stonewall Top 100 Employers in Britain Workplace Equality Index' achieving 54th place on the index with more points than we have ever scored previously.

In addition, our LGBT employee network group was singled out as the 'Star Performer Network Group' for the North West region and was presented with this prestigious award at the North West awards ceremony last week. Bury Council is also quoted as a case study in the index report for our 'robust commitment to fostering a workplace culture where all employees are treated with dignity and respect'.

NEETS

The latest Annual Activity Survey for NEETS for Bury Year 11 leavers shows it's been another record year with 97.1% in Employment; Education or Training. This is an improvement from the previous impressive record last year of 95.9% which naturally we are delighted with. I would like to publically thank all our High Schools, Colleges and Employers for making available these opportunities for our young people.

High Street of the Year

The good news keeps on coming
Bury recently came joint second in the Daily Telegraph Awards, where there were 500 entries and where it was the only one in the North West to be shortlisted.

I and Cllr Frith recently visited a number of shops in the high street and clearly the diversity of shops played a big part in this award. I also recently met local business leaders and I pay tribute to them for the good work they do in working with us to continue to improve the shopping experience for residents and visitors to Ramsbottom.

Employment

I was pleased to read recently that Bury town centre had the largest increase in employment of all the GM town centres over the 2009-2012 period. This 15% increase in employment highlights the crucial importance our impressive Bury town centre makes to the economy of this borough. Creating a strong local economy is a key priority of this administration and we will continue to do whatever we can to support and celebrate the success of all our town centres.

HEN Project

Helping Homeless people to change their lives around is something we all I am sure would wish to support. Earlier this month I had the pleasure of attending the HEN Graduation Ceremony which is shorthand for the Housing Employment and New Opportunities.

The project made available 44 bed spaces and where 21 placements were completed; 15 found new employment and 25 people were in training.

Madam Mayor that concludes my statement.

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