

## **Council Meeting – 9 July 2014**

### **Questions:-**

**The Leader of the Council**

#### **1. Councillor Kerrison**

Please can the Leader confirm that Bury has been selected to become a pilot area for the roll out of Universal Credit and can he tell us what the Council's role will be and what we will be doing to make sure that local residents don't suffer as a result?

**A. The Bury area has indeed been selected as a Universal Credit pathfinder from the beginning of July as part of expansion across the North West area.**

**Initially this will affect new claimants who are single people and we understand that it will be rolled out to couples sometime in August or September. No customers with children are in scope at this stage and we expect claimant numbers to be in the low 100s. We have been working closely with local and regional DWP staff to ensure that the rollout happens as smoothly as possible with no adverse effect on customers.**

**The Local Authority will have a direct involvement in a number of ways and all are intended to ensure that customers are supported during this transition.**

**This will include providing support for customers in making on-line applications as this is the only method of claiming Universal Credit. We have established a Digital Hub at Whittaker Street and identified staff who will act as `Digital Assistants`. This will be replicated at the Town Hall in the area currently occupied by HMRC.**

**We will also be providing `personal budgeting support` to customers referred to us by DWP who have debt problems. This is in addition to the existing support offered by trained staff as part of the Council's Support Fund. These staff have processes already in place to signpost customers to other agencies such as CAB and StepChange and also to agencies which provide support back into work.**

**We have ensured that Social Landlords including Six Town Housing are kept informed about the roll out and the potential impact it may have for them.**

## **2. Councillor Gartside**

Can the Leader or relevant Cabinet member confirm exactly how much extra funding from central government Bury Council has received to help fix pot-holes since the start of this year and how much of it has been spent?

**A. The Government have just provided us with £244,561 on top of the £192,770 that they made available earlier this year. To date we have spent £70,741 which is 37% of the original funding.**

**I am pleased that we have qualified for this funding because it shows that the Government recognise that Bury Council delivers best practice when it comes to highway maintenance.**

**However this money only goes a fraction of the way to making up for the savage cuts that the Government has previously made to our highways funding and so it is clear to everyone that the blame for potholes on our roads lies firmly at their door.**

**Also the ad hoc and one-off nature of this support is also extremely unhelpful compared to the strategic approach taken by the last Labour Government who provided funding that allowed us to take a proper, planned and long-term approach to looking after our roads.**

## **3. Councillor Parnell**

Will the Leader extend an invitation to the Party opposite to join us on the picket line tomorrow? The hard working men and women of Bury Council haven't had an above inflation wage rise for 10 years. Will the Party opposite be joining us tomorrow?

**A. Tomorrow our employees are expressing their frustration by going on strike over the way they are being undervalued by this coalition government in much the same way local government has been shabbily treated.**

**When you see the millions of pounds paid in bonuses to bankers and other allied professions it's a bitter pill to swallow for our staff, off the back of a 3 year pay freeze to now be faced with a modest rise, to say the least of 1%. We for our part, because of government cuts simply are not able to fund a higher figure.**

**So I hope the disruption to residents and businesses is minimal and that we can get back to normal as soon as possible.**

#### **4. Councillor Gunther**

Can the Leader tell us what the footfall has been from people visiting the new Sculpture Gallery situated in part of Bury Library?

**A. There will have been 9,500 visitors to the Sculpture Centre between May 3rd and July 3<sup>rd</sup> with school pupils/students visiting the centre accounting for 487 visits within this total.**

**Whilst it is difficult to project an annual footfall from this because the figures have seasonal variations we have every reason to expect that the total will come to more than 60,000 which means that in its first year of opening the centre will have cost Bury residents less than £1.25 per visit.**

#### **5. Councillor Mallon**

Bearing in mind the Council had to make nearly £10 million in cuts in 2013/14, can the Leader update us on the financial outturn for the year?

**A. Despite having to deliver cuts of £10m in 2013/14 I am however pleased to report that the Council has, yet again, lived within its budget and in fact we will be reporting an underspend for the year of £406,000.**

**This is due to the fact that we take a longer-term approach to our finances and part of the underspend relates to cuts being delivered in advance and part is due to the prudent approach we took towards the extra dividend from Manchester Airport.**

**It is also testament to our extremely effective treasury management activities and it is also due to the hard work and diligence of Cllr Smith, Cabinet Members, managers and staff who have once again strived to maintain quality services against the onslaught of the coalition Government's cuts.**

**We mustn't be complacent though, because Members will be aware that we have to deliver cuts of £9.7m in the 2014/15 budget, and we face cuts of over £31m in the coming two years.**

**The scale of this challenge cannot be underestimated, but at least we know we are entering this period of cuts with a sound financial foundation.**

## **6. Councillor Nuttall**

How many lollypop ladies or men are employed by the Council and in particular how many are sited where there is also a pedestrian crossing?

**A. There are 69 permanent crossing patrol staff and 11 casual staff. 20 are sited where there is an assisted crossing point.**

## **7. Councillor Fitzwalter**

Can the Cabinet Member for Health and Well Being confirm how many grants have been approved from the "I Will If You Will" Fund to help community groups in Bury improve women's participation in sport and physical activity?

**A. The community fund is available to both constituted and non-constituted clubs in Bury. To date 19 applications have been received totalling £14,357. 471 women and girls have will be engaged through these applications. There is a total budget of £25k available for clubs until the end of September. Work is being done through the IWIYW Community Activators and the Communities team to raise the profile of the funding. Applications to date have been received from a good mix of organisations including Sports Clubs, TRAs, Community Centres**

## **8. Councillor Bevan**

Can the Leader or relevant Cabinet Member please confirm if all "Self Service" machines are now fully operational across all of the libraries in the Borough?

**A. Self Issue machines have been installed and are working well at Bury, Prestwich, Radcliffe, Ramsbottom, Tottington, Unsworth and Whitefield Libraries. A machine has been installed at Castle Library to replace a rather antiquated model which had been there for some years; the book stock at Castle is being processed and the new system should be operational within a couple of weeks.**

## **9. Councillor Southworth**

The Council has just begun to consult on possible changes to staff terms and conditions. Please can the Leader explain why it is necessary for the Council to undertake this consultation?

**A. We are being forced to undertake this consultation for one reason and one reason only and that is because yet again this Con Dem Government have imposed swinging and unfair cuts on Bury Council's budget. In 2015/16 these cuts amount to £16 million and a similar level of cuts is expected in 2016/17. These cuts are in addition to the £38m cuts that we have been forced to implement since this government came to power in 2010.**

**Although this Labour administration will once again be doing all we can to protect jobs and services, the reality is that the cuts are now so severe that we will not be able to meet the savings target without making extremely difficult and upsetting decisions.**

**We owe it to taxpayers and service users to look at all available options and sadly this means that we have no choice but to review terms and conditions once again.**

**The proposed changes are explained in more detail in a consultation pack that has been issued to employees and the trade unions. Each of the proposals has been considered in detail and the decision to move to formal consultation has not been an easy one to take. I must stress that at this stage these are only proposals and we have made it clear that we would welcome feedback from employees and trade unions.**

#### **10. Councillor Daly**

Since September 2011, 49 employees of Bury MBC have been made compulsory redundant. Can the Leader/Cabinet Member give details of what cash saving has been achieved as a result of this? Furthermore, what cash saving has been achieved from non-compulsory redundancies since September 2011?

**A. Thank you for your question Councillor Daly. There has been a cash saving of £1.2m made as a result of 49 compulsory redundancies that have occurred since September 2011.**

**The cash saving achieved from voluntary (non-compulsory) redundancies since September 2011 is in excess of £5m per annum. This has been achieved by people taking Voluntary Early Retirement, Voluntary Severance and Flexible Retirement.**

#### **11. Councillor Jones**

In light of the cuts to staffing, can the Leader give an assurance that we will meet our statutory deadline of 30 September 2014 for the production and approval of the Council's accounts?

**A. Like all departments across the Council, our Accountancy service has faced significant cuts and staffing reductions and yet the work does not go away nor does the desire of the staff to improve on the already impressive services that they provide for us. In fact the demands are increasing as more and more reporting requirements are imposed on us in order to comply with International Accounting Standards.**

**However, thanks to the efforts of our staff, and the investment that we have made in top quality financial systems, I am pleased to report that the 2013/14 Accounts are ready to be signed off by the Audit Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> July – a whole two and a half months ahead of the statutory deadline. This means that the Audit Commission assess our work as being 'world class' performance.**

**Members can also be assured that we haven't cut corners either and our auditors, KPMG, have given the Accounts a clean bill of health.**

**I would like to pass on my thanks to all staff who contributed to this tremendous effort.**

## **12. Councillor Gunther**

Can the Leader/Cabinet Member inform us how much money has been spent from the £2.3 million "I Will If You Will" fund and how is this broken down?

**A. Thanks to Cllr Gunther for her question.**

**As the Councillor knows the funding programme has been jointly 'signed off' between Officers from the Department for Culture Media & Sport, who are in effect the sponsors and the 'I will if you Will' Steering Group. Up to the end of June we have spent £1,039,442. This figures includes procurement of a wide range of professionals and facilities which includes instructors/equipment/room hire for a number of delivery strands – Dance & Fitness/Outdoor Fitness/National Governing Body schemes (Lawn Tennis Association/Breeze cycling network etc); pop up pool at Broadoak & Later Life. In addition national and local costs have been incurred covering staffing/marketing/general overheads. The remaining budget of £1,344,336 is committed against both existing schemes and a range of new ideas/proposals in order to get optimum use of the remaining funds for the final 3 months of the project.**

## **13. Councillor O'Brien**

Can the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing confirm whether the Council supports the recently published north-west public health manifesto prepared by the regions directors of public health and how it will influence Bury's Health and Wellbeing Strategy?

**A. Thank you Cllr O'Brien for this really relevant question.**

**I think this manifesto is a very exciting development which encompasses a holistic approach to health and well-being with recommendations which will reduce health inequalities such as promoting the payment of the living wage, initiating tougher regulation of pay day loans companies as well as many more which target banning marketing of foods high in fat, sugar and salt being advertised before 9pm, to reduce children's exposure to this, requiring all schools to provide a minimum of one hour of physical activity to all pupils every day and eradicating child poverty as well as many more policies such as**

minimum alcohol pricing. These are actions lie largely outside council control. Implementation of the 10 polices would need to be at a National level which would a significant impact on improving the health of the people of Bury. Adoption of this manifesto would support the goals of our health and well being strategy and create the conditions that would enhance the impact of locally delivered interventions. What we do know is that knowledge and education alone is not enough to change health related behaviours. Many so called health choices are also strongly influenced and determined by the commercial sector which are driven by profit. People's health is determined by the extent to which they have access to the economic, social and physical resources they need to meet their needs and deal with the changes to their circumstances. Without addressing these wider determinant of health such as adequate housing, environmental quality; strategies that focus on advocating change at the individual level will have very limited impact at a population level and may exacerbate health inequalities. The most significant interventions to impact on reducing smoking prevalence has been a ban on advertising, taxation policy, restriction on sales and the introduction of the smoke-free legislation. Through the Health and Wellbeing Board we will seek to gain and corral the support of our partners and stakeholders including gaining public support for the pledges in the manifesto to help make them become a reality.

#### **14. Councillor Daly**

Can the Leader or relevant Cabinet Member inform us how much money has Bury Council spent to date on installing a sculpture centre at Bury Central Library?

**A. The costs associated with the Sculpture Centre total £73772.16. The budget is £75,000.**

#### **15. Councillor Noel Bayley**

Would the Leader agree that local authorities should determine planning applications promptly and efficiently?

**A. Yes. The speedy determination of planning applications is critical both to the businesses that work in Bury as well as our residents who want to extend their homes. I'm pleased to be able to report that from the latest statistics, Bury is the best performing Council in Greater Manchester with 85% of all Major applications, these are the really important ones that bring new jobs and homes to the borough, being determined within the statutory time limits.**

**In addition the Planning Department has recently been awarded the status of a 'Smarter Planning Champion' for the work that they have carried out in making the service as open to its 'customers' as possible.**

**I am extremely proud of the professional and innovative ways that our Development Management team work to deliver a first class service to the businesses and residents of Bury.**

**16. Councillor Hussain**

Residents of Walmersley Old Road are concerned by constant speeding and dangerous driving in their area and the risks that this poses. Can the Leader/Cabinet member please consider introducing a 20 MPH zone immediately?

**A. It is expected that a 20mph scheme for the Walmersley Old Road area will be promoted during Year 3 of the Street Safe initiative (2015/16). This scheme will be expected to take into account the potential development of land adjacent to Walmersley Old Road as currently occupied by Tetrosyl Limited. Were this land to be developed for housing then this would have a notable effect on traffic conditions on Walmersley Old Road and the requirement for traffic calming measures in order to achieve a road environment consistent with a 20mph speed limit.**

**17. Councillor Gartside**

Can the Leader please give an update on the Metrolink improvement works and what further disruptions to normal services between Manchester and Bury are likely?

**A. There are some key pieces of work that still need to be undertaken during the Metrolink improvement works at Victoria Station. The main piece will be the reopening of Victoria from single line to twin track working. This will enable the connectivity with a gateway to the city centre and a radically improved station for passenger use. This is scheduled to be completed by winter. This means that there may be a weekend possession in winter, although the date is to be confirmed. Other works include the Tram Management System (TMS) installation at Irk Valley. TMS is vital to protecting and improving network performance and the provision of passenger information at passenger information displays and via other sources. This is a significant piece of signalling work which would enable the operation of more new trams onto the network. There is a date of 13 July for TMS enabling works, however a weekend possession may be required, but a date has not yet been agreed.**

Planned network improvement information is usually available online at <http://www.metrolink.co.uk/pages/pni.aspx> up to six weeks in advance of the planned maintenance. Metrolink and TfGM are committed to reducing and limiting the impact of disruption to passengers through this period of improvements. Other passenger experience improvements include the Greater Manchester Growth Deal increasing the double units on the Bury Metrolink line in the coming years.



## **18. Councillor Wright**

Please can the Leader of the Council request highways officers and the police review the current proposal (Decided in 2011 but not yet implemented) to reduce the speed limit on the derestricted part of Turton Road, Tottington to 50 MPH and consider reducing it further downwards to 40 MPH?

**A. The Transport for Greater Manchester Speed Limit Review Report published in December 2011 was endorsed by the Traffic Management Unit in January 2012. The proposed change in speed limit for Turton Road from 60 to 50mph is consistent with the Department for Transport's published guidance on "Setting Local Speed Limits" and it is expected that this reduction will be implemented before the end of the current financial year. The Councillor's request that this speed limit is reduced further to 40mph will be noted.**

## **19. Councillor Pickstone**

Could the Leader say what proportion of staff who are currently employed by the Authority at levels below the 'living wage' are employed in schools?

**A. There are 646 schools-based employees who currently earn an hourly rate of pay that is below the Living Wage of £7.65 per hour. This amounts to just under 56% of the total number of employees who earn less than the Living Wage. This Labour administration is very clear that it aspires to pay all staff at or above the Living Wage and the simple reason that we cannot do this at the present time is the sheer scale of the cuts imposed on us by the coalition Government which Councillor Pickstone's party plays a full role in. However, despite this, the proposals on terms and conditions that we have just begun to consult on provide for a move towards the Living Wage for the lowest paid of our employees.**

## **20. Councillor Pickstone**

Will the Leader join me in welcoming the £245,000 extra money for potholes for Bury from the Government? How will the funding be split between townships?

**A. As I said in an earlier answer, I am pleased that we have qualified for this funding because it shows that the Government recognize that Bury Council delivers best practice when it comes to highway maintenance. However this money only goes a fraction of the way to making up for the savage cuts that the Government has previously made to our highways funding and so it is clear to everyone that the blame for potholes on our roads lies firmly at their door. We intend to spend the money in the areas of most need and so it is not possible to provide a township split at this stage.**