

Council Meeting – 28 January 2015

Questions:-

The Leader of the Council

1. Councillor John Smith

Please will the Leader update Council on the Government's response to Bury's fight for improvements to the funding formula so that the people of Bury get a Fair Deal?

A. The short and simple answer to the question is that the Government's response to Bury's plea, and to the practical suggestions that we made for changing the formulae was a resounding and emphatic NO.

I wrote to my friend 'yours ever Eric' last year asking for a meeting to outline our problems and his answer was NO.

A request for a meeting with Kris Hopkins the local government minister was met with a NO.

I took part in a teleconference with Mr Hopkins and asked him if he would review the funding system to help authorities like Bury get a fairer deal and his answer was NO.

And then I had a conference call with the delightful Penny Mordaunt, the junior minister for coastal communities. Despite promising that she was in 'listening mode', when we made a simple observation about the use of benefit claimant numbers within the system and asked that it be reviewed we were told....NO

Bury is faced with crippling and unfair cuts to its funding and if the Conservatives have their way then public services in Bury will be lucky to stay at the level they were in the 1920s let alone the 1930s and the response we have had to our fight for a Fair Deal, and the resounding NOs that we have received, shows that this Government simply doesn't care.

2. Councillor Parnell

Last year the Council committed to invest £1 million to part fund a new bus station in Radcliffe Town Centre. Please will the Leader advise us how the scheme is progressing and what can we expect from this new facility?

A. Members will be aware that the Council is working in partnership with Transport for Greater Manchester to create a new bus station fit for the 21st century in the centre of Radcliffe.

The new development, anticipated to cost in the region of £2 million, is now the subject of a planning application, which has been submitted earlier this month. The scheme provides for a wholly new station, incorporating purpose built bus shelters which will provide live travel

information and CCTV coverage. They will be enclosed by glazed walling to provide both a high degree of weather protection and security for passengers.

Work on the new station is to start in late March and the facility will be completed by November this year.

The new bus station is the second of three major projects to be delivered by the Council in Radcliffe Town Centre. The third phase will see the old bus station site and existing unsurfaced car park being developed as a retail led scheme, designed to 'knit' the town centre together by linking the existing Radcliffe Piazza, the newly refurbished market and the Asda store across Pilkington Way.

3. Councillor O'Brien

Can the leader of the Council provide us with an update on the state of the Local Welfare Assistance Fund?

A. In April 2013 the Government localised down to Councils parts of what was known as the DWP Social Fund whilst shamefully cutting the funding by 50%. Councils were required to design their own schemes and following widespread consultation the Bury Support Fund was established locally which focuses on resettlement assistance and crisis support.

The overarching approach of the Scheme is aimed at not only alleviating immediate need but also providing financial advice to customers in order to maximise their incomes and provide a better solution to debt/financial problems and thereby reduce reliance on such short-term awards.

At the time Bury received an allocation of £571,000 for each of the years 2013/14 and 2014/15 and between April 2013 and December 2014 the Scheme has made 1,309 payments. The Fund has proved to be a valuable safety net for vulnerable and often desperate people and along with other initiatives such as the establishment of the local Credit Union it has helped to prevent people in crisis turning to other measures such as door step lenders.

Even more shamefully the Government announced last year that from April 2015 it was withdrawing all funding for local schemes. This means that the Council has an extremely difficult decision to make regarding the local Scheme. However, as Members would expect, we have planned ahead for this contingency and it is our intention to continue with the Fund for as long as possible. I will be bringing a report to Cabinet on 4 March setting out options for reshaping the Fund so that it can focus it's support in areas where this is most needed.

4. Councillor Walker

Can we be advised of the cost to the taxpayer (whether local expenditure or grant aid) of the displays on television screens situated on the floor next to the broken aeroplane in the Sculpture Centre which has replaced two thirds of Bury Central Library?

A. The TV monitors cost nothing - all donated or loaned to us.

5. Councillor Haroon

Given we are less than 4 months from the next Local and General Elections, can the Leader tell us what the latest figures are for people registered to vote?

A. When the latest register was published on 1st of December 2014 there were 142,689 people registered to vote which is approximately 2,600 less than at the same time in the previous year. The reduction appears to be due to deletions from the register resulting from non-response over the past 2 years to the Individual Electoral Registration process.

I would urge everyone who is eligible to vote to make sure that they are registered. In addition the Council has put a number of proactive measures in place to encourage people to register.

6. Councillor Quinn

The three weekly bin collection scheme has been very well received. However, one of the main complaints that come from the general public is with regard to the amount of excess packaging that we, as consumers, have to buy when we use supermarkets. What can be done to reduce this, and how can we send a strong message out to supermarkets that this is not acceptable?

A. The Council continues to promote the reduction of waste including where waste is generated by buying items with too much packaging. Useful advice is provided on the Councils web site. Examples of avoiding such packaging include buying fruit and vegetables loose, buying concentrated products that use less packaging, using re-usable carrier bags and buying products that are refillable. The Council works in partnership with the GMWDA who in turn work with WRAP to promote reduced packaging with retailers. This has been ongoing since 2005 through voluntary agreement with retailers.

An example is the Cooperative group who have investigated the use of compostable carrier bags with the potential to roll this out across Greater Manchester.

7. Councillor Quinn

In 2010 the Tories promised us that the maternity wing at Fairfield was safe. It is now closed. Does this show that the coalition cannot be trusted with the NHS?

A. Cllr Quinn won't be surprised to hear that my answer is very simple and to the point. No, the coalition cannot be trusted with the NHS and it is most definitely not safe in their hands.

The decision to close the maternity wing at Fairfield Hospital was a monstrous betrayal, a betrayal of patients and voters. We were promised that the maternity wing at Fairfield would be protected and it wasn't. The people of Bury were misled.

And that isn't the only reason why the NHS isn't safe in their hands. We only have to look at the reality of life in the NHS today. Despite the best efforts of the amazing people who work in the NHS nearly half of the patient guarantees in the NHS Constitution have now been broken – from the right to start your cancer treatment within two months to the right to get your operation within 18 weeks.

A&E targets are being broken daily, people are queuing round the block to see a GP, staff are over-worked, services are being privatised, jobs are being lost and moral is at rock bottom..no the coalition cannot be trusted with our wonderful NHS.

8. Councillor Wright

With Dog Waste Bins in demand and costing the Council £550 each, does the Leader agree with me that another less expensive supplier should be found as soon as possible, preferably a local engineering company?

A. When ordering dog bins we will always consider value for money. We use both a local fabricating company within the borough and a national supplier dependent upon design and timeframe. The cost of a dog bin is in the region of £180 plus installation. The cost of £550 provided to Cllr Wright was incorrect and we have not ordered any dog bins at this cost. Over the past 2 years when dog bins have become damaged, the in-house response team have also been carrying out repairs in order to keep the cost to a minimum.

9. Councillor Tim Pickstone

The Leader will be aware of the Ofsted Report: "The sexual exploitation of children: it couldn't happen here, could it?" which raises significant concerns, in the eight authorities inspected, of local government failing to adequately address issues of child sexual exploitation. Have the recommendations been considered at a senior level in Bury and are there actions which need to be undertaken in the light of the report?

A. The Local Authority and its partners have noted the recommendations of the Ofsted report The sexual exploitation of children: it couldn't happen here, could it? and are in the process of revising the action plan that will deliver the outcomes detailed in the updated Bury CSE Strategy.

The strategy is a refresh of the document that has been guiding the work for the past two years in Bury; it has been revised and updated, not only in line with the Ofsted report but also with other work in this area, most notably the report of the Children's Commissioner If only someone had listened and the recent report for the Police & Crime Commissioner by Anne Coffey Real Voices – CSE in Greater Manchester

(to which Bury Safeguarding Children Board made a significant contribution). The approach taken in Bury over the last two years has significantly raised the profile of CSE amongst those working directly with children and young people in Bury and has provided an easily accessible pathway through SEAM (Sexual Exploitation & Missing group) for raising concerns, getting advice and making referrals. The resulting partnership work is strong and from this the Phoenix Team has been developed. This team brings together police, social workers, substance misuse workers and other colleagues in a dedicated CSE team that coordinates its work with other Phoenix Teams across Greater Manchester.

10. Councillor Haroon

Can the Leader tell me about the role of ambassadors in adult safeguarding?

A. The development and introduction of Ambassadors will ensure we have a dedicated cohort of volunteers. The Ambassadors will proactively promote awareness of adult abuse within Bury and who will participate in the identification and prevention of adult abuse.

To do this Ambassadors will provide additional eyes and ears; be a single point of contact; increase the knowledge around adult abuse and how to report it within their organisation/community; circulate including directly identifying and reporting abuse.

11. Councillor Carter

Can the Leader explain why there is no longer a cafe provision in Bury Art Gallery?

A. Barney's cafe was being run successfully as a private enterprise and was proving to be increasingly popular. Sadly the cafe became a focus of political attention in the wake of the changes to the library, which placed a huge amount of stress on the cafe operator, and has subsequently had a serious effect on her health. Following a series of unfounded comments made in this chamber, as well as comments online, she decided that she would withdraw from the cafe in January. She felt that her presence was being used to unfairly target her partner, the head of Museums and Galleries, by inferring that the council's tendering process had been undertaken improperly. An accusation strongly denied by both myself and the Director responsible. Not surprisingly I have yet to receive any evidence to support the inference.

We are now looking to rent out the Gallery space to another cafe provider and are in the process of arranging this with the support of the Council's procurement department, as indeed we did last time. In the meantime there is no cafe provision in the Gallery, and won't be for some time,

which is causing its own problems. This week alone we have lost a coach party visit because there is currently no cafe facility, and I anticipate more visits will be lost because of it.

I would like to congratulate the gallery and museum staff on recently being awarded Museum Accreditation from the Arts Council, which is a great achievement, sadly one of the criteria on which that was judged was the provision of cafe facility, which we currently do not have.

12. Councillor O'Brien

In light of the recent cold weather can the leader of the Council provide information on the borough's homeless provisions?

A. Our aim is to ensure that no one has to sleep rough on the streets of Bury. To this end our homeless service operates 24/7, 365 days per year so that anyone identified as a rough sleeper will not spend a second night out on the street. During the winter months when it is cold for three consecutive nights we have additional provision, working in partnership with a local church to provide rough sleepers with shelter and a bed for those nights.

This is part of a suite of services designed to discharge the Council's homeless duty. It includes commissioning Calico – a voluntary sector organisation – to provide a rapid response to rough sleepers to:

- Enable a single offer of support based on each individual's needs**
- Help rough sleepers to access a place of safety, where they can get the support they need**
- Reconnect rough sleepers from outside the area with their community.**

In November, the Council with our partners undertook a rough sleepers' count with staff and volunteers visiting hot spots in the Borough. No rough sleepers (that is people bedded down according to Government guidance) were identified. A street needs audit will be undertaken later this year to identify any rough sleepers in the Borough that do not bed down for the night.

I can assure Members that all homeless people including rough sleepers can access support from the Town Hall. Services in this area have improved significantly in recent years with homeless preventions more than three times the level they were in 2011/12. A number of innovations such as the HEN Project for single homeless are making a

difference to people's lives and helping them on a journey to a stable home life, employment and training. I am delighted to say that:

- Over fifty people have gained employment since the Project started in 2013;**
- Former entrenched rough sleepers are now managing tenancies; and**
- The structured approach to life skills is rebuilding confidence among these individuals.**

These services are a credit to Bury and I am also proud that we have been able to find a way of continuing to fund these services to an extremely vulnerable group for at least another year despite the cuts we are having to make across the board.

13. Councillor Bevan

Can the Leader of the Council update Members on how the Council's Winter Service is coping with the recent winter weather, particularly in the north of the Borough?

A. Bury Council has a well developed Winter Plan, which is published each year identifying how the service works, gritting routes and how the gritting service is activated.

Activation is triggered following scrutiny of weather forecast and ground and air temperatures. All elements of the gritting service were activated as usual and in line with operational protocols. Interruptions to the service are always notified via our Facebook and Twitter feeds. One aspect of this service is proving responses over the week-end and I have asked the Chief Executive to look at a way of ensuring any necessary updates are issued over that period.

Laying down grit will always be dependent on weather conditions, and in the main the service is going according to plan. As far as the north of the Borough is concerned the gritting service has and continues to be activated in the same way as it is for all areas.

14. Councillor FitzGerald

Following the recent announcement that Castle Leisure Centre is to remain in its current location, could the Leader advise us how the demolition of the former Police Headquarters on Irwell Street is progressing?

A. The Council has now completed the procurement process for a contractor to undertake the demolition of the former Police headquarters and has appointed Masterton Demolition to undertake this work. The contract is due to commence within the coming month

and, owing to the complex nature of the buildings concerned, is projected to take up to 20 weeks to complete.

The contractor is very aware of the potential for disturbance to local householders in carrying out the works and the need to minimise the impact of issues such as noise, dust, vibration and traffic. Consequently, a briefing letter was sent to the local residents in early December, advising of the demolition and the measures to be adopted to reduce any disruption. A follow up, containing details of the exact timing of the various works, will be issued shortly, once matters are finalised with the contractor.

The Council remains committed to redeveloping the area between Bolton Street and Jubilee Way and is currently reviewing a number of redevelopment options for the site of the former Police headquarters. Needless to say, we will consult widely on any proposals once their viability has been established.

15. Councillor Holt

Can the Leader explain why the Council is investing in improvements to the Council's website and also update us on the progress with this work?

A. The Council recognises that digital services will be a key element of the transformation that we need to undertake in order to provide good quality services whilst tackling the vicious cuts imposed on us by the Government. We also recognise that local government has a role in allowing people to move with the times and digital services form a big part of a mixed model that will allow us to continue to deliver vital services and at the same time help our citizens to help themselves.

We currently have over 16,000 web transactions a year and we are aiming to double that in the coming year. We know that in order to do this we need to completely revamp the web-site to make it more transactional and also to make it easier to use on mobile devices such as phones and tablets. We have tendered for a redesign of the site and a supplier will be appointed within the coming week. The new site will be live by June 2015.

16. Councillor Gartside

Can the Leader or Cabinet Member responsible, outline what criteria will be used in the allocation of the extra £10,638,000 for Bury which was announced last month from the Government to repair pot-holes over the next 6 years?

A. The first thing I need to do is to correct the inaccuracies in Councillor Gartside's question. Firstly this is not new or extra money at all, it is simply an indication of what the Government currently intends to give to the Council in future years as its share of national capital maintenance funding. Nor is it purely to repair potholes, it is money for all major highways maintenance works.

Bury's share of this indicative funding is £10.638 million over six years.

For 2015/16 our allocation is £2.038 million.

For 2016/17 £1.868 million.

For 2017/18 £1.812 million.

And for the following three years an indicative amount of £1.640 million per annum.

This allocation compares to a figure for the preceding six year period (2009/10 to 2014/15), of £12.419 million for Capital Highways Maintenance funding and so the latest announcement is not good news, it is actually a cut of nearly 15%.

To make matters worse, the Government advised at the same time that the allocations no longer make provision for resilience contingency funding and this will now have to be met from within mainstream allocations.

As in previous years, the initial selection of sites to be dealt with from our funding allocation will primarily be data led, using outputs from UKPMS (UK Pavement Management System) which is the national standard for management systems for the assessment of local road network condition and for the planning of investment and maintenance. This process identifies locations for consideration; actual scheme confirmation and methodology will require a degree of engineering judgment which will be exercised by staff who have considerable experience in this area.

In order to promote economic growth, the primary focus of the investment will be on the major roads, although some element of the Capital funding will be made available for the local road network.

17. Councillor Kerrison

The Government's failed and inequitable economic policies mean that personal debt in the UK has soared to its highest level in six years and more than one in eight people are struggling to make ends meet. Can the Leader say what the Council is doing to help people affected by such debt?

A. The Council is acutely aware of the appalling impact of the coalition's policies on our residents and in fact the Council has established a Welfare Reform Board that has developed a true partnership approach towards mitigating the draconian effects of the Government's welfare cuts and the subsequent debt problems these cuts have caused.

The scale of the issue is so great that the Council has developed a Poverty Strategy to help to coordinate our efforts, and those of our partners, to make sure we can give the best possible help and advice to those that need it. As part of this, the Board has worked proactively with Porch Box and others to help address the issue of Bury residents who are experiencing food poverty.

We have implemented a Corporate Debt Policy which underpins our approach to debt collection, and makes clear that we will be both firm and fair with people struggling with debts whilst ensuring that the various bodies who may be collecting debt from the same customer will work together to ensure individual customers facing more than one debt will have their situation considered as a whole.

Importantly, the Policy is underpinned by pro-active signposting to debt agencies including CAB and Stepchange and between them the Council and Six Town Housing fund two dedicated CAB workers to assist customers with more advanced needs.

We are now working on a debt strategy that will provide information to all staff employed by the Council, Six Town Housing and schools who have any contact with customers on how to recognise customers who they may find have debt problems and how to actively assist them to get help. This information will also shortly be issued to Members.

18. Councillor Daisy Bailey

Can The Leader provide reassurances that Council will be working with Ainsworth nursing home to ensure quality and safety of care following CQC concerns?

A. Bury council has already been working closely with Ainsworth nursing home to improve standards following concerns identified by the Council and CQC.

The provider is working to a Quality Assurance action plan that is being monitored regularly by Council staff, who are visiting the home regularly to check on the welfare of residents. Council staff are providing ongoing support to the manager and owner of the home. A recent visit by a Quality Assurance Officer on 14th January identified that progress was being made. Admissions to the home have been suspended to enable the home to focus on improving standards. This is in line with Council procedures. Safeguarding alerts have been raised and the Council is investigating these. The Council are satisfied that the home is providing safe care but will continue to monitor them closely.

19. Councillor Jones

Despite the Government's promise to reduce red tape, the Council has been forced to wrestle with new rules governing electronic communication with Whitehall. Can the Leader therefore tell us whether we have complied with the new rules satisfactorily?

A. The simple answer is yes we have.

Despite the fact that the Cabinet Office unilaterally increased the security requirements, despite the unhelpful threats that were made to local authorities whilst they attempted to comply with the new rules and despite the fact that the Government refused to provide any financial support I can assure members that Bury has fully complied with the Code.

In fact we were one of the first authorities to be subjected to the new requirements and the superb work that our ICT team has done has been of great assistance to other Councils.

20. Councillor Frith

Can the Leader update me and parents of children with special needs on the issues of home to school travel escorts please and what more can be done to ensure no child has to stay off school simply because of their disability and a lack of transport for them?

A. There will be, on some occasions, an impact on the service. In those circumstances staff monitor which schedules have been cancelled previously and ensuring the same children and young people are not always affected. Where there are occasions that for one journey in the day there is no escort available staff will arrange transport for the other journey if parents are able to take or collect their child for the cancelled journey. However, we are working hard to improve the situation. This includes:

- **An active recruitment campaign;**
- **Speeding up the DBS checks by using the on-line DBS checking facility**
- **Vehicle contractors are providing drivers who are DBS checked to act as escorts where they have availability to do so**
- **Elms Bank Specialist Arts College have provided staff to act as escorts, other schools have been also requested to assist**

21. Councillor Bury

Following the recent major investment in Radcliffe Market, what benefits have been brought to Radcliffe and how will the regeneration programme be sustained?

A. The refurbishment of the market is a key element of the development of Radcliffe Town centre and is an indication of this administrations ongoing commitment to invest in Radcliffe. The successful launch of the revamped market brought an immediate lift to Radcliffe and coincided with the Christmas Light Switch on which attracted fantastic support from local residents.

The market itself has a fresh feel brought about by a prominent feature window overlooking the river, better lighting, inviting new entrances and a new public toilet block. A tender for a new cafe is currently ongoing, and more prominent signage will be fitted shortly. The market has been well received by customers and traders alike with the latter reporting a vast improvement in repeat customer business.

22. Councillor Caserta

Can the Leader advise us of the general situation of our home to school transport for our SEN children within the Borough?

A. The Council is working towards a more varied offer of assistance with travel for children and young people in response to the Children and Families Act and the local SEND review.

Travel Pass

All children and young people in Bury who have an Education Health and Care Plan or a Statement of Special Educational Needs can apply for a Transport for Greater Manchester travel pass. This provides free travel within Greater Manchester 24 hours a day 7 days per week on buses, trains and trams.

Independent Travel training -there are three programmes on offer

- **The Visually Impaired team are delivering specialised training to pupils attending mainstream schools**
- **Elms Bank Specialist Arts College have developed a team within their staff to deliver independent travel training to their pupils**
- **Pure Innovations – the Council have a contract in place with Pure until February 2016 to train young people to travel independently.**

Reimbursements

We are able to offer parents reimbursements for their mileage if their child meets criteria for assistance with travel and they chose to take them to school themselves

Dedicated home to school and college transport

Currently we are providing transport to

- **375 Pupils to school**
- **24 Students to college**

Independent schools

We currently have four independent schools providing transport to 55 pupils as part of the educational package.

Transport Contract

The current contract will be renewed for September 2015. Retendering the contract will provide an opportunity to reroute the schedules ensuring that pupils located within the same area are taken to school on the same vehicle to provide efficiency savings. Tendering will also provide an opportunity for new contractors to be accepted onto the framework and increase competition which could result in savings in the cost of transport.

Tripartite working

Using an external organisation to facilitate we will be working with Rochdale and Oldham Councils over the next twelve months to explore efficiencies of working across three local authorities.

23. Councillor Mallon

Will the Leader give this Council an update on the recent Peer Review that was undertaken on the workings of the Planning Control Committee?

A. I am delighted, but not surprised, that the peer reviewers found that the Committee, and the Development Control service as a whole, works extremely well and is something that the Council can be proud of.

This is demonstrated by a quote from the reviewer which says 'Our observations are that the PCC in Bury is working very well and members and officers should be proud of what they have done to establish a system so well regarded by customers and colleagues. Members go to great lengths to be aware of the importance of planning procedures and are served by officers who are trusted and who are supportive. The planning papers are read carefully by members who are forthright but reasonable in expressing their views.'

Planning is an extremely emotive subject and I hope that all members of the Council will join me in thanking, and congratulating, the members and staff who do such a great job on our behalf.

24. Councillor Whitby

Can the Leader inform this Council what has been achieved across the Borough to help reduce Youth Unemployment?

A. We all understand and agree that high levels of youth unemployment can have a detrimental effect on the economy but, more importantly, it can damage a young person's future life chances.

This administration has no intention of letting this Government's economic policies cause our young people to become a lost generation

whose aspirations are thwarted by a lack of opportunity to move forward in their working lives.

This is why we launched our nationally acclaimed Backing Young Bury campaign in January 2012 and since then we have been working tirelessly as a Council and with our partners to tackle youth unemployment. Within the Council we have adapted our own recruitment practices to ensure that we are not excluding those young people who may need a helping hand to get their working lives started.

As a result of these efforts I am proud that we have seen an annual decrease of 57.7% in the number of 16 – 24 year olds claiming Job Seekers Allowance and the even better news is that youth unemployment rate is reducing across all our townships.

We have also secured City Deal funds which have allowed us to develop a comprehensive menu of activity to our family of secondary schools and this has resulted in unprecedented engagement, with all our schools engaging in one activity or more.

25. Councillor Walker

Given the proposed axing of popular late night weekend bus services returning to Bury from Manchester's "night time economy", the continuing loss of tram services stopping at Manchester Victoria and Piccadilly, the 98 buses from Manchester taking several hours to get through to Bury, the road works undertaken in parallel on several major roads in Bury causing long traffic jams reminiscent of "The Italian Job" meaning it can take almost an hour to travel just over 2 miles to access the Motorway - can we be assured that Bury will be part of the "Northern Powerhouse"

A. In overall terms Cllr Walker makes a strong case for Devolution, even though at a previous Council meeting Cllr Walker and Members of the Conservative Group voted against Devolution thus ignoring the chance to develop a 'Northern Powerhouse' from which all Districts including Bury would benefit from.

As far as buses are concerned the Combined Authority, under devolution plans, will see the control of buses transfer to this body which brings to an end the shambolic deregulation of buses, so loved by the Conservatives. Once that process has been achieved the bus and road network will benefit from regional and sub regional strategies that knit together to support the CAs growth and reform plans to create levels of inward investment, bringing thousands of new jobs and where people can travel more easily across the City Region.

26. Councillor Bevan

How can Bury Council be committed to recycling when waste placed in recycling bins in our town centres is currently going into landfill?

A. Councillor Bevan's question gives a completely inaccurate impression because the fact is that recyclable material collected from recycling bins in the town centres is always sent for recycling. The Council has installed about 90 recycling bins across the borough, mostly in the town centres. This is to encourage people to recycle on-the-go. These larger recycling bins hold three separate bags for collecting the separate waste streams. The bags will be transported in one electric or cage vehicle with the waste streams being separated before going for recycling or disposal. Councillor Bevan will also be aware that the mini recycling centre in Ramsbottom was recently removed. This was because every household now has access to the full range of kerbside recycling service and most of the problems on site were caused by trades disposing commercial waste.

27. Councillor Matt Bailey

In light of the very welcome decision to reverse the proposed closure of Stepping Stones Children Centre in Radcliffe, will The Leader reassure the hundreds of residents, parents and service users that their excellent campaign has resulted in more than just a short term change to the configuration of these sites?

A. I too was very impressed by the range and quality of ideas that we received during the Children Centre consultation and we were pleased to be able to respond to the proposals that came from the Radcliffe community. I can assure Cllr Matt Bailey that the arrangements we will be making to develop a spoke Children's Centre provision at Stepping Stones will be sustainable with the support of the partners who at present we work with in that community.

28. Councillor Gartside

According to recent statistics from the "Big Brother Watch" campaign, Bury Council employs some 50 staff with powers to enter Bury resident's homes. Can the relevant cabinet member confirm this is the correct and under what acts of parliament they have used these powers over the last few years?

A. The Council does not employ 50 staff to enter people's homes, rather it has authorised that number of existing staff to exercise these powers in respect of services and duties that the Council is required to undertake. The Parliamentary Acts that provide these powers are the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Building Act 1984. Our officers visit thousands of homes each year and in the vast majority of cases residents allow officers to enter their properties to carry out lawful investigations. Where permission is

refused then before entering properties officers will apply to the Magistrates Court to obtain a warrant which will only be granted where the justices find that the Council has sufficient grounds and evidence. Over the last five years it has been necessary to use these powers to require access to domestic premises on just five occasions. An example of this was where Police officers accompanied Building Control Officers to help them enter a dangerous apartment following fire damage caused by the apartment being used as a cannabis factory, which is why it is assumed that the owner originally refused access.

29. Councillor Pickstone

Could the Leader inform members of the take-up of free lunches for infant children across the Borough? How many children have benefitted from the service and how much money will have been received by Bury schools for free lunches in the current academic year?

A. Based on the October 2014 pupil census the number of infant children 'newly eligible' and taking up a free meal and benefitting under the Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) initiative is over 4,800 infant pupils. The indicative funding for Bury's schools eligible for UIFSM grant for this current Academic year is £2.2million. It should be noted that the final figures for take-up and grant funding will be based on the average of the October 2014 and January 2015 pupil censuses, the data for the January 2015 census is currently being collated and validated. A further update may be provided once the January 2015 pupil census data is available for analysis.