

COUNCIL 1 APRIL 2015 – WORK OF THE CABINET
LEADER’S SPEECH

Thank you Madam Mayor, it gives me great pleasure to up-date Council on the work of the Cabinet since the January meeting of Council.

Madam Mayor before I start I hope you, and Council, will indulge me for just a couple of moments whilst I say a few words on matters not relating directly to Cabinet.

Firstly, as you rightly said, there are 7 members of Council who are stepping down and not standing in the forthcoming local election and I would like to endorse your kind comments.

Councillors John Smith, Bury, Campbell, Cummins, Frith and Walton are all long standing and highly respected Members who have given to this Council, to their constituents and to the people of our Borough a level of service which has been nothing short of outstanding and I hope that all Members will join me in thanking them and wishing them well for long, healthy and happy “retirements”.

I would particularly like to pay tribute to John Smith for all the help, support and guidance that he gave me during his time as Deputy Leader of the Council.

John, you were a star and I'll miss you....although I suspect I'll still have another year of looking across the Council Chamber at your beaming smile whilst you sit through Council meetings in your role of Mayor's Consort.

Turning to you Madam Mayor, tonight's meeting will be your last sat up there in the hot seat and I really wanted to place on record my personal thanks, and the thanks of the Labour Group, for the superb way that you have chaired Council meetings during your year of office.

You have been firm but fair, clear and considerate and you've done a great job keeping us moving and keeping us under control! Quite simply you've been a credit to the office of Mayor.

I know that there will be other opportunities to express our thanks but I'm sure that all Members will want to join me now in saying a huge thank you to you.

Speaking of the Mayor, I am very pleased to be able to tell Council that negotiations with our insurers have come to a satisfactory conclusion. The insurers have accepted liability and will be meeting the cost of replacing the chains on a like-for-like basis.

We are now in the process of getting new chains made and I will keep Council informed of progress.

Moving on to the work of the Cabinet....

Planning has been uppermost in our minds at the last two Cabinet meetings. We approved draft changes to be made to the Supplementary Planning Document on open space, sport and recreation provision in new housing developments (rolls of the tongue doesn't it!?) to reflect new Government advice.

This advice means that the Council is now unable to apply the current provisions of SPD1 in seeking developer contributions for housing developments of 10 units or less, and which have a maximum combined gross floorspace of no more than 1,000 square metres.

It also means that the current flexibility which allows section 106 contributions to be pooled will be lost and detailed schemes will need to be agreed at the point of a planning application.

Madam Mayor these changes are a very retrograde step which will mean that the Council will lose yet more money and have less flexibility when it comes to providing important schemes for the benefit of our residents. Sadly this continues an all too familiar approach from this Government.

We also agreed to delegate to AGMA Executive Board the formulating and preparing of the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework to cover housing and employment land requirements and associated infrastructure across Greater Manchester.

As part of this report we noted that the Government has issued up-dated projections of household numbers which show that over the period of the planned Core Strategy Bury is anticipated to have a household growth rate equivalent to 539 dwellings per annum.

This is at odds with the Core Strategy which included a target of 400 dwellings per annum and means that 2,363 more dwellings will be needed in the Borough than we were planning for in the Core Strategy.

It is clear that from these figures the Government's target for housing growth cannot be accommodated within the urban area of the Borough.

As a result of the up-dated household projections and the changing circumstances surrounding the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework Cabinet agreed that the Core Strategy should be withdrawn and that work should commence on the production of a new Local Plan that will include both policies and site allocations.

Progress on the Local Plan will run alongside, and compliment, the work being undertaken at the Greater Manchester level.

On a more positive note, we received reports on things that the Government hasn't interfered with and all of which mean good news for our Borough.

We approved a draft strategy for the future development of Burrs Country Park. As members will know, Burrs has much to offer the visitor and the Council is proud of the transformation undertaken to-date in developing a formerly derelict site into the Green Flag Award-winning flagship park it is today.

Key to the success of the Strategy is the development of a railway halt at Burrs on the ELR and an extension to the Caravan Club site under Phase 1. The Strategy will now be subject to consultation.

We also approved investment into the provision of 88 new affordable housing units and to provide improved facilities at Chesham Primary School.

This is yet more evidence that the Council is focussing on the things it can do, not the things the Government wants to stop us doing.

Lastly, to confirm what I've always said about this being an open, honest and transparent Council, we agreed improvements to the Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and to the Whistleblowing Policy.

Of course between the last ordinary meeting of Council and this one we have also dealt with the little matter of the Council's Budget.

Madam Mayor, unlike the hotch potch of a Budget delivered by the Chancellor of the Exchequer last week, the Council's budget was clear, concise and costed.

It contained a Triple Lock of freezes and it also provided for further investment into our housing estates, further investment in key areas of our borough and further investment in our children's safety.

Our Budget will help to protect Bury people from the worst ravages of the coalition's attack on public services and it showed that under this ruling Labour Group Bury is Investing in Growth.

It's just a real shame that the Conservative Group didn't feel able to lend their support to it. They weren't able to support a Council Tax freeze, they weren't able to support lower business rates and they weren't able to support better safety for our children.

And not only that Madam Mayor, the amendments that they put forward on the night would have left tenants facing above inflation increases in rents and older people facing higher heating charges. Typical Tories.

And what of the Chancellor's budget? A deficit of £90bn, three times higher than he promised when he told the country that the economy was safe in his hands!

A roller coaster ride for public spending, annual cuts that will be twice the size of any we've already seen and £10bn to be slashed from the welfare budget...although he's admitted he doesn't know where from yet.

And we're supposed to trust this man?

Anyway, enough about the Government...we've all had enough of them and they won't be here for much longer. No madam Mayor, I'd much rather finish on a positive note by telling Council about some of the great things we've achieved over recent months.

I'm delighted to say that progress with the regeneration of Radcliffe is speeding up. The Market looks fantastic after its refurbishment and work will be getting underway in the next fortnight or so on the new bus station. This has allowed us to issue tenders for a developer for the new retail development and we will be shortlisting towards the end of this month.

We said that we would invest in Radcliffe and we have. This Labour administration keeps its promises.

Madam Mayor, the recent Independence Referendum in Scotland showed that the youth of today can play a vital role in refreshing democracy in the UK. Despite the scepticism of the members opposite we know that our young people are interested in politics and well able to come to sound conclusions on some of the biggest issues of the day.

And nowhere is this more evident than in Bury as shown by the vibrancy of our Youth Parliament Elections. Elections were held in Schools and Colleges across Bury on Thursday 26 February and nearly 5000 young people voted for one of their peers to represent them on the national stage.

And so I'd like to offer my congratulations and warmest best wishes to Bilal Qureshi (Parrenthorn) who was elected as MYP, with Emily Branney (St. Monica's) and Nathan Hughes (Holy Cross) being elected as Deputies.

Keeping our residents safe and well are two big priorities for this Council and through a joint Adult Safeguarding investigation the police and the Council secured a conviction of fraud by a care worker, yet again showing that the Council will not tolerate abuse of vulnerable Adults.

I'm also thrilled that over 7,500 Health Checks have been delivered in Bury throughout 2014/15, that's over 1,800 more than the previous year, representing a 32% increase. For the first time in 2014/15 an ambitious national uptake target of 66% was set which Bury has already beaten.

Finally I'd like to congratulate 'Catering with Pride', a social enterprise, who are now doing the catering at Elmhurst. They have already made a really positive impact on the quality of meals provided to customers in terms of both increased choice and the nutritional value and it is great to see social enterprise in action.

Madam Mayor as I think we probably all know this is the last Council meeting before the elections and so I would like to finish by passing on my best wishes to all candidates who are standing for office...clearly I'm sending better wishes for some than others and even better wishes for the candidate for Bury East!

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