

COUNCIL 1 JULY 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 April meeting of Council.

Madam Mayor before I begin, can I take just a moment to wish you well for your Mayoral year? Many tributes were paid to you at Mayor making, and to your consort John, and like everyone I’m sure you will be a magnificent Mayor and you’ll be a great ambassador for the Borough.

Certainly one thing that everyone agreed was that you would have absolutely no problem controlling Council meetings and I know that the first piece of advice that John gave to you was to make sure that the gavel was out and ready...and I can see that it’s there right now!!

Madam Mayor I know that I speak for all Members when I say that we’ll TRY to be good and I wish you well in all this year’s Council meetings.

Turning now to the two Cabinet meetings...

Each of the meetings has taken on a distinctive theme.

The first meeting, on 8 April, focussed on delivering commitments made as part of my Budget speech.

Firstly we approved the details behind the exciting new Bury Business rates discount scheme. This scheme is aimed at attracting new businesses and employers into the borough by providing reductions in rates on new commercial buildings in our employment generating areas.

We launched the scheme at the recent highly successful Bury Business Fair as part of our 'Bury Means Business' package and it has been very well received by the business community.

Madam Mayor, growing our business base and providing local jobs for local people is a key priority for us and this scheme is yet another part of the fabulous Bury offer.

We also considered a report on the establishment of the ground breaking trading company that will be the vehicle for the delivery of a range of adult social care services.

At Budget time I reiterated the ruling Labour group's determination to do everything possible to avoid cutting services to vulnerable people despite the vicious cuts imposed on us by the Government and the LATCO is evidence of this determination.

It is an innovative way of structuring services that means we can make savings and increase income whilst still maintaining vital services.

We also confirmed the details of another promise made by Labour, to do everything we can to tackle poverty. We did this by approving a report that set out how we would maintain the Bury Support Fund in the face of yet more Government cuts, cuts that this time have been aimed at the poorest members of our society.

The other major issue that we considered on 8 April related to a Memorandum of Understanding between the GM Councils, CCGs and NHS England that created a framework for the devolution of health and social care responsibilities to Greater Manchester.

Madam Mayor, the MoU means that decisions about health care in Greater Manchester can now be made IN Greater Manchester, BY Greater Manchester, FOR Greater Manchester. This is a massive step forward in the fight to improve the health and well-being of our residents.

At the Cabinet meeting on 10 June we moved the emphasis towards planning for the future.

Firstly, we considered what was probably the most important report to come before Cabinet for a very long time. This was a report setting out our Vision, Purpose and Values and there is no doubt that this is THE key document for the Council because it will serve as a corporate plan to take the organisation, and the Borough, forward through the coming period of austerity.

Unlike previous plans, this document does not follow a traditional format. In keeping with the times, it has been cut back to focus on the key elements that deliver the Council's vision to lead, shape and maintain a prosperous, sustainable Bury that is fit for purpose.

Madam Mayor, the strong policy-led approach is deliberate. All the evidence points to the Council becoming a smaller organisation with less money to spend at a time when expectations and demand for services continues to rise. This is truly a perfect storm. A clear sense of direction and passion to deliver local priorities will be absolutely fundamental to managing this scenario and making best use of resources and this is what is reflected in our Vision.

We also considered strategies covering the Adult Learning Service and Burrs Country Park.

For Adult Learning the strategy makes clear that there should be a strong focus on actions that increase basic skill levels and reduce other barriers to employment.

I am particularly pleased that the role of learning in promoting community cohesion and reducing inequalities is also recognised. In these troubled times this is more important than ever.

The Burrs Strategy, and a paper on changes to Supplementary Planning Document 1, reported back the results of consultation exercises and, in the spirit of listening that this Labour administration is renowned for, I am pleased that we have been able to take on board the feedback that we received and that both documents have been amended accordingly.

PAUSE

Madam Mayor, foster carers truly are community heroes. The word "foster" means to help someone grow and develop and it also means to take care of someone's needs and what could be more important than that to a child, especially one who has lacked this kind of love and care in their life.

That is why I was so pleased that Cabinet approved a report that affords Family & Friends carers the opportunity to qualify for the payment of the fostering fee, that promotes training and development for foster carers including a Payment for Skills system which will now be open to all carers and finally puts in place an enhanced fee to underpin the development of a specialist foster care scheme.

Not only are all of these things the right thing to do to adequately reward foster carers and incentivise others to become carers but they will also be cost neutral to the Council. This shows clearly the value of investing in such a critically important service.

Finally Madam Mayor, we considered a report seeking approval to a number of recommendations to enhance Township Forums.

Township Forums continue to provide a unique opportunity for local councillors, community representatives and residents to work together to address local priorities and improve local outcomes.

However in view of the significant budgetary challenges facing the Council and its partners, the changing local partnership landscape and advances in digital technologies, we thought that it was vital that we took the opportunity to refresh the Forums to make them more efficient, effective and locally focussed.

Following consultation, the proposals we approved included reducing the number of generic presentations (and I'm sure we're all in favour of that!), formalising Police involvement in Township Forums, reducing the frequency of meetings, introducing the Localism Act into Township Forums in respect of assets of community value and finally establishing Community Funds of £8000 for each Forum to use to award small grants to community and voluntary groups.

Madam Mayor, I really must stress...all of these proposals are intended to build on, and improve, the already brilliant work that the Forums do.

We did do one other thing at these two meetings and that was to invest in local assets.

We made provision to develop a Secondary Pupil Referral Unit, we approved proposals that will support the establishment of a Greater Manchester Housing Investment Fund as part of Devo Manc, we approved a programme of investment in our highways and bridges and we confirmed our commitment to improve our play areas.

As I said in my budget speech, Bury is Investing in Growth.

Madam Mayor it has been an 'interesting' couple of months since Council last met to do it's 'ordinary' business.

We've had the little matter of local and General elections and I want to say a particular thanks to the elections team for the superb job that they did to make the process run so smoothly. The eyes of the world were on Bury and they did us proud.

We've seen the opening in Radcliffe of Dunelm's very impressive national call centre which will bring vital jobs for local people, building on the regeneration work that the Council is undertaking.

And I've been involved in sod cutting...no that isn't how I control the Labour Group!!...for the Fire Service's magnificent new training centre and for the long awaited improvements to Elton High School.

Madam Mayor, this is yet more evidence that this wonderful borough of ours really is THE place to be!

Thank you.

END