

Question 1 submitted by Councillor Jones

- Q. What does the Leader make of the Chancellor's announcement that Councils will be able to retain 100% of their Business Rates? Is this a good thing for Bury or simply another example of the government transferring risk to already hard pressed local authorities?
- A. **We were made aware of this development in HM Treasury's Press Notice of 5th October, where the Government undertook to (quote) "fix the current broken system of financing Local Government"; that's quite an admission, but something we have been telling them for some time !**

The proposals will see Councils fully retain business rates by 2020, coupled with the removal of the Revenue Support Grant.

The Government have stated that they wish the reforms to be "fiscally neutral"; we would question at what level – nationally, or for individual Local Authorities.

It has not been made clear how they will achieve this, and the devil will certainly be in the detail.

100% retention poses significant risks to Local Authorities as they will now be liable for the full impact of any appeals or business failures.

Question 2 submitted by Councillor Susan Southworth

- Q. Can the Leader tell us what impact the Government's cut in Tax Credits will have on hard working families in Bury?
- A. **HMRC have an early Xmas present for millions of working families. They will be notified `before Xmas` of a cut in their tax credit from April 2016. This is biggest change in the set of upcoming welfare reforms. Although this group may also see increases in their wages due to national living wage, in all cases the reduction in tax credits will be greater than increases in wages, leading to a net reduction in income.**

The Government's stated aim of these changes is to encourage people to work longer hours by removing the adverse incentives of employers paying low wages because their staff can claim enough tax credits to live on. The Government assumes that this group of people will work more hours to make up the shortfall in their reduced tax credits. The level of earnings disregarded will be reduced from £6,420 to £3,850.

The Government state that overall people will be better off. However, this fails to take into account that the cuts will take place next year while the changes to tax personal allowances and introduction of the national minimum wage will not be fully introduced until the end of parliament.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies have said that 13 million families will lose an average of £240 per year while 3 million families will lose £1000 per year. IFS Director, Paul Johnson, stated it was 'arithmetically impossible' for the increase in the minimum wage to compensate for the loss in tax credits.

Question 3 submitted by Councillor Jamie Walker

- Q.** Can the Leader explain the potential impact on the Housing Revenue Account of the cut to Social Rents of 1% a year?
- A.** **The Council's Housing Revenue Account currently collects approximately £30 million in rents per annum.**

A 1% reduction therefore equates to £300k per annum.

The Government propose to apply this cut for 4 years – giving a cumulative reduction in the order of £3.0m.

It is important to note that this is the reduction from current rent levels – if we factor in the effect of any future rent rises that may have been planned, then the loss is even higher.

The Council was sold "Self Financing" on the back of the Localism Act and took on a £78 million debt in good

faith, on the assumption that it could manage its own affairs through a locally devised HRA business plan.

The proposals outlined in the Housing Bill totally destabilise the Council's position and potentially have significant implications for tenants in terms of the services they receive, and the Council's ability to maintain its stock going forward.

Question 4 submitted by Councillor Gunther

Q. Would the Leader agree with me that this Council should pass on its commiserations to Ivan Lewis Member of Parliament Bury South who, following the recent somewhat controversial Labour Leadership Election offered to continue his services as (Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland) albeit on a temporary basis was rejected by the new National Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn.

A. Madam Mayor, far from commiserating with Mr Lewis I would thank Councillor Gunther for giving me the opportunity to publically congratulate Mr Lewis for having the courage of his convictions, congratulate him for his loyalty to his party and congratulate and thank him for his many years of selfless public service at the highest levels of political office.

As a Minister of State Mr Lewis has contributed significantly to this country and latterly as Shadow Secretary of State he worked tirelessly to maintain the Northern Ireland peace process.

I have no doubt that he will continue to be an excellent constituency MP for many, many years to come.

The people that I will commiserate with are residents of Bury North who's MP is unlikely to come anywhere close to matching Mr Lewis' record.

Question 5 submitted by Councillor Parnell

Q. Can the Leader confirm the latest position on the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework and what work is currently being undertaken to progress this?

A. As you are aware, in January of this year the Council supported the decision to amend the AGMA constitution to allow for a statutory development plan to be produced collectively between the 10 districts of GM.

This plan, known as the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework or GMSF for short, will set out a strategic planning framework that will include statutory targets for the number of homes to be built and the level of employment floorspace that will need to be planned for within each district over the next 20 years.

It will also consider the necessary associated infrastructure required to support the agreed level of growth. One of the key challenges for the GMSF will be to consider how to accommodate growth in the most sustainable way possible.

Officers from across the ten authorities are contributing to the development of the GMSF and the extensive evidence that will underpin it. This emerging evidence shows that Greater Manchester's population is forecast to see significant growth. There is no getting away from this issue and these people will need homes to live in and jobs to go to. The evidence also shows that currently identified housing and employment land supplies across Greater Manchester are insufficient to meet anticipated future development needs

The first stage of the GMSF is the preparation of an Options Paper and this, together with supporting evidence, will be published for consultation in November. As the name suggests, this document will set out a number of options in terms of how Greater

Manchester and the GMSF could potentially approach the issue of growth.

Following consultation on the options, a preferred growth option will be identified and reflected in a draft plan. The identification of a preferred option will require a fine balance of issues and it is clear that some difficult decisions will need to be made along the way. Ultimately, the preferred growth option will inform the amount of new housing and employment floorspace that will need to be planned for and, critically, the amount of land that will need to be found to accommodate this development across GM and in each of the ten districts.

Question 6 submitted by Councillor O'Brien

Q. Can the Leader say how many housing association properties in Bury will be threatened by the Tory Government proposal to allow housing association tenants the right to buy their homes and what are the likely consequences of this misguided policy?

A. **As it is very early days, and as housing associations are still considering this together with other recent announcements that will affect their business plans, we do not yet have a full picture of the likely implications. We are of course keeping a close watching brief on this as it could have serious consequences - not just on current housing waiting lists but also on the future development plans of these organisations. Members will be well aware that most of the affordable housing in this Borough is provided through our partnership with these bodies.**

The National Housing Federation (NHF), on behalf of Housing Associations, considers this voluntary deal is better than one which would be otherwise imposed by Government. However I can't help feeling that it will impact on the sector's ability and appetite to develop new social housing and ultimately this will compromise this Council's Housing Strategy which purposefully set out to meet housing need.

It will also impact on the property levels we own ourselves with also the loss of stock reducing the amount in the Housing Revenue Account, because, although the details of how this will work are not yet available, the funding of this is likely to be through the sale of high value council owned stock.

Let's not disguise it. This is a blatant attack on social housing. It is an attempt at populist sound bites without thinking through or even understanding the impact this will have on people who cannot raise the finance to buy their own homes, the many families that have been affected by welfare reform and next generation who face a lifetime of living with their parents.

It is a policy for a few to the detriment of the many.

It even ignores the impact this will have on house building at a time when we need all the accommodation we can get to meet needs – and keep house prices within reach of working families.

How short sighted can you get.

Question 7 submitted by Councillor James

Q. Could the Leader update us on the progress we are making on increasing the take up of free early learning places for 2 year olds?

A. I am delighted to do this. We know that high quality childcare and early learning has a huge benefit to children in terms of their future academic and social development and want to increase take up as far as we can. In the summer we were criticised by the Minister for our take up, which stood at 63% at the time, placing us towards the bottom of the regional league table. I am delighted to inform you that, due to the hard work of our Early Years Team and Children's Centres that we have increased this to 77% in September and we are expecting this figure to increase still further. This is clearly excellent news for children and families in Bury.

Question 8 submitted by Councillor R E Walker

Q. Can we be advised of the income received from fines on vehicles caught by the spy camera car using the bus lanes in the 12 month period up to 1st September 2015 for Bolton Road, Bury and for Rochdale Road, Bury ?

A. **Bus Lane enforcement is not a means of income generation for the Council; it is a valuable tool to ensure the smooth flow of traffic around the Borough, particularly at peak times.**

The recent independent review of Town Centre bus lanes recommended a number of changes which are in the process of being implemented.

I can confirm that income of £97k has been generated, and all has been reinvested back into highways activity.

Question 9 submitted by Councillor Pickstone

Q. Could the Leader please inform members on what measures are being taken at a city region level to tackle the worrying numbers of people who are homeless, including people forced to live on the streets?

A. **There is no doubt that homelessness is a concern for us all in Greater Manchester – and it is situation which many of us feel will deteriorate due to this Government’s sustained attack on social housing and punitive welfare policies.**

To answer your question, the focus at Greater Manchester level has been to increase the supply of housing – and work is ongoing to identify major development sites, agree funding streams to encourage building and strengthen partnership working with the Homes and Community Agency to coordinate activity and reduce red tape.

Addressing actual homelessness remains a district responsibility. I cannot comment how other areas are tackling the problem but I can point to this Council’s track record.

We have seen a 20% increase in the number of people presenting as homeless compared to three years ago but the situation could have been much worse. For every household coming in the door, our staff are preventing a further two cases materialising – through mediation, negotiation with landlords and other providers and generally providing high quality advice and guidance.

We have also developed innovative solutions to help the situation such as:

- the HEN project which helps single homeless with accommodation and support into employment**
- Community Resettlement – helping people move on from temporary accommodation**
- multi disciplinary panels which consider more difficult cases such as ex-offenders and rough sleepers**
- services commissioned for rough sleepers and other vulnerable groups including specialised provision during the freezing weather**
- partnership working with Six Town Housing and the Council's Benefits team to assist people struggling with the welfare reform changes**
- amending our Allocation policy council housing to target those in greatest housing need**
- the creation of a Homeless Rescue Fund which provides small amounts of money for more imaginative ways of resolving customer needs**

The Council can be proud of the improvements in Housing Services over the last five years. I just wish the Government could be more supportive.

Question 10 submitted by Councillor Jamie Walker

Q. Does the Leader agree that high quality careers education, information, advice and guidance is crucial to young people and can he comment on the quality of the service offered in Bury?

A **With the world changing as rapidly as it is it is critical that our young people get the right sort of advice and guidance about future careers options so that they can make a well informed choice about their career path. It is also absolutely essential to the economy that we get the right people with the right skills to help our economy grow. I therefore can't stress too much how important good information, advice and support is to the young people themselves, local businesses and the community as a whole.**

In Bury our young people are very lucky to have access to our local, in-house Connexions Service. It has an excellent track record of performance in terms of young people's participation in learning, NEETs and Not knowns and has an enviable track record in supporting some of our more vulnerable young people such as young parents. The service has recently been assessed for the Matrix Quality Award and has passed with flying colours.

Question 11 submitted by Councillor Susan Southworth

Q. How that the changes to the bin collections have been operational for twelve months, can the Leader tell us what savings have been delivered?

A. **Recycling rates are difficult to predict. They rely on seasonal variations and customer behaviour. We currently estimate that we have saved in excess of £800k based upon month 6 data, after taking account of the cost of the initiative**

Question 12 submitted by Councillor Parnell

Q. Can the Leader tell us what initiatives this Council are undertaking to tackle social isolation in our communities?

A. With families becoming increasingly fragmented due to the requirements of modern living, I am well aware of the blight of social isolation faced by more and more individuals. That is why this Council has supported work with groups at risk of being marginalised, funded the Volunteer Centre and championed activities that reduce social exclusion and the new danger of digital exclusion.

While we remain committed to this valuable work, cuts to Council funding severely constrains our ability to act. Accordingly residents are having to become more self reliant and depend increasingly on their community to help out. I would however draw attention to two key projects that the Council is developing to address social isolation:

- Firstly we are making information and advice more readily available through investment in the 'Bury Directory' to provide a one-stop information point for advice, support, activities, services and much more. By combining all existing directories and sources of information into one place, our aim is to make it easy for both professionals and the public to find services and activities to ease the problem of isolation.

The Bury Directory is available online at www.theburydirectory.co.uk 24 hours a day, 7 days per week and fully accessible to all – being DDA compliant and with the option to change the content into any language. It also contains an interactive map to enable people to find an activity or event in their local area by clicking on one of the 6 townships and plan their journey by public transport, car or walking.

- Secondly, we have been integral to securing a 5-year 'Ambition for Ageing' project with support from the

Big Lottery Fund – to bring communities and organisations together to reduce social isolation by understanding the needs and aspirations of older people across Greater Manchester.

A competition is now underway to find organisations to become 'local delivery leads' who will work with older people and communities in Moorside, Radcliffe North and St Mary's to shape the way an estimated £650,000 will be spent over the next 5 years. I fully expect this work to result in a broad range of projects which will generate new connections and social activities to make older people feel more confident and involved in their communities.

Question 13 submitted by Councillor Harris

Q. Regarding an article in the Sunday Times, page 19, on the 20th September 2015, some Councils continue ignore Government demands to cease paying senior staff through various tax loopholes, including letting them pay corporation tax at 20% rather than income tax at 45%. This has resulted in some top-paid staff earning over a £1000.00 per day. Can the Leader of the Council please confirm if this is happening at Bury Council and if so how many staff are benefiting from such tax loopholes?

A. I'd like to thank Cllr Harris for her question...I'd like to but I can't.

The question is both a waste of time and an insult, an insult to the integrity of the Council and an insult to the integrity of our dedicated, committed and hard working senior managers.

It's a waste of time because as a Council that believes in openness and transparency we always publicise the details of senior staff pay in our Accounts and so if Cllr Harris had troubled herself to look then she'd have seen very clearly that we don't operate these sort of arrangements.

And it's an insult because Bury Council never has, and never will, enter in to the sort of arrangement that she has asked about.

And finally it's an insult to our staff because never once has any senior manager, including the current team of senior managers, asked for such an arrangement to be considered for the purposes of avoiding tax.

So Madam Mayor, the answer to the question is a most emphatic no.

Question 14 submitted by Councillor Black

Q. Can the Leader tell us, with the commencement of the LA Trading Company 'Persona' in October, what changes we can expect in delivering services and how the company intends to grow?

A. The first thing to stress in relation to this question is that Persona has been set up to attempt to secure the long term sustainability of the adult services it delivers. It was very apparent from the consultation completed in 2014 that customers, carers, family and staff value the services delivered by what was then the in-house service and wanted to be able to rely on them in the future. Therefore in the early stages of Persona customers should not experience any obvious changes.

There is a comprehensive business plan in place for Persona which poses some challenging development areas for the organisation in the coming months and years. This will mean that services do need to continue to change and develop. Change has been a constant feature of service delivery over recent years and some of the existing change programs will continue to be worked on.

In the lead up to its creation the organisation began to develop partnerships and co-delivery arrangements which will continue to be strengthened and rolled out further within the services delivered.

The organisation is working closely with commissioners to understand the priority areas for service development in order that changes and developments can be agreed in partnership to fulfil the strategic objectives across the wider community.

There will be a number of focuses to change and development; efficiency of existing services plus growth and development of new offers. This will see the widening of access to services so that more people can benefit from what Persona can offer. Change and development will be based around the organisation's principles of Staying Well, Whole Family, Enablement, Personalisation, Quality and Healthy Lifestyles. There will be a focus on maximising technology, enabling self care and developing community assets.

Specific areas for growth will be based around research and intelligence on gaps in the market, demographic pressure areas and customer demand. Some growth will be achieved through opening existing and new services to direct paying customers and others will come from being successful in winning bids for additional work

Question 15 submitted by Councillor Preston

- Q.** Targeted work with young people is vital in the fight against hate crime in all its ugly forms. Could the Lead Member for Community Safety outline what work is taking place in Bury schools to educate and engage young people about hate crime?
- A.** Bury is a place where I am very proud to live, work and enjoy my free time. Community Cohesion lies at the heart of what makes us a strong, vibrant and safe community and is central to all we do.

I am pleased to say that partners in our borough continue to work together to educate and engage young people about hate crime.

Tied in with national hate crime awareness week, we have worked with all of our secondary schools through the innovative 'Be Safe Be Cool' initiative, promoting positive messages and dialogue with young people.

Hate Crime awareness is an integral element within a play that is delivered by students from Bury College as part of the initiative. This leads the way in developing the discussions we then have with the young people through a number of workshops about the choices they will make in life. The workshops centre around how they can keep themselves safe from crime, reduce anti-social behaviour, fire safety, countering hatred, extremism and terrorism and demystifying life in prison.

This work also compliments diversity awareness days and disability awareness days run in schools throughout the year. These days have a specific emphasis on raising awareness of hate crime relating to disability, learning disability and homophobic bullying.

Young people in this borough are our future. I am committed to ensuring we continue our work with schools to help support and engage young people in standing up against hate crime in all its forms.

Question 16 submitted by Councillor Adams

Q. Members of the Council will be aware that World Mental Health Day took place on 10 October – an international day to raise awareness. What is Bury Council doing to bring attention to the cause and promote good mental health and wellbeing?

A. During October, the Council is taking action in 3 areas to raise awareness of mental health and promote positive wellbeing for everyone in Bury:

Web pages dedicated to providing information about mental health have now gone live on the Bury Directory.

The pages aim to provide the information which will help the public and patients get well and stay well.

There are tips on what we can all do to help ourselves feel better, simple steps to take around eating, sleep and exercise – promoting the prevention agenda. There are tips on what people can do to take care of themselves if they are experiencing mental illness and links to self help guides - promoting self care. There is also a section on myth busting – targeting the misinformation and poor understanding of mental health and mental health conditions that still exists.

In addition to providing information to tell people more about mental health and the services available in Bury; the web pages also aim to break down barriers and tackle the stigma that still exist about mental health.

This required a different approach. Brian, a local man who has been supported through our services, has worked with the Council to make short film to tackle stigma. He tells his story of coping with depression, anxiety and low self esteem. Brian describes how local services (Helping Yourself to Wellbeing) have helped him with his recovery and how he is moving on with his life. The film (which is on the mental health pages of the Bury Directory is a deeply personal account that brings to life both his experiences and struggles, and his hopes and aspirations for the future. The aim of the film is to encourage more people to be more open about their own emotional and mental health and talk about these issues.

As part of the Stoptober Campaign, our health partners, Pennine Care, raised awareness of the Healthy Minds service at Bury Light Night – helping to get the message out about the support and treatments local counsellors and therapists can provide that are available to all adults in Bury with lower level needs.

However, this is a very challenging agenda and the actions that Bury Council is currently undertaking will not solve all the issues around stigma and misunderstanding – this is an on-going task and the authority will continue to link into national campaigns to raise awareness, promote positive mental health and challenge stigma.

Question 17 submitted by Councillor Caserta

Q. Can the leader of the Council give his views or find out why it took our Labour Police Commissioner elected in November 2012, three years to work out that senior staff including the HR office on £124k a year were not entitled to a company car with sirens that was tax deductible. Mr Lloyd told the MEN: "I have commissioned a review into terms and conditions both for chief officers and staff."

A. **Responsibility for police staff terms and conditions now lies with the Chief Constable not the PCC.**

During his three years in office Mr Lloyd has had to focus his attention on working with GMP to ensure that the best possible police services are provided to the people of Greater Manchester in the face of an onslaught of cuts imposed by the Government.

Since 2011 the Government has cut £134m from GMPs budget and current estimates are that a further £157m will be cut between now and 2018/19. This is expected to lead to the loss of over 4,000 police jobs, or more than half of the force and destroys any credibility that the Government might have in the area of community safety.

Despite this, in his time in office Mr Lloyd has led on some groundbreaking developments in areas such as tackling child sexual exploitation, putting victims of crime first, improving the way that mental health issues are addressed and tackling the cause and affects of

alcohol abuse, something which we all know is a scourge on society and a huge drain on police resources.

Question 18 submitted by Councillor D'Albert

- Q.** Could the Leader please update members on impact on the Borough's children and young people on changes in eligibility criteria for the CAMHS services? Could he include figures of children and young people helped and those we have been unable to help?
- A.** **Bury CAMHS have until recently been operating within the traditional CAMHS tiered framework. CAMHS provides a comprehensive service to children, young people and their families between 5-16 years old. It also works with some 16-18 year olds who are open to the service with neuro developmental difficulties such as Autistic Spectrum Condition and learning difficulties. Specialist interventions and pathways are well established into the CAMHS Service.**

CAMHS operates a multi disciplinary single point of entry for all 5-16 year olds presenting with emotional well being and mental health issues. Working with partners, a Commissioning for Quality and Improvement (CQUIN) for 2015/16 will improve access and strengthen further CAMHS provision across the Borough. The local transformation plan, 'Future in Mind', will be launched on 4 November 2015 at the Children's Trust Emotional Health and Well Being Network event.

Total number of referrals for 2014/15: 2,541 children and young people supported through CAMHS.

There were 483 redirected into other support services following triage from CAMHS practitioners.

There has been no change to the eligibility criteria in respect of CAMHS referrals. It is the way emotional mental health and well being is delivered within each borough and the links and access to specialist services that are the change of focus and delivery. CAMHS operate a stepped care model offering advice and consultation to facilitate step up and step down as required and to ensure they embed the Children's Trust

priorities. Priority 1 being that children and young people have access to early help, right help, right time, right service.

There is no reported data/concern which states children and young people have not been helped in any way.

Question 19 submitted by Councillor Skillen

Q. Would the Leader join me in congratulating the Council on being named in the Sunday Telegraph's Top 50 Apprentices Careers List?

A. We are extremely proud of this achievement. It was great to hear that the Council has been named as one of the top 50 Employers to offer 'outstanding opportunities' for apprentices along with the likes of BT, the BBC and the RAF.

The article describes the list as showcasing the '50 most noteworthy apprenticeship schemes in the UK' and with Bury being one of only two councils named in the list it's something to be really proud of.

Bury Council is committed to providing meaningful opportunities for young people. We've recently hired 13 new apprentices in addition to the 25 apprentices who are currently serving apprenticeships.

Over the past 2 years alone we as a council have provided over a hundred opportunities to young people across the borough and we're keen to continue and expand upon this success.

Question 20 submitted by Councillor Kerrison

Q. Can the Leader advise us of the changes to the Council's website and explain what steps have been taken to ensure it is accessible to all?

A. The website has indeed undergone a transformation. As the Council moves towards delivering more and more services via 'self serve.

We needed to replace the website with one which was geared towards making the self serve option appeal to customers.

It had to be quicker, transactional, easy to use and also to be able to be used on mobile devices as almost half of our customers access our website using these.

We completely changed the landing page, making most prominent the transactions which were most often used by customers.

We reduced the number of pictures and text to avoid customers having to download unnecessary material.

Of course, we can't just assume we know what customers want so we tested the proposed website on various customers to get feedback. We've also launched a Digital Inclusion project. This is to help people who may not currently be on-line to do so.

There are an estimated 11 million people in the UK who don't have the digital skills to benefit from the online world, and nearly 61% of these have never been online before. It's those who are already at a disadvantage through age, education, income, disability or unemployment who are likely to be missing out more.

We'll shortly be launching a Digital Buddy` recruitment which asks for volunteers with some computer skills to help other customers not as experienced. They'll be based in libraries and other digital hubs across Bury. Last week saw us taking part in the national initiative `Go On` week where we publicised the help people could get at the council hubs and libraries.

Question 21 submitted by Councillor Gartside

- Q.** Can the Leader of the Council / relevant Cabinet member, please provide an update on the level of existing equal pay claims being dealt with this year and how much reserves do they anticipate in having to put aside for any final claims?

- A. I have previously explained to Council that it is not appropriate to discuss details of existing claims whilst the settlement / legal process is ongoing.**

It would be reckless to release this information, and I'm surprised Councillor Gartside doesn't appreciate this.

Regarding the funding of claims, I can assure Councillor Gartside that a prudent approach is being taken – as it has been throughout this process.

Question 22 submitted by Councillor Sarah Southworth

- Q. Can the Leader update the Council on how many Bury businesses have benefitted from the Greater Manchester Broadband Connection Voucher Scheme?**

- A. The Broadband Connection Voucher Scheme was launched in 50 cities across the UK.**

Locally the scheme has been managed by Manchester City Council on behalf of Greater Manchester.

The grant was aimed at small and medium size enterprises, charities and social enterprises to enable them to cover the infrastructure costs to upgrade to faster broadband connection. The Connection Voucher Scheme has provided grants of up to £3,000.

I am pleased to confirm that between the 1st April 2015 and 27 September 2015 a total of 220 vouchers have been issued to eligible Bury businesses. That equates up to £660,000 investment locally, from an initial contribution of £6,000 from Bury Council to cover the costs of administering the scheme.

Applications to the current scheme are now closed.

The good news is that Bury businesses have accessed the largest number of vouchers in the north of Greater Manchester with more grants delivered than Rochdale, Bolton Wigan and Oldham.

Bury *really* does mean business.

Question 23 submitted by Councillor Cassidy

Q. Can the Leader tell us what the Council is doing this year in relation to the selling of fireworks for Bonfire Night?

A. During this year's firework season, the Council's Trading Standards Section and Communities Team will be working with the Police and the Fire Service to tackle illegal fireworks and the associated nuisance that they can cause.

This is part of Operation Treacle, an AGMA wide initiative which will run during October and November, including the selling period , which this year runs from 15th October to 11th November, a day longer than usual because of the inclusion of Diwali.

Activities include inspections at wholesalers and retailers to ensure fireworks comply with all the applicable British or European standards, and that they are stored safely and securely.

This year there will be an increased number of new European type CE marked fireworks on the market which may require closer attention. Sellers will be given advice about not selling to under 18s and how to check for proof of age, which may be followed up by test purchases in cases where there are complaints about particular premises.

The Communities Team are attending a number of events, including Township forums, the Homewatch conference, and Light Night where they will be promoting the anti-social messages from Operation Treacle.

They will also be visiting all the secondary schools delivering messages on firework nuisance and dangers, anti-social fires, attacks on fire fighters and anti social behaviour.

There will also be a bespoke “Treacle” page on the Council’s website.

Question 24 submitted by Councillor Mallon

Q. Can I ask the Leader what is Bury Council doing to help those in fuel poverty in Bury survive the coming winter, such that the fear caused by the cruel words of this Tory Government may be eased and not forgotten?

A. **The Council absolutely see fuel poverty as an issue and are committed to helping those in this situation, especially over the winter months.**

We undertake a broad range of promotional and engagement activity and work to identify those in fuel poverty. We facilitate, provide access to and in some cases directly provide help to people in fuel poverty through for instance energy efficiency measures to properties, energy efficiency advice and income advice.

This is done very much on a partnership basis across and outside the Council, recognising that there are a broad number who can help with this agenda.

We are also just about to start a process to re-energise and obtain a renewed commitment for our fuel poverty action plan to make a difference to those in fuel poverty over the coming winter months.

Question 25 submitted by Councillor Pickstone

Q. Could the Leader please outline to members what the estimated impact will be to the Authority with introduction of the so-called ‘Living Wage’ by the Government on staff costs, and on expenditure through contracts with other providers (e.g. adult care providers).

A. **The Council already pays staff the “Bury Wage” which is above the current minimum wage. The initial impact of the Living Wage on the Council’s paybill is therefore not significant in the first instance.**

However, the proposed increase to £9 per hour by 2020 is likely to cost the Council approximately £600k, and schools £1m.

Work is currently being undertaken to model the impact on commissioned services.

It is too early to say what this impact will be, however the cost will be significant, and Local Authorities are lobbying the Government to recognise this as a "new burden" when determining the 2016/17 Local Government Finance Settlement

Question 26 submitted by Councillor Black

- Q.** Can the Leader confirm that other GM Councils are now starting to follow Bury's lead and introducing three weekly bin collections, because of the evidence of our reduced recycling rates?
- A.** **Rochdale Council have followed Bury's lead and will begin a phased introduction of 3 weekly residual waste collection commencing Monday 19th October. No other Council has declared their intentions.**

Question 27 submitted by Councillor D'Albert

- Q.** Could the Leader please inform members how many empty (residential) properties there are at present in the Borough? How many have been empty for more than a year and how many properties has the Council been able to bring back into use through its empty properties programme in recent years?
- A.** **We have just under 3000 empty properties across the borough, just over 1600 of which have been empty for 6 months or more and of which just over 1000 have been empty for a year or more.**

Council Tax data shows that whilst there is an inevitable fluctuation of figures, as properties move in and out of these categories, we have nonetheless seen around 800 empty properties brought back into use since April 2015.

We are very much committed to tackling empty properties, particularly long term empties and those causing negative impacts on surrounding properties and

areas. Members may be aware that over recent years we have taken a focussed approach in the Radcliffe area to tackle empty properties. Out of 185 targeted properties 121 have been brought back into use, with others in the pipeline. This activity has sat alongside our borough-wide approach.

We utilise a range of approaches and tools to tackle the issue, including partnerships, various enforcement actions and external funding. Our positive track record of delivery with the Home and Communities Agency has led to quite significant resources from them to assist us with this issue.

It's also important to note that we focus our activity on properties that really need action and we have not shied away from dealing with some extremely challenging and complex cases, a number of which are coming to fruition imminently.

We will continue to target and prioritise our work around empty properties and continue to find new and innovative ways of managing and extending our resources.