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Unanswered Questions Letter – July 2015

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Date 23 July 2015

To: All Members of Council

Dear Councillor

COUNCIL MEETING – 8TH JULY 2015

At the above meeting, the thirty minutes of Question Time expired with questions 8 to 22 unanswered. Council Procedure Rule 11.6 requires that each Member of Council is sent responses to such questions.

Q8 Councillor Towler - Could the Executive Member for Employment, Enterprise and Opportunity update Council on progress with assisting young people in Leeds to be able to access apprenticeships?

A Focused partnership working in the City has doubled the number of apprentices to over 6,000 in the last few years.

- We are committed to continuing this upward trend and making Leeds the best city in the UK for a young person to become an apprentice in whatever sector they choose.

- In 2014/15, the Council-led Apprenticeship Hub:

- Supported **263** young people (under 24yrs) into apprenticeships,
- worked with **268** SME businesses to establish new apprenticeship positions and
- supported **47** young people into new apprenticeship positions across the Council

- The challenge remains in engaging young people and securing apprentice starts. While an increasing number of young people are attracted to apprenticeships,



there is still a perception among young people, parents and schools that apprenticeships aren't for young people who are bright and ambitious. However, through Higher Apprenticeships, there are opportunities for those who want an alternative route to Higher Education level qualifications.

- There is also an issue around red tape. With many employers asking for 5 A*-C's, those that don't have this aren't able to access apprenticeships and this is something we need to be able to address at a local level.
- Next Monday 13th July we will be holding the Leeds apprenticeship recruitment fair at Leeds Town Hall from 5 to 8 pm. Over 50 employers and training providers will be offering over 500 apprenticeship vacancies at all levels and across all sectors. Over 1,700 people attended the event last year and we are hoping to achieve similar levels again this time.
- Following the successful Legal Apprenticeship scheme we also plan to launch an Accountancy and Financial Services programme in the autumn involving financial businesses, many with a global reputation, from the largest financial sector outside London.
- In June, we also established our new Apprenticeship Application Workshops. These provide one to one support to young people aged 16 to 24 years to help them find and apply for vacancies.
- In the last year we also engaged with 37 of the 38 high schools and academies across the city to provide information sessions and workshops on applying for an apprenticeship.
- We have further work to do to ensure that we increase the number of young people from BAME communities accessing apprenticeships and Action Plans will be developed with communities and our partners to address this.
- Finally, building on the successful work of the Council to date to place employment and skills obligations on developers and contractors and the Re-Making Leeds heritage construction skills programme, plans are being developed to support access to apprenticeships and jobs in the construction sector through the Housing Growth Programme. Working with house-builders and housing associations we will seek to develop apprenticeship opportunities.

Q9 Councillor Harper - Could the Executive Member responsible for transport please update members on the Park and Ride scheme at Elland Road?

A Since the scheme opened in June 2014 in preparation for the Tour de France, the scheme developed in partnership with West Yorkshire Combined Authority has exceeded expectations. Use of the facility has grown continuously such that over 4,000 passenger journeys were made in the week that marked the first anniversary of its opening and the number of cars parked now regularly exceeds 400 cars per day capacity of the made up car park with the overspill area now being frequently in use. In the light of the continued growth in demand, Executive Board will next week consider proposals to upgrade the overspill area to provide a total of 800 spaces of a consistent



high quality across the site and plans for the further progression of a new 1000 space site at Temple Green in the Enterprise Zone which will further build up the city's park and ride options. In a survey of customers the high quality facilities, efficient bus service and friendly staff prompted 99% of customers' to say they would recommend the service. Elland Road Park and Ride is making a significant contribution to reducing congestion, improving air quality and providing sustainable parking provision to aid the economic development of the city.

Q10 Councillor Robinson - Will the Executive Member for Resources and Strategy tell us how much of the councils pension fund is invested in tobacco and smoking related companies?

A As I am sure Councillor Robinson is aware, the Council's pension scheme for non-teaching staff is operated by the West Yorkshire Pension Fund. As end the end of 2013/14, which is the lasts year of published accounts, the fund had investments with a market value of £180.5m in tobacco companies. This at that time represented 1.76% of the total investments of the Fund.

Q11 Councillor J Bentley - Could the Executive Member for Regeneration, Transport and Planning provide council with an assessment of the impact of the Government's ill-advised Housing Association Right to Buy policy?

A The Conservative Party manifesto 2015 seeks to extend the Right to Buy policy to tenants in Housing Associations. The compensation, to the Housing Associations, for the properties sold at discount under the extension of Right to Buy is proposed to be funded by requiring local authorities to sell the most expensive properties off as they fall vacant. The policy suggests that this will allow 1:1 replacement and compensation to be paid.

Whilst detailed policy proposals in respect of this have yet to be determined by the Government, it is understood that this means that local authority properties that rank among the most expensive third of all properties of that type in their region will be sold off and replaced with new affordable housing on a one for one basis only when they fall vacant.

Our understanding is that one bedroom bungalows above £85k, two bedroom semi and terraced properties above £130k and three bedroom semis above £165k would be affected by this policy. In total 1456 properties or 2.5% of the housing stock currently fall into the above categories.

Given new build costs it is difficult to understand how the value from the sale of these properties can be expected to fund 1:1 replacements let alone provide surplus resources for Housing Associations. We await further details.

Q12 Councillor Nagle - Can the Executive Member for Environmental Protection and Community Safety update Council on the most recent enforcement results, and confirm he is happy our approach is the right one?



A Some examples of areas of environmental enforcement activity:

City Centre litter / waste enforcement.

A patrol of uniformed staff operates in the city centre between 8.00am-6.00pm daily, including weekends. This is a dedicated resource which acts as a deterrent through being highly visible and through intervening and fining people seen to drop litter. This work is undertaken by a private company, under what is in effect a 'payment by results' arrangement. The response by businesses has been one of complete support, leading to discussion with the Leeds BID on the potential to extend this work further. The Council also employs a small team of environmental enforcement officers who have succeeded in getting city centre businesses to manage their trade waste well and remove it from public view before collection. Through being prepared to take a hard line on this matter, a series of meetings with trade waste companies operating in the city centre has secured changed collection times and operations which have impacted on the appearance of key areas such as Briggate.

Dog Fouling.

Clean streets are not solely achieved through enforcement of course. Alongside cleansing and enforcement work, we undertake to educate our residents and visitors of the impact of careless littering, dog fouling and waste storage. Two examples of a different approach can be given which complement and include elements of enforcement work are as follows:

Hawksworth Wood, Kirkstall.

Significant work was undertaken with Hawksworth Wood Primary School, working with school children to inform them and in turn for them to spread the word about the problems of dog fouling locally. Sessions were held at the school with the council's enforcement staff with the children taking home letters to encourage discussions with their families on good dog ownership. Children designed dog fouling signs for posting in the area and a local dog show reinforced the problems associated with dog fouling here. Intelligence was obtained about the probable owners / home addresses of dogs seen to be regularly fouling in the area for contact to be made by enforcement staff.

Dog Watch scheme in Garforth (details known)

Dog fouling is an issue which our tenants have highlighted for action on their estates. In May, we brought together enforcement agencies and housing staff to seek better ways of addressing fouling here, which will take account of tenancy management approaches and underline tenant responsibilities in addition to the usual route of recourse to FPNs.

We are taking a keen interest in the possibility of introducing an offence of not having the means to clean up after a dog. However there are flaws inherent to that process, not least that a person could have the means to clean up such as a bag, but never use it nor have any intention to use it. The fouling then remains of course, but no offence has been committed.

The law is not always a straightforward tool in dealing with environmental issues. Whilst we have issued many more FPNs for littering than others across West Yorkshire, it can be hard identifying the person at fault and following that through to some sort of penalty. The powers to seize vehicles used to fly tip waste were strengthened last year, but the Regulations have proved very complicated. We recently



responded to a DEFRA consultation (May 2015) to support the introduction of FPNs for fly tipping, allowing an 'out of court' sanction to perpetrators of lower level fly tipping offences. This would allow us to report back quickly to complainants and local communities that swift action had been taken against the perpetrator rather than waiting for a decision from a court hearing months down the line.

Overall, we can show that we have taken a robust approach to enforcement on environmental issues in the city. However, we see this in the context of a mix of approaches which include cleansing and educational work too. We want to find & nurture the connections between interested parties and share responsibilities previously left only at the Council's door. We appreciate the contribution made by volunteers and want to waken up others to their responsibilities to keep their local areas clean. We want the public to behave more responsibly and in doing so, reduce costs to clean up the city and improve on what we've achieved thus far. We are happy to assist and support communities in their quest to keep areas clean, but are not afraid to step in and penalise those whose actions detract from that goal.

Q13 Councillor Harington - Can the Executive Member for Children and Families inform Council what steps are being taken to recruit more foster carers for teenagers?

A The local authority acknowledges that there is a current pressure on placements for adolescents entering care. This is a national problem, and there is an acknowledged shortage of both in-house and external placements across the region.

In order to address this, the fostering service has identified carers for adolescents as one of its priorities for recruitment.

The fostering service has refocused foster carer recruitment and marketing into three priority areas; carers for adolescents, carers for large sibling groups, and carers for children and young people with complex/ additional needs.

The fostering service has been re-organised and a 'Teenager Plus' team has been established in order to offer specialist support for carers/ providers who are willing and able to care solely for teenagers or young adults. This team has: established a support group; the Supervising Social Workers in the team have a reduced caseload which allows them to offer more support to carers/ providers in order to reduce the risk of placement breakdown; and work is ongoing to identify appropriate training for carers in responding to issues specific to caring for adolescents.

The service organised and held a multi-agency recruitment evening at Leeds Arena on 8th June as part of fostering fortnight; believed to be the biggest event of its kind in the region, and involving 14 fostering providers in addition to the local authority. As a direct result of this event, the team received ten requests for home visits to potential foster carer households.

The recruitment and assessment team are in the process of assessing carers willing to care for teenagers in foster placements, and assessing increasing numbers of [supported lodgings](#) providers who are willing to care for young people over the age of sixteen.



Approvals of foster carer households increased year on year between 2011 and 2014, from 34 in 2011-12 to 58 in 2012-13 and 67 in 2013-14.

Q14 Councillor B Anderson - Does the Executive Member with responsibility for Planning agree that planning applications are being validated despite advice from expert officers to the contrary?

A Planning Applications are validated against a checklist of national and local criteria by a group of experienced technicians when applications are received. On average 40% of planning applications submitted are invalid on receipt as the relevant information has not been submitted or the correct fee paid. The national planning system aims to be proportionate so as not to require onerous amounts of supporting information before an application is validated. In recent years there has been a national government push to reduce red tape around the planning process. Once the application is valid and the required documents have been submitted the case officers will then assess them in detail and consider the content of the submitted applications – at this stage more information may be required or applications may be refused for insufficient information / inadequate justification etc.

Q15 Councillor Campbell - Could the Executive Member for Environmental Protection and Community Safety please confirm for council how many homes will be heated by the District Heat Network by the end of next year?

A Work is underway on a local district heating station for the Clydes and Phil May Court, so an additional 231 homes will be heated by district heating, provided by wood pellets, by the end of the year. This will increase the number of council homes connected to district heating to over 1,600 in total.

There is a much more ambitious plan to develop a district heating network linked to the energy from the waste plant. This will potentially provide heat to public buildings, businesses and 2000 multi-storey flats. Although excellent progress has been made over the last year, there is still work to do. The RERF is not due to be fully online until early 2016 and we do not plan to start constructing a heat network until after this. It will take around a year from this point for the first homes to receive heat from the RERF, so the likely date is mid-2017. However, there are still detailed commercial, funding and procurement hurdles to overcome before we can commit to this deadline.

Q16 Councillor Anderson - Would the Executive Member with responsibility for Education care to comment on the problems the Administration has caused to residents because of their policy of withdrawing funding for transport to schools?

A Changes to our transport policy have been necessary in view of the significant reductions to local government funding.

The changes that Leeds has made have followed full consultation and information: online, through schools and within the admissions process.

The Leeds offer exceeds that required in law and will continue to do so.

It has been necessary to withdraw support from those families who live more than three miles from their nearest school but who choose not to send their child to the



school which is nearest. We do appreciate that this has affected a number of families in certain areas of the city.

However, in the current budget context we have to support those families who are the most vulnerable. Our policy continues to make special arrangements for low income families whose children are entitled to free travel to one of their three nearest schools.

Q17 Councillor S Bentley - Can the Executive Member for Regeneration, Transport & Planning confirm that he is aware that residents in some areas of Yorkshire have received letters urging them to protect their York stone with SmartWater, and that Leeds City Council uses SmartWater technology for any York stone used for kerbs and pavements etc.?

A The loss of Yorkstone paving flags from the streets of Leeds is a great cause for concern. Over the past decade there have been roughly 180 theft reports per year.

This is not just a problem for Leeds, I am aware that it has been reported in the national media that thieves are stealing roofing slabs, dry stone walling as well as paving flags and that some residents in Yorkshire have been advised to protect their personal property with things like Smart Water, although this advice has not come from Leeds City Council.

We have previously issued press statements to raise awareness of the problems that the theft of stone is causing across the city and we have discussed the issue with the Police to encourage them to take further action but we do not currently use Smart Water technology to mark flags and kerbs on our streets. Our initial investigations into the use of Smartwater has indicated that it would be expensive to adopt when advice received from those working in crime prevention suggests that the technique is unlikely to have any significant impact in reducing thefts of paving flags.

Given the scale of the problem and the general shortage of stone products we face, I have asked highway officers to undertake a detailed review of all options that may reduce the risk of theft of stone products from our streets, including the use of Smartwater.

We would be keen to see a change in the law to better regulate the sale of stone products, similar to the changes put in place in the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013, which resulted in a reported reduction of 40% in metal thefts. Officers in Highways have reported to me that the reduction in the theft of drainage gully covers is now only a fraction of what it used to be prior to the Act coming into force.

Q18 Councillor Robinson - Will the Executive Board Member for Regeneration, Transport & Planning comment on whether the construction of the Leeds cycle way is having a detrimental effect on highway maintenance and repairs elsewhere in the city?

A The City Connect project is divided into several sections. Sections A to E were put out to tender last year and the winning bid was made by North Midland Construction PLC. Sections A to E cover the length from Bradford City Centre to the eastern edge of Leeds City Centre.



Section G, which runs from the outer ring road at Cross Gates to the Western edge of Leeds City Centre, is being constructed by the Council's internal Highway Maintenance team.

In order to make it possible for the internal team to carry out the construction of Section G, some of the planned work normally carried out by the internal team has been given to the council's term contractor, Colas. In addition the internal team has also sought assistance from three neighbouring authorities, Bradford, Kirklees and Wakefield, whose teams are also helping in the delivery of the Leeds planned maintenance programme.

It is currently anticipated that the work of the internal team on the project will be completed by the end of December.

We have made sure that sufficient resources are available to deal with both emergency and routine repairs of the highway. However, work programmes have been adjusted to allow the internal team to deliver both Section G of the City Connect project and to carry out its routine work. There should be no detriment to highway maintenance repairs overall but clearly this is a demanding year for the internal team.

Q19 Councillor Anderson - Does the Executive Member for Resources and Strategy support the proposals in the Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill?

A "We welcome initiatives that will deliver more job opportunities and help people find employment. However, in order to address the growing problem of in-work poverty, the focus needs to be away from the types of jobs that are low-paid, part-time or zero hour contract jobs – it is clear to see that there has been real growth in these types of jobs in recent times.

We are also concerned that the Bill also sets out the intention to freeze working age benefits, many of which provide vital support for low paid workers. We are concerned that more in-work families and children will find it even harder to make ends meet. This council has had a focus for some time on supporting those young people not in employment, education or training, commonly referred to as NEETs, and we await detail of the Government's proposed Youth Allowance so that we can see whether that will help address this problem. However, the proposal to remove automatic entitlement for Housing Benefit for 18 – 21 year olds is a significant concern, particularly as many 18 – 21 year olds getting Housing Benefit are vulnerable in the first place. So, in conclusion, we welcome any measures that will help people get into employment and take people out of poverty but what we cannot support are proposals that will end up hitting the working people the hardest.

Q20 Councillor Anderson - Does the Leader of Council believe that council officers should be contactable during office hours?

A In general, Council officers should be contactable during work hours, although inevitably there will be periods of time where this isn't always achievable (for example because officers are in meetings, or working out on site).

The Council is moving to 'New Ways of Working' in many services, and large numbers of council staff have gone through the 'Changing the Workplace' programme, with more to follow. These approaches combine more effective use of office space and



technologies to give greater flexibility to meet changing business needs and to achieve significant savings on premises costs.

In practice this means that the more traditional 'fixed office hours and location' approach has been replaced by officers working more flexibly across different locations and, in some cases, adopting different working patterns to meet service needs.

While officers may be 'out of the office' and perhaps not available to deal with queries immediately, they should be equipped with mobile technology including smartphones, and other devices to enable them to maintain contact with the office, answer queries and deal with work issues that may arise. We deploy a range of approaches and technologies to make it easy for people to leave messages or contact someone else who might be able to help. So even if a particular officer is not available, the enquirer should be directed to someone else who can respond appropriately.

Q21 Councillor Anderson - Does the Executive Member for Employment, Enterprise and Opportunity support the Enterprise Bill promoted by the Government?

A I strongly support any measures that will help small businesses to grow and create jobs.

Leeds City Council is taking a lead in supporting small businesses. According to Centre for Cities, Leeds currently has the fastest private jobs growth of any major UK city. We have the largest number of fast-growing scale-up companies of any area outside London and Cambridge. We have provided grants to over 950 SMEs enabling them to create over 950 jobs as part of the Business Growth Programme, which we deliver for the Leeds City Region LEP. We secured the world's first Google Digital Garage which supports small businesses develop their digital capabilities.

I await with interest to see the details of the proposed Enterprise Bill. Whilst I welcome any sensible measures to help small businesses, we need Government to do much more than cut red tape and tinker with the business rates system. Small businesses need access to finance, workers with the right skills, a modern and efficient transport network and the right sort of business support. We need Government to invest in those areas, and we need to see greater devolution of initiatives to support businesses, as we know the issues facing businesses in Leeds better than civil servants in Whitehall.

Q22 Councillor Lamb - Is the Executive Board Member for Communities confident that the changes taking place at the Wetherby One Stop Shop will continue to meet customer demands?

A The changes taking place across the city, not just at Wetherby, are as a result of a new process whereby residents can report more services for themselves, something we know residents in this city want to do.

These improvements to the Council's website mean it is now easier and quicker to report highways and environmental issues to us. It also means that residents can track the progress of enquiries they make.



Because of this change, Customer Services Officers are now encouraged to help residents report issues themselves via the free telephone or via the self-serve PCs available in One Stop Centres.

The issue at Wetherby arose because at the moment there is no public access PC in the One Stop for local residents to report issues to the Council and therefore they have to use the free telephones.

I have been assured that the lack of a public access PC at Wetherby is being addressed as a priority

However to ensure that customers in Wetherby continue to receive good customer service we have also taken further action to ensure the reporting experience is a customer friendly one and responsive to local need.

We have:

- Established a hard copy reporting book for customers, located on the front desk at the One Stop Centre, where the public can leave any message or query which can be reported on behalf of the customer.
- Ensured the Freephone has clear and simple notices/signs located next to it highlighting what numbers the customer will need to press to be put through to the appropriate department. This makes the process clear, simple and concise for the customer who can also request support from staff if need be. And
- We have provided further guidance to the Customer Service Officers detailing how to continue to report certain issues on behalf of the customer should they not wish to use the self-serve options – this includes bulky collections, environmental issues and bins.

Therefore overall we are confident that a good number of user friendly options are in place for the Wetherby One Stop Centre and that we will continue to meet customer demands to a high standard.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Tomkinson
Principal Governance Officer

