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MEETING OF COUNCIL - 18TH NOVEMBER 2009

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS LETTER

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To: All Members of Council

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Your ref:
Our Ref: A61/isw/sepquest

Date: 2ND December 2009

Dear Councillor

COUNCIL MEETING – 18th November 2009

At the above meeting, the thirty minutes of Question Time expired with 14 questions unanswered. Council Procedure Rule 11.6 requires that each Member of Council is sent responses to such questions.

Question 11

“Can the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods & Housing please explain the delays in completing the structural proposals for Neighbourhood Wardens and provide a definitive timescale for its completion.”

Answer

“The warden restructure has been delayed by a longer than expected period of consultation with staff and Trade Unions and HR procedure. These have resulted in some changes to the original proposals. These are now concluded and the Restructure Report is ready to be signed off.

As this is a key decision it would be inappropriate to provide a definitive completion date. However officers have advised that provided there are no more unforeseen delays recruitment should be underway by January.”



Question 12

“Would the Executive Board Member for Learning like to congratulate the Leeds BSF Programme on their shortlisting in three categories for this years ‘Partnership for Schools’ Excellence in BSF Awards?”

Answer

‘Absolutely. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate everyone involved in the Leeds BSF partnership for being nominated for three Excellence in BSF awards for the second year in a row.

This is a fantastic achievement in itself, but at the ceremony we received ‘highly commended’ this year to follow the two awards we earned last year.

It is welcome recognition of the way our BSF programme has helped Leeds to transform teaching and learning in many of our secondary schools, giving thousands of young people state-of-the-art buildings and 21st-century facilities. The commendation was in the ICT category, recognising the positive impact of the strategic partnership between RM and Leeds. Together we are providing creative and innovative uses of technology which are improving teaching, learning and the management of schools.

The other two nominations were for the Local Education partnership, which has saved the city’s BSF programme around £40m through effective partnership working and efficient procurement, and for the versatility of Pudsey Grangefield’s new learning environment. Pudsey Grangefield is a pioneering school design.

Along with our other BSF and PFI schools, it continues to inspire the many headteachers and education leaders who come from across the country and the rest of the globe to visit our schools. Everyone involved in the BSF partnership deserves our recognition for making sure this huge investment has such a positive impact on young people’s lives.’

Question 13

“Would the Deputy Leader of Council care to comment on the ruling administration’s approach to public consultation?”

Answer

“The dictionary definition of the verb ‘to consult’ is ‘to have regard for a person’s feelings, interests etc in making decisions or plans’.

That is something which this administration pledges in all the public consultations we carry out. And of course we follow national Cabinet Office guidelines on public consultation to ensure best practice.

We have a sound track record in consultation, with the Fairer Charging consultation in Adult Social Care a year ago being commended by service users and carers for the thoroughness of its processes.



Today. I am going to cite the most recent consultation we have held, the one over proposals by Adult Social Care for the closure of six day centres for older people.

Officers had put forward a strong argument for the closures because of falling attendance figures at day centres across the city, with some centres only being one-third full.

When we gave the go-ahead to consult service users, carers, staff and the general public over the proposals, this administration made two important promises.

Firstly, we assured people that no decisions would be taken until after the consultation was complete.

Secondly, we gave an absolute undertaking that people's views would be very much taken into account as, eventually, decisions were taken.

And we did listen. And we did not pre-judge the outcome.

We listened to local people's strongly-held views and we decided that two out of the six centres would remain open. And two others would close but be relocated in better premises or at a centre more suitable to the area it served.

We did this because the comments we received from local people during the consultation persuaded us that this was the right thing to do.

I would like to thank everyone who took part in our consultation. What we heard helped us make some important decisions. People placed their trust in us by being open about their feelings and making some powerful arguments.

This administration has kept its side of the bargain and will continue to do so in the future."

Question 14

"Can the Leader of Council update members on the authority's plain English campaign?"

Answer

'The communications team is currently working on a Plain English campaign that will be launched in December.

The campaign will explain why using plain English in all internal and external communications is essential to ensure we get our message across clearly to all audiences, including staff, residents, visitors and businesses.

A brand new staff training course has been developed and is currently being tested. This will be available to all staff from December and will give practical advice and guidance on using plain English.

The campaign will also capture staff feedback on council letters, leaflets, web material etc which can then be used to help improve those communications.'



Question 15

“Can the leader of council confirm a picture printed in the Daily Mirror this month of a man at a 1985 Equal pay demonstration in the city is him?”

Answer

“Yes”

Question 16

“Would the Leader of Council update members on the progress of investment proposals to fund new buildings for Leeds City College?”

Answer

“Due to the debacle over central government funding approvals for Colleges across the country investment plans for new buildings at Leeds City College are not able to proceed at the current time.”

Question 17

“Can the Executive Board Member for Environmental Services please inform members how much waste is to be processed per year at the Council’s planned incinerator?”

Answer

“The amount of waste to be received by the Residual Waste Treatment facility has yet to be finalised and continues to be discussed with all remaining bidders as the procurement progresses and their proposals develop.

The Council's latest projections for the maximum amount of residual waste requiring treatment over the life of the contract are at 163,000 tonnes per annum, compared to the 348,000 tonnes of residual waste generated in 2003, that required collection and transport to landfill. These future projections are based on LCC having achieved a recycling rate of in excess of 50% of household waste. Projections continue to be reviewed throughout the procurement process.

As agreed by the Executive Board, the facility will be permitted to accept an element of commercial waste generated in Leeds of a similar composition to domestic waste. This is waste that is currently going to landfill. However, all of the remaining bidders' proposals are designed primarily to treat municipal waste. Bidders are each taking a different approach to this issue and the amount of commercial waste to be accepted varies. As such the precise capacity of proposed facilities will only be finalised at a later stage of the procurement process. However it is unlikely that any bidder will accept more than 60,000 tonnes per annum and it is possible that this would be considerably less.

In order to prevent significant levels of importation of waste into Leeds, bidders are only permitted to source a quantity of waste equivalent to 1% of Leeds' projected municipal waste from outside Leeds. Since commercial waste collections do not mirror administrative boundaries, allowing this small degree of flexibility is considered to be a practical approach.”



Question 18

“Can the Leader of Council confirm what figure a Freedom of Information Request by his own party earlier this year found the authority to have spent on pavement accident compensation claims between 2004-2009?”

Answer

Year	Paid
2004/05	£2,057,641
2005/06	£2,464,667
2006/07	£2,191,532
2007/08	£1,991,274
2008/09	£1,554,011

The amounts in this table relate to the totals paid out on claims that have been closed in each year shown. However, those claims are not necessarily received in the year in question. Many claims are paid out in years after the one in which they were received.

Question 19

“Would the Executive Board Member for Learning care to comment on the new OFSTED Inspection framework regarding Safeguarding, and its implications for schools in Leeds?”

Answer

“The new OFSTED Framework for Schools has again raised the bar, increased expectations and safeguarding is one of the key limiting judgements in the new Framework which means that schools cannot be found to be adequate or better if safeguarding is found to be inadequate. With each new version of the Framework early inspections have tended to be more harsh and the number of schools falling into a category increases. This is being reflected nationally at the moment and has resulted in one of our secondary schools and some pupil referral unit provision being identified as unsatisfactory by OFSTED teams.

All our schools have been informed of the new requirements and we have put in place an extensive programme of briefings and training supported by revised policies and toolkits. Clearly, we want all our schools to be safe for our children and for our young people to be happy, healthy and successful. We work closely with schools about to be inspected to help them check that they meet these essential requirements.”

Question 20

“Can the Executive Board member for City Development please inform Council how many developments given the go-ahead in our communities over the last five years have promised to create local jobs?”



Answer

“There have been a significant number of major developments in the city since 2004. On average we determine 150-200 major applications a year. It would be not be a productive use of time and money to quantify how many had promised local jobs.

Where the Council has had a direct role in development, local training and employment opportunities are included in agreements with contractors or more recently in the bidding criteria.

Examples include the housing construction work being undertaken by Bellway Homes in East Leeds, the Council’s Affordable Housing Programme and the Housing Decency Programme.

Similar requirements are being built into the Housing PFI Programmes for Beeston Hill and Holbeck, Little London and Lifetime Neighbourhoods for Leeds, as well as the new Arena.

In addition the Council’s main funding partner for physical regeneration, the Homes and Communities Agency, has made providing local training and employment opportunities a requirement for developers obtaining support through its Kickstart Programme. Around £25 million Kickstart funding has been allocated to Leeds so far and a second round of bidding is underway.

On most major developments in the city training and employment requirements are written into legal agreements for reasonable endeavours to be used to work closely with Jobs and Skills Service of the City Council with respect to employment and training opportunities arising from both construction and the operational needs of business /employers occupying the development. The clauses used also request reasonable endeavours to use local contractors and sub contractors and materials in construction.

Recent examples where local jobs have been mentioned as part of the planning application consideration are Trinity Quarter ; Eastgate / Harewood Quarter mixed use schemes in the City Centre; University of Leeds schemes on the City Campus; new Tesco supermarkets at Roundhay / Middleton; Terminal building extension at Leeds Bradford Airport.

The Council also supports unemployed residents so that they are prepared and ready to take advantage of these opportunities through its Job Shops, investment in construction training for young people who can’t get onto college training courses; and through its support for Construction Leeds which works with developers and construction companies in the city to promote local labour and training.”

Question 21

“Can the Leader of Council please inform members how long it took the Council to enter into formal talks with the unions following the first day of industrial action by bin workers and street cleaners in the city?”

Answer

“The Council outlined its proposals to the Trade Unions on Tuesday 7th April; since that time and up to the 7th September 11 meetings were held in total.



7th April
11th May
2nd June
17th June
24th June
2nd July
8th July
17th August
27th August
2nd September
4th September

Prior to the strike taking place, the Council presented proposals regarding a productivity scheme to the unions and asked for the industrial action to be postponed until such time the issue has been fully explored. This was rejected by the unions, who insisted on going forward with the strike.

Formal talks with the Trade Unions to try and end the dispute recommenced on Monday 5th October; since that time 10 meetings have been held in all, following an indication from the Unions that they were prepared to discuss productivity.

5th October
6th October
8th October
9th October
12th October
14th October
23rd October
2nd November (meeting with the Leaders)
5th November
12th November

A further meeting, also involving the Leaders, was held on 17th November.”

Question 22

“Would the Executive Member for City Development and Regeneration care to comment on the success of the ruling administration’s Town and District Regeneration scheme on Yeadon High Street?”

Answer

“The Yeadon High Street improvement scheme involves significant investment of c£800,000. It includes high quality Yorkstone paving, parking bays, traffic calming, pedestrian crossing points, street furniture and pedestrian signage, all to improve the attractiveness to shoppers and businesses. The installation of a 3 camera CCTV system is designed to improve safety. The scheme also includes improvements to the area outside the Town Hall including seating, planters and a new information board, whilst a new traffic island outside Morrisons has used recycled setts from the Town Hall and the roundabout has been replanted and the stonework made more attractive.



The scheme started on site during the last week in April 2009 and will be substantially complete by Friday 20th November 2009. Amongst other community benefits the scheme should improve local business and community confidence in shopping in Yeadon.”

Question 23

“Why is the Council unable to produce working computer models of the principal road junctions in the A65 quality bus scheme, and why does it not have any contingency plans to ensure the free passage of buses and emergency vehicles if these junctions fail?”

Answer

“The A65 Quality Bus Corridor major scheme has been designed not to have a detrimental effect on traffic. The scheme design is based on the principles of queue management using bus lanes to ensure that buses are able to pass traffic queues. Therefore the junction arrangements do not alter the capacity/queueing for general traffic. The Council's highway traffic model has been used in the preparation of the scheme business case. As described earlier the scheme does not significantly alter the designs of the major junctions on the route which have been assessed in accordance with the principles of traffic signalled junction design by the Council's Urban Traffic Control section.”

Question 24

“Could the Executive Board member responsible for Environmental Services update Council on measures being taken to reduce the Council's carbon footprint?”

Answer

“We are committed to reducing our corporate carbon footprint, in order to improve our environmental performance, to reduce energy costs and to prepare for the forthcoming Carbon Reduction Commitment. We have therefore adopted NI185 (CO2 reduction from local authority operations) within both our Corporate Business Plan and the Leeds Strategic Plan.

To ensure that we make progress and meet our targets (3.4% reduction over two years) we have established a NI185 strategy group. This is chaired by our Chief Corporate Property Management Officer with contributions from across the council and has developed a detailed action plan containing a wide range of projects and initiatives. The group is focussing first on the most cost-effective emissions reductions (energy management, energy efficiency improvements, procurement of low energy goods, staff behaviour change, smarter driving techniques etc) but is also developing longer term programmes (such as large-scale energy efficiency programmes, use of renewable energy and trailing alternative fuelled vehicles).

The NI185 Strategy Group is meeting regularly to monitor the actions and is receiving good cooperation from all the relevant internal stakeholders. Early results show a downward trend in carbon emissions.

Key achievements



- In September 2009 the Council achieved the Carbon Trust Standard. This is an Early Action Metric which will improve our standing in the league tables in the early years of the government's "Carbon Reduction Commitment" cap-and-trade scheme.
- New initiative in progress with Carbon Trust to survey buildings to identify cost-effective carbon reduction projects which can be funded via Salix Fund. Four major buildings surveyed and Salix applications for £350k approved. Up to 6 more applications to be submitted in December.
- Two refuse collection vehicles powered by bio-methane fuel are on test with the fleet and early results look promising.
- Together with other core cities, joined the Clinton Climate Initiative in November 2009 and now have access to the Building Energy Efficiency Programme framework developed by the GLA. Will be trialling this in 2010 as an approach to project manage and finance carbon reduction retrofits of our buildings, aiming to reduce emissions by up to 25% in each building."

Yours sincerely

Ian Walton
Principal Governance Officer



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