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MEETING OF COUNCIL – 20TH JANUARY 2010

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS LETTER

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To: All Members of Council

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Your ref:
Our Ref: A61/isw/sepquest

Date: 3rd February 2010

Dear Councillor

COUNCIL MEETING – 20th January 2010

At the above meeting, the thirty minutes of Question Time expired with 11 questions unanswered. Council Procedure Rule 11.6 requires that each Member of Council is sent responses to such questions.

Question 10

“Can the Executive Board member for Central & Corporate please provide an update on the future of the Royal Park buildings?”

Answer

“Further to Executive Board on 14 October 2009 tenders were invited from parties interested in acquiring the property. The invitation was open to all and advertised in the local press with a deadline for receipt of tenders of midday on 18 January 2010. A report on the principles of a Community Asset Transfer Strategy will be considered by Executive Board on 10 March 2010. The tender details and business plans for Royal Park will be evaluated against these principles and reported back to Executive Board as soon as possible.

As part of the consultation process with local ward members each will receive a summary of the non-financial aspects of the Royal Park proposals for comment.”



Question 11

“Does the Executive Board member for Learning agree with me that it is perverse for the Government to penalise schools which remained open in recent adverse weather conditions by recording children who were unable to reach the schools as absent?”

Answer

“Education Leeds are in agreement with and have endorsed the statement made by the DCSF in regard to the adverse weather and have circulated the following to all of their schools.

Education Leeds endorses the DCSF statement which makes it clear that schools are not ‘penalised’ as such. The key message is that it is desirable to keep the school open, but that it is up to individual headteachers to make the decision that is right for their school in considering health and safety of their staff and pupils.

Education Leeds regularly alerts schools to the appropriate code to use when weather prevents schools from opening. This action was taken in the recent adverse weather period.

Schools make best use of the code ‘Y’ which ensures that the absence does not count. The attendance strategy team have already committed to audit those schools that did not stay open and ensure that this code was not used inappropriately or inconsistently as this would create an unfair advantage for any school that stayed open but applied this code.”

Question 12

"Would the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Housing please update Council on changes to the level of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF) available to the Council as well as the impact on any projects that receive this funding?"

Answer

The reductions in levels of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) grant awarded to Leeds by the Department for Communities and Local Government over the last 3 years were as follows:

2007/08 - £15,065,217 allocated

2008/09 - £ 8,930,489 allocated

2009/10 - £ 3,492,400 allocated (this is the final year of the funding)

2010/11 - Nil

The projects that have been funded through the NRF programme have been targeted at the most deprived wards in Leeds and have contributed to meeting key indicators within the Leeds Strategic Plan. The projects have contributed to activity across the key themes of Children and Young People, Healthy Communities and Older People, Economic Development and Enterprise and Safer and Stronger Communities. The projects funded have included key deliverers within the Voluntary Community and Faith Sector as well as key statutory partners and services such as the Police, Fire Service, Education providers and Council services.



Since the Council was informed during 2007/08 that NRF was ending and that Leeds is not eligible to receive Working Neighbourhoods Fund, we have ensured that all projects have been kept fully informed of the reduction in funding to give them as much time as possible to develop a sustainable exit strategy from the programme. All projects were encouraged to develop appropriate exit strategies and the officers have worked with projects to signpost alternative funding opportunities where appropriate.

Question 13

“Can the Executive Board member for Leisure, please inform members by how much in monetary and percentage terms his administration will raise the cost of a new burial plot in the city this month?”

Answer

“The charge for a new plot will increase by £300 or 47% (the 2009 Core Cities Average).”

Question 14

“Can Cllr Richard Harker please inform members when the decision was first taken by the Council to shut City of Leeds as a secondary school?”

Answer

“The Executive Board of the Council has not decided to close City of Leeds School. The Executive Board, at its meeting on 13 October 2009 recommended that we consult on this proposal and then at its meeting on 5 January 2010 decided to formally consult on the closure of City of Leeds as part of its plan for schools vulnerable to the National Challenge. The consultations will run from 7th January 2010 to Friday 5th March 2010. We expect Executive Board to consider the consultation outcomes when making a decision on the 7th April 2010.”

Question 15

“Would the Executive Board member for Central and Corporate outline the keys aims and objectives of ‘2010 – The Year of Volunteering’?”

Answer

“The Leeds Year of Volunteering 2010 is a celebration of the work already happening in our city and an opportunity to promote volunteering and encourage more people to get involved. It is an initiative supported by Leeds City Council and partners, and by the voluntary, community and faith sector.

The aims of the Year of Volunteering are to:

- Celebrate and promote volunteering
- Achieve a sustainable increase the level of volunteering in the city
- Promote higher quality volunteering
- Increase community engagement through volunteering



Volunteering has many benefits for individuals, communities and organisations. People who volunteer gain confidence, learn new skills and develop a real sense of belonging to their communities whilst helping to improve the quality of life for local people. Organisations benefit from the skills, enthusiasm and time of a diverse volunteer workforce. It helps unlock the talent and creativity of individuals to lead activities, groups and communities and to build skills, confidence and independence that may also be transferable into a work environment. Volunteering is also a way to help people to develop a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood and community.

Engaging more people in volunteering in the city is important at present to people and communities many of whom are experiencing negative impacts as a result of the impact of the global recession. It is also seen as an opportunity to attract new resources into the city.

What will happen during the year?

The official launch was held on 13 January 10.30-12 when the Lord Mayor Cllr Judith Elliot welcomed over 400 volunteers to an event in Leeds City Museum. The joint leader of the council, Councillor Richard Brett introduced the proposals for the year and Cllr Anderson and Cllr Yeadon also contributed, showing the cross party support for the Year. Martin Patterson from St George's Crypt and Phil Hall from the "No to Knives" campaign spoke eloquently about the importance of volunteering. People at the launch event joined together to form the Year of Volunteering Logo which will be used as the Tear of Volunteering photograph.

A new Volunteer Centre Leeds opened, also on 13th January at Enterprise House, 12 St Paul's Street, Leeds. The centre provides opportunities to help groups and organisations attract more volunteers and to provide volunteering opportunities for people wishing to volunteer their time.

A new website with details of the events has been developed. The address is www.leedsyearofvolunteering.org.uk.

A city wide programme of events has been programmed over the coming year, with specific months focusing on a particular type of volunteering or client group within the community.

Local programmes have been developed by the ten Leeds City Council Area Committees with a focus on neighbourhood volunteering within each of the local areas.

A new Compact for Leeds will be launched between the City Council the voluntary sector. This will include a toolkit to guide organisations use volunteers to deliver a good volunteering experience. Community volunteer activity will be expanded through the use of "ideas and how to" packs. There will also be a Volunteers Managers Training Programme and a new Leeds Volunteering Kite Mark.

There will also be the opportunity for voluntary organisations to bid for funding. The Leeds Community Foundation have provided a Year of Volunteering grants scheme with a number of strands

Funding has been provided by the Council to support some of the costs of programme co-ordination and delivery and to support work to secure sponsorship. In addition, sponsorship has been obtained from public and private sector organisations to help fund the year.

How will this be funded?



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How will we know when we have succeeded?

Leeds Strategic Plan has the following improvement priority:

“ An increased number of local people engaged in activities to meet community needs and improve the quality of life for local residents”

Participation in volunteering is seen as one of the main ways of measuring whether we are meeting this improvement priority. The recent 2008 Place Survey results showed 19.9% of the people sampled in Leeds were currently volunteering. Our target is by 20010/11 to increase the proportion recorded in the Place Survey 2010 to 24%.

There will be an evaluation made of the year that will be measure the impact on volunteering achieved by the project.”

Question16

“Will the Executive Board Member for (Development and Regeneration) share his views on the Government decision to assume control of local authority grit allocation?”

Answer

“The decision by Central Government to assume control was inevitable once a major supplier of salt to local authorities started to have difficulties honouring its contractual commitments. There is an argument that the timing was too late and that the Salt Cell should have been activated just after, if not just before, Christmas, when problems were starting to occur.

The Council's supply comes from another supplier, Cleveland Potash who continue to provide an excellent service to Leeds although now heavily influenced by the directions and guidance emanating from Salt Cell.

The current position is that we have 1800 tonnes of salt left and are in a much better position than many other authorities across the country. We are continuing to conserve stocks as best we can in line with the guidance being issued. We have currently reduced usage from on average of 600 tonnes a day to 300 tonnes to comply with the 50% reduction required by Salt Cell. This means we have enough stocks left for 6 days at current levels of use. On the other hand, should conditions worsen, further reductions may be necessary later in the week. A heavy snowfall would use up all stocks within 48-72 hours.

We continue to work with Salt Cell and our supplier. No significant deliveries are expected in the near future.

When stocks were comparatively healthy we were able to assist other authorities under the Mutual Aid Scheme; this is unfortunately, no longer the case.

The forecast is better this week although there is some uncertainty around the situation for later in the week.

I would take the opportunity to express my thanks to the gritting teams for their hard work, determination and commitment to keeping Leeds' roads clear since 17th December. They



have worked, often in very dangerous and difficult circumstances and throughout the holiday period, including Christmas Day and Boxing Day. “

Question 17

“Can the Executive Board member with responsibility for Youth Services reassure members that all possible resources are being made available to tackle the problem of NEETS within the city?”

Answer

“16-18 NEET in December 2009 was at 8.1%, compared to 9.2% in December 2008. This current NEET figure is the lowest of any month in the last five years and NEET in Leeds it is now below the mean of our statistical neighbours.

The Integrated Youth Support Service and the 14-19 Service are working closely together to ensure the effective use of all available resource to tackle NEET. Strategic Planning across the two services has come together to ensure a coordinated response to addressing NEET. The Connexions contracts for universal and intensive support provided to young people have been re-commissioned to improve performance.

Work to successfully embed the responsibilities for the commissioning of post 16 learning transferring from the LSC to the local authority and recent work around the development of the Foundation Learning curriculum, puts us in an excellent position to continue our recent progress in addressing NEET.

Tackling NEET is a key focus of energy and resource throughout the local authority and it was a key item on the agenda of Corporate Leadership Team yesterday.”

Question 18

“Can the Executive Board member for Environmental Services, please inform members where his administration plans to site their proposed incinerator?”

Answer

“The Council commenced its procurement of a Residual Waste Treatment solution in July 2008 in order to deliver a major step change in terms of reducing the environmental impact of dealing with Leeds’ waste. The Executive Board agreed the detailed criteria against which proposals are to be evaluated in November 2008. The evaluation of bidders’ outline solutions has now been completed, and the bidders to be taken forward to the detailed solutions stage identified.

The Council has not selected a preferred technology for its residual waste treatment solution and has undertaken a procurement that makes this ‘technology neutral’ position absolutely clear. Solutions are being evaluated against a range of criteria intended to ensure that the Council gets the best solution in terms of securing environmental improvements and value for money.

The Council has also completed a comprehensive and fully transparent site selection exercise which has been made available to Members and published more widely. This identified four potential sites in the Cross Green/Lower Aire Valley area which are considered suitable for a waste treatment facility. The Council has not identified a preferred option and



has taken a neutral approach on sites, and indeed two alternative sites, and a range of technologies, remain amongst the proposals.

Consultation has been carried out both on a city-wide basis and in communities local to the original short list of four Aire Valley sites, and a letter was sent to over 10,000 households within a mile radius of these sites at the time of their identification, providing an update on the project and specifically listing the sites.

Officers took a report to the September 2009 round of Area Committee meetings in order to provide an update on the project and to present some of the communication material to be made available to the public. Since this time, information on the proposals has again been sent directly to over 12,000 residents within close proximity of the potential sites for the Residual Waste Treatment facility, providing residents with the opportunity to register to receive additional information and to participate in public communications events within local communities during February and March 2010.

The Project Team is currently concluding the evaluation of the detailed proposals submitted by bidders, and it is anticipated that the number of bidders will be reduced to two in February 2010, with the preferred bidder being selected by the Council in late 2010. The two sites currently being put forward within bidders' proposals are the former wholesale market site on the East Leeds Link Road on Cross Green Industrial Estate and an area of the Knostrop Wastewater Treatment Works site. The outcome of the evaluation of this phase of the procurement process will be notified to Members on its conclusion."

Question 19

"Would the Executive Board member for Environmental Services care to comment on progress made in introducing new refuse collection routes and rotas?"

Answer

"As part of the Streetscene Change Programme complete route rationalisation is an integral element. Discussions are currently taking place with a route planning software provider to redevelop the routes city wide. It is envisaged that this initial work will take between 6-8 weeks.

In the short term a review of current routes has been carried out and work has progressed to rationalise Saturday routes with historical early finishes. To date 8 routes have been condensed into 4 which were implemented on 9 January 2010.

Further work is being carried out to identify more short term improvements. The crews have co-operated in the initial route rationalisation work and two Shop Stewards have been seconded onto the Change Programme to assist with development work. To date the approach has been positive. "

Question 20

"Does the Leader of Council have any thoughts on the impact the recent Pre-Budget Report is likely to have in Leeds?"

Answer



“Alistair Darling, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, delivered his Pre-Budget Report to Parliament on the 9th December 2009. The report seeks to address the on-going effects of the global financial crisis and sets out developments in Government economic policy since the Budget last April.

Summary of main issues

- Significant in year budget deficit, with plans to half it by 2013/14, national debt will continue to grow.
- Local government funding settlement for 2010/11 confirmed, with increase in Formula Grant for Leeds just 1.8%. This increase is below the national average (2.6%) and the average for Core Cities (2.2%).
- No Comprehensive Spending Review before the next election, thus no indication of settlements for Local Government beyond 2010/11.
- However, given state of public finances and commitments to bring down the deficit, it is clear that future settlements for all parts of the public sector will be exceptionally challenging and clearly neither local government generally nor Leeds will be immune from this.
- Clear expectation that despite Local Government over the last few years being the most successful part of the public sector in terms of generating efficiencies, more will be expected.

Further details

The Economy

- The economy is now expected to shrink this year by 4.75% (compared with the -3.5% estimate in the April Budget), but the Chancellor predicts that it will grow by between 1.0% and 1.5% during 2010.
- Government borrowing will be £178bn this year (up by £3bn from previous estimates). The estimate for 2010/11 is also up by £3bn to £176bn. For future years the estimates are unchanged: £140bn in 2011/12, £118bn in 2012/13 and £96bn in 2013/14 (approximately half the current value).
- Public sector net debt (as a proportion of GDP) is anticipated to rise from 55.6% in 2009/10 to 77.7% by 2014/15.
- The Chancellor claims that the recession will be short with GDP beginning to recover in the second half of 2009 and the country returning to growth of between 1.5% and 2% in 2010/11 and 3.5% in 2011/12 and 2012/13.
- CPI is estimated to be 2¼% in 2009/10, falling back to 2% in 2010/11 and 1½ in 2011/12 before gradually rising to 2% again by 2014/15. RPI will rise dramatically from -1½% in 2009/10 to 3% in 2010/11 and then stabilise at 3¼% thereafter.
- The statement confirms that there is to be no Comprehensive Spending Review before the election.
- In last year's Pre-Budget Report the Chancellor announced that the employee, employer and self-employed National Insurance rates were to rise by 0.5% from 1st April 2011. These increases have now been doubled to 1.0%
- As anticipated, the headline rate of VAT is to go back to 17½% from 1st January 2010.

Local Government and the Public Services

- The Government is to maintain the planned 2.2% growth in public sector current expenditure for 2010/11 but from 2011/12 onwards growth will fall back to 0.8%.



- The 1.0% cap on public sector pay settlements for 2010/11 is to be extended to 2011/12 and 2012/13. This is expected to save £3.4bn a year.
- There is to be a review of senior pay across the public sector led by Bill Cockburn which will report to the 2010 Budget.
- The Government is also to examine the scope for local authorities to borrow against:
 - future Community Infrastructure Levy revenues;
 - Renewable Heat Incentive and Feed-in Tariff revenue streams; and
 - revenues from new council homes.
- Reforms to the NHS, teachers, local government and civil service pension schemes will cap employer's contributions and will save £1bn a year from 2012.
- The average guideline rent increase for 2010/11 is to be reduced from 6.1% to 3.1%.
- The entitlement to free school meals is to be extended to primary school children of low income working families. This will benefit around 500,000 children.
- In order to control rising costs, the 2009 Budget announced that tenants would no longer be permitted to receive more in Housing Benefit than they have to pay in rent. However, recent consultation suggests that there are disadvantages to withdrawing the excess so the Government has decided to delay the reform until April 2011 and launch an immediate consultation on its approach to Housing Benefit reform and affordability.

The 2009 Pre-Budget report also announced further details of the £12 billion a year of savings set out earlier in *Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government*, £11 billion of which are planned to be delivered by 2012/13. The amount includes £670 million from local government:

- £550 million to come from:
 - more efficient waste collection and disposal
 - reducing the burden of inspection, assessment and reporting
 - reducing duplication and inefficiency between different tiers of local government
- £120 million from improvements to the administration of concessionary travel.
- The government has also looked at additional local government efficiency savings by 2012/13, on top of those previously published, through better procurement and through cutting lower-value or lower-priority programmes on the basis of early findings of the Public Value Programme.
- £250 million from reducing variations in spend on residential care, including greater use of preventative approaches to care for older people allowing people to stay longer in their homes.
- £160 million from clamping down on fraudulent access to social housing tenancies, and rationalising smaller DCLG funded community programmes, and ending time-limited schemes.
- £60 million from the cost of concessionary travel by aligning eligibility with forthcoming changes in state pension age.

£340 million from improved targeting of regeneration and housing growth funding, concluding the New Deal for Communities programme, prioritising regeneration and growth programmes to maximise value for money as the economy recovers, and by tackling the barriers to housing growth including a reduction in the impact of regulation on house building”

Yours sincerely



Ian Walton
Principal Governance Officer

